SAINTS' RELICS IN MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LITERATURE

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By

Roberta Malo, M.A.

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Dissertation Committee:

Professor Lisa J. Kiser, Advisor   Approved by

Professor Christopher A. Jones

Professor Ethan Knapp   _____

                                                    Advisor

                                            English Graduate Program

ABSTRACT

My dissertation, "Saints' Relics in Medieval English Literature," examines how the occlusion, control of and access to saints' relics became the source of significant tensions in late medieval culture and literature. I argue that in England, conflicting ideas about papal control, institutional power and the role of the laity directly influenced the literary presentation of relics and their cults. Because saints' relics were thought to channel God's healing power and to work miracles, clerics highly regulated access to these body parts and objects. Literary scholars have seldom recognized this highly politicized regulation of relics. Instead, the assumption has been that relics are, as medieval theology would have it, an uncontroversial bridge between heaven and earth. I show that in fact, when they discussed relics, medieval authors were frequently using relics to explore lay experiences of hierarchical power.

Relics inspire interest and even repulsion in the contemporary scholar, but in the Middle Ages, they were a crucial focal point for lay devotion and, because of their miracle-working capabilities, institutional control. Situated as they were in the shrines and churches that became places of pilgrimage, relics inspired saints' cults and pilgrim communities, but also enabled a parish's or cathedral's assertions of institutional dominance. By examining the cultural history of relics, I argue that these objects

functioned to consolidate Church authority and hierarchy. In this historical context, control over relics tended to be material and tactile: pilgrims were often literally kept from seeing or touching relics. In literature, however, writers tended to explore relics' management by presenting relics as rhetorically, as well as materially, occluded. This literary phenomenon is nevertheless based on the actual incorporation of the saint's body into the Church (in the form of a relic) and draws from the historical exclusion of lay bodies from full participation in and access to the power that the relic was thought to mediate. I show that the strict regulation of relics directly influenced literary presentations of local churches as more powerful than secular authority, as well as presentations of conflict between pilgrims and shrine-keepers.

       To this end, I examine literature from widely diverse genres and time periods. Chapter 1 juxtaposes twelfth-century Latin liturgical and theological tracts on relics with fourteenth-century Lollard attacks on relic cults; Chapter 2 focuses on the Latin, Old English and Middle English renditions of the lives of Saints Erkenwald and Swithun; Chapter 3 features Thomas Cantilupe's fourteenth-century Latin canonization proceedings and Malory's fifteenth-century *Morte d'arthur*; and Chapter 4 engages with Chaucer's fourteenth-century *Canterbury Tales*. In these works, writers use relics as tools either to uphold or to criticize institutional control over access to divine grace and healing. By investigating some of these historical conflicts, my work challenges the idea that relics were uncomplicated objects of devotion and the idea that relics' appearance in literature was apolitical. In this way, my dissertation opens up new avenues for understanding lay and clerical roles in the religious culture of the English Middle Ages and the ways in which these roles impacted the vernacular literature of the period.

Dedicated to my husband, Mike,

and to my high school English teachers,

Fraser Cameron and Tom St. Amand.

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vi

VITA

December 13, 1975…………………………....Born—Kitchener, Ontario, Canada

2002……………………………………………M.A. English, The University of Toronto

2000……………………………………………Honours B.A. English, The University of

Toronto

2002-03, 2005-06…………………………....Distinguished University Fellow, The

Ohio State University

2003-05, 2006-07..GTA, The Ohio State University

PUBLICATIONS

1.   Robyn Malo**.** Rev. of *Reading Medieval Culture: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Hanning*. Ed. Robert M. Stein and Sandra Pierson Prior, *The Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 61.1 (Spring 2007): 100-102

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Access and Encounter

Relics and Macrohistory

All that will be England gone,
The shadows, the meadows, the lanes,
The guildhalls, the carved choirs.
          ~Philip Larkin, *Going, Going*[1]

This dissertation is about what has already passed away. Saints' relics are, in the

twenty-first century, under the purview of orthodox Catholics, skeptics, and fetishists—

they belong on the news or in a darkened church,[2] and many people do not think of them

or even know what they are. When scholars consider relics at all, it is frequently to

discuss their metaphorical or spiritual significance, and we do not often stop to think

about the physical monuments that have all but disappeared.[3] Canterbury is no longer

one of the central pilgrimage sites of the world; we do not even know where Becket's

bones were finally laid to rest.[4] The St. Paul's of Erkenwald was destroyed in 1666; and

the memory of pilgrimage and relic veneration was all but stricken from the collective

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[1] Margaret Aston also uses this excerpt as the epigraph to *England's Iconoclasts*.
[2] Witness, recently, the discovery that Joan of Arc's relics are fakes, covered by the BBC. See
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/6527105.stm>, accessed 6 April 2007.
[3] See below, "Approaches to Medieval Relic Cults."
[4] For an engaging treatment of Becket's bones, see John Butler.

memory by iconoclastic "obliteration" (Aston, *England's Iconoclasts* 2). And yet relics, like pilgrimage, were a central, devotional feature of the English Middle Ages, and as David Wallace observes of Flanders and Calais in *Premodern Places*, "their tales and poetries return [...] to delight and instruct and disrupt" (2). Hence, rather than enact the kind of "cultural erasure" Wallace rightly associates with some New Historicist synchronic approaches (and with some microhistorical approaches, as well) (10), this dissertation presents some of the governing features of this devotional crux, in order to think broadly about how relics and their veneration might have fit, intellectually, institutionally, architecturally and poetically, into premodern England.[5]

The title of this section aims to suggest that, by undertaking a macrohistorical, diachronic investigation of the intellectual attitudes to and institutional practices of English relic cults,[6] we can arrive at—in Caroline Walker Bynum's turn-of-phrase— some of the "common assumptions" that lie behind English medieval depictions of relics.[7] In this I take Wallace's lead and move away from approaches that center on *rupture* and *crisis*, since, as many architectural historians have made clear, the ebb and flow of relic cults (and of the literary texts that interest me most) was fairly consistent in the years between the Benedictine reform and the Reformation (see below). I also follow Bynum, in her similar deployment of the *longue durée*.[8] Bynum observes in *Wonderful*

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[5] I borrow the phrase "premodern" from Wallace, who adopts this term "in an attempt to escape the peculiar eddying (and indeed mutually antagonistic) force fields of 'medieval' and 'Renaissance' " (11).
[6] Wallace similarly takes a macrohistorical approach, though he uses "place" as his "organizing category of choice" (14), I will be focusing on the temporal continuities (and some of the differences) in relic veneration and its literary expressions.
[7] See the detailed discussion of Bynum's methodology below, "Approaches to Medieval Relic Cults."
[8] To some degree, I also follow the anthropological methodology suggested by Geertz's reading of cockfights, in which he tracks the complex ways in which such fights manifest some of the social dynamics of Balinese culture. That is to say, I am interested in how intellectual attitudes about relics can manifest some of the social dynamics of English medieval culture. See especially Geertz (249).

Blood that "the shape of this book" is both committed to "specificity of starting point and to broad sweep" (xvi); and she notes that "we must examine that whole for the basic, often implicit concerns that lie behind it" (xvii).[9] Because this approach necessitates broad brushstrokes, the arguments I make here about the cultural work of relic cults will be wide-ranging, and hence I cannot always account for some of the particular (and numerous) regional differences at individual cult sites. Bynum's cautionary remark— that "we must also remain aware" of the vast differences when making a broad argument, since issues will necessarily "appear different from every particular vantage point" (xvii)—is hence important to keep in mind throughout this dissertation. She explains her use of the general and the specific as follows: "I am not able to jettison either a 1990s sense that there are only particular stories and voices nor my 1960s conviction that somehow, behind it all, lie common assumptions" (xvi). In taking a macrohistorical, diachronic approach, I similarly hope to consider general devotional trends "while"—as the *longe durée* historicism "at its best"—"remaining [...] cognizant of locally experienced differences" (Wallace 12).[10]

I aim here to show that specific representative examples—in the cults of Winchester and London, for example—can expose some "common assumptions" or

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[9] As Salih so rightly comments, "Nations and regions may have different emphases, but the lives of popular saints crossed such boundaries with ease" ("Introduction" 12). I would add that, in spite of the vast differences in regional vocabulary present in canonization proceedings and in *miracula* (noted by Leigh Ann Craig, "Critical Approaches to Hagiographical Sources: The Libri Miraculorum" [International Medieval Congress, 2007]; see also Goodich, *Violence and Miracle* [12]), depictions of relics in particular crossed temporal boundaries as well. It is hence fruitful to consider the similar ways in which, across a vast period of time, a variety of hagiographical *and* secular texts present relics. I hence extend to include not only *miracula* but also canonization proceedings, shrine miracles, medieval romance and Ricardian poetry.

[10] I am hence in agreement with Wallace's observation, "A commitment to locally contingent but endlessly exfoliating processes is difficult to manage in writing this kind of book. But the struggle seems preferable to reliance on those paradigms, or notions, more readily and typically favored by literary critical method, such as *rupture* and *crisis*" (12).

méntalites that governed relic cults in England. That is, though this project does not aim to argue for the specific and individual realities of microhistory, it will nevertheless depend upon some specific cults and literary narratives in order to track the *méntalites* that emanate from medieval English relic cults. Throughout the English Middle Ages, relics were regarded as crucially important material objects. As a result, lay access to saints' bodies was often limited; or at the very least, there were those who argued (sometimes extensively) that such access should be limited. Arguments for limited access are expressed in canon law, clerical writing, hagiography, and indeed in the material settings of many relics in individual church buildings. These intellectual ideas about relics changed little over time. Guibert of Nogent's and Thiofrid of Echternach's twelfth-century tracts on relics establish an intellectual, clerical attitude to relics that persisted in England throughout the Middle Ages, and that found its genesis in the tenth century. And although the institutional embodiment of these ideas was often far more difficult to regulate, much architectural evidence shows that in England, many relic cults were treated consistently. The shrines of major cult figures, for example, usually exhibit the same basic patterns of elevation, translation and ultimately, of enshrinement in house-shaped and opaque *feretra* that were placed on enormous shrine bases, well out of reach for most. By safely sequestering many relics out of sight and out of reach, some architectural practices in fact mirror the intellectual concern with lay access to relics.

In one twelfth-century justification for limiting lay access, Eadmer of Canterbury, describing the elevation and translation of St Oswald, "mentions that one of the purposes of the translation was to move the body to a place where lay people could not penetrate, far from 'irreverent access' " (Crook, "Enshrinement" 209):

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> God [deigned] to direct [Ealdwulf] in a vision to raise the holy body of his beloved Oswald from its place of burial, and when it had been elevated to bury it elsewhere in a more worthy place [*alibi dignius*].[11] [...] Ealdwulf recognized that there was easy access to him [Oswald]—more than was just—for these men and those and perhaps men less worthy than was suitable [*facilisque accessus his et illis, ac fortasse minus dignis quam expediret*], and because of this he had determined in his mind to move Oswald from that place, should the opportunity be granted him. But now, since a divine revelation had just fortified him for the task, he determined without delay the day on which he would fulfil his wish, that is to raise up the limbs of this preeminent father from the earth and to set them down in a place free of the bustle of secular persons and removed from access by the irreverent [*ac in loco saecularium personarum frequentia uacuo irreuerentique accessu remoto collocaret*]. (*Miracvla S. Oswaldi* 300-301)[12]

Eadmer makes use of the word "access" [*accessus*, *accessu*] twice in this passage, and both instances have to do with preventing those who are unworthy [*minus dignis*] from approaching Oswald's shrine too closely. Eadmer explicitly associates "secular persons" with the unworthy and with the irreverent; according to Eadmer, Eadwulf seems to think that none of these groups should be in close proximity to relics. This passage thus renders elevation and translation as glorifying God through his saints, but also as keeping the physical remains of God's saints away from most people. Eadmer's rhetoric suggests that Oswald's relics were regarded as too holy for "secular persons" to approach. And, as this dissertation shall demonstrate, Eadmer's attitude is by no means anomalous. Throughout the English Middle Ages, in fact, clergy worked to assert the supremacy of their authority via saints' relics, and they also frequently worked to affirm that many lay people had no business to be near the physical remains of the saints. In *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Sir Thomas Malory explores these very issues of access and unworthiness in a fictional relic pursued on a fictional relic quest, as I shall discuss in chapter four. Malory

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[11] Elevation and translation were common practices in England from the seventh through sixteenth centuries. See chapter three, n. 52.

[12] Crook does not regard this as a moment that justifies restricting lay access to relics, though he does use Eadmer's account as further evidence for the location of shrines in cathedrals ("Enshrinement" 209-10).

shows that the intellectual justifications for restricting access to relics were still alive and well in the fifteenth century—and Malory's depiction of the Grail knights both illustrates and challenges the prevalent intellectual attitudes to relics.

This project aims to outline the cultural and ideological work effected by the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century literary depictions of relics I examine in chapters four and five.[13] In order to do this, I argue that the long-term intellectual attitudes to relics, and some of the long-term institutional practices of relic cults in England, constitute the germ for writers like Chaucer and Malory. My *longue durée* hence runs from the tenth through fifteenth centuries—which may be considered, as Wallace points out, a *longue durée* "of short duration" (11). A consideration of relic cults' *longue durée* requires beginning with the intellectual attitudes that underpin some of the institutional practices of relic cults. These opening chapters will thus form the backdrop to the case studies of chapters four and five, which present fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manifestations of and responses to these *méntalites*. By contrast, many important scholars have recently been investigating particular saints' cults as they informed local (and even internal) monastic and civic policies.[14] This microhistorical work is crucially important, as it

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[13] In associating the term "cultural work" with saints' cults—in this case, with presentations of relics in particular—I follow Karen A. Winstead (*Virgin Martyrs* 4) and Kathleen Ashley, who has begun to think about the broader implications of her study of St Foy. I am grateful for my conversation with Dr Ashley and for her insights at the roundtable discussion, "Critical Approaches to Hagiographical Sources: The Libri Miraculorum" (International Medieval Congress, 2007), where Ashley made some preliminary remarks about the common "cultural work" of the cults of St Foy, St Benedict and St James of Compostela.

[14] For approaches to specific monastic and local or civic politics, see especially Kathleen Ashley, Sharon Farmer, Thomas Head, Felice Lifshitz and Pamela Sheingorn. Lifshitz remarks of saints' biographies that "they defended property rights and territorial endowments; they fuelled episcopal rivalries; they conveyed political and theological stances; they propagated an individual author's or group's notion of 'the holy' " ("Beyond Positivism" 97, n. 7). See also *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, a collection of essays edited by Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe. I am also grateful for a conversation with Cynthia Turner Camp, whose dissertation work on Anglo-Saxon saints investigates particular monastic politics and their saints. Camp's conference presentation, "Monastic Division and Corporal Unity in Henry Bradshaw's *Life of St Werburge*" (International Medieval Congress, 2007), addressed the way in which

affords a glimpse of the ways in which a local cult could shape a particular place.[15]

These studies are not concerned with access to the actual relics, however, nor with the

ways in which depictions of access (or lack of access) can illustrate the broader

méntalites of relic veneration. The terms "secular" and "lay" do frequently elide

distinctions between class and gender at shrines,[16] and "*ecclesia*," "ecclesiastical" or

"church" does extend to include bishops, abbots, monks, canons, and even Roman

authority, many of whom had conflicting interests.[17] Nevertheless, these terms are still

useful for thinking about some of the ways in which, across time, intellectual *méntalites*

enabled and inspired medieval literary depictions of lay experiences of relic veneration

and pilgrimage to relics—even when the demotic practices at shrines were sometimes

very different than medieval theologians would have wished.

There were obviously vast differences between various secular and ecclesiastical

groups, and the objections against an approach that focuses on "what is repetitive"—on,

in other words, Bynum's "common assumptions"—are often trenchant.[18] Giovanni Levi,

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Bradshaw's *Life* enabled Chester to assert its position against civic and episcopal incursions. For similar
arguments about the function of Bradshaw's *Life*, see Lewis (132-40); and Thornton (37-44).

[15] On microhistory as an intellectual approach and program, see Ginzburg, who distinguishes between
microhistory and the *Annales* school of thought:

> The choice of a circumscribed and close-up perspective reveals a dissatisfaction […] with the
> macroscopic and quantitative model that dominated the international historiographical scene
> between the mid-1950s and mid-1970s, primarily through the activity of Fernand Braudel and the
> historians of the *Annales* school. (17)

Elsewhere, Ginzburg engagingly observes that the *reductio ad absurdum* of microhistory "could wind up
as a reflection upon Cleopatra's nose" (12).

[16] On which see Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*.

[17] On some of the (many) distinctions between these ecclesiastical roles, see Ott and Jones, eds., *The
Bishop Reformed*.

[18] As Ginzburg objects,

> To select as a cognitive object only what is repetitive, and therefore capable of being serialized,
> signifies paying a very high price in cognitive terms. First of all, on the chronological plane […]
> medieval history renders it very difficult (for many of the themes suggested by Le Goff the
> documentation is fragmentary). (21)

See also Levi (102-7). Nevertheless, it is not always clear whether the reduced scale of microhistory
prohibits it from being contextualized within a larger scale. (I owe this point to Michael Johnston.) It

a microhistorian, identifies the difference between microhistory and the kind of

macrohistorical project I propose as follows:

> It seems to me that one of the main difference of perspective between
> microhistory and interpretative anthropology is that the latter sees a homogeneous
> meaning in public signs and symbols whereas microhistory seeks to define and
> measure them with reference to the multiplicity of social representations they
> produce. (107)

And indeed, there were a "multiplicity of social representations" in various relic cults.

