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Gender and Pilgrimage: The Impact of Gender on Miracle
Narratives.

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Abstract.

This essay will be exploring the gender roles presented in miracle narratives between the twelfth and fifteenth century. It will be drawing comparisons between gendered miracle stories, aiming to evaluate how hagiographers presented gender social norms and gender expectations. The gender profiles will be built up with other literary sources such as medical pieces that reference a saint or their cult in relation to gender performance. The study will focus on lay men and women, as the aim is to understand the average experiences and choices of pilgrims. The main sources used originate from England as it allows us to focus on a specific culture and its habit.

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Introduction.

This study will be focusing on the impact of gender in miracle narratives and its impact on the pilgrim and their choice of pilgrimage. There will be a particular focus on the choice and motif of female pilgrims as the vast majority of studies on the topic have explored the narrative of male pilgrims. The voice of the male pilgrim is one that has been focused on throughout the study of medieval history, and this study aims to shine a light on aspects of female pilgrimage through a variety of sources that reflect the average life experiences of lay women. In his book *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England*, Ronald C. Finucane discusses how female pilgrims have been neglected when studying medieval pilgrimage and that contrary to those studies female pilgrims make up a significant percentage.¹ Finucane found that the majority of female pilgrims attended their local shrines as it was safer than traveling to a long distance shrines, and because many of the miracles happened within the home, this may suggest that many female pilgrim experiences went unnoticed.² The aim of the study is to not only explore gender roles but also the significance of the female bodies in miracle collections and relics. The use of relics outside of the shrine will also be discussed in relation to male pilgrims and their place in women's miracle narratives.

The focus of this study will be the experiences of lay men and women as this will allow us to understand the experiences and the norms of everyday medieval life. Sources like the work of Margery Kempe will be excluded from this study as they do not reflect the average experience of lay women. Henrietta Leyser comments in her book, *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England 450-1500*, that Margery Kempe focuses on her own religious experience, she comments very little on her children, and her husband has little impact as a companion.³ Lay women may not have the privilege of documenting their experiences, having to rely on the shrine guardian and even then it

¹ Ronald C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (Surrey: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1977) p. 26.

² Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*, p. 186.

³ Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England 450-1500* (London: Phoenix, 2002) p. 230.

was up to the discretion of the individual guardian whether he believed in the miracle. As Diana Webb states in her work, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, “Even if their standard of proof were not ours, respectable churchmen claimed to require trustworthy evidence that what had occurred was really a miracle: it was common for witnesses to be produced to testify that the beneficiary had really been suffering from the condition that had now been cured”.⁴ It cannot be ignored that the authors of miracle collections were biased, perhaps their aim was to increase pilgrimage to their shrine, regardless the miracles they chose to document would have reflected current beliefs and norms in order to appeal to pilgrims.⁵ Many hagiographers have stated that the amount of miracles they have been told is truly overwhelming and that if they were to write them all the book would be too tiresome to read. So hagiographers had to be selective and chose miracle stories that not only portrayed the saint as great but represented believable real life situations.

Finucane recognised the potential within miracle collections to reflect the behaviours of medieval pilgrims and of other characters involved in the miracle.⁶ For this study, miracle collections written between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries will be the main source of evidence as over nine-tenths of the miracles written were cures of human illnesses.⁷ In her work *Wonderful to Relate: Miracle Stories and Miracle Collecting in High Medieval England*, Rachel Koopmans discusses a shift of focus in the early twelfth century miracle collections to the ones explored in this study. The early twelfth century miracle collections reflected the life of the clergy and their experiences such as ill monks, aggressive nobles, and property disputes.⁸ Later there is a significant increase in the collection of healing miracles relating to lay men and women, with miracles centred around ill children, shipwrecks, and the occasional difficult pregnancy.⁹ Due to the medicalisation of miracle narratives, we are now given a unique insight into how women treated not only their medical conditions but those of their children and

⁴ Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (London: Hambledon and London, 2000) p. 182.

⁵ Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval*, p. 182.

⁶ Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*, p. 14.

⁷ Ibid, p. 59.

⁸ Rachel Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate: Miracle Stories and Miracle Collecting in High Medieval England* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania, 2011) p. 114.

⁹ Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate*, p. 114.

other family members.¹⁰ There will be alternative sources throughout the chapters such as medical treatise and theological dialogues, giving us insight into how miracles influenced other aspects of medieval culture . As Koopmans states, “I believe that what most defined a cult, what made people, literate and illiterate alike, think of a cult as a living and active, were personal stories of a saint’s intervention”.¹¹

The first chapter of this study will be centred around pregnant lay women and their experiences during labour. Childbirth would have been a dangerous and frightening time in a medieval woman’s life, and would have had a massive impact on her health and on the household. Susan S. Morrison comments in her work, *Women Pilgrims in Late Medieval England: Private Piety as a Public Performance*, “Fertility, childbirth, and the health of the surviving children constitute a dominant feature in women pilgrim’s recorded motivations for setting out on pilgrimage”.¹² The second chapter will be focused on alternative female miracle narratives such as marriage, sex and feminine bodily functions. The bodily functions that will be explored are menstruation and breast lactation, as these functions either have a social connotation or a family one. For example, breast feeding effects the child and has connections to menstruation. The third and last chapter will be discussing the male pilgrim and what impact he has on the miracle narrative of other female pilgrims. Comparisons will be made between similar gender roles such as mother and father, evaluating how either gender is perceived and represented.

The aim of the study is to build a gender profile that allows us to understand the common motif for pilgrimage based on gender and its social norms. The expected end result will show that female pilgrimage is ruled by the body and its functions, dominated by traditional female roles such as motherhood, whereas the male pilgrim is expected to be more concerned with their reputations and name.

¹⁰ Hilary Powel, ‘The Miracle of Childbirth: The Portrayal of Parturient Women in Medieval Miracle Narratives’, *Social History of Medicine*, 25(4) (2012), 795-811 (p. 807).

¹¹ Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate*, p. 25.

¹² Susan S. Morrison, *Women Pilgrims in Late Medieval England: Private Piety as a Public Performance* (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 16.

The Pregnant Pilgrim.

