

# Tyrolean stigmata in England: the cross-cultural voyage of the Catholic supernatural, 1841–1848

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This article considers the transcultural dynamic between English Catholicism and mainland Europe in the early 1840s through the lens of the reception of two famous Tyrolean women bearing the stigmata. After the publication of the account of their supernatural qualities by John Talbot, sixteenth Earl of Shrewsbury, Waterford, and Wexford they became the controversial subject of the heated debates on the nature of English and universal Catholicism, and by extension on the nature of religiosity at large. This article argues that adopting a transnational approach to the study of supernatural phenomena within Catholicism in the 1830s and 1840s allows us to look beyond the history of institutions and key figures in the polemic, and to shed light on more nuanced religious and devotional interactions between the British Isles and the Continent. As such this article also argues for the inclusion of supernatural phenomena in the transnational history of English Catholicism.

Keywords: mysticism, celebrity, transnational, supernatural, stigmata

I address myself to those who, like you, obedient to the recommendation of Christ, are willing to believe though they do not see [...] To those who reject with the coldness of incredulity, at once and without inquiry, or deny with the proud disdain of the philosopher, I shall say nothing.<sup>1</sup>

So wrote the Catholic apologist John Talbot (1791-1852), the sixteenth Earl of Shrewsbury, Waterford and Wexford (hereafter Shrewsbury), in a published and widely circulated letter to his friend Ambrose Phillipps de Lisle (1809-1878) in 1841. The message was clear to doubting Thomases across England: to believe was to see. The letter, ‘descriptive of the Estatica of Caldaro and the

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<sup>1</sup> John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, *Letter from the Earl of Shrewsbury to Ambrose Lisle Phillipps, Esq. descriptive of the Estatica of Caldaro and the Addolorata of Capriana* (London: Charles Dolman, 1841), 27.

Addolorata of Capriana', two young women in the Tyrolean countryside who had risen to fame for exhibiting the holy wounds of Christ, sparked sensational controversy immediately upon publication. Read widely, it became a topic in debates on Shrewsbury's public person and political agenda, on the role of religious credulity, the miraculous and the supernatural in Catholicism and, by extension, on the nature of Catholicism itself—global and English. By early 1842, a second edition was published by the London-based Catholic publisher Charles Dolman, who at the time was also responsible for the literary monthly *The Catholic Magazine*.<sup>2</sup> This edition came with the account of the earl's visit to the Italian mystic Domenica Barbagli in the Tuscan town of Monte San Savino. By then, Shrewsbury's letter had also appeared and been discussed to great length in most newspapers. Given the polemical vigour, we can assume a wide and diverse readership.

In this article we examine the circumstances in which Shrewsbury wrote his contested letter in relation to the evolution of international celebrity of the two Tyrolean 'miracle girls', and the lives the letter led during and after its public dissemination. By tracing its context and the ways in which it was interpreted, defended and rejected, this article provides a necessary and often overlooked perspective on the transcultural dynamic affecting debates on the development and nature of English Catholicism after 1829. This is a dynamic that is often studied from the viewpoint of theological disputes, ritual differences and anti-Catholicism, rather than in terms of the role of the supernatural, which nonetheless constituted an important part of people's religious lives.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, this case study suggests that the supernatural further obfuscates the traditional trinary of a 'superstitious', naïve Catholicism discursively placed in a neatly delineated opposition with a rational Protestantism, with a moderate Anglican Church perched compromisingly in the middle. To grasp the significance of the religious supernatural it is essential to look across not only national but also denominational boundaries. As we will see everyone, be they Catholic, Anglican or atheist, felt compelled to put pen to paper upon reading Shrewsbury's letter about the miraculous women that lived in the Tyrolean hills.

English Catholicism in the years between the Emancipation Act of 1829 and the restoration of episcopal hierarchy in 1850 has received

<sup>2</sup> Rosemary Mitchell, 'Charles Dolman, 1807-1863, Roman Catholic publisher', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Online edn, [<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/7785>]. Accessed 2 May 2019).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Mary Heimann, *Catholic devotion in Victorian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); John R. Wolfe, *The Protestant crusade in Great Britain, 1829-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991). The supernatural has received considerable attention for Reformation and Enlightenment England. See, for example, Alexandra Walsham, 'The Reformation and the "disenchantment of the world" reassessed', *The Historical Journal* 51 (2008): 497-528; Francis Young, *English Catholics and the supernatural, 1553-1829* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); Peter Marshall, *Invisible worlds: death, religion and the supernatural in England, 1500-1700* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2017).

bountiful scholarly attention. In particular, studies have long focused on narratives of a Second Spring and Catholic Revival, on the Irish Catholic question and the influx of Catholic Irish immigrants in England, on the interactions of Catholic figureheads with the Established Church (and the projects to reunite the church hierarchies), the Oxford Movement and its flamboyant key figures, and on the links of English (and Irish) Catholicism with the Holy See.<sup>4</sup> The emphasis on intellectual debates, theological polemics and grand figures has shaped the view of an English Catholicism tied to developments in mainland Europe, especially in its relations with the Papal States. Within the historiographical focus on anti-Catholicism and conflicts between English Catholics and English non-Catholics, this has further contributed to the contested image of an English Catholicism that had political (Whig) goals as well as ambitions of (re)conversion.<sup>5</sup>

The extent to which contested supernatural manifestations of faith fuelled the debates of the 1830s and 1840s has thus far been largely excluded from this expansive literature. This is partly due to the embarrassment surrounding such manifestations as expressed in those debates. In December 1841 rumours circulated that John Henry Newman (1801-1890), a key figure in the Oxford Movement who was increasingly moving away from Anglicanism and toward Roman Catholicism, had experienced a miraculous vision. This experience had convinced Newman to remain within the Church of England while nonetheless continuing his efforts to return ‘the Anglican Church to its primitive and Catholic roots’.<sup>6</sup> The supernatural was a sensitive matter in the inflammatory religious context of the period, and prone to being used as ammunition on the polemical battlefield. Meanwhile, in the public sphere such manifestations elicited

<sup>4</sup> Both narratives have been nuanced considerably in the last two decades by widening the lens from theological and intellectual religious history to day-to-day religious practices and beliefs. See, for example, Heimann, *Catholic devotion*; Gerard Atkins, *Making and remaking saints in nineteenth-century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016). Saho Matsumoto-Best, *Britain and the Papacy in the age of enlightenment, 1846-1851* (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, for the eighteenth century, Stephen Conway, ‘Christians, Catholics, Protestants: the religious links of Britain and Ireland with Continental Europe, c.1689-1800’, *The English Historical Review* 124 (2009): 833-62. For the nineteenth century, see, Michael Wheeler, *The old enemies: Catholic and Protestant in nineteenth-century English culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For the decades following the chronological scope of this article, taking the reinstatement in 1850 of Catholic hierarchy in England as issued by Pope Pius IX’s bull *Universalis Ecclesiae* as a starting point, some important work has been done to bring attention to the ‘Roman turn’ to ritual, apostolic tradition, and other aspects of ‘genuine’ Roman Catholic religiosity.

<sup>6</sup> John R. Connolly, *John Henry Newman: a view for Catholic faith in the new millennium* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 27. The rumours of Newman’s alleged supernatural experience were outed by William George Ward and Ambrose Phillipps. Phillipps himself had allegedly experienced a vision in 1823, preceding his conversion to Catholicism. ‘Ambrose Lisle Mark Philips Delisle’, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Online edn, [<http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=3739>]. Accessed 22 November 2018].

unforeseen but fervent reactions. Newman's admirers reinforced the rumours as 'pious gossip', while others felt it jeopardised the Oxford Movement.<sup>7</sup> English 'old Catholics', on the other hand, observed an underlying malign frequency in the story of Newman's vision. Shrewsbury, whose quote at the start of this article is indicative of the importance he attributed to faith, also and especially in that which cannot be proven, condemned Newman's supernatural experience: 'Does not this sufficiently prove Newman's Vision to be an illusion of the Father of Lies?'<sup>8</sup> The condemnation was inspired by Shrewsbury's suspicion of the Oxford Movement, not by distrust of the miraculous; after all, only months earlier the earl had visited the stigmatic women of the Tyrol.<sup>9</sup>

### 'Holy Land' of stigmata

Explaining and enhancing the exceptional charismata and popular appeal of the Tyrolean stigmatized women, Mario Marinolli, a theologian and major supporter for the cause of beatification of Maria Domenica Lazzari (1815-1848), argued for an 'anthropological' perspective that presented the people of the Tyrol as a stereotype. Tyroleans, according to him, were 'cold', tireless workers, and not inclined to exaggerated religious enthusiasm or so-called irrational devotions.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, their cults must be considered as genuine, and as proof of the presence of the divine.