Monks were pitted against each other often enough—the monks of both St Albans and

Ely claimed to have St Alban's relics,[19] for example, and many miracle collections of the

twelfth century and later attest to, and even boast about, the efficacy of one saint over

another in effecting a cure.[20] Wulfstan, as I shall discuss in chapter four, rehabilitates

Eadsige (a secular, expelled canon) and presents him as Swithun's first relic custodian,

thereby handily illustrating the (very specific) function a saint's relics could serve: first,

in conveying distinctions between the Benedictine monks and secular canons; and

second, in resolving one specific and local conflict between monks and secular canons.[21]

There were internal struggles within some ecclesiastical institutions as well, and as

Wulfstan of Winchester's and Eadmer of Canterbury's texts show in chapter two, relics

sometimes provided the means for regulating monastic behavior within a particular

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seems to me, therefore, that exploring some of these themes is a necessary starting point, even where
documentary evidence is imperfect. This macrohistorical approach is especially helpful in the case of relic
cults, which have been, as Cynthia Hahn observes in discussing her forthcoming book (entitled *The
Rhetoric of Reliquaries*), little studied (<http://www.carmagofoundation.org/fellowdetails.asp?recno=551>,
accessed 15 May 2007). I would add that Hahn's observation is particularly the case in England, where
only recent books such as Nilson's *Cathedral Shrines* and Crook's *The Architectural Setting* begin to
consider the architectural manifestations of relic cults in exactly a macrohistorical way. Crook and Nilson
thus take up and expand upon some of the evidence present in J. Charles Wall's *Shrines of British Saints*.
[19] See Wall (36-39).
[20] See chapter three, (129-30). See also Goodich, *Violence and Miracle* (22); French (5); and Rawcliffe
(117).
[21] This conflict arose when, in 964, Æthelwold expelled the secular canons from Winchester. See the
discussion of Wulfstan and Eadsige in chapter four; see also below, "From the Benedictine Reform
(almost) to the Reformation."

community. Nevertheless, it is still helpful to think about the common ways in which

various cults manifested in practice some of the *méntalites* articulated in theory by the

medieval theologians I examine in chapter two.

In the "secular" world, most "secular persons," as Eadmer calls them above, did

not often have intimate access to notable relics,[22] or any hope of manipulating them for

any particular ends. But some kings did own relics, and hence the term "secular" is, in

some ways, thornier still than the term "ecclesiastical." Scholars such as David Rollason

have documented at length the importance of relic cults to the monarchical ambitions of

the West Saxon dynasty; Nicholas Vincent has argued that the Angevin kings used relics

similarly.[23] Relics hence provided a sort of hub for assertions of authority, and because

kings and potentates were the only members of the laity to own relics—indeed,

sometimes bizarrely extensive collections of them—ecclesiastical owners of relics may

well have been aware that they had some kind of competition for claiming ownership of

the saints. And in the face of such potential rivalry, it is probable that ecclesiastical

communities, many of which depended upon royal support, were concerned with their

own internal, ecclesiastical agenda when it came to their relics. Hence, as can be seen in

chapters two and three, ecclesiastical *dicta* for venerating relics in churches and within

shrines came to be extensive and detailed; and such guidelines may have functioned in

part to distinguish cathedral relics from those kept in royal collections. These guidelines

can also be seen as part of an attempt to govern the behavior of the "secular persons" to

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[22] For a discussion of notable versus non-notable relics, see chapter two, "Access and Occlusion: Notable versus Non-notable Relics."

[23] See Rollason, "Relic-cults" and *Saints and Relics*; and Vincent, "Angevin Kings." Vincent writes about the Plantagenet kings—who often expected smaller relics as gifts for making a pilgrimage or attending a translation ceremony—and their relic collections (34-36). For more on Henry II's and Henry III's zeal in relic collecting and veneration, see Jankulak (30); Roberts; and Vincent, *The Holy Blood*.

whom Eadmer refers, thereby suggesting that these "secular persons" ought to listen to the *ecclesia* first and any branch of the secular *curia* second.[24]

In this dissertation, I am most concerned to show the ways in which the literary case studies of chapters four and five manifest some of the governing intellectual and institutional *méntalites* that I outline in chapters two and three. Chapters four and five provide case studies for the actual institutional embodiment of the intellectual ideas governing attitudes to relics. And although there were various practices, the texts I examine here show that at least some cults must have enacted (or tried to) the limited access advocated by Eadmer, Wulfstan, Thiofrid and Guibert. The sort of special access afforded to kings and potentates is an issue to which I will turn, briefly, in chapter three; but since relics were not so available to most "secular persons," it is essential to focus on the global ways in which the *ecclesia* justified restricted access to its relics (even if such justification was not always practically successful). These justifications frequently reveal that relics often worked to express conflict between those who had access to, in Bynum's phrase, "holy matter" (*Wonderful Blood* 7) and those who wanted some kind of access; but they also reveal the ways in which the church had its own investment in articulating its authority over secular society.[25] Relics' cultural work is hence intimately concerned with, as Claire M. Waters notes of saints' lives, exploiting "the implications of [earthly] power and even usurp[ing] it" (70). Moreover, such exploitation frequently depends upon which institution—the church or those authorities outside of the church—could best

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[24] And in fact, this exact distinction is outlined in one of Thomas Cantilupe's justice miracles. See chapter four (176-78). See also chapter three, n. 23.
[25] On the various canonizations that were expressive of this dynamic between the church and secular authority, see Heffernan, "Political Canonization" (182); and Lewis (128-30).

argue for its ability to administer justice, punishment, and to offer access to the divine, to the less empowered "secular persons," or, more broadly speaking, to the disenfranchised laity.

From the Benedictine Reform (almost) to the Reformation

The temporal limits of this dissertation are vast, beginning with Wulfstan of Winchester in the tenth century and extending through Malory in the fifteenth. The fundamental practices surrounding relic cults changed little—even in the face of the increasingly centralized power of Rome—in the intervening years. These limits could be extended into the sixteenth century, in fact, since, as revisionist historians have shown, English recusant culture was alive and well throughout the sixteenth century and beyond[26]; and certainly many sixteenth-century writers, Erasmus, More and Calvin among them, addressed the ever-increasingly controversial subject of saints and their relics. A project of this breadth must be provided with some restrictions, however, and so its chronology ends, albeit artificially, with fifteenth century England, when relic cults were still one of the central devotional features of English Christianity.[27]

I begin this project, chronologically, with Wulfstan's account of St Swithun at Winchester in part because it is such a marvelous and instructive poem; but also because this poem marks a crucial historical moment in the development of relic cults in England.

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[26] Christopher Haigh has done some of the most influential work on recusant culture and religious practices in Elizabethan England.

[27] In contrast to Duffy's claim that image-cults took the place of relic cults in later medieval England, Nilson and others have shown, thorough examination of the shrine-keepers' records, that cult donations were still high until the dissolution in 1538. See Duffy, "Dynamics" (171-72) and Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* (193-94).

For the Benedictine reform, as many historians have noted, enabled the promulgation of

the English cult of saints as nothing else, up to that point, had done.[28] As Rollason

shows,

> The reformed abbeys [...] had particular reasons for exploiting possession of
> relics. They were after all claiming to represent the acme of religious life and, as
> the self-styled spiritual leaders of later Anglo-Saxon England, they wished to
> excel in the collection and veneration of relics. (*Saints and Relics* 181)

Rollason and Catherine Cubitt both point explicitly to St Swithun's cult at Winchester as

a representative example of a relic cult under a prominent reforming clergyman, in this

case St Æthelwold.[29] St Swithun's relics were clearly not only at the center of a pious

relic cult, but also provided a way for monastic reformers to assert their position in

England's monastic centers. These Benedictine monks sometimes did so by suggesting

that their secular colleagues were not up to the task of caring properly for a relic cult. At

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[28] For the *locus classicus* on the English Benedictine reform, see Knowles, *Monastic Order* (31-82). For
the monastic revival as it relates to Winchester and St Swithun, see chapter three, especially nn. 26 and 31;
see also chapter four, n. 12. Given that the general scholarly consensus is that the Norman Conquest did
not disrupt the cult of the saints in England, it seems advisable to identify an earlier, post-Viking starting
point for an exploration of the cult across time. This dissertation hence begins with Æthelwold's
translation of St Swithun's remains in 971, and not with the Norman invasion nearly one hundred years
later. For the most seminal assessments of 1066 and the English cult of saints, see Hayward; Ridyard;
Rollason (who follows Ridyard), *Saints and Relics* (215-39); Vincent, "Angevin Kings" (13-14, 31); and
Whatley, *The Saint of London* (71-84). For an alternative view, see Rubenstein, "Liturgy against History."
In *Cathedral Shrines*, Nilson remarks of his wide-ranging study,

> The period under examination in this study is a long one, marked at beginning and end by
> dramatic events. The arrival of the Normans provides a convenient starting point: they rebuilt
> every cathedral, moved several old sees to new sites, created others, reorganised the chapters and
> set a new standard throughout English ecclesiastical life. Thereafter, shrines and the traditions
> surrounding them did not undergo any absolutely radical changes for the next four and a half
> centuries, at the end of which period they were destroyed by order of Henry VIII. This stability
> not only allows but actually requires the historian to study shrines over a long period. (2)

Though Nilson's reasons for beginning his study after the Conquest make some architectural sense, the
literary tradition of saints' and relic cults suggest that an earlier, post-Viking date is, for this project, even
better. Moreover, since France was by 1066 well beyond the Carolingian period—with its attendant
Roman religious practices—the Conquest actually posed little difference in terms of English devotional
practices or even of enshrinement. On English cults as relatively stable, architecturally speaking, from the
seventh through twelfth centuries (and, I would add, beyond), see Crook, "Enshrinement." See also chapter
three, n. 52.

[29] See Cubitt (450-51); Knowles, *The Monastic Order* (50-54); and Rollason, *Saints and Relics* (179-80,
182-86).

Ely, for example, where secular canons had tended the cult of St Æthelhryth, "their

unsuitability for the task compared with the Benedictine monks who succeeded them" is

demonstrated by a Benedictine narrative, the *Liber Eliensis*, which portrays "the head of

the secular community" as having "the temerity to doubt that Æthelthryth's undecayed

body really was in her tomb" (Rollason 181). Such a reading squares exactly with

Wulfstan's depiction of Eadsige.[30] And literary tradition bears out Nilson's suggestion

that, after the Norman Conquest (and certainly, as above, well before it), English "shrines

and the traditions surrounding them did not undergo any absolutely radical changes for

the next four and a half centuries, at the end of which period they were destroyed by

order of Henry VIII" (*Cathedral Shrines* 2). Hence, this study will take the years 971

through 1538 as its rough and ready parameters, though it will discuss sixteenth-century

responses to relic cults (such as those of Erasmus and More) only occasionally.

Approaches to Medieval Relic Cults

      In spite of moments as explicit as Eadmer's insistence that "secular persons" had

no place in proximity to relic cults, modern readers of the later Middle Ages have

generally focused on the spiritual efficacy of relics and have not acknowledged the

central intellectual (and institutional) problem of access.[31] This lacuna is in marked

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[30] On Wulfstan and Eadsige, see chapter four, n. 12. Joshua Easterling makes the fascinating suggestion that hermit cults during the period of Benedictine reform do not follow the same pattern as relic cults in monastic and cathedral centers. I am grateful to Mr. Easterling for his insight on this matter. For a discussion of Winchester as a hotbed for Benedictine reform, see also chapter three, nn. 26 and 31.

[31] Such approaches follow the seminal work of Peter Brown and Caroline Walker Bynum, both of whom emphasize relics' ability to signify "the presence and absence of the divine" (Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* 16), and the supplicant's personal relationship to the saint, rather than relics' complex relationships to their containers or their political roles. See Brown (86-105); and Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body* (92-94, 107-8, and 200-3), and *Wonderful Blood* (10, 30-31, 76-77, 185 and 250-51). Literary scholarship that relies on and cites these kinds of sources alone tends to assume that pilgrims had easy and intimate access

contrast both to the wealth of modern scholarship on the royal politics of early medieval

relic cults, and also to the proliferation of modern scholarship on the political import of

later medieval hagiography. For, as Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn so rightly

comment, many scholars "now argue that," first, "medieval hagiography has a place

among 'rhetorical sources' and tends to articulate 'themes of power and authority' "; and

second, that the "impulse" which generates these texts is "fundamentally 'political.' "

(ix).[32] Felice Lifshitz, whom Ashley and Sheingorn cite, explains her use of the term

"political" as follows:

> I use 'political' in the broadest possible sense, to indicate the state of being
> enmeshed in those material and ideal power relations which have been the subject
> of philosophical musings at least since Plato and Aristotle. Humans are political
> animals, those denizens of the Athenian *polis* asserted so many centuries ago; any
> subject which requires attention to human relations is a political subject. (*Norman
> Conquest* 13)

I follow Lifshitz's definition of the political, and when I use this term, I similarly intend it

to be construed in the "broadest possible sense." In spite of the general consensus that

hagiography is "political," when relics come up explicitly in work on the later Middle

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to relics—and that relics' *only* function was to unite the material with the spiritual. This was not always the case. However, in contrast to Bynum and Brown (and the literary critics whom they have influenced), many historians have considered the political and ideological significance of relics. See especially Smith, "Old Saints, New Cults"; and Rollason, "Relic Cults" and *Saints and Relics* (105-63). This political significance was so commanding that secular canons of Bodmin in Cornwall "took a shrine containing the relics of St Petroc to King Henry I in order to gain release from unjust exaction of revenues" (Jankulak 17). Henry I acquiesced to their request; and Henry II later aided in the recovery of these same relics from Brittany (24-31). Relics were similarly used on the continent in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and were even occasionally brought to political meetings in order to curb violence against the institutional church. See Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints* (173-76), and Rollason, *Saints and Relics* (194).

[32] See Rosenwein, Head and Farmer (769). See especially *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, which includes a wide variety of essays that address saints' cults as doing cultural work. Salih outlines some recent approaches to politicizing the cultural work of saints' lives ("Introduction" 16-17). See also Aers, *Faith, Ethics and Church* (40-45); Stouck, "Saints and Rebels"; and Winstead. Medievalists have often addressed the issue of saints who rebel against or resist the government, and the corresponding interplay between the terms martyr and traitor. On the cult of Simon de Montfort as emblematizing the issue of sanctity versus treason, see Heffernan, "Political Canonization." And, of course, many have addressed the political significance of canonization proceedings, on which see chapter four, n. 4. None of these readings, however, examines the physical manifestations of the devotional aspects of relic veneration and what these might tell us about the further political importance of relic cults and *miracula*.

Ages—rather than obliquely, as in discussions of saints' cults or *vitae*[33]—they are often

assumed to express a straightforward correlation between the heavenly and the earthly,

rather than to express some aspect of "human relations" (Liftshitz 13). Hence, instead of

manifesting "themes of power and authority," a relic is frequently identified as "a sign of

holiness" that was "itself holy," a sign that was able to erase "the line between the

material and the spiritual" (Patterson, "Chaucer's Pardoner on the Couch" 675-76).[34]

This assertion is in some ways correct, but it emphasizes relics' spiritual importance at

the expense of their political operation, which depended in part upon the regulation of

when and by whom a relic could be accessed—and which depended in part upon the

physical and institutional manifestations of the intellectual ideas about relics.

Hence, although scholars such as Crook, Nilson and Rollason have identified the

political import of relics in the earlier Middle Ages, they have not necessarily attended to

the importance of access to relics, which is—as articulated explicitly by Eadmer, above—

a central concern of the medieval clergy in setting up a relic cult. And modern scholars

of later medieval hagiography do not often discuss relics, and when they do, they tend to

efface relics' physical presence in shrines. And even though work on the earlier Middle

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[33] Literary-critical attention to later medieval cults tends to focus on written accounts and not on the material presence of relics. Salih points out that "the saints are located at the join of textual and material cultures," but then associates this "material culture" with manuscript production, observing that "the corporality of saints might spill out onto their texts" ("Introduction" 10). It is also important, however, to investigate representations of saints' corporeality *in their relics*, as well as to think about the ways in which this corporeality informed textual production and transmission.

[34] Rawcliffe similarly observes that, when pilgrims arrived at a shrine, they were "at the very boundary where the sacred and the temporal met" (120); Salih comments that saints were "both in heaven and ever-present," and that "their bodies stretched across the spaces between life and death, heaven and earth" (1). Patterson cites Aston (who argues that the relic was "a special sort of bridge between the visible and the invisible" [*England's Iconoclasts* 402; qtd. Patterson 675]), Bynum and Dahl in support of his claim about relics, and he misinterprets, in my opinion, St Hugh of Lincoln's zeal for relic collecting. The problem is not that these sorts of observations about relics are incorrect, but rather that they are incomplete. Other literary works that focus on relics, such as Seeta Chaganti's dissertation (forthcoming as *The Medieval Poetics of the Reliquary* [Palgrave, 2008]), also give undue emphasis to Bynum's and Brown's hypotheses and do not explore the wealth of architectural history on relic cults in England.

Ages *does* address relics as politicized objects, it does not often address issues of lay access, focusing as it (very rightly) does on issues of insular unification and on the royal exploitation of relic cults.[35] This project will hence begin to address the central issue of access to relics as mediated by the *ecclesia* and as experienced by Eadmer's "secular persons." Indeed, in order to control who could get close to them, saints' relics were often occluded by their shrines, which demarked the relics as holy, but which also (paradoxically) served frequently to hide and sequester the very things they honored.[36]

The texts I examine in this dissertation—including some theological treatises on relics, such as Eadmer of Canterbury's twelfth-century *Sententia de memoria sanctorum quos veneraris* and Thiofrid of Ecternach's twelfth-century *Flores Epitaphii Sanctorum*—can help us to think about and understand the cultural, religious and historical investments in relic discourse. These stakes are very often different from our inherited assumptions about relics' cultural function in the Middle Ages. Four interrelated assumptions in particular inform most literary (and also some historical) readings of relic cults: first, the prevalent idea that access to relics was common and unregulated[37]; second, the idea that all relics were treated and regarded as being the same;

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[35] Cubitt's argument—that lay devotion in rural centers should be considered separately from "high-status and ecclesiastical devotion," which "was centred upon churches, shrines, and corporeal relics" (426)—does not explain diachronic patterns, since in the later Middle Ages especially, lay devotion often took place *at* these "high-status and ecclesiastical" sites, rather than in the kind of rural environment Cubitt discusses.