Pregnancy and childbirth can be the most dangerous experience in a medieval woman's life, for her and the child. It is not surprising that in their time of uncertainty, many women sought reassurance from the church. Most importantly, the saints. Some saints proved more popular than others and were often approached for certain remedies. The patron saint of pregnant women is Margaret of Antioch, with over 200 churches in England where she was frequently depicted emerging from the belly of a dragon.¹³ Saint Margaret was often called upon to aid with pain during labour due to her torture and her battle with a dragon, which allowed her to empathise with pregnant women.¹⁴ However, there are very few miracle stories featuring pregnant pilgrims and their labour pains. William of Canterbury's *Miracula S. Thomae*, has the highest number of pregnancy miracles in a single collection, a grand total of seven out of 409 miracles.¹⁵

With so few miracle narratives focused on the experiences of the pregnant pilgrim, it is difficult to create an image that reflects the pregnancies of lay women. There are other aspects of pilgrimage, such as ampullae and contact relics, that have aided medieval women during labour. Morrison focuses a lot her studies in *Women Pilgrims in Late Medieval England* on the relics, ampullae and spaces pregnant pilgrims interacted with. These ampullae were often filled with holy water from the shrine, and in the case of Walsingham it was the Virgin's milk and stone shavings from the milk grotto.¹⁶ By doing this the pilgrim created a secondary relic or contact relic that could be given or lent to others, like pregnant women. Anthonius Guainerius, an early fifteenth century physician, writes in his *Tractus de matricibus*, Treatise on the Womb, that:

"At the time of birth, it is good that the legend of the blessed Margaret be read, that she have the relics of the saints on her, and that you carry out briefly some familiar ceremonies in order to please the patient and the old woman".¹⁷

¹³ David Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) pp. 289-290.

¹⁴ Lesyer, *Medieval Women*, p. 128.

¹⁵ Hilary Powel, 'The Miracle of Childbirth', p. 796.

¹⁶ Morrison, *Women Pilgrims*, p. 25.

¹⁷ Roison Donohoe, "Undynde her anoon': The Lives of St Margaret of Antioch and the Lying-in Space in Late Medieval England', in *Gender in Medieval Places, Spaces and Thresholds*, ed. By Victoria Blud, Diane

This clearly shows that relics were present in the lying-in chambers, and that it was common practice to involve them in the process as it would please the older generations who have become accustomed to it. Marian relics were extremely popular with pregnant pilgrims, there are multiple examples of her girdle that were on display for pilgrims, and hundreds of vials of her breast milk could be found throughout Europe.¹⁸ At various Marian shrines such as Chartres, birthing talismans with the image of the Virgin's girdle stamped onto lead badges were available to purchase to alleviate the fears of mothers to be.¹⁹ So common was the practice that it received criticism and their authenticity was questioned. In his *Treatise on Relics*, written in 1543, John Calvin mocked the popularity of the Virgin's breast milk stating:

"With regard to the milk, there is perhaps not a town, convent, or nunnery where it is not shown in large or small quantities. Indeed, had the Virgin been a wet-nurse her whole life, or a dairy, she could not have produced more than is shown as hers in various parts".²⁰

It can be argued that the use of ampullae and other similar items in the home may have impacted the number of pregnancy narratives at shrines. Scribes may not have seen the need to record every pilgrim who purchased an ampullae for pregnant women, or maybe their numbers were too great to keep count. Perhaps the pilgrim never voiced their motives when purchasing ampullae.

There may have been few reports of birthing miracles at the shrines but there are examples of members of the church recording miraculous events within the lying-in chamber. In his work *Children in the Middle Ages*, Peter Biller explores the accounts of priests who are present during these miracles. In one of the accounts, the priest credits St Thomas Becket with the miracle:

Heath and Einat Klafter (School of Advanced Study, University of Historical Research, 2019), pp. 137-156, (p. 140).

¹⁸ Katherine Allen Smith, 'Mary or Michael? Saint-Switching, Gender, and Sanctity in a Medieval Miracle of Childbirth', *Church History*, 74(4) (2005), 758-783 (pp. 773-774).

¹⁹ Katherine Allen Smith, 'Mary or Michael?', p. 774.

²⁰ Vibeke Olson, 'Embodying the Saint: Mystical Visions, *Maria Lactans* and the Miracle of Mary's Milk', in *Matter of Faith: An Interdisciplinary Study of Relic Veneration in the Medieval Period*, ed. By J. Robinson and L. Beer and A. Harden (London: The Trustees of The British Museum, 2014), pp. 151-158, (p. 151).

“One of my parishioners was in labour in a difficult childbirth. One arm would not come out, and when it would not follow the hands of the midwives who were struggling to bring it out it swelled to equal the thickness of a man’s leg.... The [mother] shrank at every touch, and whenever they [midwives] applied their hands she cried out in dread. She went through almost a night and day.... I profess I noticed there was no help for her unless the arm was cut off. Fortunately, the hand was withdrawn and the foetus turned and presented normally all through the intervention of St Thomas [of Canterbury]”.²¹

As discussed previously, Thomas Becket has one of the highest numbers of birthing miracles in his collection and is clearly renowned for his help. Morrison points out in her book that Becket was responsible for fertility cures and aiding breastfeeding women.²² According to Benedict of Peterborough, Thomas Becket was able to transform water into milk for female pilgrims who could not lactate due to a poor choice of diet.²³ There are other examples of pregnant pilgrims attending shrines belonging to male saints or requesting their relics for the lying-in chamber. The English historian Eadmer has one of the earliest references to a saint aiding in pregnancy in his work, *Vita Sancti Anselmi*, stating:

“....it is common practice for sick people on all sides and especially for women in the dangers of childbirth, to ask for the belt with pious intention and in the sure hope they will regain their health if only they can have the use of it for the time-being”.²⁴

‘For the time-being’ suggests that the ability to remove the relic into the lying-in chamber may have been the cause of the belts popularity. It would be difficult to find the time as a pregnant pilgrim to not only travel to the shrine, but to also remain there

²¹ Peter Biller, ‘Children in the Middle Ages’, *History Today* (1986), pp. 42-43. (Found in Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women*, p. 127-128).

²² Morrison, *Women Pilgrims*, p. 3.

²³ Ibid, p. 18.

