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Matronymics at Work: Female Succession Techniques in Lucian's *Dialogi Meretricii* and Some Early Thecla Literature

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Introduction[1]

It is a commonly bemoaned fact that our evidence for women's lives in the ancient world is less robust than that for men.[2] Scholars have complemented the thin literary evidence with different sorts of evidence from archeology and art history, creating a deeper and richer view of what ancient Greeks thought their women were up to.[3] In this article, I

[1] I would like to thank audiences at the North American Patristics Society Annual Meeting in 2022, especially Laura Nasrallah, Morwenna Ludlow and James Corke-Webster, those at the Classical Association of the UK Annual Meeting in 2023, especially Richard Hunter and Simon Goldhill, and those at the Corpus Christi Classics Seminar on 'Mothers in Time' (Michaelmas 2023) for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Additionally, this article has benefited greatly from the feedback from my colleagues at ACU, especially Michael Hanaghan and Killian Quigley. Finally, many thanks to the reviewers for their helpful suggestions for improvement.

[2] One foundational example from many: "We are trying to assemble a puzzle with many pieces missing. In a period when the history of men is obscure, it naturally follows that the documentation for women's lives is even more fragmented," Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), xvii.

[3] For instance, the work of archaeologist Lisa Nevett has complicated our conceptions about the seclusion of respectable citizen women in Classical Athens, Lisa C. Nevett, *House and Society in the Ancient Greek World* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Lisa C. Nevett, "Towards a Female Topography of the Ancient Greek City: Case Studies from Late Archaic and Early Classical Athens (c.520–400 BCE)," *Gender & History* 23, no. 3

add yet another aspect that has been underused to gain a fuller understanding of (at least the construction of) women's lives in the ancient world: naming conventions, and, in particular, the Greek tradition of identifying a child by the name of one or both of her parents. Patronymics and matronymics (alternatively spelled as metronymics) displayed which relationships were deemed central to identification in the ancient world, and therefore can provide glimpses into gendered power. When matronymics alone are used, they are evidence of the social power given to mothers as the key identifiers of their child.

The second and third centuries CE witnessed the significant use of matronymics in literary texts that organized female characters into all-female "found families" based on female lines of succession. The evidence comes from three authors who are not typically studied together, despite the fact that they were writing in close temporal proximity: Lucian of Samosata's racy and short *Dialogues of the Courtesans* (second century CE), the tale of the adventures of the female wandering charismatic teacher Thecla in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* (second century CE) and the thoughtful, Platonic-inspired philosophical dialogue *The Symposium, or on Chastity* by Methodius of Olympus (late third century CE). I will argue in this article that by focusing on how matronymics are used in these three texts we can gain access into situations where women were allowed to socially reproduce themselves in female lines of succession. Mother-daughter social structures pointed to systems of value that were gender-specific and distinct from male social norms. And at the same time, matronymic use in these male-authored texts reveal how men were attuned to gendered differences in speech and could harness them for their own literary characterization.

(2011): 576–96, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0424.2011.01658.x; Lisa Nevett, "'Least Talked About among Men'? The Verbal and Spatial Rhetoric of Women's Roles in Classical Athens (ca. 450–350 B.C.E.)," *Archaeology and Text* 2 (2018): 7–24. For the benefits and limitations of using visual representations of women to construct women's lives in Classical Athens see Sian Lewis, *The Athenian Woman: An Iconographic Handbook* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2002).

Recent work on 'significant naming' has shown that, rather than being rigid and empty formula, Greek naming techniques provided ancient writers with tools for characterization within a set of standards. For example, scholars such as Jennifer Starkey and Susanna Phillippo have looked at the use of significant patronymics in Euripides and the ways in which they are used for characterization.[4] I argue in this paper that the recent trend in scholarship to look at 'significant naming' should take gender more into account. This is true not only of the gender of *the person being named*, but the gender of *the person doing the naming*, as female speech tended in the ancient world to be marked as different to male speech.

The most typical formulation for a woman's name was to use the name of her husband in the genitive. Almost as frequently, she could be identified by her father's name in the genitive case, even if she were married. Sometimes she would be named with both her

[4] Jennifer Starkey argues that Jocasta's use of the patronymic when she describes herself in the prologue to the *Phoenissae* (Eur. *Pheon.* 10) reflects the character's desire to control the activation of her audience's memory. Euripides crafts Jocasta as motivated to speak about her relatively unknown father rather than her (in)famous husbands in order to avoid the more recent problems in her life. Menoeceus is a safer name to conjure with than either Oedipus or Laius (Jennifer Starkey, "'The Famed Child of Menoeceus' (Eur. Phoen. 10)," *Classical Philology* 117, no. 2 (2022): 324–42). Susanna Phillippo has made a similar argument for the importance of naming choices in Euripides' *Andromache* (Susanna Phillippo, "Family Ties: Significant Patronymics in Euripides' *Andromache*," *The Classical Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (1995): 355–71). For a rich investigation into significant naming in Homer, see Carolyn Higbie, *Heroes' Names, Homeric Identities* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995). Hesiod uses matronymics more frequently than Homer, but almost exclusively for sons of Zeus, see M. L. West, *Hesiod. Theogony. Edited with Prolegomena and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 431, commenting on line 1002; Mark A. Joyal, "Hesiod's Heracles: *Theogony* 526, 950," *Glotta* 69, no. 3/4 (1991): 184–86.

father and her mother's names as identifiers.[5] But the choice to use the name of her *mother alone* to identify her was unusual and something that requires further investigation. This is true not only in our literary evidence, but also in our papyrological evidence, as Mark Depauw's work has shown.[6] With some frequency, a patronymic was *combined* with a matronymic, but in only 10% of cases are ancient people in documentary papyri identified with *only* their matronymic.[7] As identification with the father's name is the most common, sole matronymic use is something that needs to be explained. With this wider context in mind, this article will focus on the specific dynamics at work in *literary* uses of the matronymic.[8]

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[5] Eleanor Dickey, *Greek Forms of Address: From Herodotus to Lucian*, Oxford Classical Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 52. This went hand-in-hand with avoidance of speaking the woman's name itself in public, as witnessed in the orators of the Classical period. See David Schaps, "The Woman Least Mentioned: Etiquette and Women's Names," *The Classical Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (1977): 323–30; A. H. Sommerstein, "The Naming of Women in Greek and Roman Comedy," *Quaderni Di Storia* 2 (1980): 392–418.

[6] Mark Depauw, "The Use of Mothers' Names in Ptolemaic Documents: A Case of Greek-Egyptian Mutual Influence?," *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 37 (2007): 21–29; Mark Depauw, "Do Mothers Matter? The Emergence of Metronymics in Early Roman Egypt," in *The Language of the Papyri*, ed. T. V. Evans and D. D. Obbink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 120–39; Yanne Broux and Mark Depauw, "The Maternal Line in Greek Identification: Signalling Social Status in Roman Egypt (30 BC - AD 400)," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 64, no. 4 (2015): 467–78.

[7] Broux and Depauw, "The Maternal Line in Greek Identification," 472.

[8] Greek patronymics and matronymics come predominantly in two forms. One is the more archaic -ιδης adjectival form of the parent's name. In the later period, the custom was the parent's name in the genitive, most frequently with υἱός/θυγάτηρ/πάις only implied, but at other times expressed. Examples of all of these naming techniques can already be found in Homer, and examples of women's identification with a patronymic almost always state the relational noun in addition to the genitive patronymic, see Higbie, *Heroes' Names*,

The arena where matronymics are most commonly used in Greek literature are for the 'families' of female prostitutes.[9] At times, scholars have concluded not only that prostitutes commonly used matronymics, but that matronymic use without further evidence might be evidence of prostitution.[10] As Elaine Fantham has explained in reference to the ancient culture of Athenian courtesans: "There was something like a caste of courtesans, a sequence of mother and daughter families; indeed an aging courtesan without a daughter would look for a foundling to rear as her economic substitute."[11] Anise Strong found in the mother-daughter bonds among prostitutes a "startling alternative to the conventional father-dominated narratives of the ancient family."[12] But by connecting the sole use of the matronymic specifically with prostitution, scholars are in danger of missing the broader social logic behind

Homeric Identities, 111–45. The examples in this article deal exclusively with constructions in which there is an expressed θυγάτηρ along with a genitive.

[9] Christopher A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (Harvard University Press, 2001), 154–55; Anise K. Strong, "Working Girls: Mother-Daughter Bonds Among Ancient Prostitutes," in *Mothering and Motherhood in Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Lauren Hackworth Petersen and Patricia Salzman-Mitchell (University of Texas Press, 2012), 121–40; Elaine Fantham, "Women in Control," in *Women in Roman Republican Drama*, ed. Dorota M. Dutsch, Sharon L. James, and David Konstan (University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), 98; Edward E. Cohen, "Mothers and Daughters in a Family Business," in *Athenian Prostitution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Dorota M. Dutsch, "Mothers and Whores," in *The Cambridge Companion to Roman Comedy*, ed. Martin T. Dinter, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 200–216, https://doi.org/10.1017/9780511740466.014.