[36] I borrow the phrase "occluded relic" from Christopher A. Jones, whose suggestions on this point have been invaluable.

[37] Such an assumption is expressed, for example, by Rawcliffe's claim that "Close physical proximity to the saint's earthly remains was the ultimate goal of these pilgrims, who hoped that a touch or kiss would infuse their bodies with healing grace" (120), or that "shrines display[ed] sacred artifacts associated with their persons" (123). Stephen Lamia similarly comments, "these ceremonies and practices thereby enlivened the relationship between the living and the dead" (52); and Dee Dyas has remarked in a lecture that pilgrims "touched" relics. It is not clear exactly what Rawcliffe (and others) means by "displayed," and although Rawcliffe does not specify what pilgrims kissed, the extrapolated claim—that every pilgrim could have come into direct contact with the relics themselves—is likely inaccurate. Hence, Osbern Bokenham's physical contact with St Margaret's toe (*Legendys of Hooly Wummen* ll. 167-69) should be read with some

third, that because relics united heaven and earth, they signified the promise of

resurrection and hence, like bodies in general, "tend[ed] to signify community, inclusion,

gathering in" (Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* 10), when in fact relics often served the opposite

purpose; and fourth, that "spiritual" seeing or access could serve as a substitute for the

physical denial of lay access to relics.[38] While these hypotheses have shed light on the

devotional practices of medieval English relic cults—and have certainly helped to

balance some earlier, dismissive studies of relics[39]—they have also served to divert our

attention from some of the most crucial aspects of relic cults, having to do not with piety

and spirituality alone, but with intellectual history, institutional practices, and access.

For in the last twenty years, many architectural historians have contributed vital

information to the consideration of relics' function in medieval devotional culture,

suggesting that, *pace* Peter Brown, relic cults were not "made accessible to all" (9),[40] and

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caution as evidence for greater pilgrim access to relics. On kissing at saints' shrines (and the unlikelihood that pilgrims ever kissed relics), see chapter two (53-54).

[38] The resulting assumption is that pilgrims were satisfied with seeing shrines and were unconcerned with never coming into direct contact with relics. Moreover, although Bynum observes that "behind debates over pilgrimage, relics, eucharist, miracles and veneration," were the "issue of holy matter, and the issue of access to God" (7), she never defines precisely what she means by access, and later substitutes spiritual for physical access to "holy matter" (77). See also Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints* (166-67); and Blick (429); even Nilson, who otherwise discusses shrines' inaccessibility, argues that "visibility [...] was not an important factor" (*Cathedral Shrines* 82). See also (79-91); Herrmann-Mascard (201-3); and Sigal, *L'Homme et le miracle* (35-40). Burger begins to offer a corrective to this assumption in his observation that Chaucer's Pardoner's character "suggests that everyone expects some real return from this pilgrimage, that its spiritual reward will be materially signified—whether by a physical cure or by release from time in purgatory" (*Chaucer's Queer Nation* 152).

[39] For a good example of an often skeptical and thoroughly irreverent study of saints' cults, see Eire; Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*; and Heath. Bethell criticizes this kind of approach (62).

[40] Alan Thacker, John Crook and Richard Sharpe have all complicated Brown's presentation of late antique relic cults. Early medieval English practices generally followed those of Merovingian Francia (elevation and translation rather than burial in ring-crypts beneath the altar). Moreover, though there was a revival of Roman practice in Carolingian Francia, English practices continued to follow the patterns established by the elevation and translation of Æthelthryth at Ely and Cuthbert at Lindisfarne. See Crook ("Enshrinement" 208-9) and Thacker ("The Making of a Local Saint"). Neither Crook nor Thacker outline explicitly the political stakes of relic cults, but it is clear that they are aware of these stakes, and that their complication of the early period (on which Brown focuses) should lead literary scholars to question whether Brown's basic assumptions about *loca sanctorum* in the late antique period ought to be applied— with broad brush-strokes—to relics' depictions in medieval English literary texts. See chapter three, n. 52.

that in fact pilgrims may have frequently had a difficult time getting close to the physical

relic.[41] Second, as I outline in chapter two, not all relics were treated the same or

considered to be equally powerful. It is hence essential to keep relics' sub-categories in

mind when pilgrims or supplicants succeed or fail to access relics in medieval literary

texts.

The third assumption—that relics, like all bodies, signify "inclusion"—depends

upon the idea that pilgrimage and/or relics served a sort of equalizing or unifying

function, and that as a result, the devotional practices surrounding saints and their cults

actually subverted the hierarchical order of medieval Christianity. Victor Turner is most

famous for advancing the concepts of *communitas* and structure in his discussion of

pilgrimage—a paradigm which suggests that pilgrimage, in the face of heterogeneous

(and hierarchical, and even oppressive) structure, was able to help articulate (even create)

the homogeneity of human experience, or *communitas*. Pilgrimage, according to Turner,

served a sort of leveling function, and pilgrims experienced their journey—and even their

destination—as a cohesive group, no longer bound by the limitations of class, religious

status, or gender.[42] Many scholars of pilgrimage have identified this approach as

problematic, especially as applied to medieval literary texts such as *The Canterbury*

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[41] See the discussion in chapter two, "Access and Occlusion: Notable versus Non-Notable Relics."
[42] Turner conceives of *communitas* and structure as opposites:

> It is as though there are here two major 'models' for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of 'more' or 'less.' The second [...] is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals. ("Liminality and *Communitas*" 360)

Turner therefore figures *communitas* as an ontological state that "transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structures and institutionalized relationships" (*The Ritual Process* 128), and he argues that, because pilgrimage "releases" its participants from their structured social roles and classes, it enables the manifestation of *communitas* (*Image and Pilgrimage* 253).

Tales, with its obvious differentiation of class and occupation, and with its frequent overt

challenges to these class distinctions. (Were such distinctions erased by the mere act of

pilgrimage, presumably Chaucer-the-narrator would not have so much to say about

them.) Dee Dyas, for example, has challenged whether Turner's binary is even relevant

to the Middle Ages at all, since "Turner's work has been largely based upon observation

of modern-day pilgrimage practices and it is not necessarily appropriate to read back all

of his conclusions into a medieval text" (175).[43] Dyas' observation is typical of literary

scholars and even of some recent anthropological studies, many of which have reached

vastly different conclusions than those of Turner.[44]

Though scholars have been careful to challenge Turner's binary, most have not

been similarly cautious in their readings of saints' relics; and as a result, the objections to

Turner bear repeating. Scholars like Bynum sometimes transpose Turner's observations

about pilgrimage onto relics, and when such research is applied in broad brushstrokes to

medieval literary depictions of relics, the results are less than satisfactory.[45] Bynum's

comment, that the body "tends to signify community, inclusion, gathering in" (10),

echoes Turner's sentiment that in the context of pilgrimage, *communitas* "strain[s] toward

universalism and openness" (*Image and Pilgrimage* 251). Both statements are

exceedingly problematic, as these ideas tend to efface differences of class and religion,

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[43] For the argument that Turner's ideas of *communitas* cannot account for the social dynamics at play in
The Canterbury Tales, see Dyas (174-79).

[44] Eade and Sallnow, for example, argue that pilgrimage entails the "reinforcement of social boundaries and
distinctions in the social context, rather than their attenuation or dissolution" (4), and they find Turner's
model to be overly deterministic. For other critical responses to Turner, see Morris, Introduction (6-7);
Theilmann; and Vincent, "Angevin Kings" (12-17). For a less dismissive but still fault-finding reading of
Turner, see Duffy, "Dynamics" (165). And for a reading that suggests Turner's binary to be useful in
thinking about medieval pilgrimage and the sick and diseased, see Rawcliffe (117-118).

[45] And in fact, as recently as 1995, Michael Goodich accepted Turner's ideas—as they apply to medieval
miracles—wholesale. See *Violence and Miracle* (27-28).

on the one hand (Turner), and the way in which bodies—and by extension, saints' relics—became emblematic of these differences on the other (Bynum). Hence, though the idea is not essentially new, somatic hierarchy provides a pointed way of talking about the obvious differences between saints' bodies, clerical bodies, and lay bodies. Saints' bodies, in their careful segregation from lay and other unworthy bodies, clearly did not "signify community, inclusion" or "gathering in." It is remarkable that, although so much important work on pilgrimage and hagiography has identified the political import and differentiating function of pilgrimage on the one hand, and of the literary accounts of the saints at the journeys' centers on the other, scholarship has little acknowledged the similar function of those saints' physical remains.

This lacuna suggests the fourth difficulty in approaches and attitudes to saints' relics, and it is in fact a difficulty suggested by Dyas' approach to pilgrimage, as well as by Bynum's assertions about lay experience of the tactile religious culture of the Middle Ages. Too frequently, the physical aspects of medieval Christianity are explained as important only because they pointed to the spiritual world beyond them. Indeed, this is exactly the assumption informing Patterson's claim about relics when he discusses the Pardoner—that relics somehow point beyond what they are (physical objects) to the mysteries of eternity. Paradoxically, such an approach, while claiming to be representative of medieval Catholic religion, depends upon the proto-Protestant assumption that Christian religion cannot (indeed, should not) be concerned with temporal existence or with material and tactile objects. But, as any reader of Margery Kempe will certainly agree, the material and tactile (tears, ascetic practices, pilgrimage, affective piety) often informed devotional aspects of medieval Christianity. Surely for

Catherine of Siena, as David Aers so rightly suggests, the physical (and, for Aers,

political) act of consuming diseased flesh was as important as its spiritual significance.[46]

And surely, as Chaucer spends the opening lines of the *Canterbury Tales* observing, the

physical aspects of pilgrimage were as important as the spiritual metaphor of pilgrimage.

It is difficult to believe that pilgrims, traveling through the wet and cold, would always

have been thinking about their spiritual journey to Heaven. It is similarly difficult to

believe that pilgrims, once they arrived at a shrine, would have been content with

imagining the communion of saints, since more intimate contact with a shrine and its

relics, as I shall discuss in chapters two and three, was often difficult or even impossible.

Relics in English literary texts need to be re-contextualized in their own particular

historical, intellectual, religious and even architectural milieu. It is not enough to observe

more generally, as Bynum does so frequently, that relics enabled expressions of lay

desire for wholeness and resurrection, and themselves expressed soteriological and

ontological, and not political, issues.[47] Without discounting relics' theological,

soteriological and ontological significance, however, we need to re-examine Bynum's

and others' assumption that to interpret relics as carefully controlled by the medieval

church necessitates a Foucauldian—or even a New Historicist—approach.[48] For while

relics and their cults were often about power, they were certainly not always about

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[46] See *The Powers of the Holy* (32-35). The Utraquists, in another example, were not satisfied with the spiritual experience of consuming the Holy Blood in the Host. See chapter four, n. 22.

[47] Bynum does acknowledge that "blood relics and miracle hosts were both instruments of clerical control and elements of religious and social resistance" (*Wonderful Blood* 249). However, she more usually focuses on relics' metaphorical function (*Resurrection* 92-94, 107-8, and 200-3), and ultimately argues in *Wonderful Blood* that "the issue of access to a God both hidden and revealed was not primarily a disciplinary one; it was soteriological and ontological. At its heart lay the question of how the unchangeable omnipotent could meet humanity" (253).

[48] Aers does invoke Foucault in his objections to Bynum (*The Powers of the Holy* 35). But Bynum seems closely to associate *all* politicized readings with Foucauldian interpretative strategies. See *Wonderful Blood* (30-31).

power; and lay attitudes of pious devotion should not be discounted as insignificant or

unimportant.[49] When I use the term "power" in this dissertation, it is almost always

because the word appears in the medieval text itself—both Chaucer and Malory *explicitly*

associated pilgrims' inability to access relics with their not having the "power" to do so.[50]

Moreover, to separate relics from issues of access is to deny the ways in which relics

helped to shape the English religious and political landscape from the Benedictine reform

in the tenth century to the Reformation in the sixteenth century. Charles Zika's statement

about the Eucharist is hence particularly relevant to the study of relic cults:

> Particular practices and objects channel and reproduce interaction and conflict [...]
> within the clerical élite who hold themselves responsible for the regulation of
> these practices, and in turn between them and the laity, for whom such practices
> have supposedly been instituted. In other words, the meaning of religious
> practices needs to be sought not only in their relationship to social practices, but
> also in the changing theological discourse which they span and on which they
> depend. (26)

While I do not subscribe to the kind of two-tiered model Zika is positing here, I do not

accept the simple optimism of the integrated model presented by scholars such as Brown,

Bynum and Eamon Duffy, either. Moreover, the theological texts of chapter two bear out

Zika's argument that clerical discourse worked to shape religious practices as well as to

respond to them. It cannot be contested that lay participation in cults was effusive and

enthusiastic; but it should not be forgotten that the institutional church both took

advantage of *and also helped to mold* this enthusiasm for its own ends.[51]

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[49] For an integration of relics' pious and political functions, see Marion E. Roberts, who observes that
"relics were politics" (137); elsewhere she is careful to emphasize Henry III's personal piety as well (139).
[50] On Chaucer's Pardoner and the "power" and "grace" necessary to access relics, see chapter five. Malory
is insistent that Launcelot has "no power" to access the Grail, which I argue extensively in chapter four to
be a relic. See *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory* (II. 894-895, 927 and 1016).
[51] Both because of the obvious institutional importance of a patron saint—and his or her notable relic—to a
religious community, I find it difficult to accept Herrmann-Mascard's thesis that "*La prééminence absolue
acquise par les reliques corporelles n'est pas résultat d'une évolution consciente et guidée par les autorités*

From Intellectual History to Institutional Practices

In the Middle Ages, the business of displaying and accessing relics was diverse

and complex. As cultural phenomena, pilgrimage and relic cults were widespread and

difficult to monitor—with great gaps between theological theory (which insisted that

relics ought to be carefully regulated)[52] and demotic practice (which at its most extreme

included physically assaulting a holy body in order to obtain a relic).[53] This project is

structured to explore the interrelationship between theological theory and demotic

practice, for certainly the one was not divorced from the other. Chapters two and three

hence present, respectively, the intellectual history and some institutional practices of

relic cults, in order to show that, though institutional practices were often divergent, they

still frequently manifested the handprint of some intellectual ideas about relic cults.

Chapters four and five serve as case studies of later medieval literary representations of

and responses to the intellectual ideas and institutional practices discussed in chapters

two and three. Though these texts all focus on different cults and even various secular or

religious groups, they all take up, support or challenge the intellectual idea that relics

should not be accessible to all. Chaucer and Malory in particular address with suspicion

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ecclésiastiques. C'est plutôt le fruit des circonstances et du dévelopement anarchique de la dévotion aux reliques [The absolute preeminence attained by body-part relics was not the result of a conscious program guided by ecclesiastical authorities. *Instead, this preeminence was the fruit of circumstances and of the unregulated development of devotion to relics*]" (70; emphasis added). She argues, in other words, that relic cults were not constructed, but rather that they sprung up spontaneously in response to popular demand.

[52] See for example Wilmart (184-85).

[53] "When he was at the celebrated monastery of Fécamp, [St Hugh of Lincoln] extracted by biting two small fragments of the bone of the arm of the most blessed lover of Christ, Mary Magdalen" ("Apud Fiscamni quoque insigne monasterium, de osse brachii beatissime Christi dilectricis Marie Magdalene duo mordicitus excussit frustra"). See Adam of Eynsham, *Magna Vita Sancti Hugonis* (2:169-70). See also Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims* (28). Relics themselves were similarly diverse and difficult to monitor: they came in different sizes and types—and even different classes, as I shall discuss in chapter two.

the intellectual claim (made, for example, by Guibert) that faith and penitence guarantees access and divine intervention. The ways in which *Le Morte* and the *Canterbury Tales* grapple with the abstract ideas presented as early as the tenth century, by a Winchester monk, show that even in the face of radical, microhistorical differences across time and space, there is a sense in which it is reasonable, and even necessary, to undertake a diachronic macrohistory of relic discourse in England. Such an undertaking in fact enables an understanding of the literary depictions of relics in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century literature in a way that examining relics in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England alone would prohibit.

The theological theory behind relic cults is consistent enough to suggest that the most crucial psychological attitudes (or *méntalites*) underpinning intellectual presentations of relic cults were, as I have suggested already, overwhelming concerns with access to relics and behavior at shrines. These concerns are to be found in all the intellectual approaches of the texts in chapter two. These texts can help us to think about and understand the cultural, religious and historical investments in relic discourse. Furthermore, they afford a consistent intellectual paradigm against which to measure the institutional practices (and literary responses) that form the basis for the chapters that follow. Eadmer of Canterbury's twelfth-century *Sententia de memoria sanctorum quos veneraris*, for example, is a homily that justifies the veneration of a saint's memory through his or her relics. Eadmer stresses the expectations of a devout supplicant, arguing that if a supplicant is humble and prostrate at a saint's shrine, the saint will act as an intercessor. This homily thereby affirms some of the institutional church's requirements for lay access to saints' relics: humility and obedience. Thiofrid of

Ecternach's twelfth-century *Flores Epitaphii Sanctorum* identifies relics as the precious

flowers of saints, but also justifies their containment in elaborate shrines. Thiofrid and

Eadmer both work to rationalize the careful regulation of access to relics, and in so doing

they reveal intellectual approaches to regulating lay and clerical behavior at shrines. So,

too, the Lollard responses with which I engage at the chapter's end show the temporal

continuity of intellectual responses to relic cults.