²⁴ *The Life of St Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury by Eadmer*, ed. And trans. By R.W. Southern (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) p. 165.

until they go into labour is not feasible. Ampullae and similar contact relics may have fulfilled this role; replacing the need to attend distant shrines and relics. The next example gives an account of women attending shrines after an unsuccessful pregnancy. Perhaps these pilgrims had already used relics associated with the lying-in chamber and were disappointed, their last hope is to attend the shrine itself. William of Malmesbury is the author of various saints' lives, his account from the life of St Benignus briefly mentions these pilgrims:

"From many provinces flocked in people [to his tomb] afflicted with all kinds of illness, the blind, the dumb, the paralytic, the leprous, the mad, the dropsical, the crippled, women too who carried dead foetuses in their wombs; all were healed by St Benignus's merits, and went back home with a light step".²⁵

In the miracle collection of William of Norwich, there is one miracle concerning childbirth. This miracle not only emphasises the use of secondary relics in the lying-in chamber but the ingenuity of the pilgrim as she created a relic to take back to her home. In her work *Common Ground: Reliquaries and the Lower Classes in Late Medieval Europe*, Sara Black explores the uses of common items such as rocks and stones as contact relics for use by lay people.²⁶ Although they are not originally relics, the pilgrims believed that the environment surrounding the saint absorbed some of the 'holy powers' as Finucane described as 'holy radioactivity'.²⁷ In this miracle, a woman named Botilda removes a fern from the burial place of Saint William and keeps it, as it was 'likely to be a benefit to her in the time to come'.²⁸ It is suggested that she removes the fern knowing that she will need the aide of the saint during her pregnancy as only a few days late she goes into labour:

²⁵ *Saints' Lives: Lives of SS Wulfstan, Dunstan, Patrick, Benignus, and Indract by William of Malmesbury*, ed. And trans. By Michael Winterbottom and Rodney M. Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002) p. 364.

²⁶ Sara Black, 'Common Ground: Reliquaries and the Lower Classes in Late Medieval Europe', in *Matter of Faith: An Interdisciplinary Study of Relics and Veneration in the Medieval Period*, ed. By J. Robinson, and L. Beer, and A. Harden (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 2014), pp. 110-115, (p. 112).

²⁷ Sara Black, 'Common Ground', p. 111.

²⁸ *The Life and Miracles of St William of Norwich by Thomas of Monmouth*, ed. And trans. By Augustus Jessop and M.R. James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p. 78.

“And a few days after she, being with child, began to be in labour. But when for 15 days her agony went on from more to more, and though many medicines were given to her which profited nothing, at last she even drank the water of certain relics which had been blessed, and not even so was she any better. And when at last she seemed to have come to her last hour, in the extremity of her pain she raised her eyes to heaven, and stretched out her arms to right and left and rolled her eyes in every way in agony; and lo! She saw the little sprig of fern hanging on the wall beside her; and she said to those that were standing by, “Oh unhappy that I am! How forgetful I have been! I have delayed my own deliverance! Make haste and take that sprig of fern and steep it in holy water and give it me to drink!” Which when they had done, holding the cup she cried “Oh boy-martyr William, vouchsafe to show at this time in how great esteem thou art with God, and pitying thy servant in her extremity stretch for the right hand of thy power over me!” With these words she drained the contents of the cup”.²⁹

In his work *The Miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, William of Malmesbury writes of a pregnant pilgrim who takes a dangerous journey to the shrine of St Michael. There are two versions of this miracle, one depicts the Virgin Mary as the saviour, and the other has St Michael. Both narratives have changed and altered the perception of the female pilgrim in order to fit the values of the favoured saint. Both bring to focus certain literary tropes regarding the gender of both the pilgrim and the saint. The Marian miracle, often called ‘The Peril’, is interesting because it shows the pilgrim to be traveling even though she is heavily pregnant and close to her due date, and risking her life as well as her child in travelling to the shrine:

“One feast day, then, crowds were hurrying there, among them a poor pregnant woman near her time. And here comes the terrible roar of the advancing waves. Terrified at the sound, everybody doubted their safety. The able-bodied could get away by running fast. But (poor thing!) no one helped the unhappy, or I should more properly say the happy, woman. For happy indeed she was, as the outcome showed.

²⁹ Thomas of Monmouth, pp. 78-79.

She was enveloped in the waves, grim death was upon her, no one was helping. Let everyone who hears this search the depths of his own conscience, and judge, if he can, with what sobs she assailed to Heaven; for I cannot put into words what the woman felt in such straits. But because she had absolutely no help from man, the Virgin Mary came with help from Heaven; she protected her with her sleeve and kept her safe from all danger. In the midst of the waves there formed an agreeable place for her to give birth: The Virgin's sleeve made a chamber scented more sweetly than balsam".³⁰

Both the William of Norwich birthing miracle and the Marian sea miracle have neglected to mention the father or husband of the women. This is not surprising for the Marian miracle as the Virgin Mary often performed miracles for women conceived outside of marriage or in other taboo situations.³¹ The removal of the husband from the miracle can be a reflection of the development of Marian miracles in the twelfth century that stressed the ability of the Virgin Mary to aide certain sinners, emphasising the possibilities of redemption.³² Although it is suggested that the pregnant pilgrim conceived without a suitable partner, the Virgin knows the true strength of the pilgrims devotion by attempting the pilgrimage and therefore is deserving of the Virgin's intervention. Smith comments, "Separated from the sinful world – and from her own implicitly wicked past – by the Virgin's embrace, the fallen womans transgressions are forgiven even before she completes her pilgrimage and finishes her penance".³³

Another example of the Virgin Mary aiding a sinful woman is the repeated Marian motif of a clergy woman who falls victim to the sins of the flesh. The result differs from prostitution to giving birth to an illegitimate child. The previous miracles explored focused on the narrative of lay women, however, it is possible that miracles regarding fallen members of the clergy would have been told to pilgrims at shrines or on their travels, and would have encouraged the lay pilgrim to attend the saints shrine.

³⁰ *The Miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary by William of Malmesbury*, ed. And trans. By R.M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2015) p. 119.

³¹ Katherine Allen Smith, 'Mary or Michael?', p. 774.

³² Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary*, p. 299.

³³ Katherine Allen Smith, 'Mary or Michael?', p. 776.

What is interesting about this miracle is that, not only does she aide an abbess in having a pain free labour, but also hides the evidence of her pregnancy in order to protect her status in the convent:

“While this was going on in the chapter, the most merciful Virgin, flanked by a company of angels, appeared to the abbess as she prayed in private. For having no mortal to console her she had recourse with all her heart to divine help; and the Mother of Mercy stood by the poor woman. Full of pain, and in extreme distress and fatigue, she was overcome by sleep; and in the absence of a midwife she enjoyed the services of the blessed Virgin. Who ever heard of a miracle of the kind? It is quite unparalleled that a woman should give birth while dreaming. But his abbess, after first being reprimanded in her sleep by the Blessed Virgin, proceeded to give birth to a son, with no pain. The new-born child was sent by the blessed Virgin, by means of an angel, to a faithful servant of hers to foster.