[10] "Given the prevalence of prostitution as a female occupation transmitted from generation to generation in the literary sources, it is likely that many of the metronymics found on funerary inscriptions can be explained as referring to courtesans or other types of female prostitute", Laura McClure, *Courtesans at Table: Gender and Greek Literary Culture in Athenaeus* (London: Routledge, 2013), 77.

[11] Fantham, "Women in Control," 98.

[12] Strong, "Working Girls: Mother-Daughter Bonds Among Ancient Prostitutes," 135.

their deployment. In this article, I will bring in a wider range of matronymic uses contemporaneous with their use in prostitution families, in order to argue the fundamental point that matronymics were used as a way to note 'professional' female succession lines—there were simply very few of these in the ancient world, with prostitution being a highly-visible (but not the only) example.[13] In the contemporaneous Thecla literature, which has never entered discussions of Greek matronymics, we see matronymics being used in Christian female ascetic circles in ways similar to those in courtesan circles, as a new female 'profession' was created in the ancient world, often naturalized, like prostitution before it, into all-female "found families."[14]

By putting the Thecla literature's concern with female succession together with discourses around female prostitution contemporary with it, this article will argue that professional relationships among women tended to be naturalized into mother-daughter relationships, regardless of confessional divide. Such domestication granted power to women as 'mothers', capable of influencing and forming their daughters. Simultaneously, it limited the feminine role through gender segregation, which carefully shielded men from

[13] An intriguing parallel can be found in the recent phenomenon of drag queens who embrace a role of drag mother to daughters in the drag community, often explicitly setting up a household (called a Haus). These family relationships between women are also professional mentoring relationships chosen by adults. For some examples, see Manuel Betancourt "All Hail the Drag Queens Raising L.A.'s Tight-Knit Families" *Los Angeles Times*, May 5, 2022, https://www.latimes.com/lifestyle/story/2022-05-05/drag-queens-who-are-drag-mothers-in-los-angeles. This helpful parallel was suggested by Dr. Alexandra Hardwick.

[14] 'Found families' is a term developed in cinema studies to analyze a particular story type. The term for this phenomena in the social sciences is more frequently "fictive kin", with "chosen kin" and "voluntary kin" also used, see Margaret K. Nelson, "Whither Fictive Kin? Or, What's in a Name?," *Journal of Family Issues* 35, no. 2 (January 1, 2014): 201–22, https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X12470621. For an application of the sociological theory on sources near in time to ours, see Rebecca Krawiec, "'From the Womb of the Church': Monastic Families," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 283–307.

female influence. Furthermore, drawing on Marilyn Skinner's argument that matronymic use was a female idiom,[15] I will make further arguments about the deployment of the female idiom, both internally by female characters, as well as externally by narrators, making a final suggestion that the way in which matronymics are used in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* suggest that the *Acts* were composed in a female idiom, whether or not the author was a woman.

Significant Naming and the Matronymic Beyond Prostitution

Marilyn Skinner has argued that the use of matronymics was a distinctive part of 'women's speech' in the ancient world.[16] Skinner takes as her key example the poetess

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[15] Marilyn Skinner, "Greek Women and the Metronymic: A Note on an Epigram by Nossis," *Ancient History Bulletin*, no. 1.2 (1987): 39–42.

[16] Skinner. Women's diction in both Greek and Latin has been the focus of a number of recent scholarly works that prise out the patterns that would have been recognizable to the ancients as "feminine". Much of the recent literature has been inspired by twinned articles in a special issue of *Antichthon* 18 (1984), where David Bain focused on female speech in Menander and J. N. Adams on female speech Latin comedy (David Bain, "Female Speech in Menander," *Antichthon* 18 (1984): 24–42; J. N. Adams, "Female Speech in Latin Comedy," *Antichthon* 18 (1984): 43–77.). Then, more recently, Laura McClure and K. O. Chong-Gossard expanded on the basis provided Bain for Greek tragedy, and Dorota Dutsch expanded on the groundwork laid by J. N. Adams for Latin comedy (Laura McClure, *Spoken Like a Woman: Speech and Gender in Athenian Drama* (Princeton University Press, 1999); J. H. Kim On Chong-Gossard, *Gender and Communication in Euripides' Plays: Between Song and Silence* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Dorota M. Dutsch, *Feminine Discourse in Roman Comedy on Echoes and Voices*, Oxford Studies in Classical Literature and Gender Theory (Oxford: University Press, 2008).). An example from tragedy can highlight this intra-female use of matronymics. In Euripides' *Hippolytus*, only when women are speaking to women is Hippolytus referred to by the matronymic, "son of the Amazon", alone (Eur. *Hipp.* 307, 351, 582). In the prologue, Aphrodite calls Hippolytus by both patronymic and matronymic (Eur. *Hipp.* 10). Counterexamples to this trend that I have found are Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, where Agamemnon calls Clytemnestra "offspring of Leda" (Λήδας γένεθλον, Aesch. Ag. 914), the male speaker Archilochus' Cologne Epode calling the woman he is seducing "the daughter of Amphimedo" (Ἀμφιμεδοῦς θύγατερ, Arch.

Nossis, who provocatively gives the names of her mother and grandmother in one of her poetic fragments. Nossis is doubly interesting for my argument. Not only does she place herself into a female family line of her mother and grandmother, but she is also concerned to place herself as a literary successor to Sappho. She does this both by referencing Sappho by name as well as by using a dialect form for her poetry as Sappho did herself, as has been recently argued by Taylor S. Coughlan.[17] Nossis' significant matronymic use likewise helps create an all-female line of succession—which was able to be mocked already in the ancient world by male authors who were not as pleased with Nossis' popularizing a 'feminine aesthetic' in Hellenistic poetry.[18]

Frag. 196A [West], 7) and Lucian's *Dialogues of the Gods* 4 where Hermes pleads with his mother Maia, calling himself by the matronymic (ὁ δὲ Μαίας τῆς Ἀτλαντίδος) and complaining that other sons of mothers are better off than he is (οἱ μὲν Ἀλκμήνης καὶ Σεμέλης). Each of these examples deserve further attention, but suffice it to say here that I think that they can all be explained as specific to their context. Calling Clytemnestra the "daughter of Leda" falls under the tradition of referring to children of Zeus by their matronymic (see note 4 for bibliography). The Archilochus fragment depends on the interpretation of the tone of the entire poem, and could either activate the question of removed protection in this seduction scene (as the mother is now dead), or could align the object of his seduction with the more pejorative social standing. For some interpretations of the use of the matronymic in this fragment, see John Van Sickle, "The New Erotic Fragment of Archilochus," *Quaderni Urbinati Di Cultura Classica* 20 (1975): 135–36. Of interest might be the attestation that Archilochus apparently called himself "the son of the slave woman Enipo" in one of his poems, according to an attestation by Critias preserved in Aelian, for interpretations of which, see Andrea Rotstein, "Critias' Invective against Archilochus," *Classical Philology* 102, no. 2 (2007): 144–46. The matronymic in the mouth of Hermes in Lucian can most easily be explained as a sustained word-play on motherhood in the dialogue stemming from the etymology of Maia's name.

[17] Taylor S. Coughlan, "The Poetics of Dialect in the Self-Epitaphs of Nossis and Leonidas of Tarentum," *Classical Philology* 115, no. 4 (2020): 607–29.

[18] Celesiana Warwick argues that Herodas *Mimiamb* 6's reference to "Nossis the daughter of Erinna" stealing a dildo metapoetically refers to the unproductivity of female poetic practices (Celsiana Warwick, "Nossis' Dildo:

Other key examples for intra-female matronymic use brought forth by Skinner are five occurrences in Herodas' *Mimiambs*.[19] Indeed, Herodas' *Mimiamb* 1.5 shows that women in a prostitution setting could use matronymics, but those who only wish to focus on matronymics' 'specialized use among courtesans fail to remark that there are instances of matronymic use elsewhere in Herodas that are not associated with prostitution.[20] For instance, in Herodas 3, the mother, Metrotime, of a wayward son, Kottalos, says that her whole apartment house (among whom we can imagine women playing a central role) complains about "Kottalos, the son of Metrotime" ("τοῦ Μητροτίμης ἔργα Κοττάλου ταῦτα", Herodas 3.48). From the rest of the poem, it is clear that Metrotime is a respectable, albeit poor, married woman. This evidence connects matronymics more generally with female social circles, as Skinner argues, of which prostitution is only one particularly visible example.

Another particularly intriguing use of *only* a matronymic connected with female speech but unconnected to prostitution happens in Plato's dialogue the *Alcibiades Major* 123c. There, Socrates invites Alcibiades to imagine someone approaching Xerxes' wife Amestris in order to compare Alcibiades' wealth to her own. Alcibiades is introduced to Queen Amestris with only a matronymic, he is "the son of Deinomache" ὁ Δεινομάχης ὑός (Pl. *Alcib.* 123c). François Renaud and Harold Tarrant, in their commentary at this point, say, "That is surely not the language that a Greek male would readily use, unless perhaps some gross insult were intended. We have here the mothers of competitors thinking like

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A Metapoetic Attack on Female Poetry in Herodas's Sixth Mime," *TAPA (Society for Classical Studies)* 150, no. 2 (2020): 333–56, https://doi.org/10.1353/apa.2020.0013.).

[19]These are 1.5, 1.50, 3.48, 6.20, 6.50. For a discussion, see Skinner, "Greek Women and the Metronymic: A Note on an Epigram by Nossis," 40.