Chapter three focuses on the actual, institutional embodiment of the intellectual

ideas presented in chapter two. This institutional embodiment necessarily manifests

greater differences in practice than in the medieval theory surrounding relic cults, and the

cults of St Swithun and St Erkenwald provide representative examples of some of these

practices. They are not meant to serve as generalizations of a universal practice, but

rather they serve to show that in some accounts of these two cults, the consistencies in

practice and representation take up the very issues that so concerned the theorists of

chapter two: access and behavior. I establish that the intellectual justifications for

controlling relics can illuminate the function of relics in particular parishes and cities. I

argue that relics enabled local parishes to claim dominance over secular authority and

that such assertions validated the church's position in relationship to the

(disenfranchised) laity, and even occasionally, to the king. Using this historical

framework, I analyze the Latin, Old English and Middle English accounts of St Swithun

of Winchester and the Latin and Middle English accounts of St Erkenwald of London,

spanning from the tenth through fifteenth centuries. I focus on justice miracles which

feature relics, in which a saint extends mercy and forgiveness to a supplicant who has

unsuccessfully pleaded his or her case to secular authorities. These miracles permit

clerical assertions of superiority over secular law. They also suggest that only the *ecclesia*, through the power of its saints and their bodies, could give refuge to the wrongly accused. So, too, these depictions work to justify, practically speaking, why access to relics should be carefully regulated.

As the texts of Chapter four demonstrate, relic discourse and culture influenced the individuals who visited or worked at shrines in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as well. In order to contextualize the relic custodians and supplicants in the literary texts of this chapter, I consider an actual late thirteenth-century relic custodian of St Thomas Cantilupe's shrine, Gilbert of Chevening. I also examine the representation of supplicants and pilgrims in Cantilupe's canonization proceedings. The historical characters of relic custodian and supplicant enable a more complex understanding of shrines as "contact zones," places where a conflict plays out between those who had access to the shrine and its relics and those who did not. Such intimate, individual experience directly translates into the literary representations of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Texts such as Malory's *Le Morte d'arthur* and the fourteenth-century romance *Joseph of Arimathie* use encounters between pilgrims and relic custodians to challenge the longevity of ideas that relics are only for the most holy or virtuous to approach. These works illustrate the tension between pilgrims or supplicants and relic custodians. This conflict permeates and informs accounts such as Malory's Grail Quest, as well as the presentation of characters such as Chaucer's Pardoner.

Chapter five depends upon the distinction between material and rhetorical control over relics. In it, I argue that Chaucer's Pardoner should be considered a "fake" relic custodian, whose rhetorical manipulation of his supposedly holy objects serves to mock

and even to question material occlusion at shrines. What relic culture accomplished visually through opaque shrines, the Pardoner accomplishes through his rhetoric. His rhetorical gymnastics depend on the intellectual conventions and institutional practices of relic culture and on the conventions dictating the behavior of supplicants or pilgrims and the relic custodian. I discuss the centrality of rhetorical occlusion and relics in the Pardoner's European Analogues, Brother Onion in Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Girolamo in Masuccio's *Novellino*. By placing Chaucer's Pardoner in conversation with these texts, as well as with Heywood's relic-focused *The Pardoner and the Frere*, I demonstrate that the Pardoner's relics are crucial to understanding his character, and that relic discourse, which allows for concerns with vision, hegemony, greed and access, permeates the Pardoner's Prologue and Tale.

It is unlikely that anyone would contest relics' centrality to the religious culture of the English Middle Ages. Nevertheless, relics have not received much attention, and, as outlined above, much of the attention they have received has relied solely on work that, while critically important, has passed over relics' diachronic presence throughout the medieval period. So, too, the historical work that does address these aspects of relic cults does not often speak to relics' representation in literary texts; nor does it often directly address access as a primary concern. By investigating relics' appearance and occlusion in literary texts, this dissertation hence opens up a new avenue for thinking about relics as a way of talking about access. For it *was* significant that many notable relics were kept hidden—and it is not enough to note their occlusion as a point of interest and then pass on.

Much recent criticism in the field of medieval religious and literary studies has shown the need to understand the religious Middle Ages not as static and unchanging, but as a radical and even revolutionary period during which many texts interrogated limitations on access, literacy and lay involvement in shaping devotional practices of the English Christian Middle Ages. Ultimately, my dissertation contributes to this exciting scholarship by theorizing relic discourse as a form of cultural and institutional power. By arguing for relics' importance over time, my project contributes to the cultural history of relics and adds to our understanding of relics' function in literary texts. As such, relic discourse is a vital tool for literary scholarship that examines more general trends of lay access to the institutional hierarchy of the church.

CHAPTER 2

Cotidiana commemoratio:[1] Notable Relics and the Formation of Corporate Identity

Relics, Relic Discourse and the Desire for Access

In his discussion of relic quests, Pierre André Sigal describes the lay response to

relics' arrival at various cities[2]:

> The crowd rushes towards the saints bones' "like a swarm of bees" [...]. On one
> occasion, after the relics had been placed in the church, there was a steady stream
> of the sick and disabled who wanted to touch the relics [...] each person placing a
> coin or a candle beside the *feretrum*. ("Le Voyage" 88)[3]

This moment is typical of depictions of lay behavior in the presence of saints' relics, and

it portrays many people as eager to access relics.[4] Clerical writing often seems to

encourage this kind of frenzied devotion. As the texts of this chapter show, however,

such writing also attempted to rationalize deferring (even blocking) access to relics.

Failing that, clerical writers frequently present, on the one hand, virtuous pilgrims who

are able to achieve some kind of access; and on the other, depraved supplicants who are

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[1] Wilmart (190).

[2] For more on relic quests and relic custodians, see chapter five.

[3] "*La foule accourt vers les saints ossements 'comme un essaim d'abeilles' [...]. Une fois les reliques déposées dans une église, c'est un défilé ininterrompu de malades et d'infirmes désireux de toucher les reliques [...] chacun déposant une pièce de monnaie ou un cierge près de la châsse.*"

[4] See Eadmer's account of Oswald's translation (*Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan, and Oswald* 302-303). See also Goodich, *Violence and Miracle* (21-22); and see Wulfstan's account of Swithun's translation (Lapidge 449-63), which includes a depiction of a woman whose zeal inspires her to cast her son "upon the tomb from which the saint had been translated" (463). This motif is incredibly common in accounts of translations, especially, which would have afforded the devout with the greatest possibility of contact with a relic. See chapter five, "The Pardoner's 'Tresor,' " especially n. 67; see also chapter three, n. 59.

punished for desiring access in the first place.[5] In both cases, clerical and monastic

presentations of relic cults were clearly invested in regulating lay responses to the shrines

of saints. Attempts to regulate relics did not always meet with success: many monarchs

and aristocrats themselves possessed relics,[6] and from the ninth through fifteenth

centuries, lay ownership of relics was not unheard of.[7] Christopher A. Jones argues that

lay ownership of relics was in fact common in Anglo-Saxon England, and Julia M. H.

Smith presents a case for relics as part of a complex aristocratic gift-exchange.[8] Through

the fifteenth century, there is evidence that prominent gentry families, such as the

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[5] Gawain is certainly one such depraved supplicant (chapter four, 152-53, 161-65); Eustace is another (chapter three, 128-29). For a full discussion of the ways in which pilgrim desire to touch (or even to see) relics could result in censure or even saintly retribution if a supplicant's intentions were worldly, see chapter four. Eadsige in fact explicitly accuses the slave-girl of "presumption" until he discovers her innocence. See chapter four (138-45).

[6] For historical examples of kings and other laity whose relic collections were impressive, see Rollason, *Saints and Relics* (159-63) and "Relic-cults"; see also Vincent, "Angevin Kings." A later constitution, *Ad furturam rei memoriam* of 1672, forbade the ownership of relics by the laity, and made only small allowances that "great princes and the leading Church prelates" could be in possession of "lesser relics (*minus insignes*)" (Dooley 38). Notable relics (*insignes*), that is to say "the head, leg or that part of the body in which the martyr suffered—if it be entire—*should [...] be kept [...] in a church*" (37; my emphasis). The tenets of this constitution can be seen legally to make manifest the ideology that asserts the rights of the Church as the sole guardian and even owner, so to speak, of saints' bodies.

[7] Vincent writes about the Plantagenet kings—who often expected smaller relics as gifts for making a pilgrimage or attending a translation ceremony—and their relic collections ("The Pilgrimages of the Angevin Kings of England" 34-36). Nevertheless, it is important to note that these relic collections were often kept in the king's private chapel and were frequently moved from there to Westminster Abbey (36). The relics of these kings were, therefore, to some degree at least, still in the possession of the church. Furthermore, Vincent argues for a monarch's status as a special kind of pilgrim, thereby affirming a kind of somatic hierarchy that distinguished between the bodies of the living: kingly pilgrimages were equivalent to the "*itinera principum*," and were "royal phenomen[a], set apart from the experience of less exalted pilgrims" (15). They, therefore—and like other famous pilgrims, Erasmus included—were permitted freer access to relics than "less exalted pilgrims."

[8] Julia M. H. Smith, "Old Saints, New Cults"; and Jones, "Old English Words for Relics of the Saints" (10). See also Rollason, "Relic-cults As an Instrument of Royal Policy" and Mary Frances Smith, Robin Fleming and Patricia Halpin. M. F. Smith's account of ecclesiastical gift-giving shows that bishops usually transferred relics from one monastic or cathedral community to another (572-78). Fleming details the relic collection—and extensive gift-giving—of Earl Harold Godwineson, who collected (and stole) relics on his travels, as well as on his visits to English cathedrals and monasteries. Earl Harold gave eighty-five relics to Waltham priory, of which he had collected fifty-nine. The other twenty-six "had been given to Harold by Archbishop Ealdred of York to mark their friendship" (587). Some other smaller relics that were occasionally distributed to noble supplicants included *brandea*, non-notable cloth relics (see McCulloh, *passim*). *Brandea* are understood to be pieces of cloth that serve as relics when they have "absorbed holiness from another relic, and in most cases that absorption is incidental to the use of the cloth to wrap a relic" (McCulloh 166).

Pastons, owned relics as well.[9] And certainly less prestigious laity had access to some kinds of relics, though it is unlikely to have been the kind of unfettered access we often imagine.[10]

Nevertheless, even when we cannot be certain about the actual practices at a shrine, it is clear that many monastic writers did not necessarily support lay access to relics.[11] In fact, relic discourse enabled these monastic writers (and other clergy) to advocate for relatively *limited* access to notable relics. The literary and historical texts of this chapter serve to illustrate some of the conventions these writers deployed to rationalize regulating behavior at shrines and keeping some kinds of relics hidden.[12] These conventions have not been widely considered in the literary study of relics and their cults.[13] The result of this lacuna has been that even an intuitively obvious concept like "somatic hierarchy" has not been incorporated in a discussion of saints' relics, which were considered to have, after all, a very prestigious place relative to lay, and even

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[9] See Dobson (197-99). Dobson also describes Sir John Fastolf's gift of the arm of St George to the Guild of St George at Norwich (197). Dobson's evidence is mainly for private ownership of small relics of the True Cross, and his inference—that this kind of personal devotion "leads directly to the English Reformation" (198)—may be overstated, especially given the evidence for private ownership of relics in the Anglo-Saxon period.

[10] See the discussion below, "Access and Occlusion: Notable versus Non-Notable Relics."

[11] See chapter one (4-5).

[12] These texts have seldom been examined. For example, Thiofrid of Echternach's treatise on relics, which also includes some commentary on the Eucharist, is not included in Caroline Walker Bynum's recent and important book on blood relic cults and Eucharistic debate in northern Europe, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond*. And as Thomas Head, writing in 2000, comments, Guibert of Nogent's "*On the Saints and Their Relics* has yet to find an interpretation both compelling and comprehensive in modern scholarship" (*Medieval Hagiography* 402). The focus is typically on Guibert as anti-relic cult, or, alternatively, as concerned primarily with bodily wholeness and resurrection (Bynum, "Bodily Miracles" 77-78). Issues of resurrection theology are certainly important, but it is equally important to pay attention to Guibert's careful (and implicit) justification of restricting access to relics. For he was concerned with bodily dismemberment not only because he was invested in bodily resurrection, but also (and, I would submit, even more crucially) because he believed that it was easier to pilfer and then to expose non-notable relics than notable relics. Guibert's trenchant views on moving saints' bodies indicate his own concern that notable relics' be out of the sight and reach of lay desire. For Guibert as commenting on traveling relic custodians, see "Traveling Relic Custodians" in chapter five.

[13] See discussion in chapter one, "Approaches to Medieval Relic Cults."

clerical or monastic, bodies. Wulfstan of Winchester and Eadmer of Canterbury both see

notable relics as a way to affirm the corporate identity of their monastic communities.

Moreover, in their twelfth-century treatises, Thiofrid of Ecternach and Guibert of Nogent

both carefully distinguish between notable and non-notable relics and suggest that

notable relics ought to be occluded. All four writers concern themselves with what I call

here the "somatic hierarchy": the idea that *not* all bodies are equal (one is not born a

saint), and that proper behavior at a shrine (and proper treatment of the shrine's notable

relics) is a crucial way to demonstrate the relative differences between the bodies of the

saints and all other bodies. This somatic hierarchy affirmed the value of a saint's relics,

but it also helped to justify the relative access that various groups of people had to relics.

According to Thiofrid, this hierarchy begins with Christ, whose flesh sanctified

matter. The saints follow closely:

> Certainly, apart from Christ's flesh by which the world was redeemed, there is no
> fleshly substance more distinguished than the flesh of the saints: the more their
> flesh was subordinated to the spirit [in them], the freer it [now] is and the more
> glorious, even in the state of decomposition. (I, 3.1-5)[14]

In this paradigm, the saints' merits (won by their spiritual resolve, which conquers the

body and renders it spiritual) function similarly to Christ's divinity. Saints' bodies are

hence super-somatic, as their pleasing odor demonstrates (I, 5-6). All other bodies (live

and dead) are carefully set apart from this special category of "matière inerte" (Ferrari

218).[15] "Somatic hierarchy" thus works to distinguish between the relative sanctity and

value of bodies. It applied especially to relic cults, which very often featured decaying

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[14] "*Nimirum excepta carne Christi quae precium est mundi nulla carnia substantia carne sanctorum est nobilior quae quanto spiritui subiectior tanto est liberior, et in ipsa corruptionis resolutione gloriosior.*" Except

[15] See below, "Ornamenta et operimenta."

(or miraculously whole) physical, but superior, bodies. "Somatic hierarchy" also plays a

part in determining the relative access of various supplicants to a notable relic, as we

shall see in chapter three. The idea that not all bodies were considered to be equal is not

new, of course. But surprisingly, this idea has yet to be applied to the carefully

manufactured environment at a relic cult.[16] As the miracle stories and treatises of this

chapter make clear, relic cults frequently served to create a sense of hierarchical order

and difference, even while they enabled the church to express (or perhaps to exaggerate)

its desire to manufacture a sense of *communitas* and belonging.

I end the chapter by introducing some of the most famous medieval objections to

relic cults in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These objections are few in number,

and the attention seems to have been frequently focused, instead, on images. Wyclif and

later Lollard heretics did not often refer explicitly to notable relics, however, and it is

difficult to say why relics were not a more pervasive issue for many Lollards. Some

scholars, Norman P. Tanner and J. F. Davis among them, suggest by assumption that

every time Lollards objected to images and pilgrimages, they were, by extension,

objecting to saints' bones:[17]

> The belief that earthly objects were not made holier by being associated with
> heavenly persons was implied in the attacks on images. Evidently the belief was
> also held by the two men who denied that relics of saints should be honoured, for

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[16] See chapter one, especially the section entitled "Approaches to Medieval Relic Cults."

[17] Davis argues that

> The most characteristic and enduring tenets of later Lollardy were those denouncing pilgrimages
> to the relics of the saints and the veneration of images. Images and pilgrimages raised
> considerable controversy in the schools during the late fourteenth century and this controversy was
> continued into the fifteenth by scholars like John Deverose, Nicholas Radcliffe, William Taylor,
> John Purvey, Roger Dymok and Reginald Pecock. (2)

Davis does not here differentiate explicitly between relics and pilgrimages, however, and as a result he does
not acknowledge how seldom Lollards referred to relics overtly. Moreover, his evidence indicates that
even if Lollards did not make an explicit distinction between relics and their containers (and pilgrimage),
they at the very least focused more blatantly on the (ostentatious, offensive) shrines than on their contents..

both pointed out that such relics were merely the flesh and bones of dead men. Presumably it was also a principal reason for the attacks on pilgrimages. (13)

Tanner here does not make any distinction between images and relics. His explanation is, therefore, unsatisfactory: if relics were the "principal reason" for the attacks on pilgrimage, why were they not mentioned more habitually? For pilgrimage itself *was* mentioned frequently and enthusiastically: in the Norwich heresy trials alone, pilgrimage appears in thirty-four trials (11).[18] If relics were as important, it seems that they, along with idolatry, greed, avarice and ostentatious shrines would have appeared more regularly in Lollard writings. I argue that, instead, Lollards do not focus on relics because their perception of relic cults focused on cults' ostentatious trappings (rather than what these trappings contained), and that in some ways, the relics themselves were seen as less offensive than their *feretra*. Wyclif's disapproval of the practices of relic cults, for example, gels with the later (and pervasive) Lollard concern with the accoutrements of relic cults: shrines, pilgrim oblations, ornate church buildings. I argue that when it came to relic cults, Lollards were most immediately concerned with idolatry, and that relics' shrines more readily fell under their purview. Such an idea throws into even greater relief my contention that many relics were not, for the most part, visible.

Access and Occlusion: Notable versus Non-notable Relics

The Middle English Dictionary defines "relik" as a "part of the body of a [dead] saint, or other material object associated with a saint" (*MED* "relik"). This definition is certainly correct; however, it puts undue emphasis on what all relics had in common

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[18] Other actions associated with pilgrimage and saints' cults all appear exponentially more frequently than relics (which again, only appear in two trials): praying to saints, for example, is an issue in twenty-three trials, and images an issue in thirty-seven trials (Tanner 11).