.... The bishop sent clergy, he sent laymen, he sent nuns, he sent men and women. The abbess was ordered to be brought in and examined in the presence of them all. An extraordinary thing happened: she had been pregnant shortly before, yet now she was found quite free of any sign of such burden, no trace of childbirth was found on her. In the end the bishop felt the abbess’s belly. As the charges against the abbess had been shown up as a falsehood, he ordered the accusers to be put to torture”.³⁴

In her work *The Miracle of Childbirth: The Portayal of Parturient Women in Medieval Miracle Narratives*, Hilary Powel discusses this miracle that is also found in the collection of Marian miracles written by Dominic of Evesham. It is interesting to note that Dominic also wrote a version of the Peril.³⁵ Powel suggests that, although the miracle of the pregnant abbess features childbirth, it is in fact not about the act of childbirth.³⁶ The miracle is about the Virgin Mary protecting the abbess from public shame, the

³⁴William of Malmesbury, p. 116.

³⁵Katherine Allen Smith, ‘Mary or Michael?’, p. 764.

³⁶ Hilary Powel, ‘The Miracle of Childbirth’, p. 802.

possibility of being removed from the convent and possibly becoming a harlot as previous miracles have shown.³⁷ It is also important to note that the Virgin Mary is the patron saint of nuns, which would explain why she goes so far as to provide a foster carer for the child and takes on the role of midwife.³⁸ The Virgin Mary taking on the role of midwife is a common motif in Marian miracles, she has even gone as far as to pretend to be a knight in a tournament.³⁹

Having evaluated the sources, it is clear to see that pregnancy spilled into many aspects of medieval literature if not miracle collections. Even though there are few examples of specific pregnancy narratives in miracle collections, the saint interaction with the experience has been noted in small fragments that give us insight into the intimate relationship with medicine and religion. The involvement of male saints in pregnancy indicates that pilgrims did not separate saints by gender regarding health and medicine, and that this could be the same for male specific illnesses.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary*, p. 468.

³⁹ Leyser, *Medieval Women*, p. 223.

The Female Pilgrim.

When exploring the gender of the pilgrims in miracle collections, it is clear that when classifying female pilgrims, the narrative is focused on the role of the feminine body. As Leyser, points out, “Medieval women were classified according to their sexual status: men might be thought of collectively as knights, merchants, crusaders; women were virgins, wives or widows”.⁴⁰ This chapter will explore the implications of the sexual status of female pilgrims and how the functions of the female body impacted their pilgrimage. Examples of these will be menstruation, lactation, and the responsibilities of childcare and marriage. Morrison highlights the key role the female body had on the household, and also on the healthcare of the entire family unit: “Many women travelled for the sake of the family, which was often centred on the woman’s body, the body which could have sex, reproduce, carry a child, give birth and lactate. But if this body could not function properly – if it were sterile, if the child it carried miscarried, if the child it carried died or was sickly, if the body could not heal after birth, if the body could not produce milk to feed the child – then the body, a metonymy for a healthy functioning family, needed to be cured”.⁴¹

It is important when evaluating gender and the body not to place current terms or ideology such as sexism or misogyny onto the sources as this would not have been a concept in the mind of the medieval reader. Medieval authors and individuals tried to make sense of complicated issues such as menstruation, and it is not up to this essay to pass judgement. It is clear in the writing of the time that the topic of menstruation was a taboo subject with conflicting views:

“And if any man chances to read it I pray him and charge him on our Lady’s behalf that he read it not in any way that would show contempt or be slanderous of any woman, nor for any reason except their healing and help, dreading the vengeance that might fall to him as it has done to others that have revealed women’s secrets in

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 93.

⁴¹ Morrison, *Women Pilgrims*, p. 3.

a slanderous fashion; certainly understanding that those women who are now alive have troubles no different from those once endured by women who now are saints in heaven".⁴²

It is suggested here that woman's issues – like menstruation – was viewed negatively or impacted their reputations. The use of the term 'slanderous' implies that the process of menstruation could figuratively stain the image of the woman and be held against her. This can be seen in a small example of miracle collections. William of Canterbury wrote of a woman who vomits up her menstrual blood when tempted to sleep with a knight.⁴³ What significance does menstrual blood have with sexual punishments? In their work *Gender, Health, and Healing 1250-1550*, Sharon Strocchia and Sara Ritchey explore the medieval understanding of the female body. Helen Rodnite Lemay focuses on the correlation between blood, milk, and 'breastbleeding' in medieval medicine. It is interesting to see in their work how the by-product of the female body can be interpreted and how it effects the narrative of miracles stories. Lemay writes, "In the second half of the thirteenth century, the influence of Aristotelianism as well as a revival of the Plinian tradition in learned circles helped to develop and spread a physiological view of female bodies that linked the centrality of menstrual blood to women's potential for venom".⁴⁴

In her work *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, Monica Green states, "A history of medieval women's healthcare could no doubt, be written entirely from saint's lives or canonisation proceedings, culling from these documents... tales of difficult birth, incurable diseases, and various attempts to seek relief".⁴⁵ In medieval medical theories, Menstrual blood and breastmilk were connected, as the menstrual blood was retained to provide food for the unborn child, and breastmilk would provide nutrition for the

⁴² Alexandria Barratt, *Women's Writing in Middle English* (Routledge, 2010) pp. 29-31.

⁴³ Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate*, p. 118.

⁴⁴ Helen Rodnite Lemay, 'Women's Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus' *De Secretis Mulierum* with Commentaries', in *Gender, Health, and Healing 1250-1550*, ed. By Sara Ritchey and Sharon Strocchia (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020) p. 99.