[20] McClure, *Courtesans at Table*, 76.

mothers, and taking a competitive pride in their sons."[21] Renaud and Tarrant are surely right that the impact of the diction used in the imagined conversation with Queen Amestris is meant to invoke a *female idiom* of conversation, one where maternal identification is more important than what we would typically expect to see.[22] This lends further support to Skinner's conclusion that matrilinearity "is a gender-specific speech trait perfectly familiar to Greek men from their daily encounters with their own womenfolk."[23]

Stemming from these observations, I argue that women's more common use of matronymics reflects the greater importance women placed on female social circles. And when men used matronymics while speaking as if they were women, it demonstrated that those men believed that mothers were more important to other women, whether those 'mothers' were biological or social. Separate, gender-specific modes of speaking reflected different ways of developing and maintaining status with audiences of different gender configurations. A further significance of this argument is that looking specifically to when

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[21] François Renaud and Harold Tarrant, *The Platonic Alcibiades I: The Dialogue and Its Ancient Reception* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 46–47.

[22] Patronymics and matronymics are used in a variety of ways in the *Alcibiades Major*. The dialogue opens with Socrates addressing Alcibiades by his patronymic (ὦ παῖ Κλεινίου, Pl. *Alcib.* 103a), but later uses a combination of Alcibiades' patronymic with his matronymic (ὦ φίλε παῖ Κλεινίου καὶ Δεινομάχης, Pl. *Alcib.* 105d). In addition, Socrates makes the unusual decision to call himself by both his patronymic and matronymic (ὁ Σωφρονίσκου καὶ Φαιναρέτης, Pl. *Alcib.* 131e). For more on Socrates' use of women in this dialogue, see Andre Archie, "Insightful Women, Ignorant Alcibiades," *History of Political Thought* 29, no. 3 (2008): 379–92.

[23] Skinner, "Greek Women and the Metronymic: A Note on an Epigram by Nossis," 41. One more example of maternal identification *by women* that might be added to Skinner's list is Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* 387 where a woman calls Euripides "the son of the female grocer" (ὑπὸ Εὐριπίδου τοῦ τῆς λαχανοπωλητρίας) (although here the mother is not given a proper name). See Andreas Willi, *The Languages of Aristophanes: Aspects of Linguistic Variation in Classical Attic Greek* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 170.

matronymics are used without patronymics might give us access to when women are imagined to socially replicate themselves. They are clues to the presence of female authority.

Mothers, Daughters, and Matronymics Among Ancient Prostitutes

Yet, it remains true that female-focused professions that make their way into the literary world are rare. Prostitution, as the highly-visible exception, is therefore the clearest place to view matronymics at work. To set the stage for my argument on the importance of professional 'mothers' in lines of sex workers in Lucian's second-century text, I turn first to two earlier links between 'mothers' and 'daughters' in prostitute families. The first, an anecdote from Book 3 of Xenophon's *Memorabilia* that describes a successful courtesan's household arrangements and self-presentation as a member of an all-female professional setting, has been used rarely in these discussions. The second, the Pseudo-Demosthenic *Against Neaira* is one of the most important sources for the connection between the matronymic and prostitution and has been a central text for previous scholarship on prostitute 'found families'. Yet, even in the *Against Neaira*, there is more work to be done thinking about how different speakers use the matronymic differently.

In the anecdote from Xenophon, a courtesan named Theodote stages a professional portrait which includes a mother by her side. We are led to view her by following Socrates and his crowd of eager young men into her house (which seems open to any comers). They find a scene that has been carefully designed for them. Theodote has just been sitting for a painter and had arranged her setting for this purpose.[24] But more than the painter's eyes are welcomed to feast themselves on the scene she has carefully prepared.

[24] "Thus, then, coming in to Theodote, apprehending her disposed for a certain painter, they looked at her" (οὕτω μὲν δὴ πορευθέντες πρὸς τὴν Θεοδότην καὶ καταλαβόντες ζωγράφῳ τινὶ παρεστηκυῖαν ἐθεάσαντο, Xen. *Mem.* 3.11.2). All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

ἐκ δὲ τούτου ὁ Σωκράτης ὁρῶν αὐτήν τε πολυτελῶς κεκοσμημένην καὶ μητέρα παροῦσαν αὐτῇ ἐν ἐσθῆτί τε καὶ θεραπείᾳ οὐ τῇ τυχούσῃ, καὶ θεραπαίνας πολλὰς καὶ εὐειδεῖς καὶ οὐδὲ ταύτας ἠμελημένως ἐχούσας…

Then Socrates, seeing her richly adorned and seeing her mother next to her in refined clothing and retinue, and many beautiful serving girls, who were not uncared for…

(Xen. *Mem.* 3.11.4)

Theodote presents herself in an all-female domestic tableau: her mother is next to her, well-dressed, and her beautiful serving girls flock about, among the lovely furnishings of an evidently wealthy home. This household of women arrange themselves, while various men come in turn to look: first a painter, then the unnamed companion of Socrates that initially alerted him to her existence, followed by Socrates and his entourage of young men. Theodote is in control of her narrative. She sets out the scene as she wants to be viewed. So far, she has been successful—the painter is by implication a faithful servant to her chosen designs. And the viewership is multiplying in a satisfactory way as the verbal and pictorial representations spread further afield—until, that is, Socrates comes in and ruffles the power dynamics.[25]

One detail in Theodote's self-presentation is crucial for my argument in this article: Theodote includes her mother at her side (μητέρα παροῦσαν αὐτῇ ἐν ἐσθῆτί τε καὶ θεραπείᾳ οὐ τῇ τυχούσῃ). At first glance, it might appear that Theodote could be trying to normalize her own role as sex-worker by placing her mother as her guardian, aligning

[25] "They find Theodote posing for a painting and they too *view* her (ἐθεάσαντο) – as the philosopher and his companions double the (professional) gaze of the artist," Simon Goldhill, "The Seductions of the Gaze: Socrates and His Girlfriends," in *Kosmos: Essays in Order, Conflict and Community in Classical Athens*, ed. Paul Cartledge, Paul Millett, and Sitta von Reden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 115. Goldhill's insightful analysis of this passage skips over Theodote's mother but remarks on this passage's emphasis on wealth, Goldhill, 117.

Theodote more closely to a respectable woman. Yet this mother does not protest to Theodote's being gazed at by a crowd of young men. She is not a respectable woman's mother. Instead, Theodote's mother taps into a different story about mothers in the ancient world. The ancient reader would most likely have considered Theodote's 'mother' to be her professional mentor, whether or not she was also her biological mother. Her expensive clothing is a reflection of Theodote's success. So too her female servants' beauty could reflect Theodote's economic success or could hint that they too were chosen and groomed for sexual congress. Theodote's professional activities support an entirely female household.[26]

Theodote's inclusion of her mother at her side in her professional portrait as a successful courtesan shows how female lines of power were manifested in the dynamics of courtesan households, organized into successive lines of 'mothers' and 'daughters'. Like the serving girls, Theodote's mother remains an anonymous support to the one named woman in the scene. But in other situations the focus on female inherited professions is manifested not only in *showing* prostitutes with their 'mothers', but in calling courtesans by their matronymic.

A significant example of matronymic use within the courtesan profession comes from the Demosthenic courtroom speech *Against Neaira*, which contains a sustained focus on the slippage between biological and professional motherhood. In his opening, the speaker Theomnestus accuses Stephanus of passing off "daughters of hetairas" as his own (τὰς τῶν ἑταιρῶν θυγατέρας, [Dem.] 59. 13). But this more general statement becomes concretized in the following main speech by his relative Apollodorus, who calls Phano "the daughter of Neaira" repeatedly ([Dem.] 59. 51, 55, 56, 59, 63, 67, 72, 83). And paternity and maternity

[26] Theodote's mother has been briefly mentioned in the following: Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic*, 154 n. 80; Strong, "Working Girls: Mother-Daughter Bonds Among Ancient Prostitutes," 129–30.

are precisely the issues at hand. The prosecution is trying to prove that Phano and her brothers are children of Neaira only, and not of Stephanus. The substitution of the phrase "daughter of Neaira" for Phano only happens after section 55, when Phano is exposed as marrying a citizen under false pretenses (θυγάτηρ Νεαίρας, 51; τῆς θυγατρὸς τῆς Νεαίρας, 59; ἡ θυγάτηρ ἡ Νεαίρας, 56, etc.). It is part of the rhetorical conviction that Apollodorus is crafting to refer to her *only* as the daughter of her mother without mention of a father.

However, the apparent limitation of matronymic use to one stage in the prosecution's argument melts away when we take into account the description of Neaira's own household of origin. At [Dem.] 59.18-20, Apollodorus tells the story of Neaira's childhood in the house of Nikarete. According to Apollodorus, Nikarete, a freed woman, adopted seven female slaves and passed them off as her legitimate daughters in order to prostitute them at a higher price. The first lines of the story mention that Nikarete had a husband, the cook Hippias ([Dem.] 59.18], yet he is not mentioned again in the rest of the section. The seven girls are only referred to as the daughters of Nikarete, and not the daughters of Hippias. Apollodorus constructs the family in that way to convince his listeners that the house was indeed a brothel, with Nikarete as the head. With this additional information, the insistence of Phano as the daughter of Neaira takes on another patina of infamy beyond the accusation of false fatherhood. Like Nikarete before her, Neaira also rears her daughter in her profession of prostitution, recreating in her own family with Stephanus a brothel-like set-up, with a 'mother' (this time biological) as the business head ([Dem.] 59.67).