(association with a saint) and does not clearly outline the important (theological and

practical) differences between body-part relics and "material object" relics.[19] For

corporeal relics were also subject to classification. Eugene A. Dooley outlines these

distinctions: "according to the Code of [nineteenth-century] Canon Law, there are only

two kinds of relics: *insignes* and *non-insignes*, or, in English, *notable* and *non-notable*"

(4-5). As Dooley explains, "notable relics are complete members of a body, and hence

are more noteworthy than mere parts of it." Non-notable relics thereby extend to include

the smaller or less important body parts of saints, as well as the material objects

associated with the saints. Moreover, while all notable relics are body part relics, not all

body part relics are considered notable, "since many of them are small in size and

dimension" (4-5).[20] As historians have recently demonstrated, this differentiation

between notable and non-notable relics was certainly not limited to the nineteenth

century:

> In theory even the smallest relic was sacramental of the power and presence of the
> saint concerned: in practice during the Middle Ages a knuckle bone of one of the

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[19] On the differences between various kinds of relics, see Crook, "Enshrinement" (198); Herrmann-Mascard (70); Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* (3, n. 8; 129); and Thacker, "Loca sanctorum" (9, 41). As John Crook points out, contact relics were treated differently: "contact relics had the further advantage that, *unlike saintly bones*, which were protected by more and more elaborate means, they could be kissed" (*The Architectural Setting* 31; emphasis added). See the discussion of relic-kissing, below (54-55). Contact relics are typically understood to be the non-corporeal objects associated with the saints, such as pieces of clothing or even small bits of cloth, often called *brandea*, which have "absorbed holiness from another relic" (McCulloh 166). These *brandea* were not regarded as highly as the more prestigious body-part relics, as Gregory the Great's letter to an agitated Constantina (who wanted, but was refused, a body-part relic of St Peter) indicates (McCulloh 147-50). Relics of Christ and Mary are often considered separately, though Dooley remarks, "the Code does not mention the fact that relics of the True Cross or of the Passion are notable, but this is certain from decrees of the Congregation of Rites and the Congregation of Relics where special and distinctive honors were attributed to them" (4). See also Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* (5). Finucane explains that "the 'newer' worship of Christ and his mother" may have arisen because Christ's and Mary's "holiness was freely available to all," and did not require "expensive canonizations, elaborate shrines and properly authenticated bones" (*Miracles and Pilgrims* 196-97). On relics of Christ and Mary, see below, nn. 28-29.

[20] Dooley explains that nineteenth-century canon law defines notable relics as entire body, head, arm, forearm, heart, tongue, hand, leg, or "that part of the body in which the martyr suffered, provided that it be entire and not small" (5).

apostles was not accorded the care and reverence which the whole relic of a much lesser saint attracted, nor was it as potent a miracle worker. [...] Miscellaneous relics could be in the possession of an individual who carried them about the country. Chaucer's Pardoner is a fraudulent example. [...] A whole relic, on the other hand was treated more deliberately. How it was enshrined was significant of what was claimed for it. For a relic to be treated as a whole relic it was not necessary that it should be a whole body, or even a complete skeleton. [...] On the other hand a certain minimum quantity was necessary for a relic to qualify as a whole relic.[21] (Spurrell 67-68)

Though he does not use Dooley's terms, it is clear that Mark Spurrell is talking about the distinction between non-notable (the "smallest" body-part relics) and notable ("whole") relics. [22] Non-notable relics were far more widely dispersed, easily accessible and open to abuses than their notable counterparts. What is more, these relics were treated differently because they were not regarded by clergy or laity as being as powerful as the less accessible, carefully enshrined notable relics.[23]

"Relik" is hence a complex term, and it is essential to keep its sub-categories in mind when supplicants succeed or fail to access relics in medieval literary texts. Relics' differences are especially important given the general assumptions that all relics are equally prestigious, as the evidence does not bear out this claim.[24] The evidence also suggests that, throughout the Middle Ages in England, getting close to notable relics was not always as easy as if often supposed. As Ellen Shortell has noted, many relics that

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[21] See also Crook, *The Architectural Setting* (25-31); and Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* (1-5, 15-16).
[22] In fact, Dooley's book is not cited in Spurrell's, Crook's or Nilson's bibliographies. This in no way lessens the significance or impressiveness of their work, but I do think that Dooley's terms are invaluable for making the most precise distinctions possible between different kinds of body-part relics.
[23] See Crook, *The Architectural Setting* (25-31); and Spurrell (68). Nilson is thorough in his description of the "distinction made between different sorts of primary relics," which he designates as "greater" and "lesser" (*Cathedral Shrines* 3). As Nilson shows, there were no translations of lesser (non-notable) relics, and he cites St Swithun's translation in 1476 as an example. If, as Nilson argues, translation was "among the greatest of medieval ecclesiastical celebrations" (15), it is surely significant that non-notable relics were excluded from this practice. See also (147-54).
[24] See especially Brown (78) and Bynum, who emphasizes the possibility of wholeness in partition (*Wonderful Blood* 187). See chapter one, "Approaches to Medieval Relic Cults."

were kept in cathedral feretory chapels were "displayed *and yet at the same time concealed* within reliquaries and behind choir screens" (32; emphasis added).[25] These feretory chapel reliquaries—and indeed, many of the reliquaries found in cathedrals— were constructed of opaque wood and gilded with silver or gold and gems. Theologians insisted upon the occlusion of notable relics in these shrines, and notable relics, from the tenth through the sixteenth centuries when shrines in England were dismantled, were seldom seen.[26] Even scholars such as Caroline Walker Bynum and Thomas Head, both of whom tend to take the view that physical access to relics (like touching or even seeing) was not necessarily important, still articulate the difficulty of such access.[27] Many beautiful glass reliquaries, often ornamented with gold, silver and/or precious stones, do survive from the later Middle Ages,[28] and certainly relics of Christ and Mary (such as the Virgin's milk at Walsingham, for example), were not completely hidden by their reliquaries.[29] However, many other notable relics were kept in opaque reliquaries, which

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[25] See also Shortell (41).

[26] See Wall, *Shrines of British Saints.*

[27] See Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints* (166); and Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* (30-31, 76-77).

[28] For pictures of these kinds of reliquaries, see especially Henk van Os. Bynum contrasts "so-called 'speaking reliquaries' [...] and crystal monstrances" with "house- or casket-shaped containers that more effectively masked precise contents." See *Wonderful Blood* (13). The Virgin's milk at Walsingham and the Holy Blood at Westminster are two more famous examples of relics of the Holy Family, both of which were displayed in smaller, glass reliquaries. On Walsingham, see Dickinson; see also Heath (239). On the Holy Blood and its various pilgrimage sites and monstrance-like reliquaries, see especially Vincent, *The Holy Blood* (137-85). On other occasions, notable relics were exposed: St Cuthbert's body was revealed to the select few, for example (Rollason, *Saints and Relics* 106); and Henry II was able to look at Petroc's relics (Jankulak 30).

[29] For the treatment of some relics of Christ and Mary, see Dooley (4). Some theologians, Guibert of Nogent and Thiofrid of Ecternach among them, argued strenuously against body-part relics of Christ (such as the Holy blood), since such relics undermined the Real Presence in the Eucharist. The Virgin's milk at Walsingham and the Holy Blood at Westminster are two more famous examples of relics of the Holy Family. See above, n. 28. Finucane explains that "the 'newer' worship of Christ and his mother" may have arisen because Christ's and Mary's "holiness was freely available to all," and did not require "expensive canonizations, elaborate shrines and properly authenticated bones" (196-97). On the Holy Blood and its various pilgrimage sites and reliquaries, see especially Vincent, *The Holy Blood* (137-85). For general commentary on the treatment of such relics, see also Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* (76-81); Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* (5); and Rawcliffe (123-25).

in addition to occluding the contents and affirming their value, also allowed the relic

custodian to keep careful control of them.[30]

This control is especially demonstrated by the fact that most of these opaque

reliquaries were kept locked and were only infrequently opened.[31] In *Catheral Shrines of*

Medieval England, Nilson observes that "technically, the lid of a *feretrum* was as

removable as a coffin's, but in practice was usually kept shut. For example, Erasmus

reported that St Thomas of Canterbury's bones were not permitted to be seen" (35).[32]

Nilson points out that, in spite of earlier arguments that "shrines were intended to be

visible from afar" (81), in practice cathedrals did not have vistas that permitted visual

access to shrines.[33] Instead, cathedral shrines were occluded by their position behind the

high altar, and hence behind reredoses (sometimes as high as forty feet) and choir or rood

screens.[34] Hence, such *feretra* could not have been seen from the nave—the very place

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[30] See Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* (34-91) and Wall (1-33). Havergal describes one such lesser, thirteenth-century shrine of Becket as oak, "covered with copper plates overlaid with Limoges enamel" and painted with scenes from Becket's murder and ascension into Heaven. Its "back opens on hinges and fastens with a lock and key, and the upper part is sloped so as to form an acutely-pointed roof" (143).

[31] A sixteenth-century account from Durham allows that "when they [pilgrims] had maid there praiers, the clarke did let down ye cover thereof & did locke yt at every corner" (qtd Webb *Pilgrimage* 85). Often, watching chambers were built, and the shrines were kept locked whenever the relic custodians were not present (Nilson *Cathedral Shrines* 52-53, 142).

[32] For Erasmus' (literary) account of this experience, see chapter five.

[33] See Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* (35-99). This is also in direct contrast to scholars like Beat Brenki, who argues that in contrast to the opaque reliquaries of the earlier Middle Ages, later medieval reliquaries frequently exposed their contents ("Der Kultort," cited in Tsuji 205). In this comment, Brenki does not acknowledge the architectural history of *feretra* in the English Middle Ages, which were in fact built to be larger, taller (and more inaccessible) over time. While there certainly were many exceptions to relics' occlusion—see above, nn. 28 and 29—accessing notable relics seems to have become increasingly difficult throughout the Middle Ages. Moreover, the architectural developments in relic cults from the eighth through sixteenth centuries in England are in direct contrast to the transformation Brenki notes. For these developments, see Coldstream; Crook, "Enshrinement" and *The Architectural History*, especially (242-81); and Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* (34-91); and Rollason, *Saints and Relics* (44-59). See also chapter one, "From the Benedictine Reform (almost) to the Reformation."

[34] Nilson refutes earlier ideas that "shrines were intended to be visible from afar," and very convincingly explains the various barriers (rood and quire screens, reredoses, and even shrine canopies and curtains) that would have made visibility " 'from the main body of the church' " impossible (*Cathedral Shrines* 81). Nilson concludes from this fact that "visibility [...] was not an important factor in church arrangement" (82), and that the "assumption of the importance of visibility is unfounded" (58). By this, Nilson seems to

that pilgrims would have thronged in anticipation (5).[35] The description of shrines and

shrine bases—some shrines, such as that of William of York, built in 1472, eleven feet

high (48)—is equally convincing as evidence for the inability of pilgrims to approach any

shrine too closely. Nilson in fact underscores this point when he allows that an eight-foot

tall shrine base was probably

> the practical maximum, being the highest a man could reach to lift the reliquary
> on and off, lock the cover, or do other necessary tasks around the feretrum
> without the aid of a ladder [...] Anything lower [would have been] less impressive
> and too accessible to light-fingered pilgrims" (48).[36]

Some scholars have argued, counter-intuitively, that the height of shrine bases was meant

to allow the pilgrims to get "as close as possible to the object of his devotions" (Stocker

146). This seems entirely unlikely, unless it is granted that the closest pilgrims could

possibly get was eleven feet away from a feretrum that, for the most part, kept the relics

completely hidden.[37]

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mean that, since major shrines were not easy to see from the nave, no thought was given to making them
visible; and hence that what people could or could not see was not a factor in the design of cathedral
shrines. I think it is useful, instead, to consider the ways in which shrine architecture served (perhaps
deliberately) to hide shrines from open view. For Nilson's inference misses the important idea that these
shrines may have been positioned exactly so that they could not have been seen from most places in the
cathedral. Hence, "visibility" may well have been a consideration for shrine and cathedral design, insofar
as there seem to have been serious concerns with *concealing* major shrines whenever possible. See (81-
91).
[35] *Scrinia* or *feretra* are "the technical terms for saints' shrines" (Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* 5). I follow
Nilson in using *feretra* "to describe house-shaped chests containing relics" (35). In this context, *feretra*
certainly can refer to smaller reliquary chests, but a *feretrum* could certainly be large enough to contain an
entire body. *Feretra* were, furthermore, made of wood and embellished; modeled on coffins, their lids
were almost always kept shut. This is exactly the kind of reliquary pilgrims would have found at the center
of major cathedral cults. I will hence refer to *feretra* and to feretory chapels throughout the dissertation.
[36] The inaccessibility of *feretra* is often justified by referring to a fear of theft. While I do not doubt that
this may sometimes have been the case (and certainly Geary's *Furta Sacra* indicates that in earlier
centuries, theft was a concern), it strikes me as too simple to assume that *feretra* were kept locked and
inaccessible solely to protect them from burglary. We need to read critically monastic and clerical
justifications for keeping relics hidden, which may also serve to rationalize keeping relics away from, in
Eadmer's phrase, "secular persons." See chapter one, "Relics and Macrohistory."
[37] Nilson remarks, "P. Tudor-Craig has suggested that the open base supported by columns was abandoned
because there was no private place to pray" (*Cathedral Shrines* 45-46). I would suggest instead that,
though niches did provide a place for pilgrims to kneel, they were part of a kind of shrine base that, because

This strategy of material occlusion of some relics was, to be sure, part of what empowered them. As Geary points out, it was extremely difficult to determine the value of exposed relics:

> Once removed from their elaborate reliquaries or containers, [relics] were not even decorative. The most eagerly sought after relics of the medieval period— bodies or portions of bodies—were superficially similar to thousands of other corpses and skeletons universally available. ("Commodities" 174)

Because many saints' bones looked no different than "thousands of other corpses," ornamented reliquaries were an essential means of manifesting a relic's value.[38] Elaborate cathedral shrines provide substantiating evidence for Geary's remark that without "their elaborate reliquaries or containers," relics "were not even [considered to be] decorative" (174), let alone spiritually potent.[39] Indeed, in order to control who could see them, saints' relics were often occluded by their shrines, which demarked the relics as holy, but which also (paradoxically) served to hide the very things they honored.

Just as some relics were professed to be authentic by their "elaborate reliquaries or containers," other relics were manifested as holy (were "ornamented," so to speak) by what was said (and even written) about them, including saints' *vitae* and *miracula*, as well as bulls of authentication and sermons.[40] Language—what and *how* something is

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of its height, limited access to feretra by comparison to lower table and tomb shrine bases. See also Nilson "Medieval Experience"; Webb, *Pilgrimage* (84-86); and Crook ("King Edgar" 197-201).

[38] In "Seeing and Believing," Hahn emphasizes the importance both of sight and also of the ornamentation of reliquaries (1080, 1082-84). Nilson documents the importance of ornamentation and expenditure throughout the Middle Ages (see *Cathedral Shrines* 15, 21-25, 35).

[39] Hahn also observes that "unadorned relic bones are inexpressive, anonymous, perhaps even repugnant [...] The reliquary in some sense constitutes the power of the relic" ("The Voices of the Saints: Speaking Reliquaries" 28). Thiofrid is even more insistent about the status of reliquaries, however, arguing as he does that the reliquary actually becomes a contact (non-notable, secondary) relic in its own right. See the discussion below (55-65).

[40] "To acquire the status of relics, scraps of flesh and bone had to shed their anonymity; these mute bodily remains needed to be identified and named. Medievalists have focused their attention on how written texts such as *vitae*, *miracula*, and *translationes*—and their accompanying illustrations—gave relics meaning. Surely reliquaries also participated powerfully in this process. Sheltering the relics and hiding them from

said about a relic—works to demarcate a relic as holy, and hence accomplishes

rhetorically what reliquaries do materially: it identifies a particular relic as worthy of

veneration. For that reason, relic discourse works to affirm a relic's healing power (since

a relic's healing power identifies it as holy and authentic) and popularity (since a relic's

popularity simultaneously affirms its efficacy). Relic discourse therefore features

characters such as pilgrims (who desire to approach relics) and miracles that reward

virtuous pilgrims and affirm the ascendancy of the saint's heavenly authority (which is at

the disposal of a religious community, of course). At the center of this discourse and its

miracles is the treatment of a shrine and its relics, however—and hence I shall first turn

to representative miracles that outline the appropriate behavior at a monastic shrine.

Prostrate Bodies: Monastic Behavior at Shrines

Wulfstan's experience as a young monk at Winchester provides the basis for his

eyewitness account of Swithun's translation in 971, as well as of the appropriate monastic

responses to Swithun's miraculous powers. In these sections of his poem, Wulfstan

shows the ways in which these monastic responses are central strategies for affirming the

holiness of a dead body. This is especially important in the case of a notable relic, which

(unlike non-notable relics) could in itself "*create* a holy place [...] A greater shrine thus

vastly increased a church's reputation as a holy place and gave it a special celestial

patron" (Nilson 4; emphasis added). Monastic behavior can thus either buttress or render

ineffectual a cult centered on a notable relic—and such a cult, in turn, can directly

view, reliquaries became the visible face of the sacred remains." See Remensnyder (887-88). On the
emergence of written *vita* in the early Middle Ages, see Rollason, *Saints and Relics* (109-10). On written
authentication and its ambiguities in general, see Bertrand.

influence the sustainability of a religious community or cathedral center. For writers like Wulfstan (and later, for Eadmer), this is a vital issue, since these notable relics not only garnered a certain amount of financial solvency for a religious community, but enabled a parish's assertions of civic importance and superiority over secular authority, as I argue in chapter three.[41] Wulfstan's text is especially relevant here because it originates from the then-capital of Wessex (and the political center of ninth- and tenth-century England), but most importantly because it so carefully outlines the conventions of relic discourse and shows these conventions at work in pre-Conquest England. Even more importantly, Wulfstan illustrates some of the ways in which relics could serve to highlight the authority of a bishop. Wulfstan ultimately suggests that Æthelwold depends upon the miracles of Swithun's cult to affirm his own spiritual authority as bishop.[42]

In Book I, Miracle xiii, Wulfstan suggests that for Swithun's cult to thrive, the monks must demonstrate together [*unanimes*] that the dead body is sanctified, holy and set apart from other bodies. In order to do this, the monks must acknowledge their own (relative) position in the somatic hierarchy. They must, that is, acknowledge their inferiority to Swithun—and to Æthelwold:

> [Æthelwold] commanded that, when any infirm person was divinely restored to longed-for health through the saint's medication, whether during the burning day or at the time of dark night, the monks should abandon every worldly activity [*protinus e manibus fratres opus omne relinquant*], and together [*socialiter*] go to the church and take care to render sweetly a hymn to God [*curarentque Deo persoluere dulciter ymnum*]. (475)

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[41] I include an extensive discussion of Wulfstan in chapter three primarily because Wulfstan himself identifies relics (Swithun's) and place (the Old Minster at Winchester) in the twofold purpose of his poem (Lapidge 373).
[42] Wulfstan's depiction of Ethelwold is of course complicated by the fact that Wulfstan was also Ethelwold's hagiographer. See *The Life of St Aethelwold*, Introduction.