⁴⁵ Monica H. Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. XI.

new-born child.⁴⁶ In the *Secreta Mulierum*, 'Secrets of Women', a description is given of a system connecting the womb and the breasts in order to exchange these fluids:

"The child is enclosed in the womb by a natural power which is hidden in the complexion of the foetus. The first thing that develops is a certain vein or nerve which perforates the womb and proceeds from the womb up to the breasts. When the foetus is in the uterus of the mother her breasts are hardened, because the womb closes and menstrual substances flows to the breast. Then this substance is cooked with white heat, and it is called the flower of the woman; because it is white milk it is also called the milk of woman. After being cooked in this way, it is sent through the vein of the womb, and there the foetus is nourished with its proper natural food. This vein is the umbilical cord which is cut off by the midwives at birth, and thus we see the newborn babies with their cord tied with a piece of iron".⁴⁷

It can be suggested then that the menstrual blood used to punish the adulterous woman is a metaphor for the 'flower of the woman' being tainted. Her desire to sleep with the knight is not for the purpose of reproduction, and therefore, the material used to nourish the infant, both in the womb and out, is used to punish her. It can be argued that the purging of a woman's body with menstrual blood medically can be reflected in the miracle as Lemay writes, "Menstrual blood was considered to be the purgation that all woman, cold in nature, required. Menstruation was understood as providing the function of cleansing or purging women's bodies of the residual superfluities that their overall lack of heat prevented them from consuming or refining semen".⁴⁸

There are other examples of the female body suffering due to their sexual desires. Phillip of Oxford wrote of a miracle where a woman is prevented from approaching the shrine of St Frideswide after having slept with a pilgrim, a recurring literary motif of being physically repelled by the shrine itself.⁴⁹ It implies that her entire body is an insult to the saint, and cannot be allowed within the holy space. William of

⁴⁶ Morrison, *Women Pilgrims*, p. 32.

⁴⁷ Lemay, p. 109.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 97.

⁴⁹ Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate*, p. 118.

Malmesbury used this motif in his miracle of St Mary of Egypt. In this miracle, Mary is a proud prostitute who tempts and seduces many men on her long journey to Jerusalem. It is only through physical intervention that she understands her sins:

“Crowds poured into the church, and she went alone too, out of sheer curiosity, not religious observance. The others had their prayers answered: they got into the place easily, and came out again happy. She tried three times and more to gain entrance, but to no avail. Long did she pause, pondering what strange thing it could be that kept her out of the church, but she could not tell, so thoroughly was the darkness of filth playing havoc with the light of her understanding, so grossly had her sins fattened her reason. Making yet another attempt, under the impression that the problem was womanly weakness amid such a crowd, she mingled with a bunch of men. But their pushing and shoving weakened her feeble limbs. She made no progress, and gave up trying.

In the end, without fully understanding why, she raised her eyes to the image of Mary, holy Mother of God, painted in the courtyard into which the violence of the jostling crowd had thrust her, and repenting her misdeed she bewailed her evil past and promised to do better”.⁵⁰

Both women described in these ‘barrier’ miracles have had sexual interactions that would have been frowned upon during this time. Instead of having their bodies purged through their menstrual blood, the bodies themselves are considered contaminated until the individual purges themselves willingly. This is reinforced by the speech given by a ‘sorcerer’ at the shrine of William of Norwich when she was prevented from approaching the shrine:

“O wretched miserable creature! Lost and unhappy as I am! Foul sinner, conscious of so many crimes, hardened for so many years, impenitent, unshriven; I fear not God nor regard man! How brazen-faced, how bold, to presume with polluted foot and

⁵⁰ William of Malmesbury, p. 109.

profane soul to touch this holy place! Truly I am rewarded according to my deserts. A sorceress, of impure life, I have with unlicensed foot defiled the purity of this consecrated spot, have forgotten my sins, and drawn their avenger myself".⁵¹

But what of women who did marry? What do we know of the experience of the pilgrims who were wives? Leyser gives an example of a pilgrim named Beatrix from Wiltshire who went to the shrine of St Frideswide complaining of a two-year headache after having slept with her husband.⁵² This is interesting as St Paul's teachings on marriage encourages married couples to have intercourse as it is 'due' to them, however they must practice restraint. It seems that even sex between a married couple is not guaranteed to be free of sin:

"Let the husband render to his wife what is her due, and likewise the wife to her husband. A wife has not authority over her body but her husband; likewise, the husband has no authority over his body but his wife. You must refuse each other except perhaps by consent for a time, that you may give yourself to prayer and return together again lest Satan tempt you because you lack self-control".⁵³

There are two saints who have drawn the attention of pilgrims regarding marriage. St Katherine of Alexandria was popular with lower class young women as it was believed she could provide them with a husband,⁵⁴ and Saint Wilgefortis who has been associated with prisoners, livestock, incest survivors, and an aide for women in bad relationships.⁵⁵ Although both are associated by female pilgrims with marriage, they both provide different services, and their gender has been interpreted to fulfil these qualities. St Katherine provides the role of the bride of Christ; in her prose she describes the ideal man she wishes to marry:

⁵¹ Thomas of Monmouth, p. 280.

⁵² Leyser, *Medieval Women*, p. 105.

⁵³ I Corinthians 7:3-6. (Found in Lesyer, *Medieval Women*).

⁵⁴ Katherine J. Lewis, 'Pilgrimage and the Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria in Late Medieval England', in *Pilgrimage Explored*, ed. J. Stopford (Suffolk: York Medieval Press, 1999), pp. 145-161, (p. 155).

⁵⁵ Lewis Wallace, 'Bearded Woman, Female Christ: Gendered Transformation in the Legends and Cult of Saint Wilgefortis', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 30(1) (2014), 43-63 (p. 45).

“For he that shall be my lord must be of such noble blood that all kings must worship him. And so great a lord that I shall never dare think that I made him a king. And so rich that he surpasses all others in wealth. And so full of beauty that the angels rejoice to behold him”.⁵⁶

She does not know the name of the man she is creating in her thoughts and appears to will Christ to help her.⁵⁷ In the English tradition, Katherine does in fact marry Christ and is left with a wedding ring. A late medieval tradition was for women on St Katherine’s day to go on pilgrimage bare foot to her chapel after having drunk from her well.⁵⁸ It is interesting that St Katherine listed ideal male qualities she wanted in a husband, leading pilgrims to believe that she would find them an ideal husband. St Wilgefortis on the other hand, was believed to remove any husband that did not meet the pilgrims standard.⁵⁹ The earliest name belonging to St Wilgefortis was the Dutch word for, Ontcommer, which reflected the nature of her veneration by prisoners or abused women as a liberator or ‘unencumberer’.⁶⁰ In his work *Dialogues on Heresies*, Thomas More writes a debate with a fictional character named “The Messenger” who uses St Wilgefortis as an example of pilgrim superstitions, and how the cult of saints were taken advantage of:

“But he is wiser than St. Wilgefortis [reputed to rid wives of bad husbands], for she, the good soul, is served and content with oats, as they say. I cannot see why this should be so unless because she has to feed the horse of an evil husbands to ride to the devil on. For that is the thing which she is sought – so much so that women have therefore changed her name, and instead of St. Wilgefortis, they call her St.