Moving past Marinolli's stereotype, local manifestations of religious providence were a constant between the end of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century, and they could assume a symbolic function on an international scale. As Nicole Priesching argues, the notion of '*das Heiligen Land Tirol*' ('the Holy Land Tyrol') became for locals a way of identifying and representing themselves as inhabitants of a sacred place, and it also served as an effective narrative with which others perceived them: as privileged citizens of an immaculate world untouched by modernity and permeable by the divine.<sup>11</sup> The emergence of the Tyrol

<sup>7</sup> Meriol Trevor, *Newman: the pillar of the cloud* (London: MacMillan, 1962), 262.

<sup>8</sup> Cited in Denis Gwynn, *Lord Shrewsbury, Pugin and the Catholic Revival* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1946), xviii.

<sup>9</sup> In the second edition of his published letter to Phillipps, Shrewsbury included an account of his visit to Domenica Barbagli, the 'Estatica of Monte Savigno' in May 1842.

<sup>10</sup> Mario Marinolli, *Maria Domenica Lazzari. "L'Addolorata di Capriana"* (Trent: Grafiche Artigianelli, 1998), 183-91 at 183. Marinolli died in 1945 without having finished his apologetic book in honor of the Tyrolean stigmatic. During the diocesan beatification campaign of the 1990s, the *Amici della Meneghina* committee decided to finish the theologian's book and publish it posthumously in 1998.

<sup>11</sup> Nicole Priesching, *Maria Von Mörl (1812-1868). Leben und Bedeutung einer "stigmatisierten Jungfrau" aus Tirol im Kontext ultramontaner Frömmigkeit* (Brixen: Verlag A. Weger, 2004), 32-3.

as a sacred region is linked to France's invasion in 1796 and to the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. As Napoleon's armies steam-rolled over the Lombardy-Veneto region, the representatives of the four social orders (clergy, nobility, citizens, peasants) gathered in Bolzano and consecrated the Tyrol to the Sacred Heart, with its emphasis on spiritual suffering.<sup>12</sup> Napoleon invading the Tyrol, then, equated symbolically to an assault on Christ himself. A decade later, in 1809, once again in a climate of insurrection, the Sacred Heart was confirmed as a banner under which the Tyrolean people could unite against another enemy (in this case the French-Bavarians) and to defend a faith threatened by secular reforms. In both 1796 and 1809 the Tyrol was militarily outnumbered and outclassed; professional armies against improvised local resistance. In the Tyrol as elsewhere in Italy, the population sublimated the frustration of defeat in religious terms of redemptive suffering.<sup>13</sup> Martyrdom—personal suffering and *imitatio Christi* linked to the devotion to the Sacred Heart<sup>14</sup>—became the vocation of the Tyrolean people, or at least for some of them. Tellingly, from the 1830s we can observe a quantitative 'explosion' of such martyrs.

According to the novelist Maria Veronika Rubatscher there was an 'epidemic of stigmatics' in the first half of the nineteenth century, embodied especially by young, bedridden laywomen.<sup>15</sup> This notion led Ludovico Maria Gadaletta to change the quotation of the Tyrol's official anthem from 'Holy Land' to 'Holy Land of stigmata'.<sup>16</sup> Despite the region's evident exceptionality, stigmata must be situated in a broader framework. The nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century are considered by scholars as the 'golden age' of stigmatisation, with hundreds of cases reported in Europe.<sup>17</sup> In this golden age, the Tyrol seemed to be the golden land. Although the dozens of stigmatics mentioned by Rubatscher are likely to be an

<sup>12</sup> Carlo Romeo, *I sacri fuochi del Sacro Cuore: la devozione al Sacro Cuore di Gesù nella storia del Tirolo tra politica e religione* (Bolzano: Praxis 3, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Miracles, mystical, and paranormal phenomena and their connection with the war and suffering are reported in many other Italian regions in the same period. One of the most interesting locations was central Italy. See Massimo Cattaneo, *Gli occhi di Maria sulla Rivoluzione. 'Miracoli' a Roma e nello Stato della Chiesa (1796-1797)* (Rome: Istituto nazionale di studi romani, 1995), 67–102.

<sup>14</sup> Nicole Priesching, 'Katholische Führungspersönlichkeiten zu Besuch bei der Ekstatikerin Maria von Mörl', in Nils Freytag and Diethard Sawicki, eds. *Wunderwelten. Religiöse Ekstase und Magie in der Moderne* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2006), 115–41 at 118–20.

<sup>15</sup> Veronika Rubatscher, *Die Schmerzenseiche von Capriana* (Leipzig: Rauch, 1936), 62.

<sup>16</sup> The hymn was written by Julius Mosen in 1831, and was later performed by Leopold Knebelsberger in 1844. Since 1948 it has been the official anthem of the Tyrol and with the law 3/2005 of 14 January 2005 it was reconfirmed as such. 'Landesrecht Konsolidiert Tyrol' [<http://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokument.wxe?Abfrage=Landesnormen&Dokumentnummer=LT140015128>. Accessed 12 December 2018]. Ludovico Maria Gadaletta, 'Rosmini e l'Addolorata di Capriana', *Rivista Rosminiana di filosofia e di cultura* 108 (2014): 79–149 at 100–11.

<sup>17</sup> Joachim Boufflet, *Les Stigmatisés* (Paris: Cerf, 1996), 89.

exaggeration or are otherwise difficult to identify in primary sources, at least twelve of them are fairly well-known. Two in particular gained exceptional fame as renowned Catholic symbols not only in the Tyrol but worldwide. They were Maria von Mörl (1812-1868) and Maria Domenica Lazzeri, who were the main subjects of Shrewsbury's controversial publication in 1841. Despite the similarities with other mystics (almost all of them young, sick, virgin laywomen), their saintly celebrity assumed characteristics that set them apart in the popular perception and in the press.

Von Mörl, popularly called *L'Estatica di Caldaro* ('The Ecstatic of Caldaro', figure 1),<sup>18</sup> and Lazzeri, better known as *L'Addolorata di Capriana* ('The Lady of Sorrows of Capriana', figure 2) or *La Meneghina* ('The Milanese'),<sup>19</sup> were both born in modest families in South Tyrol, a linguistic-cultural border region between the Germanic and Italian spheres. They spent their childhood, characterised by domestic work and pious devotion, in relative peace until the death of Von Mörl's mother in 1827<sup>20</sup> and Lazzeri's father in 1828.<sup>21</sup> These losses transformed their lives. According to their hagiographers, the emotional suffering was so strong that it compromised their physical health forever. Epileptic attacks, paralysis of the limbs, and inedia forced the two young virgins into a bedridden state until the end of their days: fifteen years for Lazzeri and 26 for Von Mörl.<sup>22</sup> Doctors Johann Marchesani<sup>23</sup> and Leonardo Dei Cloche,<sup>24</sup> respectively, tried to find an effective cure, but every medical attempt was unsuccessful and only aroused a sense of compassion within their communities.

As attested by the German author and theologian Johann Joseph Von Görres (1776-1848), both women not only accepted their suffering but offered it up for the triumph of the Church and the salvation of

<sup>18</sup> Maria von Mörl was born in Kaltern/Caldaro (today in the Italian province of Bolzano) on 16 October 1812 from an impoverished noble family. Nicole Priesching, *Unter der Geißel Gottes: das Leiden der stigmatisierten Maria Von Mörl (1812-1868) Im Urteil ihres Biechtvaters* (Brixen: Verlag A. Weger, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> Maria Domenica Lazzeri was born in Capriana (literally the 'goats' village', in the province of Trent) on 16 March 1815. See Simone Sommariva, *Notizie storiche intorno a Maria Domenica Lazzeri o l'Addolorata di Capriana in Fiemme* (Trent: Tip. Artigianelli, 1948); Marinolli, *Maria Domenica Lazzeri*.