In this moment, Æthelwold contrasts the relatively austere practices of a monk with the heavenly practices of a saint. In the somatic hierarchy, that is, the layperson may be below the cleric (on which more in chapter three), but the cleric or monk is most certainly below the saint's notable relic—in this case, Swithun's entire body. Æthelwold's command hence underscores and dismisses the monks' bodily weaknesses: even sleep (or eating, or study) cannot excuse laxity in praising their saint. Wulfstan is explicit in his recording of how Æthelwold instructs the monks to go: "*socialiter*" (l. 1318), together in fellowship.[43] The monks are to behave as one body, as it were, praising the holy body in their midst—and obeying their head, Æthelwold.

But the monks, naturally, do not follow Æthelwold's dictum. Their disobedience enables Wulfstan's commentary on what makes a relic cult possible (devoted monks). Moreover, their disobedience also allows Wulfstan to suggest that the chain of command extends from Swithun, through Æthelwold, to the monks. The monks are not depicted as able to access Swithun's instruction without Æthelwold's help. As soon as Æthelwold is away, some of the older monks complain that they cannot tolerate their sleep being interrupted "three and four times in one night" (475). They persuade the other monks to shirk their duties, as well, so that "At the persuasion of the evil one [...] the great majority of the monks gave up the holy work [*intermittit opus sanctum pars maxima fratrum*]" (475). The monks here recognize Æthelwold, not Swithun, as more authoritative: presumably if they understood Swithun's authority, they would behave even in Æthelwold's absence. In the absence of the bishop, their neglect of Swithun's cult

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[43] Praising a saint together is a common motif in Middle English hagiography. Witness, for example, Henry Bradshaw's description of a similar moment: "And all the clergy syngyng with vice melodious / Kneled all downe and gaue due reuerence, Honour and worship to her corporall presence" (*Life of St Werburge* I.3425-37). My thanks to Cynthia Turner Camp for drawing this passage to my attention.

continues for two weeks, until Swithun himself is so aggrieved that he appears in a vision

to reveal the problem. He instructs a "certain lady" to convey his message to Æthelwold,

who does not realize that his monks "are so wickedly carried away by human activities

that they do not return a due service of praise to Him, but they are devoted to worldly

pursuits [...] and disdain the divine gifts" (477). Swithun's rebuke continues for thirty-

eight lines (the miracle is only 110 lines long) and ends with a threat and a promise: if

praise ceases, so will the miracles; but if they take up their duties again, there will be

more miracles than ever before (477-79).

On the one hand, Swithun's words affirm Æthelwold's authority as bishop:

Swithun essentially censures the monks for failing to follow Æthelwold's instructions in

the first place. Because Æthelwold offered the same instructions first (to abandon

worldly pursuits; to praise the saint's miracles together), Wulfstan uses Swithun's

reproach to suggest that Æthelwold has unmediated access to God's divine guidance.

Unlike the "certain woman," Æthelwold does not depend upon a vision. Instead, he

accesses God directly and advises his monks accordingly. But on the other hand,

Swithun's instructions also deny Æthelwold's ability to govern his monks without

Swithun's help: Swithun knows about the monks' misbehavior before Æthelwold does.

Æthelwold's lack of knowledge suggests that, without Swithun's help, Æthelwold is

unable to do his job, and the cult will fail. Swithun's apparition provides divine

affirmation that the monks ought to listen to Æthelwold; but it also shows that Æthelwold

ought to listen to Swithun.[44] Swithun's intervention clearly illustrates the (somatic)

hierarchy at Winchester: Swithun (in his relics); Æthelwold (the head of the chapter); and

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[44] On Æthelwold's well-known austerity, see Knowles, *The Monastic Order* (50-54).

the Benedictine monks. Wulfstan hence presents Swithun's relics as a focal point for communal order at Winchester, and this is a dynamic that plays out in Eadmer's texts, as well. This miracle, then, is not so much about whether Swithun could appear to the virtuous; Wulfstan gives accounts of many such occasions. Instead, this miracle suggests that relics could confer authority on a bishop like Æthelwold. Æthelwold's response to the monks' misbehavior emphasizes both his position of authority and also his dependence on the relics and divine intervention. The monks respond to Æthelwold, whose measured rebuke prompts the monks to respond with "one accord [*unanimes*]" and to praise God for Swithun's miracles "with one voice [*una voce*]" (479). Swithun's relics, and Æthelwold's episcopal authority, restore concord to the community. What is more, Swithun's relics restore concord by emphasizing the hierarchical differences between the various bodies at Winchester.

Eadmer of Canterbury is similarly concerned with maintaining Canterbury's relic cults by reaffirming the kind of hierarchical behavior that is appropriate at a shrine. In his twelfth-century *Sententia de memoria sanctorum quos veneraris* and in the *Breuiloquium vitae S. Wilfridi*, he emphasizes how to be a good supplicant. His comments there on the necessity of faith apply to lay supplicants, as well as to his fellow monks. But he, like Wulfstan, is not simply concerned with whether the monks act appropriately. Eadmer, too, shows that there is an institutional and corporate investment in the devotional practices of relic cults. In this context, veneration is a matter of concern for the entire monastic chapter, and the monks' behavior works, as in Wulfstan, to illustrate the hierarchical chain of command. These texts, like Wulfstan's miracle, allow insight into the daily operation of a shrine at a major cathedral and what went on behind

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the scenes in order to inspire, if not to ensure, supplicants' orderly devotion. The

Sententia also reveals Eadmer's commitment to the cult of the saints.[45] Moreover, one of

Wilfrid's miracles in Eadmer's *Breuiloquium vitae* mirrors that of Swithun in Wulfstan's

tenth-century *Miracula*. The similarities in these two works make obvious the continuity

of English devotional practices over time.[46] In addition, such parallels also show the

continuing importance of the reforming bishops to the relic cults at Winchester and

Canterbury, which housed relics of Oswald and Dunstan.

In the *Sententia*, Eadmer argues that saints' intercessory prayers are effective and

that venerating relics is fruitful.[47] Just as at Winchester in the tenth century, monks at

Canterbury in the twelfth century were (at least according to Eadmer) expected to offer

praise and thanksgiving to their local patrons:

> On this account, most beloved brothers, we rejoice and exhault in the veneration
> of all the holy servants and friends of God, knowing that the devotion which we

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[45] Some have read Eadmer's support of relic cults in opposition to Lanfranc's criticisms of these cults. See Rubenstein, "Liturgy against History." Such a reading suggests that Eadmer was instructing Lanfranc, the Norman bishop, to listen to the Anglo-Saxon Benedictine saints first (Dunstan, Oswald and Elphege), and then relay their instructions to the monks at Canterbury. Eadmer may thus be using relics to re-position Anglo-Saxon authority over and above the Norman invaders. In 1070 Lanfranc became the first Anglo-Norman archbishop of Canterbury and is famous for challenging the cults of Elphege and Dunstan. Whether this challenge was based on anti-Saxon sentiment is a matter for debate; see detailed readings of the effect of the Conquest on English hagiography in Whatley (*Saint of London* 71-84), Ridyard (*passim*), Vincent ("Angevin Kings" 13-14, 31) and Hayward. For an alternative view, see Rubenstein ("Liturgy against History"). See also chapter one, "From the Benedictine Reform (almost) to the Reformation."
[46] This similarity further supports Rubenstein's observation that

> Eadmer placed in his community's mind, and in the historical imagination, the idea of an Anglo-Saxon world as a fixed entity, a world that had come to an end and that by itself ought to be venerated [...] In other words, Eadmer did not merely nurture the cults of Dunstan, Wilfrid, Oda, Bregwine, and the Conception of the Virgin. He created something altogether new: the cult of Anglo-Saxon England" ("Liturgy against History" 307).

That is to say, Wulfstan's and Eadmer's texts bespeak a continuity of belief and practice between the years 971 and 1125.
[47] Eadmer's homily, *Sententia de memoria sanctorum quos veneraris,* survives in a single manuscript (Christ Church MS 371) which dates from the early twelfth century, sometime between 1124 and 1141 (Wilmart 185). Whatley identifies Eadmer's "defensive tone" and "awareness of a climate of doubt and criticism" (*The Saint of London* 45). Rubenstein divides the *Sententia* into three sections: 1) Saints can help in time of need; 2) Saints are advocates for everyday commemoration and continual supplication before "the particular relics that a community possesses"; 3) The saints remember those who supplicate before them ("Liturgy against History" 302-3).

show to them not only adds to our community in the present life, but also adds to our heavenly kingdom, whose communion of saints [*consortium*] we venerate without end. (14-18)[48]

Eadmer outlines the conventionally understood function of relics as a bridge between heaven and earth and a locus for the heavenly "*consortium.*" Even more importantly, Eadmer emphasizes—throughout this short homily—the importance of venerating, praising and thanking the saints at the location of their relics. Like Æthelwold, that is, Eadmer implicitly recognizes the importance of institutional support for any cult: its monks or canons must exhibit the kind of zeal associated with the miraculous if the cult is to be convincing (and thus to be thriving). For the monks at Canterbury, the saints are a reminder of their role as citizens of Heaven, and their mercy serves to underwrite the (temporary, temporal) suffering of the monks' experience. Presumably, this is not altogether unlike the suffering experienced by the aged monks at Winchester, who wanted to get a good night's sleep. Eadmer addresses his monks in terms similar to Wulfstan's, exhorting them to have faith [*suae fidei*] and promising them that their suffering [*compatiantur*] will bear fruit (4-6). It strikes me that Eadmer is doing more than addressing skepticism among the monks, as Whatley argues (*The Saint of London* 45). In addition, it seems likely that Eadmer is advocating a monastic example to lay supplicants, which the monks (who because of doubt—or perhaps of laziness) are not following as closely as Eadmer would like. He is also, like Wulfstan, establishing the chain of command at Canterbury, which begins with God's greatest mediators: saints' bodies.

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[48] "*Quapropter, karissimi fratres, gaudeamus et exultemus in ueneratione sanctorum seruorum et amicorum domini omnium, scientes quod deuotio quam eis exhibemus non solum uitae praesentis subsidium, sed etiam in regno caelorum nobis adquiret eorum quos ueneramur perenne consortium.*" Except where noted, translations are my own.

Eadmer also instructs the monks to display their devotion as a community. As

Wilmart summarizes, Eadmer advocates that

> one celebrates their glory without ceasing, and they, for their part, intercede
> without ceasing for those who show their devotion through their attitude. (188)[49]

Wilmart's phrases—"*sans relâche*," "*pour ceux qui*" and "*par leur attitude*"—are

specifically instructive and conditional. The saints will *only* continually intercede

[*intercèdent sans relâche*] for those who [*pour ceux qui*] show their devotion

appropriately, by their attitude [*par leur attitude*]. Eadmer describes explicitly what this

physical and spiritual "*attitude*" ought to be:

> For when those ones [that is, the supplicants], by day or night, stand in praise of
> God for their glory, truly it is to be believed that the saints, through each and
> every moment, offer praise to God for their [the supplicants'] salvation. "The
> supplicants prostrate their bodies before the saints' relics, they grovel on the
> ground on bended knees, they bend their faces to the floor—and we are to believe
> that the saints stand before God rigidly indifferent to these prayers, that they
> refuse to listen, that they care nothing for them? Who could say such a thing?
> The devotion of these suppliants will not be useless, it will not be in vain, it will
> not go unrewarded" (trans. Whatley 45-46).[50]

Eadmer here characterizes not simply devout, but more specifically, *successful*

supplicants. Such people venerate the saint day *and* night. Eadmer does not offer this as

a necessary prerequisite, true, but given Wulfstan's account of lazy (or, perhaps,

exhausted) monks who refuse to get up in the middle of the night, it is at least possible to

imagine that Eadmer is encouraging his fellow monks to follow the good example of

those whose devotion inspires them to overcome exhaustion, whether "*diebus*" or

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[49] "*On célèbre la gloire sans relâche, eux, de même, intercèdent sans relâche pour ceux qui leur témoignent de la dévotion par leur attitude.*"

[50] *Cum enim isti diebus ac noctibus insistunt laudibus dei pro gloria eorum, profecto credendum est illos per singula momenta offerre deo preces pro salute istorum. Totis corporibus ante eorum reliquias prosternuntur, flexis genibus in humum usque deiciuntur, pronis uultibus incuruantur supplices eorum: — et ipsi ante deum ad haec rigidi starent, auditum auerterent, horum aliquid non curarent? —Quis hoc dixerit? Itaque supplicum deuotio non erit inutilis, non erit uana, non erit a gratia uacua. (23-30)*

"*noctibus*." And Eadmer is clear about who will benefit from such devotion: the

supplicants [*isti*] will [*pro salute istorum*]. Their suffering [*compatiantur*], that is, will be

for their own benefit, since the truly devout and selfless supplicant, who knows himself to

be in need of God's grace [*dei misericordia indigere cognoscunt*] finds respite in saintly

intercession. What is more, this is a group activity: not once does Eadmer refer to a

single supplicant, but rather to a group of supplicants, whose devotion is in unison, is

directed towards the good of the monastic community and acknowledges the somatic

superiority of the saint. This is a communal, even corporate, moment in which the monks

are to recognize the notable relics, which help to define and support their existence.

Hence, the bodily attitude of Eadmer's ideal supplicants must be obvious and easy

to spot. They are, as in Wulfstan, the body of the monastic community (of which

Lanfranc, like Æthelwold, was the head). Eadmer describes the bodily attitude of those

who "*dei misericordia indigere cognoscunt*." These supplicants prostrate themselves,

literally, on the floor; they await divine mercy on bended knee; they "*incuruantur*," or

"bend" their faces to the floor. This is an extremely specific description of what

Eadmer—and indeed, Wulfstan, throughout the *Narracio*—obviously believes to be

appropriate behavior at a shrine.[51] The physical attitude of such supplicants shows them

to be in need ("*indigere*"), because it shows them to be, on some level, unworthy

(*indigni*) of the saint's attentions. They are very literally on the ground; they not only

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[51] Rubenstein interprets Eadmer's exhortation to mean that "A community must continually venerate its saints, but it must do more. It must physically interact with them" ("Liturgy against History" 303). I am not altogether certain what Rubenstein means by physical interaction. The monks are evincing a certain kind of physical *behavior* at the shrine, but there is no indication that they saw or touched the actual relics, as "interaction" would surely require them to do. Rubenstein's observation, however, that "the monks' abasement is part of a liturgical vision that" illustrates "the relationship between monks and the saint to whom bonds of community and geography have joined them" is surely right (303). Here, Rubenstein articulates exactly the kind of corporate identity enabled by the presence of a notable relic.

kneel, but press their bodies, and even their faces, to the floor. For these kinds of

supplicants, Eadmer promises, the saints will not "refuse to listen [*auditum auerterent*]."

In this way, the monks provide an example for pilgrims to follow and enact a kind of

corporate affirmation of the saint's presence and physical power, which is so potent that

the monks are forced to identify their own somatic inferiority in his presence.

As Rubenstein suggests, "abstract argument in the *Sententia* received miraculous

confirmation in Eadmer's *Breuiloquium uitae S. Wilfridi*" (303).[52] In one of the miracles

from this collection—which Eadmer "intended [...] to be read" on Wilfrid's feast day

(304)[53]—a monk and sacristan (*secretarii*) named Godwin woke on the night of Wilfrid's

feast day before the monks "usually arise for vigils" (*ad uigilias surgerent*). He heard a

chorus of monks praising God for Wilfrid: "Let us faithfully worship one God in the

Trinity, through faith in whom the holy Bishop Wilfrid lives [for] God [*Unum Deum in

Trinitate fideliter adoremus, cuius fide Deo uiuit sanctus presul Wilfridus*]" (178; trans.

179). Godwin hears this summons and believes he has overslept; as a result, "he blamed

himself for laziness (*segnitiem*) which he thought had caused him to oversleep and rise

too late" (179). Godwin thus believes he has suffered from the same lack of attention as

the Winchester monks in Wulfstan's miracle, and he is eager to rectify his mistake and

join the community in their praise and public affirmation of Wilfrid's holiness. When he

arrives at the choir, however, there is nobody there. At first, he assumes that this is

because he is bleary-eyed from sleep, but when "he could see everything clearly but

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[52] Wilfrid, a seventh-century bishop of Northumbria, died in 709 or 710. Eadmer's *Vita Sancti Wilfridi* was composed sometime prior to 1110. See Muir and Turner (ix-xxxii). His relics were translated to Canterbury from northern England (Rollason, *Saints and Relics* 23-24, 112-14). For Wilfrid's training in Rome, and the resulting Roman style of the crypts at Hexham and Ripon, see Thacker, "Loca Sanctorum"; and Crook, "Enshrinement."
[53] Rubenstein argues that Eadmer uses this miracle in part to criticize Lanfranc's suppression of Anglo-Saxon saints' cults (and sequestering of their relics) ("Liturgy against History" 304-5).

realized that no one was there [...] he was filled with wonder (*mirabatur*)" (181). He

continues to praise and worship with what he realizes must be holy angels (*ipsi sancti*

angeli) "who had come, praising in hymns God who lives gloriously in his saint (*qui*

uenerant, Deum in sancto suo mirabilem laudantes in ymnis)" (181). In this case,

Godwin's experience affirms Wilfrid's sanctity and justifies celebrating Wilfrid's feast

day formally (Rubenstein 304-5). This miracle also, however, serves to remind the

monks at Canterbury that the way in which they venerate saints ought to be communal.