⁵⁶ Katherine J. Lewis, ‘Pilgrimage and the Cult’, p. 156.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 157-158.

⁵⁹ Lewis Wallace, ‘Bearded Woman’, p. 57.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 55.

Uncumber since they reckon that for a peck of oats she will not fail to unencumber them of their own husband".⁶¹

In her legend, she miraculously grows a beard in order to avoid a pagan marriage and is crucified as a result, images of her crucifixion were popular all over Europe.⁶² Samantha Black comments on 'gender slippage' when exploring the bodies of saints, and how the tasks performed follows conventional social roles of the opposite sex.⁶³ In comparison to St Katherine, St Wilgefortis takes on the masculine image of Christ, and removes husbands that did not match the description St Katherine gave for a husband. It cannot be a coincidence that St Katherine describes Christ as the ideal husband and St Wilgefortis, who is martyred in the same manner as Christ, removes unwanted husbands. Caroline Walker Bynum has explored the associations of the body of Christ and the female body, a concept she calls the 'feminization of Christ'.⁶⁴ Riche explores further the shift of power with the image of masculinity that is present in the cult of St Wilgefortis, "Becoming male or masculine is alternately (and sometimes simultaneously) depicted as a sign of power in Christianity to transform, a sign of the woman's commitment to ascetism and disregard for her own body, a glorified escape from the sinfulness of womanhood, and a sacrificial and self-effacing choice that only the most pious woman would make".⁶⁵ It would however, be misleading to suggest that male pilgrims did not also show interest in St Wilgefortis due to her function of removing husbands. As we have seen previously, pilgrims do not necessarily choose the shrines of saints of the same gender, Becket being a prime example. The fact that St Wilgefortis has blurred the lines of gender suggests that she may have been more accessible to pilgrims and that pilgrims could mould her gender to their intentions. Thomas More

⁶¹ 'Thomas More's Dialogue on Saints and their Shrines', in *Medieval Popular Religion 1000-1500*, ed. By John Shinnors (Plymouth: Higher Education University of Toronto Press Incorporation, 2008) pp. 217-228, (p. 217-220).

⁶² Lewis Wallace, 'Bearded Woman', p. 43.

⁶³ Samantha Riches, 'Relics of Gender Identity: Interpreting a Reliquary of a Follower of St Ursula', in *Matter of Faith: An Interdisciplinary Study of Relic Veneration in the Medieval Period*, ed. By J. Robinson, L. Beer, and A. Harden (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 2014) pp. 143-150, (p. 144).

⁶⁴ Lewis Wallace, 'Bearded Woman', p. 47.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 51.

pointed out how female pilgrims altered St Wilgefortis's name over time to fit their purpose, implying that there may be other examples of such activity with other saints.

This chapter shows that the female body when acting out of the social norm can be used to correct her behaviour and signify a corrupt way of living. This can also be implied for ill suited males, as is shown by St Wilgefortis who explicitly takes on the physical characteristics of men and is 'payed' to remove them. The female body and its susceptibility to corruption is apparent with the shrine segregation and when they are physically repelled by shrines. It can be interpreted that we do not see many male narratives regarding these physical indications of corruption because women are considered the weaker sex.

The Male Pilgrim.

When comparing the number of male pilgrims versus female pilgrims, it is no surprise that the number of male pilgrim stories outnumber the female. There are a number of reasons for this; some of which give us a better understanding of the world of the female pilgrim. Webb discusses how vulnerable female pilgrims were when travelling and when attending the shrine, “Even great pilgrimage churches occasionally had to be re-constructed because violence, even rape, or bloodshed had occurred within them”.⁶⁶ Through his studies of various shrines, Finucane finds that majority of local pilgrims visiting the shrines were lower class women and the majority of pilgrims visiting distant shrines were male.⁶⁷ This reflects the dangers of traveling to distant shrines. It is also possible that female pilgrims could not travel far due to their responsibilities in the home, they may have had young children or other family members to care for. There are also examples of shrines that excluded female pilgrims and only allowed male pilgrims to enter the church. Female pilgrims were not allowed to approach the shrine of St Cuthbert at Durham or near the area of the monastery due to a slanderous legend where St Cuthbert was accused of having slept with and impregnated the king’s daughter.⁶⁸ Another example is the *Sancta Sanctorum*, where only men were allowed to enter, and therefore have advantages over woman as they are allowed, not only the visionary experience of the shrine, but also the opportunity to be given indulgences.⁶⁹ It was believed that the closer a pilgrim got to the relics, the more likely they were to be cured and therefore men were given an advantage by simply seeing the shrine.⁷⁰

Finucane’s book is useful when exploring the gender differences of miracle collections and how social class effected the type of miracle reported. For example, miracles regarding blindness and the crippled were more often centred around with women of lower classes, Finucane suggests that this is due to the diet of lower class

⁶⁶ Robert A. Scott, *Miracle Cures: Saints, Pilgrimage, and the Healing Powers of Belief* (California: University of California Press, 2020) p. 77.

⁶⁷ Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*, p. 186.

⁶⁸ Morrison, *Women Pilgrims*, p. 90.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 91.

⁷⁰ Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*, p. 89.

women.⁷¹ Lower class men reported more non-healing miracles, and upper class men reported more violent cases.⁷² The high number of non-healing in male miracle stories may be due to their masculine roles and their activities such as being at sea or war. Thomas of Monmouth writes several miracle narratives regarding sailors calling on William of Norwich for aide:

“The divine goodness too, by the merits of the blessed martyr, came to the help of certain sailors of Yarmouth who were in peril by reasons of a tempest on the sea. For these men when they were at sea and a great storm was gathering force, and an extraordinary dread of the billows was threatening them with death, and when they were now brought to the very threshold of death, they all besought the divine mercy, and they implore the help of the sainted boy and martyr William”.⁷³

This miracle reflects the dangers of medieval commerce, where several factors, such as pirates and storms, threaten the lives of sailors every day.⁷⁴ This field would have been heavily dominated by men, and therefore would feature them in miracle narratives rather than women at sea. As Webb has stated, “There seems little reason to doubt that the problems and afflictions from which suppliants sought relief, their daily tasks and occupations and living condition, were often accurately described”.⁷⁵

With this in mind, medieval women were known to travel as this sea miracle shows in the *Life and Miracles of St William of Norwich*. The female pilgrim in question is the same woman mentioned previously in the birthing miracle story regarding a fern, Botilda. Although Finucane discussed women traveling to local shrines, this miracle shows Botilda traveling to two distant shrines, placing her in a male dominant miracle motif:

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 147.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Thomas of Monmouth, p. 152.