<sup>20</sup> Johann Joseph Von Görres, *The stigmata: a history of various cases* (London: Thomas Richardson and son, 1883), 127.

<sup>21</sup> Marinolli, *Maria Domenica Lazzeri*, 28.

<sup>22</sup> Their profile of holiness, as outlined by Otto Weiss for modern mystic women, showed many points in common with that of medieval 'living saints', especially related to charisms: Otto Weiss, 'Stigmata', in Hubert Wolf, ed. *Wahre und falsche Heiligkeit. Mystik, Macht und Geschlechterrollen im Katholizismus des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Oldenburg: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2013), 111–25 at 118; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy feast and holy fast. The religious significance of food to medieval women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

<sup>23</sup> Ludovico Maria Gadaleta, 'Rosmini e una mistica del suo tempo: Maria von Mörl', *Rivista Rosminiana di filosofia e di cultura* 106 (2012): 167–211 at 174–6.

<sup>24</sup> Leonardo Dei Cloche, 'Annotazioni intorno la lunga, penosa ed ammiranda infermità della vivente Maria Domenica Lazzari', *Annali Universali di Medicina* 84 (1837): 241–65.



Figure 1. ‘The Estatica of Caldaro (Maria von Mörl)’, J. R. Herbert, 1841 (private collection: Kristof Smeyers).

Catholic souls.<sup>25</sup> From unfortunate sick people they were transformed into heroic ‘victim souls’.<sup>26</sup> This was the meaning faithful locals and foreign visitors gave to their suffering. As mentioned, this narrative made sense not only within the Tyrol, where it resonated with the region’s devotion to the Sacred Heart; it was also meaningful outside of its borders. Following what Paula Kane has shown, in the nineteenth century several women deployed their physical suffering as a

<sup>25</sup> Görres, *The stigmata*, 171–2.

<sup>26</sup> Paula Kane, “‘She Offered Herself Up’”: The Victim Soul and Victim Spirituality in Catholicism’, *Church History* 71 (2002): 80–119.



Figure 2. ‘The Addolorata of Capriana (Maria Domenica Lazzeri)’, J. R. Herbert, 1841 (private collection: Kristof Smeyers).

means to appease divine wrath and to occupy a recognized role in their community.<sup>27</sup> Public interest seemed to depend on the visibility of mystic phenomena: the more observable (and disputable), the more they received attention. This happened to the stigmatics of the Tyrol. On Candlemas February 1832, Von Mörl fell into an ecstatic state for 36 hours, as testified by her spiritual father Giovanni Capistrano Soyer.<sup>28</sup> Stigmata appeared on 4 February 1834.<sup>29</sup> At the beginning of January 1835 Lazzeri confessed to the Capriana priest Michelangelo Santuari and his assistant Antonio Eccel that on 17 December of the previous year visible signs of the Passion had appeared on her body.<sup>30</sup> Through the display of religious charismata the Tyrolean victim souls became—in Weberian terms—religious virtuosi, perceived as ‘living saints’ by the faithful.<sup>31</sup>

In both cases, the cautious attitude of the clergy and the efforts of religious and civil authorities did little to stop their supernatural manifestations from becoming public knowledge.<sup>32</sup> In 1833 the

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*; Tine Van Osselaer, ‘Stigmatic women in modern Europe. An exploratory note on gender, corporeality and Catholic culture’, in M. Mazoyer and P. Mirault, eds. *Évolutions et transformations du mariage dans le christianisme* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2017), 269–89.

<sup>28</sup> Antonio Ricciardi, ‘Relazione storica di Maria Mörl di Caldaro’, in Anonymous, *Le tre mirabili vergini viventi nel Tirolo. Maria Mörl, Maria Domenica Lazzeri, Crescienza Niekhutsch* (Milan: Santo Bravetta, 1840), 5th edition, 7–51 at 19.

<sup>29</sup> The relationship between Von Mörl and her father confessor can be reconstructed from the pages of Soyer’s diary published in: Priesching, *Unter den Geiseln Gottes*, 128–93.

<sup>30</sup> Michelangelo Santuari reported to the higher religious authorities in a letter of 19 February 1835. See Ludmila Vesley Leonardi, *La santità nel Tirolo. Domenica Lazzeri da Capriana* (Rovereto: Longo Editore, 1991), 77–81.

<sup>31</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and society: an outline of interpretive sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 539–42.

<sup>32</sup> Görres, *The stigmata*, 181–3.



prince-bishop of Trent, Johann Nepomuk von Tschiderer, intervened in the Von Mörl affair and certified the absence of any ‘pious fraud’,<sup>33</sup> while in the spring of 1835 the Tridentine curia gave instructions to the parish priest of Capriana to stop the Lazzeri rumours.<sup>34</sup> Von Mörl’s ecstasies and Lazzeri’s Passions nonetheless attracted a growing crowd of visitors; in the summer of 1833 there were over 40,000 pilgrims in Caldaro.<sup>35</sup> First from within the Tyrol, then from Italy, Austria, Germany and France, thousands of visitors crowded the impervious mountain roads of Caldaro and Capriana, disrupting the daily life of small communities.<sup>36</sup> Among them there were curious people belonging to all social classes and denominations, some of them believers, some of them sceptics.

In 1837, Dr Leonardo Dei Cloche published a detailed medical report in the *Annali Universali di Medicina* about the ‘long, painful and admirable infirmity’ of Lazzeri.<sup>37</sup> This report caught the attention of the international scientific community, the members of which were eager to join the debate. Lazzeri and Von Mörl showed the supernatural signs on their bodies to doctors and university professors from all over Europe. Some influential voices in this debate were the German theologian Görres, the French historian of Christian spirituality Léon Boré, and the editor of *L’Avenir* Edmond de Cazalés.<sup>38</sup> The media celebrity built around the bedridden charismatics was, however, initiated by the volume *Memorie intorno a tre mirabili vergini viventi nel Tirolo*.<sup>39</sup> It was printed for the first time in Switzerland in 1836 and gained fame with its second edition, which appeared the following year.<sup>40</sup> Although the curator of the book is unknown, it is likely that the priest Antonio Ricciardi wrote the report on Von Mörl. Near the end of his essay he invited readers to make a pilgrimage to the Tyrol in order to visit the two stigmatics, described as the Catholic ‘living schools of perfection’.<sup>41</sup>

We do not know if Shrewsbury read Ricciardi’s plea, but he visited the Tyrol and entered the homes of Von Mörl and Lazzeri on 20 and 21 May respectively. In his letter to Phillipps de Lisle, dated 27 May 1841, he hinted at the importance of what he had witnessed in the bedrooms

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>34</sup> For the correspondence between Santuari and the Tridentine Curia, see Giovanni Brunelli, *Un fiore purpureo tra i monti* (Trent: Scuole Grafiche Artigianelli, 1968), 321–6; Vesely Leonardi, *La santità nel Tirolo*, 94–6 and 106–8.

<sup>35</sup> Priesching, *Unter den Geisel gottes*, 42, see n. 89.

<sup>36</sup> In the first part of the nineteenth century the modern Italian, Austrian and German nation-states did not exist. Here we mean the socio-cultural entity rather than the official political one.

<sup>37</sup> Dei Cloche, ‘Annotazioni’, 241–65.

<sup>38</sup> Görres, *The stigmata*, 198.

<sup>39</sup> Anonymous, *Memorie intorno a tre mirabili vergini viventi nel Tirolo* (Lugano: Veladini e Comp., 1836).