To add to the argument that Apollodorus' naming of Phano almost exclusively as "daughter of Neaira" is a significant use of the matronymic, is the observable difference between how Phano is named by Apollodorus and how she is named by other sources cited within the speech as corroborating evidence. While Apollodorus almost exclusively calls Phano by her matronymic without using her proper name at all (some version of τὴν τῆς Νεαίρας θυγατέρα is used to refer to Phano more than twenty time in [Dem.] 59.50-117),

deputized witnesses tend to call her simply by her name, Phano, and do not use the matronymic nearly as often.[27] Apollodorus is using the matronymic to add an air of infamy to the family. The repeated use of the matronymic alone is part of Apollodorus' affective diction to persuade his listeners that Neaira is a non-citizen involved in an established line of prostitutes.

Lucian's Courtesan Families in the *Dialogi Meretricii*

Following in the tradition of professional 'mothers' of prostitute families, Lucian's fifteen short ***D**ialogues of the Prostitutes* (***D**ial. Meret.*), written in the second century CE, feature multiple mother-daughter relationships brought into focus through female focalization. Mothers are especially prominent in the middle dialogues of the collection, Dialogues 6-8, a prominence which permeates to the level of naming. Daughters are named with matronymics, and some 'mothers' are named with significant diminutives. Matronymics are sometimes used to display these important mother-daughter relationships that bled between biological and professional, although they were not universally used.[28] Being a hetaira was a female profession with a strong 'maternal' didactic line, and you could call your female superior and guide in the profession your 'mother' whether or not she was your biological mother.

Dialogue 6, a conversation between the mother Crobyle and her daughter Corinna, begins a set of three dialogues that emphasize mother-daughter bonds. The dialogue opens

[27] For example, [Dem.] 59.71 and 59.84 both mention Phano by name, and also the name of her 'father' Stephanus, but do not name Neaira.

[28] In Dialogue 11 there is a moment when they are trying to figure out which woman they are talking about, since there are two prostitutes named Philematium. One is described as living in the Piraeus, recently a prostitute, and loved by Damylus. The other is described by her nickname "the Trap". But neither are specified by a matronymic (or patronymic), which would seem a simpler way to differentiate them.

with an explicit statement about the transition from childhood to adulthood, occasioned by the first paid sexual encounter.

> Ὦ Κόρινα, ὡς μὲν οὐ πάνυ δεινὸν ἦν, ὃ ἐνόμιζες, τὸ γυναῖκα γενέσθαι ἐκ παρθένου, μεμάθηκας ἤδη, μετὰ μειρακίου μὲν ὡραίου γενομένη, μνᾶν δὲ τὸ πρῶτον μίσθωμα κομισαμένη, ἐξ ἧς ὅρμον αὐτίκα ὠνήσομαί σοι.
>
> O Corinna, you have already learned that it's not as terrible as you thought, the transition from a virgin to a woman. You have been with a handsome young man, and you have earned your first wage of one mina, from which I will buy you a necklace straightaway. (Luc. *Dial. Meret.* 6.1)

The mother in this dialogue is not characterized as a professional sex worker. Her senior status is as pimp of her daughter, setting up opportunities, controlling the income, and giving Corinna a portion (but only a portion) of the proceeds. Crobyle has been planning for the last two years how Corinna can support her economically: Corinna will now take her turn rearing her own mother (θρέψεις μὲν ἐμέ, Luc. *Dial. Meret.* 6.2), or at least that is the plan.

Their relationship is emphasized when Corinna replies to this opening line of her mother with a "Yes, mommy" (Ναί, μαννάριον, Luc. *Dial. Meret.* 6.1), addressing her mother with an unusual diminutive of μῆτηρ.[29] In the following dialogue, Dialogue 7, Musarion uses the same diminutive to talk to her unnamed 'mother', who does not seem to be her biological mother (Luc. *Dial. Meret.* 7.4). These are the only two instances of this version of the diminutive in the entire corpus of surviving Greek writing, leading Eleanor Dickey to conclude that "it seems likely that these addresses were meant to emphasize the closeness of

[29] In addition, there is also one instance of a related diminutive, μαμμίδιον, being used at Plutarch's *Moralia* 858c (Dickey, *Greek Forms of Address*, 269–70).

the relationship between mother and daughter and to show special affection".[30] Lucian is at pains to explore a particular mother-daughter interaction among prostitutes, linking together the professional and biological by repeating the rare use of 'mommy' in both relationships. As we saw in the case of Neaira, the confusion between biological and professional 'daughters' in prostitutional contexts was seen by outsiders as intentional obfuscation in order to gain benefits from both situations.

The reader watches Corinna's slowly-dawning awareness of the future her mother has crafted for her. Corinna links her own self-discovery with imitation of other mother-daughter pairs. Corinna asks whether she is going to become a hetaira "like Lyra the daughter of Daphnis" (καθάπερ ἡ Δαφνίδος θυγάτηρ Λύρα, Luc. *Dial. Meret.* 6.2).[31] Her mother replies that she is going to become equally well-known, which will reflect back favorably on her own mother. Crobyle says that if Corinna becomes a successful courtesan, others will say, "See how very rich Corinna, Crobyle's daughter, is (τὴν Κόρινναν τὴν τῆς Κρωβύλης θυγατέρα), and how she's made her mother prosperous three times over!" (Luc. *Dial. Meret.* 6.4). Both Corinna and Crobyle embrace the link between mothers and daughter in this profession. Well-known prostitutes are linked to their 'mothers', equally enriched by the success of the younger woman, reminding us of the sumptuous presentation of Theodote's mother in Xenophon.

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[30] Dickey, 80.

[31] Daphnis' name is repeated later in the dialogue, again in a matronymic use and without an article (τὴν Δαφνίδος γοῦν, Luc. *Dial. Meret.* 6.2). The name Daphnis could be either male or female, but the male version almost always has the accent on the first syllabus (Δάφνις) and the female version on the second syllabus (Δαφνίς) (*Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*, s.v.). Lyra is the model held up to Corinna for the entire central section of the dialogue, where Crobyle tells Corinna how to behave at a symposium she's been paid to attend.

The community of women involved in the profession of prostitution, the relationships of support and dependence, are brought to the fore in Lucian's Dialogue 7. Musarion's 'mother' opens the dialogue with a series of first-person plural verbs. Musarion's current lover is not only *her* lover, but *our* lover.[32] The gifts and wages earned by Musarion are a vital part of her 'mother's' income, and she extends her proprietary concern to his income level and the monetary support he gives her 'daughter' and, by extension, herself. Lucian allows the reader to decide whether Musarion's unnamed mother (called simply ὦ μῆτερ, Luc. *Meret. Dial.* 7.3) is her biological mother or an elective mother of a different sort.[33]

Of further interest is that Dialogue 7 is, in fact, about two sets of mothers—the courtesan's and the young man's.[34] The lover's mother is so important that the lover Chaereas is named by both his matronymic and patronymic: he's the son of Dinomache and Laches, the Areopagite (καὶ Δεινομάχης καὶ Λάχητος υἱός ἐστι τοῦ Ἀρεοπαγίτου, Luc. *Dial. Meret.* 7.2).[35] Musarion's mother also alerts us to the agency of Dinomache in arranging a suitable marriage for her son in the future, pushing out Musarion's hopes ("His mother will find him a match worth many talents," ἡ δὲ μήτηρ γάμον πολυτάλαντον ἐξεύρῃ αὐτῷ, Luc. *Dial. Meret.* 7.4). Musarion's 'mother' attributes a great amount of power

[32] E.g. "You see how much *we* are getting from the young man…" (νῦν ὁρᾷς παρὰ τοῦ νεανίσκου ἡλίκα λαμβάνομεν, Luc. *Dial. Meret.* 7.1).

[33] Anise Strong assumes that the relationship is biological, Strong, "Working Girls: Mother-Daughter Bonds Among Ancient Prostitutes," 127.

[34] *Dial. Meret.* 11 also comments on the mother of the client. A prostitute recommends a lover ask his *mother* to look at his prostitute friend in the baths to see what she really looks like (Luc. *Dial. Meret.* 11.4). In a complicating moment, the mother here could serve as an ally of one courtesan at the expense of another.

[35] Intriguingly, Chaereas shares the same matronymic with Alcibiades, which Plato uses in one of our rare Classical examples of a matronymic used by itself without a patronymic (ὁ Δεινομάχης ὑός, Plato *Alc.* 123c).

and savvy to her parallel and competitor for control of the romantic situation, Chaereas' mother.