⁷⁴ Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*, p. 115.

⁷⁵ Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval*, p. 182.

“She was returning from the shrines of St James and St Giles, and was crossing the Norman sea in a ship with her fellow-pilgrims to return to England. It happened that she was sleeping on the ship when they were now half-way across, and Saint William appeared to stand by her and say, “Behold, immediately a severe storm is coming upon you, and, had I not already interceded for you, this ship and all on board would have been in extreme danger. So, when the hour of peril comes, call on me as your advocate and intercessor, in the name of Christ, and without doubt there shall ensure a calm and sunshine such as if there had been no storm at all: and by the evening you shall gain the shore of England with a fair breeze, and your joy shall be greater in proportion as you have seen the peril whence you were saved was great. For you, Botilda, when you reach Norwich, take your son, whom from birth you dedicated to my care and whom you will find ill – and delay not to come with him to my hermitage in Thorpe Wood. Approach the tree where I was once thrown by the Jews and lay long in the open air: dig a little near the roots, and drink the water which you will find there. On this, you will be rid of the discomfort from which you suffer, and your son of his disease”.⁷⁶

What is interesting about this miracle is that it still describes the traditional healing miracle often associated with lower class women. Botilda has gone on pilgrimage for health, it does not explicitly state what the cause of her discomfort is but she was previously mentioned in the miracle collection during a difficult birth, so it could be in relation to the birth of her son. Also, this sea miracle does not follow the same format as typical sailor narratives. As seen previously, the male sailors knew to call on divine aide and did not need to be approached by a saint. It can be argued then, that due to Botilda’s lack of experience at sea, she would not know to call on a saint when a storm is approaching, unlike an experienced sailor. It can be interpreted to be a true experience of a female pilgrim crossing the sea, as she is unfamiliar with the practices as Webb comments, “There is valuable information about practices which were familiar to all those involved in pilgrimage”.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Thomas of Monmouth, pp. 178-179.

⁷⁷ Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval*, p. 182.

Another example of miracles which could be perceived as a masculine task are miracles involving land or farm animals. There are numerous examples of injuries or sick animal miracle stories centred around a male narrative:

“In like manner too a certain Goscelin le Gros, a man of knightly rank, when he perceived that his oxen were seized by murrain, and some of them were already dead, he hastened to provide help for the rest who were still alive. Accordingly too he tied a thread around the oxen and ordered a candle to be made in the name of Saint William, and when it was made he brought it to his sepulchre. As soon as he reached home, and knew that his oxen were already quite well, straightaway he proclaimed to all virtue of the holy martyr William which he had manifestly experienced in the case of his oxen”.⁷⁸

Here it is clear that the owner of the oxen is a man belonging to the upper classes. If it was not evident from the name, Thomas of Monmouth has made sure the audience is aware by explicitly stating that he is a ‘man of knightly rank’. The language used to describe his miracle is fairly neutral, a distinct contrast to how a similar miracle is described but centred around a woman:

“Accordingly there was a certain poor woman at Norwich, who used to keep hogs, and when they had grown to their full size she provided for herself the necessities of life by the price she got for them. But it happened that her swine fell sick and once died and death was threatening another of them. So the woman, perceiving that under the circumstances she was being left destitute of the means of support which she hoped for, almost losing hope of recovery, wiled greatly, and at last betook herself to the help of the blessed martyr. And coming to his sepulchre she prayed with tears; she offered a candle, and then going home she was overjoyed at finding the hogs, which in her distress she had left almost dead, now cured and safe”.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Thomas of Monmouth, p. 154.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 153.

Labour was not divided by gender and peasant woman were called to work all kind of tasks.⁸⁰ Leyser states that women could be found working a variety of jobs, such as haymaking and breaking stones for the use in roads.⁸¹ The emphasis here is the ownership of the animals and the emotional response to their illness. It can be interpreted that Goscelin de Gros keeps his emotions in check and knows the appropriate action, on the other hand the unnamed woman is immediately emotionally overwhelmed. This is emphasised by the statement, 'which in her distress she had left almost dead'. It is interesting that Thomas of Monmouth has chosen to leave the woman unnamed and emphasises the dependence she has on her stock. In various miracle collections, women are often identified by their male family relations and represent their social reflection.⁸² Morrison points out the numerous examples of women names in *The Life and Miracles of St William of Norwich* whose names are followed by 'wife of...'.⁸³ It can be suggested then, that the woman with the hogs has no husband or male guardian, and may be the reason for her sudden weeping when her livelihood is threatened.

But what of male characters in a female pilgrim narrative? What can a female driven miracle tell us of the views and social perceptions of men and the social norms? A miracle story that has an interesting perspective in the role of male pilgrims is in the 'Peril'. This miracle, featuring the Virgin Mary, was discussed previously, however the version centred around the archangel Michael includes the husband in the narrative. Considered the most famous shrine dedicated to the archangel, presided over by a Benedictine abbey that was founded in the tenth century.⁸⁴ The earliest depictions of this miracle emphasise the piety and dedication of the pregnant pilgrim, who must beg and convince her husband to go on pilgrimage with her, he puts it off until the end of her pregnancy.⁸⁵ It is through his neglect and later cowardice, as he abandons her as the sea comes in to save himself, that the archangel intervenes and keeps her safe so that

⁸⁰ Leyser, *Medieval Women*, p. 145.

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 148.

⁸² Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrimage*, p. 117.

⁸³ Morrison, *Women Pilgrims*, p. 1.

⁸⁴ Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary*, p. 309.