<sup>40</sup> Anonymous, *Le tre mirabili vergini viventi nel Tirolo* (Milan: Tip. Santo Bravetta, 1837), 2nd edition.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 7–52.

of these ‘living saints’: ‘You have doubtlessly heard of the Estatica of Caldaro, and of the Addolorata of Capriana. We have lately seen both: and consider them the most extraordinary object in existence.’<sup>42</sup> The international interest for the Tyrolean stigmatics also sparked debate among prominent Christians in England. At first glance, the loudest voices seem to confirm intradenominational viewpoints. Edward Dalton, the secretary of the Protestant Association of Exeter Hall, cited in an inflammatory opinion piece an anonymous correspondent from Chambéry who testified to the women’s ‘fake holiness’.<sup>43</sup> In response, Nicholas Patrick Wiseman (1802-1865), then president of St Maria College of Oscott, deployed his existing network in Italy to counter Dalton’s attack, as we will see below.<sup>44</sup> The popularity of the stigmatics of the Tyrol and the prominence of Shrewsbury’s letter, however, complicated ‘traditional’ standpoints in which sceptical Protestants and believing Catholics were diametrically opposed. Many English Catholics in fact felt deeply uneasy about the links that Shrewsbury’s letter drew, and particularly, that Shrewsbury’s opponents drew, between their faith and the supernatural phenomena in the ‘Holy Land’. Perhaps more surprisingly, some Anglicans felt compelled by the sensation of the ‘living saints’ and did not dismiss the miracles out of hand.

In that capacity, the Tyrolean stigmatics underwent two symbolic transformations. Increasingly within their fast-growing communities they fulfilled a social function and were seen, through suffering and sanctity, as the embodiment of the spirit of the Tyrol itself; they became ‘living saints’, although they were not (yet) judged positively by ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>45</sup> This was an international transformation that through the ever-greater numbers of faithful and curious, pilgrims and scholars, culminated in their media celebrity.<sup>46</sup> Closely related to this development was the stigmatics’ transformation, abroad, into symbols of a particular strand of nineteenth-century Catholicism. In England, supporters and opponents alike coloured this supernatural Catholicism in predominantly Italian hues.

<sup>42</sup> Shrewsbury, *Letter*, 3.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Lord Shrewsbury’s miraculous virgins detected’, *Morning Herald*, 15 November 1842.

<sup>44</sup> Gadaleta, ‘Rosmini e l’Addolorata di Capriana’, 101, 124-7; Ludmila Vesely Leonardi, *Maria Domenica Lazzari e i visitatori inglesi. La documentazione sulla stampa degli anni 1841-42-43 in Inghilterra e Australia* (Rovereto: Edizioni Osiride, 2007).

<sup>45</sup> On the social and political ‘usefulness’ of suffering mystics, see Luca Sandoni, ‘Political Mobilizations of Ecstatic Experiences in Late Nineteenth-Century Catholic France: the case of Doctor Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre and his “Stigmatisées” (1868-73)’, *Disputatio philosophica. International Journal on Philosophy and Religion* 16 (2015): 19-42 at 19. Aviad Kleinberg, *Prophets in their own country. Living saints and the making of sainthood in the later Middle Ages* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1992), 1-4.

<sup>46</sup> On the connection between fame, celebrity, and religion: David Aberbach, *Charisma in Politics, Religion and the Media. Private Trauma, Public Ideals* (Houndmills-Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996); Edward Berenson and Eva Gioli, *Constructing Charisma. Celebrity, Fame, and Power in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010).

*The Italian network*

How did English Catholic elites come to cross the Alps into the so-called ‘country of goats’ to reach Caldaro and Capriana, places so ‘terrifying for their solitude, for the deep ravines that flank them, and for their steep and sharp peaks’?<sup>47</sup> Who informed and permitted them to make their journey into the bedrooms of the stigmatised *alteri Christi*, ‘the most extraordinary objects in the world’?<sup>48</sup> Shrewsbury’s publication marked a turning point for English travellers, who were afterwards well informed about the practicalities of the journey. But he was by no means the first Englishman to set foot in the cottages of Von Mörl and Lazzeri. His letter mentioned several ‘reviews’ of visitors who preceded him and, as mentioned, by 1841 the ‘living saints’ had been visited by scholars from across Europe. Furthermore, Shrewsbury knew the procedure to get face to face with the famous stigmatics, ‘having brought letters from the bishop of Trent to the clergymen of the place’: letters he had acquired through the support of an Italian clerical network with strong ties to England.<sup>49</sup> This transnational link opened a conduit for malleable and conflicting religious understandings of the Tyrolean stigmatics, and helps explain how they could become arguments of note in English polemics surrounding supernatural beliefs and modernising Christianity.

Especially after wartime restrictions were lifted in 1815, travelling across Europe became safer, leading to an explosion in the numbers of English travellers to Italy and, conversely, to a fast-growing body of travel literature, published and unpublished.<sup>50</sup> Contemporary popular accounts that concerned themselves with religious themes often conjured up an ‘unsophisticated metaphor for Italian Catholic backwardness contrasted with English Protestant progress’, as Ross Balzaretto has shown for early nineteenth-century travel writing that focused on ‘dysfunctional’ Italian marriages.<sup>51</sup> This descriptive contrast served to paint the ‘bulwark’ of Catholicism as fundamentally

<sup>47</sup> Léon Boré, *Les Stigmatisées du Tyrol et la patiente de Kaldern et la patiente de Capriana, relations traduites de l’italien, de l’allemand et de l’anglais* (Brussels: Imprimerie Verteneuil, 1843), 188 for ‘country of goats’. ‘Relazione di un sacerdote inglese, ottobre 1842’, in Giovanni Brunelli, *Un fiore purpureo tra i monti* (Trent: Scuole Grafiche Artigianelli, 1968), 342–3 at 342.

<sup>48</sup> Shrewsbury, *Letter*, 3.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> This explosion of tourism led to a wave of criticism in which the act of travelling to an over-crowded Italy was at times conflated with what was considered in English public opinion to be an untoward sympathy toward Italian popery. See for example the commotion surrounding the publication of Lady Morgan’s *Italy* (London: Henry Colburn, 1821), Lady Morgan, *Letter to the reviewers of ‘Italy’, including an answer to a pamphlet entitled ‘Observations upon the calumnies and misrepresentations in Lady Morgan’s ‘Italy’* (Paris: A. and W. Galignani, 1821).

<sup>51</sup> Ross Balzaretto, ‘British women travellers and Italian marriages, 1789–1844’, in Valeria Babini, Chiara Beccalossi and Lucy Riall, eds. *Italian sexualities uncovered, 1789–1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 251–71.

different from religious life in England; it constructed a boundary that was intended to be absolute and non-porous. But, as Stephen Conway concluded, '[i]f religion could bolster national identity, it could just as easily cut across national boundaries and unite the British and Irish with other Europeans'.<sup>52</sup> Travel writings by English Catholics and sympathisers were explicit attempts to build bridges between England and the mainland; in the early nineteenth century they could sometimes be read as a plea for the potential 'reconversion' of the home country.

Italy in general and Rome in particular fulfilled a potent symbolic function in the imagination of English pro-Catholic circles in the 1830s. It was symbolic both as capital of the universal Church and as a romantic ideal: a land of medieval art and churches, either the cradle of civilisation or the ruin of a glorified past.<sup>53</sup> The addition of the Tyrol to the religious 'Grand Tour' of English Catholics, however, happened only when the reputation of the Tyrolean stigmatics spread internationally, from the late 1830s onward. Rome was naturally one of the most important stops on the route, and the Northern Italian lakes were popular among English romantics who saw in them an evocation of the Lake District. Rome, moreover, among its numerous churches and palaces of power, also harboured the Venerable English College, a training school for priests to the English mission, and a centre that played a crucial role in spreading the fame of the stigmatics.<sup>54</sup>

Among those at the College was its future rector Nicholas Wiseman. During his Roman sojourn, Wiseman met Antonio Rosmini (1797-1855), a leading figure in Italian Catholic philosophy, and they maintained a close friendship. Rosmini, hailing from nearby Rovereto, was one of the most fervent supporters of the *Estatica* (Von Mörl)—he was also her distant relative—and the *Addolorata* (Lazzeri).<sup>55</sup> He first went to Caldaro in September 1833. Enthusiastic about what he called a true religious experience, he began to entertain an international correspondence about the extraordinary phenomena in the Tyrol. Among Rosmini's recipients was Lady Mary Arundell, wife of the tenth baron of Wardour, who was sent detailed reports on Von Mörl's health and holiness and even received a portrait of the ecstatic of Caldaro.<sup>56</sup> Rosmini's network included Phillipps de Lisle since they met in Milan in May 1831. Phillipps de Lisle became a key figure in the

<sup>52</sup> Conway, 'Christians, Catholics, Protestants', 860.