This particular miracle substantiates the importance of a communal gathering by the

presence of not one, but many angels—*ipsi sancti angeli,* who take up the song of praise

in a multitude (*multitudine*). In his immediate response to the saintly chorus, Godwin

evinces exactly the right attitude for a devout monk: he denies his own physical needs in

order to corroborate the presence of a notable relic and prominent saint.

Eadmer is frequently concerned with the behavior of any supplicant and its

communal and corporate impact on a saint's cult. Physical bearing was therefore crucial,

since in their own (inferior) bodies, the monks communicated the sanctity of the saint's

relics to all those present. The proper attitude of the successful supplicant does not stop

with his physical bearing, however. Instead, as Eadmer narrates in the *Sententia*, the

supplicant ought to have faith, "by which it may be believed that the saints are able to

help [*Fides igitur qua credatur eos sibi posse subuenire*]"; unfailing hope of the saints'

goodness and which "anticipates that they want to help [*spes qua de bonitate illorum ut*

subuenire uelint praesumatur non deficiat]"; and "charity that does not grow lukewarm in

love and devotion for the joy and praise of the saints [*caritas in dilectionem ac*

deuotionem gaudii ac laudis ipsorum non tepescat]" (191). Good—successful—

supplicants hence have faith that is unwavering and that continues to believe (even in the face of contrary evidence); unabashed hope that the saints *will* help and enthusiastic devotion to their memory and relics.[54]

Eadmer urges the monks to behave as the archetypal virtuous supplicant. Many early Christian writers outline the qualities of such a supplicant: unwavering faith, hope, charity, and often penitence.[55] These characteristics are prerequisites for a miracle. (The depraved supplicant, by contrast, has no hope of receiving divine help.) Victricius of Rouen, Gregory of Tours, Guibert of Nogent, Wulfstan and John Mirk (among others), emphasize faith and penance as especially crucial.[56] In *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, Osbern Bokenham similarly specifies that "good deuocyounn" is necessary to obtain a miracle from the foot-relic of St Margaret (155). So, too, in "The Lyfe of Ioseph of Armathia" printed by Richard Pynson in 1520, pilgrims are exhorted to

> Gyue your attendaunce
> Saynt ioseph there to serue with humble affectyon,
> At Glostonbury for to do hym reuerence;
> Lyft vp your hertes with goostly deuocyon. (Skeat ed. 353-56)

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[54] Wulfstan's slave-girl, discussed in chapter four, is one such supplicant who, even in the most dire of circumstances, manages to acknowledge the physical repository of Swithun's holiness, to believe unquestioningly and to hope fervently that he is able to help her, and to love him diligently. The *Gilte Legende* similarly characterizes seven blind men who are said to have been healed by Edward the Confessor. These men are said to pray "hertely," and the people who take pity on them are said to join in their prayers "fulle devoutely" (28). For more on the requisite condition of a successful supplicant—and the way in which a supplicant's condition influenced whether he or she had access to relics—see chapter four. For Guibert's emphasis on the faith and virtue of the supplicant, see the discussion below (72-74).
[55] On the importance of penitence and confession in particular, see chapter four.
[56] Victricius of Rouen (trans. Buc 43), Gregory of Tours (trans. Van Dam 27) and Guibert of Nogent (trans. Head 410-12) all emphasize the importance of faith, as well as piety to a potential supplicant (*Glory of the Martyrs* trans. Van Dam 44). Victricius, for his part, specifies that "*faith* spurns arguments," and that "these things are to be seen *and not questioned*" (trans. Buc 45; italics added). Arcoid similarly resents the "spirit of skepticism" in his contemporaries over relic cults (Whatley 50), and avers, "it is equally pointless [*vanum est querere*] to be skeptical and critical over [a] great miracle" (147).

It is therefore clear that pilgrims and supplicants were required to meet certain standards if their prayers were to be answered or indulgences granted.[57] In this way, pilgrims' behavior was prescribed by institutional guidelines and expectations. These expectations were nevertheless propagated by many voices, and it is obvious that the faithful, hopeful, devout and penitent pilgrim was a part of the medieval cultural landscape on the one hand, and a literary commonplace on the other.[58]

Eadmer's account thus belongs to the literary and cultural tradition of the virtuous supplicant. Though his account is particular to monastic behavior at Canterbury, it applies to lay pilgrims and supplicants as well. Many of the accounts of lay supplicants—such as that of Wulfstan's slave-girl, in chapter four—demand the same kind of behavior from the laity as from clerical devotees.[59] Eadmer's account is hence crucial in its description of monastic behavior, since this can tell us about some of the general expectations at a shrine. But it is also crucial in what it does *not* contain. Eadmer, that is, makes no mention of what has been widely assumed to be common pilgrim behavior at major shrines: osculating and touching relics. It is possible that pilgrims kissed *something*, and kissing is (an anecdotally) attested devotional act at shrines. Many accounts indicate that pilgrims only very rarely kissed the relics themselves, and that instead they venerated the *feretra*, floors, or likely, in the case of prominent cathedral *feretra*, the massive stone shrine bases.[60] Eadmer's description of

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[57] See Nilson ("Medieval Experience" 114) and Hahn (1095, 1100).
[58] As I will discuss more fully in chapter four, it is likely that the relic custodians at major shrines helped to encourage (and perhaps even to enforce) a certain kind of behavior at a shrine.
[59] Lay behavior did not always result in the same kind of access that could be achieved by clerics, and as in chapter four, the virtuous and penitent layperson (Lancelot) cannot always expect the same results as the virtuous and chaste monastic figure (Galahad).
[60] One such anecdotal account is found in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum Anglorum*, wherein William claims that Irish pilgrims frequently kissed St Patrick's relics (I.21-2). Nevertheless, even

the way properly to venerate a saint, coupled with what we know to have been architecturally true of cathedral shrines, would (generally speaking) seem to render physical contact with the actual relics highly unlikely.[61]

Ornamenta et operimenta: Somatic Hierarchy and Occlusion

Thiofrid, a continental contemporary of Eadmer's, emphasizes even more clearly not just the sanctity of saints' bodies, but of the necessity of ornamenting them with(in) shrines. Thiofrid wrote one of the only two full tracts on relics, *Flores epytaphii sanctorum*—Guibert of Nogent's is the other[62]—sometime between 1098 and 1105 and dedicated the work to Archbishop Bruno of Trêves (*Prohemivm* 1-5). The *Flores*

Benedict of Peterborough is explicit that pilgrims kissed the tomb, not Becket's bones: "A wall of large dressed stones was constructed around the marble sarcophagus, held together firmly with cement, iron, and lead, with two windows on either side, through which visitors could put their heads inside and kiss the sarcophagus" ("quibus advenientes capitibus immissis ad osculum sarcophagi pervenire valerent"). See Benedict of Peterborough, *Miracula sancti Thomae Cantuariensis*, Book II, chapter 29 (81; trans. Lamia 42). For the likelihood that relics were seldom kissed or otherwise touched, see Crook, *The Architectural Setting of the Cult of Saints* (31-32); and Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints* (166). For a thorough documentation of the institutional laws that limited lay access to relics, see Dooley (25-32). These statutes and canons date from the fifth through seventeenth centuries. The sixty-second canon of the Fourth Lateran Council specifies that relics may not be displayed unless "in a fit container or reliquary" (29); the fourteenth-century synod of Constance forbids laity "to carry relics, or to take them from churches" (32).

[61] In one such instance in the anonymous *Tale of Beryn*, "the holy relikis [at Canterbury], *ech man* with his mowith / Kissid, as a goodly monke þe names told & tauȝt" (6). I wonder what relics the *Beryn*-poet had in mind; were these "holy relikis" supposed to be those of Becket? If so, his account probably plays fast and loose with the actual practice. It seems unlikely that these (quite average) pilgrims would have had such unfettered access to them when even Erasmus, who certainly saw more than most, did not. To be sure, Erasmus and his companion kissed what was probably Thomas of Canterbury's bloodied "face-cloth" or *sudarium* and were offered an arm (with bits of flesh still attached) to kiss—at least some (prestigious, privileged) supplicants, then, occasionally managed intimate physical contact with certain relics, perhaps most usually anonymous or non-notable ones. Nevertheless, given that what we know of historical practices disagrees with the *Beryn*-poet's literary presentation of events, it seems more likely that the pilgrims kissed the ornamented containers of relics rather than the precious contents themselves. The text in Erasmus reads as follows: "We were shown a *pallium*, silk to be sure, but coarse, without gold or jewels, and there was a face-cloth (*sudarium*), soiled by sweat from his neck and preserving obvious spots of blood. These memorials of the plain living of olden times we gladly kissed" (*Peregrinatio religionis ergo* 487-88; trans. Thompson 642-43).

[62] See Ferrari, "Lemmata sanctorum" (215). Ferrari likely does not include Eadmer's *Sententia* because it is a homily, rather than a treatise. The similarities between the two are unsurprising nevertheless, given that Eadmer and Guibert of Nogent were both students of Anselm.

survives in only two manuscripts, one of which was copied in the latter part of the twelfth

century at Trèves. Michele Camillo Ferrari suggests that Thiofrid was concerned to

record conventional attitudes to relic cults (219)[63]; and indeed, Thiofrid provides a useful

summary of institutional conventions of relic cults. Thiofrid's is the longest surviving

theological tract on relics, and it is divided into four *libri*. Each book deals thematically

with an aspect of relics, and all work together to organize relics by emphasizing their

physical attributes—by emphasizing, that is, their relative physical status based on

whether they are notable or non-notable relics. Thiofrid synthesizes and orders the clear-

cut distinction between holy bodies and other kinds of bodies; and most importantly, he

also articulates the various justifications for containing relics in elaborate shrines.

Thiofrid is concerned, that is, not only with justifying the importance of saints'

relics, but also with advocating their occlusion. His much-neglected treatise hence

illustrates that at least some relics were kept hidden, and in addition, that there was a

clerical impetus to advocate—explicitly—for notable relics' occlusion. In an efficient

move, Thiofrid staves off objections to relics' occlusion by arguing that the relic's *virtus*

is transferred to the reliquary. This transferal creates a relic out of the shrine:

> Thus the power of that holy soul which already reigns with God is miraculously
> conveyed from its innermost recesses to the outermost things that pertain to it,
> both while it is imprisoned in the flesh and after it has been elevated to citizenship
> in the heavenly Jerusalem; and whatever miraculous quality [that soul] bears
> through flesh and bone by virtue of those merits that go before it and intercede on
> its behalf, more wondrously still does it it transfer [*transfundit*] that quality from
> its decomposed remains [*de dissoluto puluere*] into all the substances, of whatever
> material or worth, used to cover or adorn dust so great as this (II, 3.7-11).[64]

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[63] "*Des thèmes et des arguments assez traditionnels*" (219).
[64] The Latin runs as follows:
> *Sic sanctae uis animae cum Deo iam regnantis ab intimis ad extima ad se cum in carnis carcere
> clausam tum in caelestis Hierusalem municipatum translatam pertinentia se mirifice diffundit, et
> quicquid sanctis preuenientibus ac intercaedentibus meritis per carnem et ossa mirabile gerit*

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According to this paradigm, seeing the shrine alone ought to satisfy any desire to see the

relics—since the shrine itself becomes a non-notable contact relic by virtue of what it

contains:

> And so, just as the soul is not visible in the body and nevertheless does wondrous
> things through the body, so the treasure of this precious dust, even though it
> cannot be seen or touched, nevertheless […] transfers the abundance of its
> holiness into all the materials that conceal it both inside and outside [*scil*. the
> reliquary]. (II, 3.12-16)[65]

Regardless of the actual practice of displaying some relics and not others, Thiofrid here

attempts to demonstrate that occlusion is, theologically, the only reasonable way to

"display" relics at all.

In the first book, Thiofrid is very concerned with the material (and practical)

reality of relics, and he works to justify, theologically, their status as privileged matter:

> Certainly, apart from Christ's flesh by which the world was redeemed, there is no
> fleshly substance more distinguished than the flesh of the saints: the more their
> flesh was subordinated to the spirit [in them], the freer it [now] is and the more
> glorious, even in the state of decomposition. (I, 3.1-5)[66]

He was very conscious of the paradoxical nature of relics: at once mere bodies and

material evidence of salvation and resurrection, many relics were still often subject to the

same fate of ordinary human bodies—they decomposed. Nevertheless, Thiofrid argues

that although relics are corporeal and so worthless—"By nature [the flesh] is corruptible,

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[65] "*Atque ut ipsa anima in corpore non uidetur et tamen mira per corpus operatur sic preciosi pulueris*
tehsaurus licet non uideatur, licet non tangatur sanctitatis tamen affluentiam […] transmittit in omnia in
quibus intra et extra occultatur."
[66] "*Nimirum excepta carne Christi quae precium est mundi nulla carnia substantia carne sanctorum est*
nobilior quae quanto spiritui subiectior tanto est liberior, et in ipsa corruptionis resolutione gloriosior."

[but] by [the saint's] merits and [God's] grace it endures (contrary to nature) incorruptible and for a very long time, and the hungering worm is kept away from it" (I, 3.15-17)[67]—their flesh is sanctified through the grace of God. This sanctification is possible because Christ became flesh and thereby sanctified matter (I, 4.72-74). Christ's treasure (*thesaurus*) thereby becomes the treasure of the saints, to whose relics Thiofrid habitually refers to as *thesauri, tanti thesauri, tanti precii thesaurus,* and so on:[68] "He hid all the treasures of his wisdom and knowledge in his impoverished flesh [*In paupertate carnis sue omnes thesauros sapientie et scientie recondidit*]" (I, 4.80). By pointing out that Christ's treasure was hidden in His impoverished flesh, Thiofrid sets the stage here for his justification of relics' elaborate shrines in Book II. If relics take their sancitity from Christ's "t*hesaurus,*" which was concealed in his flesh, so too should relics—themselves "*tanti precii thesauri*"—be hidden from view.

In this way, Thiofrid very clearly sets relics apart from regular bodies, which by their nature are putrid ("*ex natura est putribilis*") and disintegrate into dust and ashes (*comedatur puluis*, I, 3)—and which, clearly, cannot work miracles. Regular bodies, that is, are not the same as "*tanti precii thesauri.*" Thiofrid's tract works to affirm the monastic (and, by extension, pilgrim) behavior advocated by Eadmer. It is exactly this distinction between saints' and regular flesh that, according to Thiofrid in Book II, justifies saints' elaborate shrines. As Ferrari points out, "it is more difficult to justify ostentatious tombs [*il est plus difficile de justifier les riches ornements des tombeaux*]" (218)—but,

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[67] "*Ex natura est putribilis, ex meritis et gratia longissimo tempore contra naturam durat inputribilis, ac ab ea esuriens repellitur uermis.*"

[68] See especially *liber* II chapters two and three. In II, 3, Thiofrid describes relics as "sic preciosi pulueris thesaurus" (13).

On the other hand, Thiofrid affirms that the saints accept these shrines insofar as they are a manifestation of pious devotion. The longest *exemplum* in the *Flores* thus attempts to show that ornate shrines can aid in salvation. (218)[69]

In order to make this argument, Thiofrid relies on biblical precedent, and he compares lavish reliquaries with, for example, Aaron's robes (II, 1), arguing that what was given to Aaron ought not be denied Christian saints. But Thiofrid also justifies saints' shrines by demarcating the hierarchical differences between saints, priests, kings and the laity. He hence explains saints' tombs (again) by relying on a kind of somatic hierarchy:

> For the tombs of the saints are by no means unclean […] to the eyes of the mind there is nothing disgusting, nothing unclean, about the decomposition of their flesh; rather, everything [about them] is so sweet, everything so noble and endowed with godly power [*tanta diuina uirtute predita*] […] (II, 1.1-12)[70]

So, saints' bodies are—again—different in that they, unlike regular bodies, are "*tanta diuina uirtute predita.*" Thiofrid, however, takes this hierarchical difference one step further. He places saints' bodies in a hierarchy that possibly differentiates between the bodies of the living, as well.