⁸⁵ Katherine Allen Smith, 'Mary or Michael?', p. 767.

she can give birth to her son.⁸⁶ It can be interpreted that the archangel is written in the miracle as an example of an ideal male figure in the process of childbirth. Not only does he save the lives of the mother and child, but he is present throughout the birth as a protective figure and creates an area in which she gives birth, much like a lying-in chamber. The husband fails to provide a safe space for his wife and fails in his guardian role. This protector role can be reinforced by examples of husbands acquiring relics to aid in the lying-in chamber. William, a knight from Oxford, provides his wife with a relic of St Thomas while she was struggling to give birth to their son.⁸⁷ Although the miracle is focused on the birth of their son, it also gives a glimpse of the involvement of the father and how he can still provide for his family in this moment. Birth and motherhood are not strictly the province of female saints, St Giles was closely associated with nursing mothers due to a deer providing him milk during his time as a hermit and his image can be found on many rod screens in Norfolk.⁸⁸ Caesarius of Heisterbach, a Cistercian monk, writes about the image of St Nicolas that was turned to face the wall 'as though to avoid seeing the woman in her labour'.⁸⁹ Even though the image is turned it is significant that it is found in a lying-in chamber as it would not have been placed there as a coincidence. St Nicolas would be present during her labour but not in a physical or visual sense as hagiographers preferred to describe male figures as working these miracles invisibly.⁹⁰

There are also examples of miracle stories centred around a father figure. Although Morrison discussed the role of motherhood in miracle stories belonging to women, childcare is a concern regarding male pilgrims also. An example of one of these miracle narratives can be found in Benedict of Canterbury's *The Miracles of St Thomas Becket*, where a father demands that Thomas Becket bring his daughter back from the dead:

"But her father, who had collapsed in sleep, worn out by both sorrow and work, woke up and rushed in shouting, "Is my daughter really dead?" "Indeed," his wife

⁸⁶ Ibid, pp. 770-771.

⁸⁷ Hilary Powel, 'The Miracle of Childbirth', p. 811.

⁸⁸ Morrison, *Women Pilgrims*, p. 29.

⁸⁹ Katherine Allen Smith, 'Mary or Michael?', p. 770.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 776.

said, “she is dead.” Then he said, “O St Thomas, martyr of God, return to me now my service which in the past I zealously paid you. Return me now my service. Now I really need you. Once I served you diligently before you were exalted with this world’s honors. Return my service! Remember, blessed martyr, how you were sick long ago in Kent in Turstan the clerk’s house. And what good service I gave you there. You could not touch wine, or spirits, or beer, or any other strong liquor, and I used to scour the whole neighbourhood to find you why to drink. Return me my service! Then you had only one horse, and I had charge of that too. Return me my service! You surely do not wish for me to have served for free!”

The man spent almost half the night in such outcries. And when he had repeated “Return me my service” so often that the hoarseness shut his windpipe, the pity of the martyr assented to the prayers of the suppliant and so that he would not appear ungrateful for all his services, he restored his daughter to her original health”.⁹¹

In this miracle, the father is attempting to bribe Thomas Becket to bring his daughter back to life by threatening the saint’s reputation. It can be argued that using honour in this scenario is a masculine tactic, when examining mothers in miracle narratives there has been none that talk of their service to the saint in life. The saints connected to the female miracle narratives discussed in this essay had died long before their miracle collections, like the Virgin Mary for example. Johannes Herolt writes of a miracle where the woman abducts the statue of the Infant in order to blackmail the Virgin Mary:

“A certain woman of simple and upright life used to worship the holy Mary, Mother of God, often strewing flowers and herbs before her image.

Now it chanced that the woman’s only son was taken prisoner. And the mother weeping for him would not be comforted, and prayed with all her heart to the

⁹¹ ‘Benedict of Canterbury’s The Miracles of St Thomas Becket’ in *Medieval Popular Religion 1000-1500*, ed. By John Shinnars (Plymouth: Higher Education University of Toronto Press Incorporation, 2008) pp. 165-180, (p. 176-177).

Blessed Virgin Mary for her son's deliverance. But seeing it was all in vain, she entered the church and thus addressed the image of the Blessed Virgin: "O Blessed Virgin Mary, I have often asked for your deliverance of my son and you have not heard me. Therefore, as my son was taken from me, so will I take away yours and will put him in duress as a hostage of mine".⁹²

This miracle is more emotionally charged than the father narrative. The father asks that Thomas Becket honours his work as his servant, the mother in this situation on the other hand, forces the hand of the Virgin Mary in order to free her son. It is not explicitly stated what crimes her son committed, whereas the daughter in her fathers narrative suffers greatly and forces the audience to feel sympathy for her.

When comparing miracle stories with each other, it is apparent that occasionally both sexes are shown in their corresponding roles but are reflected differently. It is also clear that there are expectations placed on men, such as that of the protector, that are harshly criticised, although they are not physically effected by them.

⁹² 'Johannes Herolt's Miracles of the Virgin Mary' in *Medieval Popular Religion 1000-1500*, ed. By John Shinnars (Plymouth: Higher Education University of Toronto Press Incorporation, 2008) pp. 140-149, (p. 145).

Conclusion.

This study has found that the gender of the saint does not prevent their involvement in gender centric issues such as pregnancy or breast feeding. However, gender centric issues were predominantly female and there were very little male narratives regarding their bodily functions. There were a variety of sources connected to pregnancy which allowed us to build a picture of the saints involvement, on the other hand there were no examples of key issues that required men to seek a saints assistance. This could be due to the female bodies ability to go through constant change; with little medieval knowledge regarding the female body it would seem more rational to believe they were resolved through the work of saints. There were more examples of women facing punishments for their sexual desires through their bodies, specifically feminine aspects of their bodies.

When addressing gender roles, both genders could be found in miracle narratives like fulfilling specific roles, such as parents for example. There were a number of father miracles which indicates that men were involved more in the family unit than previously described. However, the female pilgrim has an advantage regarding miracle narratives as their body allows them to visit the shrine for children centric issues. They can go on pilgrimage for breastfeeding, pregnancy, infertility, still-borns, difficult labour etc. This will clearly affect the opportunities given to male pilgrims to go on pilgrimage centred on their role as a father.

Overall, it is clear that the experience of female pilgrims cannot be found in miracle collections alone and that gender issues involving the cult of saints can be found in a variety of sources. This shows that the concept of gender is not a crucial aspect when choosing a saint and that gender is in the hands of pilgrims to manipulate. When evaluating saints like William of Norwich, nearly all examples of miracle narratives were found in his miracle collection with no indication to his gender specifically. This could be due to the fact that he is a young boy, but female pilgrims would often visit Thomas Becket for breastfeeding issues regardless of the fact that he is a man. It appears that gender is predominantly important in regards to the motif, the success rate of the saint is the overall desirable trait.

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