<sup>53</sup> Judith Champ, *The English pilgrimage to Rome. A Dwelling for the Soul* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2000).

<sup>54</sup> Vesely Leonardi, *Maria Domenica Lazzeri e i visitatori inglesi*, 17–20.

<sup>55</sup> Gadaleta, *Rosmini e una mistica del suo tempo: Maria von Mörl*, 179–85 and Gadaleta, *Rosmini e l'Addolorata di Capriana*, 119–20.

<sup>56</sup> Gadaleta, *Rosmini e una mistica del suo tempo*, 192; Antonio Rosmini, *Epistolario Completo* 5 vols (Casale Monferrato: G. Pane, 1890), 5: letter 2267 'From Antonio Rosmini to the Baroness Mary Arundell', 7 June 1834; *Il cattolico. Giornale religioso-letterario* (Lugano: Francesco Veladini e Comp., 1842), 19: 259.

creation of *Institutum Charitatis*, Rosmini's Catholic institutions in England, urging the priest to send missionaries to Leicestershire with the aim of 'reconverting' England. Among those missionaries coming from Italy in the early 1840s were Giovanni Battista Pagani and Luigi Gentile, both eyewitnesses of the Tyrolean stigmatics in 1842. The Rosminian priests established close links at the very heart of the English Catholic community in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the College of St Mary of Oscott.<sup>57</sup> Oscott was profoundly reformed in the 1830s in large part due to the work of Mgr. Thomas Walsh (1776-1849) and the financial support of Shrewsbury. With the arrival of Pagani and Gentile, at a time when Shrewsbury's letter was still hotly discussed, it became the logistical centre from which the fame of the stigmatics of the Tyrol spread across England.<sup>58</sup> No less than three successive presidents were admiring believers of the 'living saints': Mgr. Henry Weedall (1825-1840), Wiseman (1840-1847 and 1853-1859) and most likely James Spencer Northcote (1860-1877) visited the famous villages beyond the Alps and defended the two Catholic celebrities against the vitriol that poured out of Exeter Hall and elsewhere.<sup>59</sup>

Rosmini's influence on the journey of English Catholics to the Tyrol was further cemented when the prince-bishop of Trent and the civil authorities of Habsburg restricted access. After the floods of pilgrims and visitors in 1834 for Von Mörl and in 1835 for Lazzeri, visitors required a signed letter of commendation in order to be allowed into the women's rooms by their spiritual directors. At the request of visitors, Rosmini activated his local network of clerical and secular authorities to obtain the bishop's approval, most notably baron Giuseppe Giovannelli of Bolzano, one of the most eminent political and social figures of the Tyrol, who had a profound impact on the bishop's decisions.

This Italian network not only facilitated the journey of English visitors to the 'Holy Land' of stigmata, it also created a stronger basis from which to refute the criticisms against Shrewsbury and 'his' stigmatics, which often focused on dismissing the Tyrolean phenomenon as 'one of the most infamous Papist tricks of modern times'.<sup>61</sup> That the stigmatics and their English visitors were easily characterised as papist in the first place, was precisely because of the strong association between Italian clergymen and English elites—an association that could

<sup>57</sup> Vesely Leonardi, *Maria Domenica Lazzeri e i visitatori inglesi*, 19–20.

<sup>58</sup> The interactions of the Rosminian priests with 'ordinary' English Catholics fall outside the scope of this article, though it can be assumed that during their missionary duties they talked about their personal experiences with Von Mörl and Lazzeri.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>61</sup> 'The Earl of Shrewsbury's "holy virgins" detected', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 April 1843.

indeed prove explosive when the supernatural became involved.<sup>62</sup> When media debate about Shrewsbury and the stigmata intensified, from the discovery of the stigmatics' 'trick' to their houses going up in flames,<sup>63</sup> English sympathisers put pen to paper and asked their Italian correspondents to provide first-hand counterarguments against the reports of fraud and fakery. From Oscott a plea for information went out to the bishop of Trent, Giovanni Nepomuceno de Tschiderer; Pagani even organised an expedition to the Tyrol that included the bishop of Sydney, John Beda Polding, in October 1842.<sup>64</sup>

Between England (and the English-speaking world) and Italy, then, there existed a well-established communication line that turned Von Mörl and Lazzeri into powerful if contested Catholic symbols in England. Shrewsbury's letter on the stigmatics was propelled into public polemic because it originated within this 'Italian network'. That connection simultaneously added weight to Shrewsbury's message and, in the eyes of sceptics, fatally undermined the credibility of the supernatural phenomena.

### *An earl travels to Tyrol*

By the time Shrewsbury set out for the Tyrol in the Spring of 1841, therefore, the stigmatised women had become a (altogether minor) point of focus in the English circles closely affiliated with Rosmini and the Italian network. They were known more widely in England because of the translation of Görres' *Die Christliche Mystik*, which appeared in 1838 and was read, at least in Oxonian and Catholic circles, as the emanation of a 'warm and fervent piety'.<sup>65</sup> The journey to the Tyrol, undertaken mostly by an aristocratic, networked elite, was not just a religious pilgrimage but, as pointed out, can be viewed as embedded within a longstanding tradition of English Catholics, and those sympathetic to Catholicism, who travelled to the 'religious heartlands'—or 'the heart of the Papal dominions', as one angry reviewer of Shrewsbury's letter called the Tyrol—in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Perhaps most telling in this respect was the missionary career of Fr Dominic Barberi, who preached in the Midlands in the early 1840s. Barberi went from being ridiculed for his preaching about Christ on the Cross to revered as a 'saint possessed of miraculous powers': Heimann, *Catholic devotion*, 160-1. Coincidentally, Barberi baptised Teresa Helena Higginson (1844-1905), who later became a stigmatic herself.

<sup>63</sup> 'Lord Shrewsbury's miraculous virgins detected', *Morning Herald*, 15 November 1842.

<sup>64</sup> Letter from De Giovannelli to Pagani, *Tablet*, 14 January 1843; Gadaleta, *Rosmini e l'Addolorata di Capriana*, 120.

<sup>65</sup> 'The life and writings of Görres', *Dublin review*, 6 (1889), 38.

<sup>66</sup> For a wide cultural analysis of the 'sense of belonging to a wider European Christian community' among the English and Irish in the period preceding the one under examination here, see Conway, 'Christians, Catholics, Protestants', 833-62. For 'the heart of the Papal dominions': *South Eastern Gazette*, 30 November 1841, 2.

Shrewsbury was not the first Englishman to come face to face with these saintly celebrities. He mentions a reverend Mr. Swarbrick, 'who passed the last winter [1841] at Rome' and visited Maria von Mörl several times in the summer of 1840.<sup>67</sup> Since 1833 a steady and increasing stream of visitors to the two stigmatics had included clergymen, physicians, and aristocrats.<sup>68</sup> Many of the English visitors to the Tyrol are mentioned by Shrewsbury himself, either to grant extra weight to the supernatural explanation of the phenomena preferred by the earl, as with Lord and Lady Dormer, renowned 'Old Catholics', or to explicitly reject alternative argumentations, as in the case of Dr. Edward Binns' diagnosis of mesmerism.<sup>69</sup> Nor was Shrewsbury the first aristocrat to visit an internationally known stigmatic and share that experience with the public. In 1821 Count and Countess Stolberg had visited the famous Anna Katharina Emmerick (1777-1824) in the Westphalian town of Dülmen. Similarly to Shrewsbury's letter, Stolberg's account was published and circulated in the German states, in particular through reprints in literary journals.<sup>70</sup>

Those who had come face to face with Von Mörl and Lazzeri shared their experience with the Oscott circle, but also more widely, in person and on paper.<sup>71</sup> Shrewsbury exchanged stories with the German prince Licknowsky, who had made the trip in October 1839, talked at length with the Dormers during their meeting at Aix-la-Chapelle, and asked several Englishmen for a written account of their own experiences of 'their pious curiosity'. In the early 1840s, the stigmatics were visited by several scions of recusant aristocracy. As members of a community of letters they corresponded, compared and commented upon each other's notes. These notes included not only the details of the stigmata and ecstasies of the 'living saints'—though the minute observations of the wounds and the pain constitute the lion's share of most letters—but also recommendations of a more practical nature. Henry Weedall's letter to Shrewsbury, for example, came with a warning: if the earl intended to travel to the Tyrol again he should not tarry, because the rumour went that Von Mörl was about to enter a convent.<sup>72</sup> Nearly as much attention went to the practical challenges of the pilgrimage: the dangers of the road, the jolting of the carriage, the discomfort of travelling by donkey.