Musarion is a young courtesan of eighteen (ὀκτωκαίδεκα ἐτῶ, Luc. *Dial. Meret.* 7.4), and the final dialogue of our mother-daughter set, Dialogue 8, also features an eighteen-year-old courtesan, Chrysis (σὺ δὲ ὀκτωκαιδεκαέτις, Luc. *Dial. Meret.* 8). Here the female mentoring relationship is clearly *not* biological. The older prostitute, Ampelis, gets specific with their relative ages in the profession. Amphelis has been "prostituting" for "twenty whole years" (ταῦτα λέγω πρὸς σὲ εἴκοσιν ὅλοις ἔτεσιν ἑταιρήσασα, Luc. *Dial. Meret.* 8), longer than Chrysis has been alive. Ampelis gives examples from her own larger store of experience to convince Chrysis to persist with a violent and jealous client in firm hope of getting a larger reward. Dialogue 8 ends with mention of a father, specifically the wealth that the client hopes to inherit upon his father's death, but no direct mention of mothers. By echoing the same pattern in Dialogue 7, staging a dialogue between an older professional and an eighteen-year-old newcomer about the economics of prostitution, Dialogue 8 continues the focus on female teaching lines among prostitutes, even without the use of biological terminology.

Mother-daughter relationships and shifting configurations of female lines of succession are prevalent in these short Lucianic dialogues, and particularly in the interconnected central triplet of Dialogues 6-8. In Dialogues 6 and 7, the younger woman uses the diminutive "mommy", and in Dialogues 7 and 8 both of the younger women are eighteen years old. While the relationship in the first dialogue is certainly biological, the relationship in the last is certainly professional. The central dialogue is entirely ambiguous. This trio of dialogues explores the slippage between the biological and professional set-up of 'families' of female prostitutes that would train up the next generation. This analysis of the domesticated female professional lines in Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans* prepares us to look afresh at the character of Thecla as she is used in multiple stories, where mother-daughter lines combined with matronymics are relentlessly important.

Thecla and her Mothers

With this second-century literary context of matronymic use in courtesan "families" in mind, I am going to explore the consistent use of matronymics alone for the character Thecla in her second- and third-century portrayals. While mothers have an established presence in the work on ancient prostitution, and in lines of female poets as we saw earlier in the example of Nossis, the character of Thecla has not been studied from this angle.

Thecla was a central character in multiple narratives from the early Christian community. We are never told the name of Thecla's father in *any* version of her legend—only her mother(s) matter.[36] I will be addressing two depictions of Thecla.[37] The first is her

[36] "…in the *Acts of Thecla* a *paterfamilias* and other male relatives are conspicuously absent" Magda Misset-van de Weg, "Answers to the Plights of an Ascetic Woman Named Thecla," in *A Feminist Companion to the New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Maria Mayo Robins (Cleveland: Pilgrim's Press, 2006), 151.

[37] There are others. Susan Hylen discusses Thecla's reception in Ambrose and Pseudo-Basil in addition to the depiction in Methodius addressed here, Susan Hylen, *A Modest Apostle: Thecla and the History of Women in the Early Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 91–113. *The Life and Miracles of Thecla* is also an important witness to the continuing reception of Thecla, for which see Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla: A Literary Study*, Hellenic Studies Series) (Washington D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2006); Susan E. Hylen, "The 'Domestication' of Saint Thecla: Characterization of Thecla in the Life and Miracles of Saint Thecla," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 30, no. 2 (2014): 5–21, https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.30.2.5. Kate Cooper and James Corke-Webster introduce us to the reception of the Thecla story in the *Passion of Eugenia*, Kate Cooper, "The Bride of Christ, the 'Male Woman,' and the Female Reader in Late Antiquity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. Judith Bennett and Ruth Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); James Corke-Webster, "Reading Thecla in Fourth-Century Pontus: Violence, Virginity, and Female Autonomy in Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Macrina*," in *Social Control in Late Antiquity: The Violence of Small Worlds*, ed. Kate Cooper and Jamie Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 277–98. Brian Sowers discusses the Thecla story's reuse in Aelia Eudocia's *Life of Cyprian*, Brian Sowers, *In Her Own Words: The Life and Poetry of Aelia Eudocia* (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020). The most recent work on the later reception of the Thecla legend can

foundational legend in the *Acts the Paul and Thecla*, part of the longer *Acts of Paul*. The second is a philosophical dialogue, Methodius of Olympus' *Symposium, Or, on Chastity*, where Thecla is also the star participant. The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* identifies Thecla with a matronymic alone—a detail which is part of a consistent focus on mother-daughter relationships in the text. This choice would have been unusual in the ancient world even if Thecla's father was dead, and it puts the focus on the mother-daughter dynamic front and center near the beginning of the narrative. This mother-daughter focus continues in Methodius of Olympus' *Symposium*, where Thecla is also placed within an entirely female line of succession, as the metaphorical daughter of the hostess of the party who is *also* only named with a matronymic. Methodius creates a world where there are multiple generations of women only in pseudo-biological 'found families' of ascetic Christian women.

Thecla's Two Mothers in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*

In speaking about the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Ross Shepherd Kraemer has alerted us to "the complex theme of mother-daughter relations, which pervade the text from start to finish yet have received relatively little attention."[38] Her statement is a clear recognition that, despite the popularity of Thecla in recent decades, more works needs to be done on her relationship with her mothers. Thecla's entrance into the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* is situated within the social bonds of family, and her family structure is emphatically feminine. When she comes onto the scene, she is described as "Thecla, the virgin daughter of her mother Theocleia" (Θέκλα τις παρθένος Θεοκλείας μητρὸς, ATh 3.7), that is, with only a

be found in Ghazzal Dabiri and Flavia Ruani, eds., *Thecla and Medieval Sainthood: The Acts of Paul and Thecla in Eastern and Western Hagiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

[38] Ross Kraemer, "Thecla," in *The Oxford Handbook of New Testament, Gender, and Sexuality*, ed. Benjamin Dunning (Oxford, 2019), 491. B. Diane Lipsett has also commented on the importance of mothers and maternal desire in the narrative, B. Diane Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion Hermas, Thecla, Aseneth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 57.

matronymic.[39] The link is so tight between Thecla and her mother Theocleia that their names differ only by the addition of four letters in the Greek.[40] Not only is Thecla named with only a matronymic, but her father is never named in the whole text or the subsequent rich Thecla tradition. One is left to presume that he is dead, and more importantly, insignificant (at least to the story).[41] Thecla is not left entirely bereft of male identifiers, however. After her mother is named, Thecla is also identified as betrothed to a man named Thamyris.

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[39] The matronymic is not used to identify Thecla when she is first introduced in the paraphrase *The Life and Miracles of St. Thekla*. There, she is first introduced as the neighbour of Onesiphorus. However, later on, there is an intriguing matronymic use by her betrothed, Thamyris, who appeals to her sense of *what people might say*. Ventriloquizing the neighbours, he calls her "the child of noble Theocleia" (*Life* 4, trans. Jacobs). Jacobs also points out that at *Life* 11, the proconsul Castilius refers to Thecla's father as someone who chose marriage and Jacobs notes that "the proconsul may be speaking generally of Thecla's having a father without specific knowledge of him" (at note 20, http://andrewjacobs.org/translations/thecla.html). Note that he is not given a name.

[40] "The names *Thecla* and *Theocleia* are related; usually *Thecla* is understood as a diminutive of *Theocleia*, but Dagron wonders whether *Thecla* might be an 'indigenous name' elaborated and Hellenized into *Theocleia*" (n. 13, http://andrewjacobs.org/translations/thecla.html). An intriguing detail in the fourth century *Apocriticus* by Macarius Magnes perhaps makes a pun on Thecla's reduced version of her mother Theocleia's name, saying that the sword of faith cut Thecla from Theocleia (Αὕτη γοῦν ἐστιν ἡ μάχαιρα τεθηγμένη καὶ λάμπουσα τῆς ἀνʼωʼλέθρου βασιλείας τὸν ἔρωτα, δι᾽ οὗ καὶ πατέρες τέκνων ἐχωρίσθησαν καὶ θυγατέρες μητέρων ἀπέστησαν—ὡς Θέκλα Θεοκλείας—καὶ ἀδελφὸς ἀδελφῶν φιλίαν ἠρνήσατο. (2.8, Makarios Magnes, *Apokritikos: Kritische Ausgabe mit deutscher Übersetzung*, ed. Ulrich Volp (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 12.).

[41] "[Theocleia] is likely a widow, for her husband is never mentioned," Hylen, *A Modest Apostle*, 82. "…that Thamyris is Theocleia's first port of call makes glaringly apparent that she has no active male relatives", Corke-Webster, "Reading Thecla in Fourth-Century Pontus," 291. Barrier does not comment on Thecla's lack of father in his recent commentary, Jeremy W. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla: A Critical Introduction and Commentary* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

Thecla's mother Theocleia plays a socially powerful and obstructive role in Thecla's story. As the presumed head of her household, she is active in arranging a suitable marriage for her daughter. Her chosen match is Thamyris, who is characterized as the 'first man' in the city (ATh 11.8, 26.9), with whom Theocleia feels free to speak with familiarity and authority. Likewise, Theocleia openly communicates with the governor when Thecla is being tried (ATh 20.10-11). As Susan Hylan has argued, Theocleia's role is a political one, and she "exerts social power in the story."[42] Thecla's mother displays 'appropriate' social activity and influence, against which Thecla's own choices should be *compared* rather than solely *contrasted.*

Tussles with Theocleia bookend Thecla's story. After playing a central role in the initial scene during Thecla's struggle to leave her house to follow Paul, Theocleia recedes to the background during most of the narration, especially once Thecla has left Iconium for Antioch (Theocleia is not mentioned between ATh 3.21-4.18). She reappears only at the very end of the story, when Thecla returns to her hometown of Iconium in order to conduct one final conversation with her birth mother. Rather than entering her mother's house for the assignation, Thecla goes to the house where Paul was originally preaching, that is the house next door to her family home. She asserts her independence from her mother by insisting on spatial independence. She summons her mother to her, in this 'other' home, the house where she first heard the gospel. Strongly positioned in her 'found family' house rather than her biological house, she invites Theocleia to make the transition to her true family, her 'found family'. To increase the poignancy, she first calls her mother by her relational title, "Theocleia, mother" (Θεοκλεία μῆτερ, ATh 4.18), before going on to say that if Theocleia believes that the Lord lives in heaven, then her child (τέκνον) stands before her. Thecla implies that if Theocleia does not choose to follow Thecla in her new way

[42] Hylen, *A Modest Apostle*, 82.

of life, Theocleia will no longer have a child, and this will be the last time Thecla calls her μῆτερ. Theocleia's response to Thecla's ultimatum is not recorded, and readers are left to presume that she did not accept.[43] In the next sentence, Thecla leaves her hometown, and her biological mother, for good.[44] She has made it clear that Theocleia can only have Thecla as a daughter within the new structure of her Christian 'found family'.

Unlike the connotations of Lucian's all-female family structures, there is no hint at infamy in Thecla's matronymics. Thecla is modelled as the ideal unmarried woman, at the height of modesty. Instead of insinuating sexual availability, Thecla's matronymic instead sets the reader up for a narrative that is more concerned with mothers than fathers, in both the physical and allegorical realm. In fact, the most dangerous moment of sexual vulnerability, when Thecla first enters Antioch and is accosted by Alexander who attempts to rape her, is precisely when she is "between mothers". She has left the protection of her natal family, but not yet entered her 'found family'. During this motherless time, Thecla

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[43] Melissa Aubin assumes that Theocleia converts, but presents no support for this belief (Melissa Aubin, "Reversing Romance: The Acts of Thecla and the Ancient Novel," in *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative*, ed. Ronald F. Hock, J. Bradly Chance, and Perkins, Judith (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 271). Barrier is much more circumspect: "The success of Thecla's preaching to her mother is not reported. The most probable point to Thecla teaching her mother is not the conversion of her mother, but to demonstrate that Thecla is now committed to teaching" (Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, 188). My argument adds more reasons to the return of Theocleia at the end of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, namely the ongoing importance of 'mothers' in the narrative.

[44] Rosie Andrious suggests that the text's negative portrayal of Theocleia is part of its anti-woman stance (Rosie Andrious, *Saint Thecla: Body Politics and Masculine Rhetoric* (T&T Clark, 2020), 194.). Such an argument requires special pleading, since as, among others, Stevan Davies has pointed out, females of all species are especially supportive of Thecla, Stevan L. Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows: The Social World of the Apocryphal Acts* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), 61. Andrious does not focus on the parallelism between Thecla's two 'mothers' beyond a brief comment, Andrious, *Saint Thecla*, 146.

does not even have the protection that was offered to the more elite courtesan 'families' that policed access to the sexual favors in exchange for benefits—a dynamic which is put on display in throughout Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans.* Thecla is not given the same choice as Chrysis or Ampelis in Lucian, to stay with or leave a violent lover (Luc. *Dial. Meret.* 8). Instead, she is without the protection either of Paul or of any 'mother' and faces the harsh consequences of her social isolation.

The violent encounter with Alexander precipitates her meeting her second 'mother'. Queen Tryphaena, who takes over the central section of the story (ATh 4.3). Tryphaena takes Thecla into her home while she awaits trial following the Alexander episode in order precisely to protect her chastity (ATh 4.2). Later, after she has withstood her trials, Thecla becomes Tryphaena's heir, explicitly replacing her deceased daughter Falconilla.

> καὶ τὴν Τρύφαιναν εὐαγγελισθεῖσαν ἀπαντῆσαι μετὰ ὄχλου καὶ περιπλακῆναι τῇ Θέκλῃ καὶ εἰπεῖν Νῦν πιστεύω ὅτι νεκροὶ ἐγείρονται· νῦν πιστεύω ὅτι τὸ τέκνον μου ζῇ· δεῦρο ἔσω, καὶ τὰ ἐμὰ πάντα σοὶ καταγράψω.
>
> And when the good news had been told to Tryphaena, she was meeting Thecla with a crowd and being embraced by her and said, "Now I believe that the dead are raised. Now I believe that my child lives. Come inside, my child, into my house, and I will transfer all my property to you. (ATh 4.14)

Ross Shepherd Kraemer has argued that "the contrast between Thecla's natural and foster mothers exemplifies the early Christian critique of natal families and the corresponding construction of alternative families of believers found already in the early traditions about Jesus and his relatives (Mark 3:31-35; Matt 12: 46-50; Luke 8:19-21)."[45] Other scholars do

[45] Kraemer, "Thecla," 491. Other scholars agree: "A new family has been created whose bonds are not of flesh and blood, but of Christian commitment", Carolyn Osiek, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Fortress Press, 2009), 242.

not agree. Magda Misset-van de Weg pushes against seeing Tryphaena as an adoptive mother to Thecla and points us instead to formal relationships of patronage.[46]

In shifting from adoption to patronage to explain the relationship between Thecla and Tryphaena, Misset-van de Weg fails to account for the parallelism that the author makes between Thecla and Tryphaena's daughter Falconilla. After all, it is surely no accident that Tryphaena had only one child, who is a daughter, not a son. Both the biological and spiritual relationships in this text are purely those of mothers and daughters. Misset-van de Weg claims that there is significance in Tryphaena not referring to Thecla as a 'daughter' (θυγάτηρ), a term reserved only for her dead biological child Falconilla, and using instead the more generic term for 'child' (τέκνον).[47] However, *teknon* (τέκνον) is not pejorative in this text, and Tryphaena uses it when talking about *both* Thecla and Falconilla in the same sentence (Τέκνον μου, Θέκλα, δεῦρο πρόσευξαι ὑπὲρ τοῦ τέκνου μου, ATh 4.4 and again at ATh 4.14). In addition, there is another reason that the author might have chosen to use the gender-neutral term in this situation. There seems to me a play on words

[46] Magda Misset-van de Weg, "A Wealthy Woman Named Tryphaena: Patroness of Thecla of Iconium," in *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla*, ed. Jan Bremmer (Kampen, the Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1996), 32–34. Yet Misset-van de Weg's argument should not be overstated. While arguing that Tryphaena did not legally adopt Thecla, she admits "the fact that Tryphaena acted *as* a mother towards Thecla", Misset-van de Weg, 34. Indeed, she softens it in a later article where she argues again for the importance of a patronage model in the relationship between Tryphaena and Thecla, but does not insist any longer that it precludes a mother-daughter model, Misset-van de Weg, "Answers to the Plights of an Ascetic Woman Named Thecla," 156, n. 48.

[47] Misset-van de Weg, "A Wealthy Woman Named Tryphaena: Patroness of Thecla of Iconium," 32–33.

between Thecla and *teknon*, and Tryphaena repeatedly uses them in close proximity (e.g. again at ATh 4.5 in addition to ATh 4.4 quoted above).[48]

Tryphaena's power in Antioch is a more heightened, but clearly parallel, situation to Thecla's biological mother's position in Iconium. Thecla moves from being the daughter of one wealthy and well-positioned woman to another. The pattern that was established by first naming her with a matronymic continues with the insistence that she has a new mother, and the lack of any mention of Tryphaena's husband. Thecla then uses the gifts and wealth of her 'found mother' to try (unsuccessfully) to bring her biological mother into the 'family' as well.

Vitally, Thecla's 'found family' is not localized in one particular home or city.[49] Thecla does not stay in Antioch with Tryphaena, although she brings material wealth from her new 'mother' when she departs (ATh 4.16).[50] She leaves Antioch for Myra to find Paul,

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[48] As one reviewer suggested, a further study on the gendered uses of τέκνον in early Christian literature could also bring into the discussion Perpetua's vision where, in both the Latin and Greek versions, she is addressed as τέκνον/tegnon by the old shepherd (*Passio Perpetuae* 4.9).

[49] Barrier rightly remarks about the importance of moving from home to home in this text, which he calls cycles of "social space shift", Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, 183.