<sup>67</sup> Shrewsbury, *Letter*, 9.

<sup>68</sup> For an extensive, though not exhaustive list of visitors, see Priesching, *Maria von Mörl*, especially 348–51.

<sup>69</sup> Shrewsbury, *Letter*, 112–20. Edward Binns (1804-1851) was a Jamaican-Scottish physician and author of *The Anatomy of Sleep, or, the art of procuring sound and refreshing slumber at will* (London: John Churchill, 1842).

<sup>70</sup> Stolberg's account of his visit to Emmerick was also read in England, where it was published in episodes in several newspapers, similar to how most people read Shrewsbury's letter.

<sup>71</sup> Léon Boré, *Les stigmatisées du Tyrol* (Paris, 1840); A.N. Veyland, *Les plaies sanglantes du Christ reproduites dans trois vierges chrétiennes vivant actuellement dans le Tyrol* (Metz, 1844).

<sup>72</sup> Shrewsbury, *Letter*, 15–6; Priesching, *Maria von Mörl*, 348.

Phillipps de Lisle, a driving force in the movement to unite the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches and, as we have seen, a pivotal figure within the 'Italian network', took Shrewsbury's letter to Charles Dolman for publication in early June 1841.<sup>73</sup> Immediately upon release, the letter was printed in episodes in national and local newspapers across the English-speaking world, ensuring maximum circulation for months. Shrewsbury made clear from the onset that the rumours and half-truths that were circulating in England about the Tyrolean miracles lacked nuance, and that his detailed account provided a 'more distinct notion of them than you have probably yet formed'.<sup>74</sup> Not only did Shrewsbury insist on bringing nuance to the 'stigmatics' story; Von Mörl and Lazzeri (and, in the second edition, the Tuscan stigmatic Domenica Barbagli) also served as a narrative way into an exploration of what faith meant, and could mean to English readers: 'They whose faith is incomplete, may there learn to perfect it,' he wrote, 'and they whose belief is already stedfast [*sic*], may know where to strengthen and confirm it.'<sup>75</sup>

Shrewsbury's account is peppered throughout with testimonies of other visitors, all acquaintances of the earl, which are quoted at length to underline this main message. 'When philosophy is at a fault, when science is mute, and reason is confounded, it belongs to religion to speak and understand,' he has M. de Cazalès, author of *The meditations of Catherine Emmerick* say, before adding that Protestants, philosophers, and even 'a great number of Catholics' rejected everything supernatural by building their argument 'upon certain pretended miracles or popular superstitions, which no one has ever seriously defended' in the name of reason.<sup>76</sup> This way Shrewsbury launched the stigmatics into discussions about 'modern' and 'scientific' approaches to miracles, in which it was often noted that 'the English mind has no true faith in the supernatural'.<sup>77</sup>

Many Catholics, too, were wary of accepting the inexplicable, as a close association with the stigmatics endangered the new-found, fragile tolerance toward them in English society after Emancipation. Reminiscent of the English controversies surrounding Italian miracles in earlier decades, Catholic attacks on Shrewsbury's letter were seen by advocates of the stigmatics as a strategy for Catholic 'rationalisation', in line with naturalistic sciences.<sup>78</sup> Living miracles like in the Tyrol

<sup>73</sup> Phillipps de Lisle continued to call for ecclesiastical union until his death. See, for example, his letter in *Pilot*, 7 July 1876.

<sup>74</sup> Shrewsbury, *Letter*, 23.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>77</sup> Anon., 'The Miracle at Rimini', *Rambler*, 6 (1850), 177.

<sup>78</sup> Francis Young, *English Catholics and the supernatural, 1553-1829* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 75-7.



naturally posed a more immediate threat to Catholicism's precarious position in the English religious landscape than biblical or doctrinal miracles did.<sup>79</sup> But the dismissal of everything supernatural came at a cost, Shrewsbury believed: it left Catholicism (and Christianity) bereft of its mystical authority and condemned 'real miracles' as readily as fake ones. The Tyrolean stigmatics thus became a case study in religious and scientific conscientiousness because of the earl's appeal to the importance of faith and scientific scrutiny concerning the supernatural. In 1840s England, he claimed, both had derailed. No wonder he asked Von Mörl to pray for his homeland.<sup>80</sup>

The letter's impact rippled across English society. It was widely read and contested, provoking a polemic that was intensified by Shrewsbury's very public (Catholic) persona and by the difficult denominational climate in which Anglicans and Catholics attempted to delineate their spheres of influence post-1829. The perceived vitality of the Catholic Church since the Emancipation Act, especially after the conversion of several high profile Anglicans, was considered by the State Church as a threat.<sup>81</sup> Shrewsbury's plea for a renewed attention for the supernatural—honing in from Italy, moreover—only exacerbated that hostility, which also had a political component. There existed among Anglican elites the idea that a 'superstitious Catholicism', as it thrived most notably and notoriously in Italy, had weakened the political landscape in the Italian states considerably.<sup>82</sup> England was to be spared a similar fate at all cost. Shrewsbury's pamphlet, and the popular introduction of the Tyrolean stigmatics on English soil, made palpable existing anxieties about an England that could 'fright the isle from its Protestantism', as one newspaper put it, and to regress to a 'superstitious' state, much like Spain or Italy.<sup>83</sup> Responses to the letter in the press were quick to dismiss Shrewsbury's stigmatics as 'fabulous absurdity' or 'revolting impiety'.<sup>84</sup>

The second edition of the publication, now expanded with the account of Shrewsbury's visits to the stigmatic Domenica Barbagli, did little to alleviate the situation: a new cavalcade of scathing reviews followed in which the very nature of Catholicism—'superstitious', 'incredulous', 'dangerous'—was under attack. On 12 November 1841 the *Spectator* compared Von Mörl and Lazzeri with dancing dogs or monkeys, beaten into performing.<sup>85</sup> By then the stigmatic women of

<sup>79</sup> On longer recusant traditions of wariness toward the miraculous and supernatural in post-Reformation England, see, among others, Walsham, 'The Reformation'.

<sup>80</sup> As did, in fact, other English visitors. See Thomas William Allies, *Journal in France in 1845 and 1848, with letters from Italy in 1847* (London, 1848).

<sup>81</sup> Wolffe, *The Protestant crusade*, 2.

<sup>82</sup> Balzaretti, 'British woman travellers', 260.

<sup>83</sup> *Christian Ladies' Magazine*, 13 November 1841.

<sup>84</sup> *Manchester Courier and Lancaster General Advertiser*, 20 November 1841, 5.

<sup>85</sup> *Spectator*, 12 November 1841.

the Tyrol had become symbols on all sides of the religious polemic, hundreds of miles from the cottages in which they suffered the holy wounds.

### *Stigmatic symbols*

One particularly revealing example of the transcultural power of Von Mörl and Lazzeri as religious symbols can be observed in the adoption of their most well-known ‘nicknames’. *Estatica* and *Addolorata* served as international shorthand for the two stigmatics, also in English—and, in fact, became generic terms for young women who suffered religious ecstasies and Christ’s Passion. In this section we propose a historicised reading of the processes that led to this international symbolic potential by situating the stigmatics within dynamics of exchange, both between the parties involved and between the different frames of reference that converged around their supernatural wounds. As argued by Nancy Caciola, ‘the saint is not a text to be read but a dynamic to be deconstructed’.<sup>86</sup> This is equally true for the more fluent category of ‘living saints’, particularly in a nineteenth-century English context in which formalised sanctity raised Protestant suspicions.<sup>87</sup> A brief examination of the stigmatics’ sociocultural environment allows us to point at some of the building blocks of their international reputation: the self-fashioning of their (living) sanctity; the forms of promotion; the role of local communities.