[50] It is interesting to note that Tryphaena's baptism is never explicitly mentioned. Thecla preaches in her house for eight days, but the result of that preaching is belief (ὥστε πιστεῦσαι), both for Tryphaena and her household slaves (τῶν παιδισκῶν, 4.14). This would seem to side-step the heated issue of women baptizing that so exercised the anger of Tertullian about this text and would represent a missed opportunity if such a justification were an objective of the author (Tertullian *De Baptismo* 17). Thecla's self-baptism is the only time when she explicitly baptizes anyone. The "enlightenment" that she is said to bring to many before her death (καὶ πολλοὺς φωτίσασα τῶι λόγωι, 4.18) does not seem to carry with it the connotation of baptism as was sometimes the case, *contra* Outi Lehtipuu, "The Example of Thecla and the Example(s) of Paul: Disputing Women's Role in Early Christianity," in *Women and Gender in Ancient Religions: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Stephen Ahearne-Kroll, Paul Holloway, and James Kelhoffer (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 355–56.

goes back to Iconium to talk to Theocleia, and then leaves Iconium for Seleucia to continue her teaching mission. Later additions to the ending of the *Acts and Paul and Thecla* (and other retellings of her story) will domesticate her once more,[51] and place her in a geographically limited rock-hewn cave. However, even in some of these stories, she manages to slip out, traveling through mysterious underground pathways straight to Rome (καὶ τὴν γῆν ὑπέρβη), still chasing after Paul.[52]

Multiple scholars have argued that Thecla's characterization in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* shifts from predominantly feminine to predominantly masculine as the narrative progresses. Her growth in independence and mobility are linked to an increasingly masculine persona. For instance, Willi Braun concludes his treatment of gender in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* with this statement:

> In sum, Thecla's conversion entails a transformed self-definition and public persona in which femininity increasingly fades out to reveal a masculinized self. The metamorphosis takes her from male custody and control to manly independence, from

[51] The argument that later versions of the Thecla legend, such as *The Life and Miracles of Thecla* are attempts at watering down and domesticating Thecla's power is countered by Hylen, "The 'Domestication' of Saint Thecla."

[52] Text found as '*Acts of Paul and Thecla* 44' in Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, 189. For an exploration of fundamental open nature of the story of Thecla, see Kate Cooper, "Afterword: Thecla and the Power of an Open Story," in *Thecla and Medieval Sainthood: The Acts of Paul and Thecla in Eastern and Western Hagiography*, ed. Flavia Ruani and Ghazzal Dabiri (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 318–28, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009008631.014.

> the womanly space of the household enclosure to the public arenas of male discourse and politics, from female bodiliness to male bodiliness.[53]

Braun follows the common trend of scholars to emphasize those moments when holy women "become male" in their pursuit of excellence.[54] I think that this overlooks fundamental *feminine* aspects of Thecla's characterizations that continue to be emphasized *in the second half and ending* of the narrative, after her maturation into a certified Christian teacher in her own right. In particular, the mother-daughter bonds continue to be a source of sustained narrative tension.

When Thecla returns to her hometown of Iconium near the end of the narrative, her betrothed Thamyris has died (*ATh* 4.18), just as her mentor Paul has also dropped out of the narrative. Yet, Thecla's mother is still alive, as is her new metaphorical 'mother,' Queen Tryphaena. Thecla's mother figures persist even after her lover figures have been replaced with a divine spouse.

Thecla returns to her birth mother, Theocleia, to beg her to join her Christian way of life, even offering her material wealth to make up for what she had lost through her daughter's departure. Continuing the interpretation of Thecla as masculinized, Willi Braun interprets this as Thecla offering to support her mother in the manner that a *male* offspring would.[55] But I think that the more central point of interest in this episode is the author's

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[53] Willi Braun, "Physiotherapy of Femininity in the *Acts of Thecla*," in *Text and Artifact in the Religions of Mediterranean Antiquity: Essays in Honour of Peter Richardson*, ed. Stephen G. Wilson and Michel Desjardins (Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion/Corporation Canadienne des Sciences Religieuses, 2000), 216.

[54] "The momentum mounts during the repetition of the narrative sequence as the text simultaneously orchestrates Thecla's masculinization and Paul's relative feminization…" Aubin, "Reversing Romance: The Acts of Thecla and the Ancient Novel," 261. "…personal and social transformation construed as both Christianization and masculinization", Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion Hermas, Thecla, Aseneth*, 54.

[55] Braun, "Physiotherapy of Femininity in the *Acts of Thecla*," 215.

commitment to focus on women-women *and especially mother-daughter interactions* right up until the end of the narrative. Thecla's final words to her mother are "if you desire a child, I stand here before you" (εἴτε τὸ τέκνον, ἰδού, παρέστηκα σοι) (*ATh* 4.18). Her mother does not reply, and the offer to continue in a mother-daughter relationship with her biological mother is left hanging over their final interaction. These are the last words spoken in direct discourse in the entire *Acts*, and the author quickly concludes the narrative with one further sentence about Thecla's death. The focus on the mother-daughter dynamic persists to the very last episode of the text.

Thecla in her *Acts*, although taking on some masculine characteristics, remains female in important ways, and the pathways to piety she points to for people like Tryphaena or her own mother are also feminine modes of holiness, specifically some form of maternity. Thecla represents leadership in the context of predominantly female sociality. Although she is the student of Paul in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and has both male and female disciples after her transition to itinerant preacher, it is still her 'mothers' who feature most prominently, from the beginning to the end of the narrative.

The use of the matronymic for Thecla when she is first introduced sets up the expectation of the importance of maternal bonds throughout the text. But might it do even more? We explained above that using a matronymic in the ancient world was understood as a female idiom. When a matronymic alone is used, it is always in the context of female speech. In the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, however, the matronymic is used by the narrator, rather than in direct speech of one of the female characters. This implies that the *author* was writing in a female idiom and lends unexpected support to the old theory that the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* originated in female story-telling circles.[56] At any rate, it shows that the

[56] Dennis Ronald MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle, The Battle for Paul in Story and Canon* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 34–53.

author knew how to "speak like a woman" and chose that particular idiom for their composition.

Thecla's Mother and Grandmother in Methodius of Olympus' *Symposium*

If Thecla is enmeshed in mother-daughter relationships in the earliest version of her legend, this characterization persisted in her later reception as well. Thecla is a star character in Methodius of Olympus' third-century dialogue, the *Symposium, or On Chastity*. Methodius' *Symposium* is a deeply feminine text. Although written by a man, all of the narrative levels are full of verbal and authoritative women. Two external female narrators tell a story they heard from a female symposiast who was at the spectacular event. It was a party by invitation only, and invitations were only sent to women. The host was no less a character than Virtue, daughter of Philosophy. Gregorion, one of the female framing narrators, asks her friend Eubulion, "But first answer me this: You know Virtue the daughter of Philosophy, don't you?" (Πρῶτον δέ μοι αὐτὴ ἀπόκριναι· γινώσκεις δήπου τὴν θυγατέρα Φιλοσοφίας Ἀρετήν; Meth. *symp.* prologue 4). Eubulion answers positively. She does indeed know this woman. Both the female framing narrators Eubulion and Gregorion know Virtue by her matronymic. If Marilyn Skinner is right, this shows that Methodius knew how to "speak like a woman" in much the same way as Plato did in the *Alcibiades Major*. He at least 'ticks the box', by having his female characters use matronymics, emphasizing the social bonds that were most vital to women in the ancient world.

Virtue is not only identified with her matronymic, but she is presented as the 'mother' of a series of 'daughters' as the lines of female descent are continued and expanded. Gregorion tells Eubulion about how the party hosted by Virtue began. She narrates the difficult journey to the chosen location and the pleasures that were awaiting the party guests. Once all the participants are settled into the beautiful garden symposium, she describes how their hostess finally appeared and addresses them.

> Αὕτη οὖν προσελθοῦσα μετὰ πολλῆς χαρᾶς ἑκάστην ἡμῶν **μήτηρ ὥσπερ** διὰ πολλοῦ θεασαμένη περιεπτύσσετο καὶ κατεφίλει, **Ὦ θυγατέρες,** σφόδρα μοι ποθούσῃ, λέγουσα, εἰς τὸν λειμῶνα τῆς ἀφθαρσίας ὑμᾶς εἰσαγαγεῖν…
>
> That woman, approaching each of us with great joy, as if a mother having seen us after a long time, embraced and kissed us, saying, "Oh daughters! I have so eagerly desired that you enter into the meadow of incorruptibility… (Meth. *symp.* prologue 6)

There is a bit of slippage here. The narrators keep Virtue's relationship in the metaphorical realm. She addresses them "like" (ὥσπερ) a mother. But Virtue's own words do not emphasize the fictive nature of this kinship, calling them all simply her "daughters" (Ὦ θυγατέρες).

This is an all-female, multi-generational family, Virtue is the daughter of Philosophy and all of the virgins present are the daughters of Virtue, and therefore the granddaughters of Philosophy.[57] They are working here in an entirely female line of succession.[58] There are no fathers mentioned at all. A line of philosophers is created in which authority structures are naturalized into family relationships. Once the narrative is established like this, with mothers and grandmothers of the participants named, it comes as no surprise that the continuation of a female succession line is outlined as well. The participants explain how they are spiritual mothers of others who are learning their way of life.

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[57] There is a later moment when Virtue is given more roles. She is called "guide and teacher", expanding upon the idea of women as the appropriate teachers of other women. ⟦Stub⟧

[58] Men are *nearly* entirely absent, but Methodius himself makes an interesting cameo at the end, when Gregorion explains that Methodius questioned Virtue directly about the event (Meth. *symp.* Epilogue 293). For a discussion of this cameo and its implication on the gendering of Methodius himself, see Dawn LaValle Norman, *The Aesthetics of Hope in Late Greek Imperial Literature: Methodius of Olympus'* Symposium *and the Crisis of the Third Century*, Greek Culture in the Roman World (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 96–98, 191–92.

> Οἱ δὲ ἀτελεῖς ἔτι καὶ ἀπαρχόμενοι εἰς σωτηρίαν τῶν μαθημάτων ὠδίνονται καὶ μορφοῦνται ὥσπερ ὑπὸ μητράσι πρὸς τῶν τελειοτέρων, ἔστ᾽ ἂν ἀποκυηθέντες ἀναγεννηθῶσιν εἰς μέγεθος καὶ κάλλος ἀρετῆς, καὶ πάλιν αὖ κατὰ προκοπὴν ἐκκλησία καὶ οὗτοι γεγονότες εἰς ἕτερον τόκον ὑπουργήσωσι τέκνων καὶ ἀνατροφὴν μήτρας δίκην ἐν τῷ δοχείῳ τῆς ψυχῆς τὸ θέλημα τελεσφορήσαντες ἀλώβητον τοῦ λόγου.
>
> But those who are not yet perfect, and are beginning the lessons leading to salvation, are being brought forth in labor and are being formed by the more perfect as by mothers, until, having been begotten, they are born again unto the greatness and beauty of virtue. These, having become at last the Church through a process of time, collaborate in additional births and rearing of children, like mothers, bringing perfectly to term, in the womb of the soul, the unblemished will of the Logos. (Meth. symp. 3.8.74–75)

As I have previously argued,[59] not only do Methodius' allegories of teaching as gestation gain a particular frisson in the context of all-female speakers, but the details of his scientific understanding of gestation consistently grant a more active role to the maternal body than other ancient gestational theories.

The *Symposium* is written as a series of ten speeches by the virgin participants. Thecla comes eighth in the line, but her voice returns at the end of the narrative, when, after being awarded a special crown by Virtue for her contribution, she leads the other virgins in an alphabetic epithalamic poem to Christ the bridegroom. In Thecla' hymn, there

[59] Dawn LaValle Norman, "Becoming Female: Marrowy Semen and the Formative Mother in Methodius of Olympus's *Symposium*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 27, no. 2 (2019): 185–209, https://doi.org/10.1353/earl.2019.0018.

are two interesting moments that are germane as we look at Methodius' maternal focus. The first is in stanza epsilon.

> Ἐλαθόμην πάτρας ποθοῦσα σὴν χάριν, λόγε,
> ἐλαθόμην τε παρθένων ὁμηλίκων χοροὺς
> μητρός τε καὶ γένους φρύαγμα· πάντα γὰρ σύ μοι
> αὐτὸς σύ, Χριστέ, τυγχάνεις·
> Earnestly desiring your grace, O Word, I have forgotten
> my fatherland, the chorus of age-mate virgins I have
> forgotten, and the wantonness of my mother and family,
> for you yourself are everything to me, O Christ. (Meth. *symp.* Hymn 286)

The nubile betrothed leaves behind her old life. This includes a *fatherland* (πάτρας) but no *father*. Rather, what she emphasizes is that she has left behind her *mother*—making "mother" the first words of a line, in contrast with the following line's opening with the vocative to her bridegroom, Christ (αὐτὸς σύ, Χριστέ). Methodius elaborates the epithalamia's traditional focus on the bride being taken from her *mother* specifically in order to join her husband's new family.[60] But instead of lamenting the break in the maternal relationship, here Thecla's song rejoices in leaving behind an immoral mother to join a significantly better household.

As has already been intimated in stanza epsilon, the story of fatherlessness is not complete. The very final words spoken by Thecla in her hymn, the last words we hear her speak in the whole dialogue complicate the absent father that has up till now been so

[60] Henriette Harich-Schwarzbauer, "Motherhood in Roman Epithalamia," in *Maternal Conceptions in Classical Literature and Philosophy*, ed. Alison Sharrock and Alison Keith (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 129–39.

prominent in Thecla stories. In the very last line of the poem, Thecla calls upon God as her Father.

> Ὦ τὰς ἀχράντους οὐρανοῦ, μάκαρ, ναίων ἕδρας,
>
> ἄναρχε, πάντα συγκροτῶν αἰωνίῳ κράτει,
>
> δέξαι σὺν παιδὶ σῷ, πάρεσμεν, ἔνδον εἰς ζωῆς
>
> πύλας, πάτερ, καὶ ἡμέας·
>
> You, O blessed one, who dwell in the undefiled seats of heaven,
>
> organizing everything with eternal power,
>
> receive even us (we stand beside you) along with your child,
>
> within the gates of life, father. (Meth. *symp.* Hymn 292)

In a deeply feminine dialogue, where Thecla and the other virgins were welcomed through the gates of an enclosed garden by their female hostess, who is only called after the name of her mother, we end with Thecla's certainty they are about to enter a deeply masculine place through another set of gates. They will be joined by their bridegroom and will be welcomed by his father into *his* house. While they abandoned their own mother and have progressed together with other women into a waiting space looked over by a new mother, they dream of their final entrance into a realm of male authority.[61]

Methodius' *Symposium* creates an all-female line of succession, and marks it out by using the matronymic. In so doing, Methodius follows up on elements already present in the focus on Thecla's mothers in the *Acts of Paul ant Thecla*. Instead of her biological and

[61] This language echoes other parts of the work, for instance, in Procilla's seventh speech interpreting the epithalamic Psalm 44/45, where the chorus of virgins enter the King's chamber in a wedding context (Meth. *Symp.* 7.3.156 and 7.9.168-169).

adoptive mother, Methodius further allegorizes maternity, making Thecla the 'daughter' of Virtue, daughter of Philosophy, and 'mother' to less mature believers.[62]

Conclusions

By focusing on an overlooked type of significant naming in texts from the second and third centuries CE, we have uncovered an intriguing link between the use of matronymics and the establishment of female lines of succession. In three different texts. Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans* (specifically Dialogues 6-8), the anonymous *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, and Methodius of Olympus' *Symposium*, women are referred to as daughters *of their mothers alone*, especially in the extended meaning of 'found families' among prostitutes and female ascetics. This adds an important aspect into discussions of significant naming, namely the *gender of the speaker*. The female idiom of matronymic use implies a female perspective that places more importance on women-woman relations and allow us to glimpse situations where women were allowed to establish lines of female authority.

This argument is an important revision to the more prevalent pessimistic readings of metaphorical maternity in late ancient texts. Writing in the context of Clement of Alexandria's maternal metaphors, Denise Buell argued that maternal metaphors were specifically *not* used in situations of social reproduction.

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[62] There were to be even more reuses of the Thecla story that focused on mother-daughter relationships. One intriguing example is Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Macrina*. Gregory tells how Macrina emphasized her tie to her biological mother so much that her mother would joke that her gestation of Macrina lasted her entire life (GNys. *Vit. Macr.* 5.20-23). This emphasis on maternal relationships goes hand-in-hand with Macrina's mother having a dream while still pregnant telling her that her daughter would follow the same path as Thecla (GNys. *Vit. Macr.* 3.2). The reference to Thecla not only foretells Macrina's ascetic life, but also intimates the maternal bonds that will be important throughout the narrative. For more on the Thecla-Macrina link, see Dawn LaValle Norman, *Early Christian Women*, Elements on the History of Women in Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 26–28.

> When Clement wants to stress…the transmission of lines of authority/power—in these cases, metaphors of paternity prevail. Metaphors of maternity appear in a shadow fashion, but always to represent the individual without power, such as the student who hopes to be a fertile field.[63]

This article has shown moments when this is not the case, when maternal metaphors *are* used to stress "transmission of lines of authority/power".

Just as starkly, Outi Lehtipuu has asserted in the context of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* that "a woman did not exist without a connection to a man—if not to a husband of flesh and blood then to the heavenly Christ."[64] While certain details in versions of the Thecla story point that direction, such as the ultimate hope to enter the bridegroom's house at the end of Thecla's speech in Methodius of Olympus' *Symposium*, such a bald statement does not cover the full story. A careful look at the use of matronymics in the three texts under discussion here reveals that an ancient woman *could* be known through her connections to other women, and more specifically to her mothers, whether those mothers were biological or 'found'.

Yet, our access to female lines of succession in the ancient world remain meagre. In a non-Christian context, prostitution was a highly visible female-dominated profession. It organized itself around mother-daughter didactic lines, as we see in Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans*. The Christian context, however, opened up new possibilities for lines of female educational traditions in ascetic circles and monastic institutions. But at least for now, these remained 'women-only' institutions. *Separate*—and we will have to leave off the question of equal for another date.

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[63] Denise Kimber Buell, *Making Christians: Clement of Alexandria and the Rhetoric of Legitimacy* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1999), 179.

[64] Lehtipuu, "The Example of Thecla," 364.

Although I have focused on the role and power of both biological and metaphorical mothers in ancient professions, the balance of evidence I have explored focuses more on children's paradoxical ability to *choose* their mothers. And when a child *chooses* a mother, that is the moment that the mother is formed or, more frequently, transformed, given an additional maternal role, or a different kind of maternal role than she had before. By focusing on mothers in professional lines, we are invited to think about the possibility of *moving between mothers*. We are asked to think about the moment of *becoming* a mother. There are no physical birth stories in these texts, only cultural birth stories. They are about the drama of adult children, about shifts in relationships, about losing children and gaining new ones.

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