In line with the burgeoning historiography of sainthood that agrees that ‘sanctity is historically determined, culturally constructed, and socially enacted’, we posit that living sanctity cannot be reduced to ‘a certain quality of an individual’, an innate charismatic core, but is instead built from the bottom up, by the ‘saint’ and their surroundings.<sup>88</sup> Both Von Mörl and Lazzeri were aware of this. While their hagiographers depicted them as passive, silent victims and humble women who suffered rather than enjoyed their popularity in the media, contemporary sources show a different sentiment.<sup>89</sup> Lazzeri and Von Mörl played an active role in building their relationship with everyone involved in the creation of their saintly fame: the faithful, visitors, doctors, scholars, civil and religious authorities. Stigmatics may have

<sup>86</sup> Nancy Caciola, ‘Through a Glass, Darkly: Recent Work on Sanctity and Society. A Review Article’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 38 (1996): 301–9 at 303.

<sup>87</sup> Lucy Underwood, ‘English Catholic martyrs’, in Gareth Atkins ed., *Making and remaking saints in nineteenth-century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 144–60 at 148.

<sup>88</sup> Among others: Peter Brown, ‘Society and the Supernatural: A Medieval Change’, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: 1982); Bynum, *Holy feast and holy fast*; Patrick Geary, ‘Saints, Scholars, and Society: The Elusive Goal’, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: 1994), 9–29. For an additional bibliography: Caciola, ‘Through a Glass, Darkly’, 301–3. The citation is Caciola’s: *Ibid.*, 302. For ‘certain quality of an individual’: Weber, *Economy and society*, 241.

<sup>89</sup> See, for instance, Brunelli, *Un fiore purpureo*; Somnavilla, *Notizie storiche*.

complained—Lazzeri was said to be offended by the stream of visitors, and Von Mörl sometimes refused to speak with them—but they also opened the doors of their room or convent cell to display their ecstasies and stigmatised bodies to the crowds.<sup>90</sup> This engagement took on many forms. Having been made aware of scepticism regarding her stigmata, the *Addolorata* voluntarily underwent empirical experiments to prove the wounds' veracity: '[I]f some unbelieving person [...] did not believe that my sores at the hands, feet and chest were real, and that my blood is not true, that the smell of lavender is produced, it will be seen that I have real sores and real blood.'<sup>91</sup>

Chronicles of English visitors illustrate how Lazzeri entertained pilgrims and curious alike. Shrewsbury and his fellow travellers were given holy cards chosen by her especially and blessed, to take back with them to England.<sup>92</sup> The two stigmatics shaped their popular sanctity in accordance with a particular model of holiness that was built on virginal purity and corporeal suffering. 'I am not a woman, I am a virgin!' Lazzeri exclaimed in response to Capriana's parish priest who had called her an 'ordinary' woman.<sup>93</sup> Von Mörl, also, saw herself not as a woman or a mystic, but as a virginal martyr. The model of lay virgin saints can be partly traced back to antiquity, to wealthy widows who refused to remarry and instead dedicated themselves to God.<sup>94</sup> Throughout the stigmatics' careers of saintly celebrity, eyewitnesses reported what they saw in similar terms: eternal teenagers with an angelic, childlike appearance, who were unstained by the continued bleeding from their stigmata.<sup>95</sup> Theirs was a sublimation of illness: being bedridden for years provided irrefutable evidence of their purity, chastity and sanctity. Both Von Mörl and Lazzeri presented

<sup>90</sup> Gadaleta, *Rosmini e una mistica del suo tempo*, 177 for Lazzeri's refusal to accept visitors. Paula Kane, 'Stigmatic cults and pilgrimage. The convergence of private and public faith', Tine Van Osselaer and Patrick Pasture, eds. *Christian Homes. Religion, Family and Domesticity in the 19th and 20th centuries*, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014), 104–25.

<sup>91</sup> Ludovico Maria Gadaleta and Ludmila Vesely Leonardi, eds. *Il "Diarium Missarum" di don Antonio Eccel con annotazioni riguardanti Maria Domenica Lazzeri "l'Addolorata di Capriana" (1815-1848)* (Rovereto: New-Book Edizioni, 2015), 55.

<sup>92</sup> Shrewsbury, *Letter*, 31.

<sup>93</sup> Gadaleta and Vesely Leonardi, *Il "Diarium Missarum"*, 71.

<sup>94</sup> Marina Caffiero, 'From the Late Baroque mystical explosion to the Social Apostolate, 1650-1850', in Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri, eds. *Women and Faith. Catholic religious life in Italy from late antiquity to the present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 176–218 at 185. The virgin saint reappears in different forms throughout history. For an analysis of thirteenth-century beguine sanctity, for example: Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies. Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001). For the tertiary followers of the stigmatized St Catherine of Siena in the fifteenth century: Gabriella Zarri, *Le sante vive. Profezie di corte e devozione femminile tra '400 e '500* (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1990); Zarri, 'From prophecy to discipline 1450-1650', in Scaraffia and Zarri, *Women and faith*, 83-112.

<sup>95</sup> About the link between sickness and childlike purity: Robert Orsi, 'Mildred, is it fun to be a cripple? The Culture of Suffering in Mid-Twentieth-Century American Catholicism', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 93 (1994): 547-90 at 552.

themselves to the world as sacrificial lambs for the redemption of Catholics and the salvation of the Church—first in the Tyrol, and by the time Shrewsbury published his letter in the world. This sacrificial symbolism, suffused with the supernatural, is what resonated so strongly with Shrewsbury and, consequently, with his readers.

This symbolic power had a twofold effect. In nineteenth-century Europe in general, and in the Tyrol in particular virginal purity, suffering and immolation were the building blocks for a saintly reputation that fitted in a more or less coherent belief system and that resonated with some English Catholics precisely because of the emphasis on redemptive suffering. Paula Kane dated the emergence of an idealised ‘victim soul’ to the end of the nineteenth century, but Von Mörl and Lazzeri seemed to have anticipated it through the personification of religious suffering.<sup>96</sup> The supernatural character of that suffering, particularly their *imitatio Christi*, appealed to ultramontanes also in England.<sup>97</sup> It could also serve a political purpose, to reassert the power of the Church. As claimed by Marina Caffiero, at the beginning of the nineteenth century the Church’s attitude toward mystical and supernatural phenomena softened. Prophecies, ecstasies and visible phenomena were, perhaps not surprisingly given their popular appeal, interpreted as evidence of the reality of the divine in reaction to the dynamics of rationalism and secularisation.<sup>98</sup> Living saints like Von Mörl and Lazzeri, immolating themselves for Catholicism’s salvation, became useful intermediaries between heaven and earth in this culture war.<sup>99</sup>

Their saintly reputation reinforced the image of the Tyrol as holy land. For locals, they became guardians of the faith. In the rest of the world they reinforced positions already taken. In England and elsewhere, Von Mörl and Lazzeri either embodied the holy land of stigmata or were exemplary evidence of what was considered typically Catholic superstition and irrationality. The power of their image was therefore the result of a process of interaction between the stigmatics themselves, and between the stigmatics and their local communities. Those practices influenced ideas that were carried out of the Tyrol by Shrewsbury and others, and in turn influenced wider culture

<sup>96</sup> Paula Kane, ‘“She offered herself up”: the victim soul and victim spirituality in Catholicism’, *Church History* 71 (2002): 80–119 at 82.

<sup>97</sup> For the extent to which English ultramontanes embraced the supernatural in the years before Emancipation: Young, *English Catholics and the supernatural*, 75–7.

<sup>98</sup> For the ‘politicisation of religion’ in Italy: Daniele Menozzi, *Sacro Cuore. Un culto tra devozione interiore e restaurazione cristiana della società* (Rome: Viella, 2001); Menozzi, ‘Contro la secolarizzazione. La promozione dei culti tra Pio X e Leone XIII’, in D. Menozzi, ed. *Rivista di Storia del Cristianesimo* (Brescia: Queriniana, 2005); Emma Fattorini, ed. *Santi, culti, simboli nell’età della secolarizzazione (1815–1915)* (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1997).

<sup>99</sup> Caffiero, ‘From the late baroque mystical explosion’, 199–202; Francesco de Palma, ‘Il modello laicale di Anna Maria Taigi’, in Fattorini, ed. *Santi, culti, simboli*, 529–46 at 531–5.

abroad. Stigmata and ecstasy became culturally meaningful phenomena in England. Visitors, pilgrims, doctors and other experts continued to enlarge the impact of the Tyrolean stigmatics.

This is why the cultural significance of Von Mörl and Lazzeri cannot be analysed within their regional context alone. The immediacy and sensory experience of their supernatural phenomena disrupted the boundaries of debates on Catholicism and the supernatural in the 1840s; the circulation of Shrewsbury's letter forced all parties in those debates to take up a position and explain their attitudes to the supernatural. To do so, they reinterpreted, appropriated and adapted the significance of the Tyrolean stigmatics to fit their purpose. Redemptive suffering was, for example, mostly evaluated positively in Catholic circles, as was the religious enthusiasm of the pilgrims making the trek to Caldaro and Capriana and, in Italy, even the political resignification of popular piety.<sup>100</sup> But the sensational supernatural complicated positive attitudes, particularly as Anglicans and 'old Catholics' considered it part of an ultramontane agenda, and as sceptics were quick to dismiss supernatural religion as bigotry or mental illness, and ultimately only as proof that this strain of Catholicism was incompatible with 'modern', rational England.<sup>101</sup> In turn, however, these debates, broadened with the opinions of doctors, scholars and politicians, only fuelled desires to see the living saints with their own eyes, favourable or not, faithful or sceptical. They had not only become international symbols of Catholic supernaturalism but also a cultural phenomenon, discussed across society.

### 'Pray for England'

The miracles of the Tyrol were fitted into polemical exchanges only with great and continued effort. Shrewsbury's letter functioned predominantly as an instrument with which to portray English Catholics as superstitious and anachronistic. However, it—and by extension, Lazzeri and Von Mörl—was a potent, complicated and divisive symbol; it served as ammunition in debates across, between, and outside English denominations and provoked the drawing of new boundaries while others were crossed and troubled. This deeply affected perceptions of English Catholicism at a time of increased

<sup>100</sup> Maria Paiano, 'Religione e politica nel Risorgimento. La devozione al tempo di Pio IX', *Contemporanea* 19 (2016): 506-35 and Paiano, 'Devozione e politica: dai santuari alle Madonne pellegrine', in D. Menozzi, T. Calì, and A. Menozzi, eds. *L'Italia e i santi. Agiografia riti e devozione nella costruzione dell'identità nazionale* (Rome: Treccani, 2017), 295-321.

<sup>101</sup> Sandoni, 'Political mobilizations', 19-22. On the methodological implications of studying religious supernaturalism: Mary Heimann, 'Mysticism in Bootle: Victorian supernaturalism as an historical problem', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 64 (2013): 335-56.

public contestation (1829-1850). The particular interpretation of Roman Catholicism that was carried out of the Tyrol to the far corners of the English-speaking world was by English elites largely considered to be the embodiment of a Continental strain of Catholicism, and deeply undesirable. The Tory Party opposed Romanism as incompatible with English political institutions, while English liberals thought it to be diametrically opposed to the ‘doctrine of progress’, and the Church of England considered it infested by so-called superstition.

This image of clearly delineated factions with regards to Romanism has persisted for so long in part because all sides shaped and reinforced it to support their beliefs. Shrewsbury, too, as we have seen, situated what he had experienced in Caldaro and Capriana as part of a mission to reacquaint English Christians with the power of the divine: ‘They teach us,’ he writes near the end of his letter, ‘that the hand of God is not shortened, that He can still alter and suspend the laws of nature.’<sup>102</sup> The Tyrolean stigmatics reverberated in England, then, to a large extent because of Shrewsbury’s letter but also because they corresponded with a recognisable model of (controversial) sanctity. Unlike in the Tyrol, however, Lazzeri and Von Mörl exemplified a deeply problematic Catholicism for Anglicans, materialists, and many Catholics alike.

That the importance of belief in the supernatural character of the Tyrolean stigmatics was inextricably linked to English Catholicism in the eyes of Shrewsbury became explicit late in his letter. He lamented the framing of sacrifice in Mass, transubstantiation, and holding the crucifix as ‘damnable and idolatrous’ and ‘superstitious and offensive to God’ in his country—a framing he claimed had become an ‘integral maxim’ in its constitution.<sup>103</sup> For those Englishmen who refused to listen to the arguments in favour of Catholic forms of devotion, so Shrewsbury seemed to say, the stigmata on the living body of two women in the Tyrol were meant to convince even the staunchest of anti-Catholics; in fact on the last pages he challenged them directly to ‘dare to look upon the ecstatic of Caldaro, and the prodigy of Capriana’ and then repeat those accusations.<sup>104</sup> To opposite ends, but deploying similar rhetorical strategies, Shrewsbury’s opponents, political and religious, placed the Tyrolean stigmatics at the core of Catholicism in an attempt to stall its momentum in England post-Emancipation. One report in the *Essex Standard* saw the devil himself below the surface of Catholic artifice: ‘The garment that has been thrown over the deformities of that Church is wide, and thick, and long, but ever and anon the cloven foot will peep out, and here we have

<sup>102</sup> Shrewsbury, *Letter*, 42.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

a striking instance of it.<sup>105</sup> In such reports, Shrewsbury's brand of Catholicism was a mockery of Christian faith and the stigmata a 'Papist trick' that proved Romanism's malign intentions.

Simultaneously, however, the injection of the religious supernatural into these debates complicated the binary image that all sides propagated. The stigmatics were not to be looked at as an exclusively Catholic phenomenon; their potential as religious symbols transcended the Roman Church. 'Without any doubt,' Shrewsbury stressed, 'in the eye of a Christian, they are the two most interesting objects now in existence.'<sup>106</sup> An analysis of Shrewsbury's links with the Tyrolean stigmatics has shown how internationally renowned manifestations of the supernatural could be used by proponents and opponents of an expansive Catholicism in England, and how the acceptance or dismissal of the supernatural did not run neatly parallel to denominational divides. Many English Catholics disapproved of Shrewsbury's letter, and some Protestants were inspired by the evidence of divine intervention in the laws of nature. '[A]mongst us a Protestant gentleman', Shrewsbury pointedly wrote, '... was as much amazed as we were at the sight of such supernatural wonders, and... I am sure, would willingly testify to the correctness'.<sup>107</sup> In 1848, when the Shrewsbury controversy had for the most part quietened down, the Protestant rector of Launton, Thomas William Allies, published an extensive account of his travels through France and Italy. He spoke of the Tyrolean stigmatics in respectful, even laudatory terms.<sup>108</sup> By tracing their path to international saintly fame and the reception history of Shrewsbury's published letter, this article has elucidated how Von Mörl and Lazzeri could come to play a part in English debates on Catholicism and Christianity at large, through the debates among religious authorities, in the press, and in popular opinion. Catholic supernatural phenomena, contrary to how they were depicted by a cultural mainstream in the decades after 1829, stirred English hearts and imaginations across denominations.

This article has also suggested an alternative pathway into studying transcultural dynamics of Catholicism in the decades following Emancipation, when English Catholicism experienced renewed opposition due to its changed legal status, and was with fresh vigour considered to be hostile toward 'modern' notions of England. This tension was traditionally described as a largely internal affair in the British Isles. However, this article has shown the necessity of adopting a transnational approach towards these debates on the nature of

<sup>105</sup> *Essex Standard*, 17 June 1842, 2.

<sup>106</sup> Shrewsbury, *Letter*, 38.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>108</sup> Allies, *Journal in France*, 221–2.

institutional religion in a period of contestation. All factions embroiled in the polemics of this period looked to developments on the Continent to plead their case. The parameters of the study of debates on Catholicism must include these developments: English Catholicism was not insular. The religious supernatural, in this case the world-renowned stigmata of Von Mörl and Lazzeri, provides the historian of nineteenth-century Catholicism with a particularly useful window onto interdenominational tensions in England as they were influenced by international dynamics. It also offers a way to untangle internal anxieties of English Catholics post-1829, showing how English Catholicism was not monolithic but divided about the role of the miraculous and the supernatural in their faith. Bringing the supernatural into this history suggests a more nuanced view of the precarious English religious landscape in the years after 1829. Protestants as well as Catholics were divided in their opinions on Continental Catholicism and ‘Catholic superstitions’ abroad and at home; this can be adequately recognised only when integrating a transnational approach towards supernatural manifestations of religious fervour.