Saints' bodies are above all else; but by articulating that notable relics are above prelates specifically, Thiofrid suggests that the bodies of prelates are holier than lay bodies. Thiofrid, that is, does not spill ink on demonstrating that saints' bodies are more precious than most laypeople; instead, he compares these "*tanti precii thesauri*" to a typology of the priesthood, and hence possibly by extension to the priestly bodies that would also have been considered (perhaps by their owners!) to be precious as well:

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[69] "*D'autre part, il affirme que les élus les acceptent en tant que manifestation d'une pieuse dévotion. Le plus long exemplum des Flores veut ainsi prouver que les biens matériels peuvent conduire au salut de l'âme.*"

[70] "*Non sordent profecto sanctorum mausolea [...] nihil omnino in eorum carnis corruptione mentis oculis f[oe]tidum nihil est sordidum, sed omnia sunt tam suauia, omnia tam honesta et tanta diuina uirtute predita [...].*"

They [*scil.* the saints] are likewise "a royal priesthood" [1 Peter 2:9], both because, corresponding to the number of eight beatitudes there exist typologically, in the Old Law [cf. Ex. 39], eight items made of linen, purple and scarlet cloth, cotton, violet cloth, gold, and the most precious stones—items of inestimable value and beauty that are ornaments rather than mere garments of the priesthood; and [because] the wondrous and, to human speech, inexplicable mystery both of what makes up the whole cosmos and of all the sacraments administered in church through the priest's office is enrobed in the majesty of such great adornment. Since the soul, after enduring times of many hardships, will be invested with a mantle of immortality and a crown of glory and, thus glorified, reign in the courts of heaven, does not the flesh—although beset by corruption for as long as it still sojourns apart from its master—does not the flesh rightly deserve, whatever its earthly house, to have for its enclosure and covering, in accordance with the devotion of the faithful, such things as belong to the soul's habitation: skillfully wrought garments (Minerva's precious gift), a [vessel] of cast metal hammered with marvelous shapes, and many kinds of gems of varied colors? (II.1.48-54)[71]

Here, Thiofrid explains the elaborate decoration of saints' shrines by comparing saints to

"a royal priesthood." Thiofrid uses this comparison to explain the logic in setting apart

saints' bodies from other bodies and to show why opulent shrines are not simply

necessary, but (typologically, symbolically, literally) appropriate. Though the

"priesthood" mentioned here is typological and hence does not correspond exactly to the

literal priesthood of the Middle Ages (and its attendant somatic hierarchy),[72] it is still

useful to think about Thiofrid's typology as separating regular bodies from holy bodies

via what they might be (symbolically) thought to wear. The priesthood, explains

Thiofrid, has "*regalia*," which are "ornaments rather than mere garments of the

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[71] "*Sunt quoque regale sacerdotium, et cum ad numerum octo beatitudinum octo sint in lege inestimabilis precii et decoris ex typico lino, purpura, cocco, bysso, iacinto et auro, et gemmis preciosissimis non tam uestimenta quam ornamenta pontificum, cum tocius mundi fabrice tum omnium sacramentorum que in ecclesia per sacerdotale oportet amministrari officium mirabile ac uix humanis uerbis explicabile mysterium et tanti ornatus maiestate uestiatur. Caro, infirmitate circumdata dum adhuc peregrinatur a domino anima, nonne cum illa post exhausta tot laborum tempora immortalitatis uestita stola et glorie corona in celesti gloriosa regnauerit curia, quicquid est terrestris domus eius habitationis huius operosas arteque elaboratas uestes mineruale precium, et fusilis metalli ammirandis figuris opus incusum, ac multiplicia uarii coloris gemmarum genera pro deuotione fidelium iure mereatur habere in operimenti sui redimicula?*" Prof. Jones was immensely helpful with this passage in particular.
[72] I owe this point to Prof. Jones.

priesthood" and which illustrate the role of the priesthood "*in ecclesia.*" This role,

"*amministrari officium mirabile,*" is at the center of a mystery scarcely explicable in

human words [*uix humanis uerbis explicable mysterium*]. Typological costumes—

decoris ex typico lino, purpura, cocco, bysso, iacinto et auro, et gemmis

preciosiussimis—help to illustrate this role, and they are similarly appropriate for the

"royal priesthood" of the saints, whose proximity to mystery is, like that of the

priesthood, difficult to comprehend in "*humanis uerbis.*" It is thus possible to read

Thiofrid as suggesting that, like the typological priesthood (and perhaps even like literal

priests), the "royal priesthood" of the saints requires decorative signs to render their roles

readable to the general public.

To be sure, Thiofrid could be understood here to be commenting on the

inadequacies of human language for expressing the mysteries of the Church (including

her priesthood and communion of saints). But he specifies the instructive role that this

kind of ornamentation is to serve for the laity—to encourage their "pieuse dévotion"

(Ferrari 218)—who worship at a Church. In the final section of II, 1, Thiofrid puts forth

that the "*multiplicia uarii coloris gemmarum*" (of the saints, and perhaps also of the

literal priesthood) serve to augment the devotion of the faithful [*deuotione fidelium*] to

the saints. Furthermore, Thiofrid's justification of saints' tombs in terms of kings and

prelates sets the saints at the head of an ecclesiastical (and somatic) hierarchy that is

based on relative proximity to the "mysteries" of the Church:

> And since, on highest festivals, every terrestrial king decks himself out in the
> grandest worldly adornments as if some sort of god rather than a man, and all
> those in the palaces of kings clothe themselves in the softest and finest garments,
> why shouldn't the bones and ashes of the saints, to which even kings and princes
> bend their knees and bow before, be hidden [*recondantur*] in wrappings and small

chests and tombs that have been toiled over and wrought at greatest expense? (II, 1.75-81)[73]

Above, Thiofrid compares the communion of saints to a sort of typological priesthood. Here, he distinguishes between saints, before whom kings and princes kneel, and secular authority figures. He therefore extends his articulation of a somatic hierarchy that begins with Christ and then the saints, and then the priesthood (and likely priests), and then kings: here, Thiofrid he clearly sets saints (and the priesthood) above kings. He does this by emphasizing that "kings and princes bend their knees and bow [*reges et principes genu flectunt*]" before shrines—even though priests did the same, Thiofrid makes a point in this passage of showing that secular authority pays homage to the accoutrements of ecclesiastical authority.

Moreover, for Thiofrid, saints' relics are superior not just to kings, prelates (and by extension, to laypeople), but to gold itself: "*Sed inter cineris naturam et auri auram magna distantia est, quia cinis naturaliter squalet, aurum claret, hic spiritualiter, hoc oblectat carnaliter*" (II, 2.7-9). Gold, that is, gives carnal delight—while saints' relics give spiritual delight, even while they "*naturaliter*" are squalid or dirty. Reliquaries are, in this context, a sign of saints' merits and holiness, and gold is the best temporal way to demonstrate that "paltry dust [of saints' relics] is more precious than worldly gold [*preciosior est puluis exiguus auro mundo*]" (II, 2.37). For Thiofrid, then, opaque, expensive and ornamented reliquaries are justified as a metaphorical (and physical) expression of what the saint represents (spiritually). This reasoning also simultaneously

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[73] "*Cumque quilibet rex terre in summis festiuitatibus summis non quasi homo sed ut alter deus mundi ornatibus decoretur, et qui in domibus regum sunt mollibus et exquisitissimims uestiantur, quare sanctorum ossa et cineres quibus ipsi purpurati reges et principes genu flectunt et inclinantur non in operosis et maximo sumptu elaboratis mausoleis et capsulis et inuolucris recondantur?*"

justifies relics' occlusion by their elaborate shrines, since only relics' shrines adequately

designate relics' true (heavenly, spiritual) splendor. Thiofrid is also concerned, I shall

argue, to excuse relics' occlusion. This is evident in Thiofrid's explanation for the *virtus*

of the reliquaries themselves. Such a move is not necessary to justify the relics' sanctity

as reflected most accurately by gold and gems—and Thiofrid has already made that

move. His insistence on the holy power of the reliquary suggests that, perhaps, not all

were satisfied *not* to see the relic, and that not all were satisfied with the idea that seeing

a golden container more accurately reflected the relic as it truly was.

As Thiofrid moves from Book II into Books III and IV, in which he discusses

non-notable contact relics (such as clothing or instruments of torture), he attempts to

classify the reliquaries themselves as a kind of contact relic. As Ferrari points out,

Thiofrid is surely working to outline and justify the physical system for containing and

classifying relics.[74] I think it is possible that Thiofrid is also working to render the

institutional system of (not) displaying relics in theological terms. He does this first by

separating saints' bodies from regular bodies, and then elaborates on this somatic

hierarchy not only by justifying ornamented (and opaque) reliquaries in II, 2, but by

arguing that—because the relics' power "*transfundit*" to the shrines (II, 3.11)—the

reliquaries themselves become non-notable second-class relics.[75] In presenting shrines as

contact relics, Thiofrid offers a theological explanation for hiding relics from view. In

effect, Book II not only justifies the need for opulent reliquaries—since such decoration

represents a saint's glorified state in Heaven—but attempts to assuage the desire to see

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[74] "*Il s'agit de l'esquisse d'une typologie qui couvre à peu près tous les genres de reliques connus*" (219).
[75] For a discussion of this passage, see above (56). This is certainly in keeping with Gregory the Great's presentation of *brandea* as notable relics.

the actual relics, since (after all) the shrine itself constitutes a relic. In this case, Thiofrid actually manages to suggest that pilgrim or supplicant desire to see relics can be fulfilled by viewing the shrine itself. A visit to a shrine hence becomes not an instance of frustrated, but rather of sated, desire.

In Book II, chapter 3, Thiofrid further justifies relics' concealment in their "*operimenta*." Here, he relies not only on the (positive) argument that the "*operimenta*" are themselves relics, but on the (negative) idea that saints' bones ought never to be seen. Because we cannot see the spirit in the body,

> And so, just as the soul is not visible in the body and nevertheless does wondrous things through the body, so the treasure of this precious dust, even though it cannot be seen or touched, nevertheless […] transfers the abundance of its holiness into all the materials that conceal it both inside and outside [*scil.* the reliquary]. (II, 3.12-16)[76]

This is a complex justification for relics' occlusion. Thiofrid argues that, because the spirit which works miracles through these bodies is invisible, then the bodies themselves should remain invisible (or hidden). And Thiofrid here spells out what Eadmer elides: that relics are not permitted to be seen *or to be touched*. Thiofrid may here be responding to popular desire; in any case, his message could not be clearer. The precious contents of reliquaries are, as in Book 1, made so because of God's grace. Hence they are not decaying flesh but the treasures of Heaven. However, because the grace or spirit that renders relics more valuable than precious gems cannot be seen (physically), the relics should neither be seen nor touched.

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[76] See above (55-56).

Thiofrid underscores the need to hide relics by comparing them to the Eucharist.[77]

In so doing, Thiofrid addresses some of the most controversial Eucharistic theology of

the time: that, (as according to Berenger de Tours), because the Eucharist "does not

change its exterior appearance, nor its consistency, nor its odor, nor its taste [*ne change ni

d'aspect extérieru, ni de consistance, ni d'odeur, ni de saveur*]" after transubstantiation,

"the transformation […] according to Berenger, is according to faith and intellect [*le

changement [...] selon Bérenger, [est] 'pour la foi et l'intellect'*]" alone (Ferrari 222).

Berenger was condemned for this view, which was seen to reject "the real presence of

Christ in the Eucharist [*la présence réelle du Christ dans l'Eucharistie*]" (222).[78]

Thiofrid challenges Berenger's conclusions explicitly in the *Flores* and explains the lack

of physical change in the Host by comparing the Host to a reliquary. In Book II,

> Thiofrid concludes that what covers relics—gold, precious gems and small
> portable reliquaries—served essentially the same function as the pieces of bread
> and the wine that hid, in the guise of a form understandable (and agreeable) to
> humans, the true nature of the Eucharist [i.e., actual flesh and blood]. (223)[79]

The passage in Book II, chapter 3—the same section in which Thiofrid explains that

seeing or touching relics is prohibited—compares seeing "the rotting human corpse

[*putrescentis humani corporis*]" of a saint with seeing the substance of the Eucharist (II,

3.83-84). Either of these would, according to Thiofrid, cause the beholder to become ill

and/or horrified [*nausia et acri bile*; *exhorrerent*] (II, 3.83, 85). It is thus logical for

Thiofrid to point out that it only makes sense to enclose relics in their shrines, lest the

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[77] Thiofrid manages this by comparing relics and some twelfth-century debates about the Eucharist. For the similarities—and differences—between relics and the Eucharist, many of which have not been adequately explored, see chapter four.

[78] For a detailed consideration of Berenger of Tours, see Stock.

[79] "*Thiofrid arrive à soutenir que les couvertures des reliques, l'or, les étoffes précieuses et les pyxides travaillées ont à peu près la même fonction que les espèces du pain et du vin qui cachent, sous une forme agréable pour l'homme, la vraie nature de l'Eucharistie.*"

faithful pay too close attention to relics "nature [*nature*]" and become offended by what they should honor (II, 3.89), just as the faithful would be disgusted by the body and blood of Christ if they could see the Eucharist's substance, literally, bloody and mangled [*cruda et cruenta*] (II, 3.85).

Thiofrid thus justifies keeping relics hidden in opaque reliquaries by comparing relics to the substance of the Eucharist [blood and flesh], and reliquaries to the accident [the bread]. In this paradigm, the host is an impenetrable reliquary—its contents (Christ's body and blood) can only ever be seen in the context of a Eucharistic miracle. Relics ought similarly never to be seen except in the case of a miracle: "If with the touch of faith one feels [the relic's] outer enclosure of gold and its silver leaf […] as if one were touching the very thing hidden within, in this way the power of divine majesty works "salvation in the midst of the earth" [cf. Ps. 73:12]. (II, 3.21-22).[80] I think it unlikely that Thiofrid is only concerned with the delicacy of medieval Christians, however. Caroline Walker Bynum observes that "None of the surviving literature that gives us insight into medieval reactions to body-part reliquaries or to depictions of bodily fragments cast up for resurrection, suggests that people found these particular representations horrifying" (*Wonderful Blood* 16).[81] And at the very least, this passage affirms that many relics were indeed kept hidden away from view, and that at least one theological approach explicitly endorsed this practice.

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[80] "*Si constantissimæ manu fidei exterior eius attrectetur clausula auri ac argenti bratea […] ac si hoc tangatur quod interius occultatur, sic diuinæ maiestatis potentia salutem in medio terræ suæ operatur.*"
[81] Jean Colet, though early sixteenth century, is a notable exception. Bynum does not discuss Thiofrid, and she goes on to observe that Guibert of Nogent provides a "counter-example" to her claim. As I argue here, however, Guibert's motives were probably as political as Thiofrid's, and it is questionable whether we should take seriously their claims that relics (and the Eucharist) ought to be hidden solely because they were concerned with medieval delicacies.

Guibert of Nogent, by contrast, argues against elaborate reliquaries. Guibert

wrote *De sanctis et eorum pigneribus*, or On *Saints and Their Relics* around 1125,[82] and

in it, he is primarily concerned with relics of Christ.[83] Guibert's treatise survives in only

one manuscript, Bibliothèque Nationale *lat*. 2900, "written in large part in Guibert's own

hand" (Rubenstein *Guibert* 128). This manuscript copy is especially interesting since, as

Rubenstein points out, "it would seem that Guibert finished his book and had to return to

it twice in order to shore up his arguments against a hostile audience" (129). Guibert's

attitude has typically been read as anti-relic, and his concerns have typically been

understood to be with resurrection theology and clerical abuses.[84] Nevertheless, as

Rubenstein and others acknowledge, Guibert was not only offering a critique of some of

the abuses associated with burgeoning relic cults, but attempting "to impose some sort of

[institutional, ecclesiastical] system of authentication upon saints' relics and upon claims

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[82] See Benton (238-9).

[83] For a summary of the traditional arguments about Guibert's treatise on relics, see Rubenstein (*Guibert* 124-131; 138-52, 158-72). Rubenstein also addresses the trends in scholarly approaches to Guibert (1-12). Morris sums up one common assessment of Guibert: Guibert was led "to a severe criticism of the cult of relics which was growing so rapidly. At its best, he saw it as somewhat marginal to the Christian life; at its worst, it was a gross abuse and tended to undermine that secure faith which was at the heart of true religion" (60). Rubenstein affirms that "In modern parlance, writing *On the Relics of Saints* was an act of professional suicide" for Guibert (*Guibert* 130). I am not convinced, however, that Guibert's attitude to relics "expresses a general revulsion at the body" (Kruger *The Spectral Jew* 41). Guibert's attitude to the body is more complex, and as I shall argue here, Guibert (like Thiofrid) works to define a somatic hierarchy that valorizes saints' bodies even while it denigrates ordinary bodies—and especially Jewish and Muslim "othered" bodies. For Guibert's attitude to Jews and Muslims, see Kruger (*The Spectral Jew* 23-66). Though for the most part, Kruger maintains that Guibert was disgusted with bodies in general, he does acknowledge Guibert's hierarchy off bodies: "Guibert never wholly rejected the institution of relics, recognizing that saintly bodies might indeed have special power, special access to a realm of spirit" (56-7). Bynum underscores this point in her discussion of Guibert's views on resurrection: "Guibert [...] not only at times spiritualize[s] heaven and hell but also take[s] an almost Origenist stance, [and] speak[s] of the resurrected body in extremely materialist terms as well" (*Resurrection* 139).

[84] See above, nn. 12 and 83. For Guibert as anti-cult (but sympathetic to lay practices), see Mireux; Morris; and Platelle. For Guibert as concerned primarily with resurrection, see Bynum, who comments, "It is the avoidance of decay and fragmentation that above all esle seems to animate his theology of relic and resurrection" (*Wonderful Blood* 97). See also *Wonderful Blood* (97-99); *Resurrection* (140); and "Bodily Miracles" (77-78, 99-100).

to sanctity" (127).[85] Guibert is anxious about considerably more than authentication, however. His fundamental worry is with relics' exposure in the first place, and consequently, Guibert advocates strongly that relics be hidden.

Even as Guibert differs from those who would argue for relics' enshrinement and careful maintenance, then, his underlying attitudes are the same: that saints' relics, because of their somatic importance, ought to be treated carefully and kept hidden—even if, as Guibert seems to suggest, the relics only need to be occluded to keep them away from those who would profit by them.[86] Guibert's own discomfort indicates that institutional preferences did not always govern demotic practice. His invective, however—coupled with the less envenomed rhetoric of Eadmer and Thiofrid—is representative of an ecclesiastical desire to regulate relic cults. As Thomas Head argues, Guibert—even more explicitly than Thiofrid—attempts "to relay [...] the importance of the clergy's authority in matters of religious practice and to urge the assertion of clerical control over the cults of relics" (Head 401). This would have been especially important in the early twelfth century, since, as Colin Morris notes, "a rapid extension of the cult was taking place" during this period, "with the writing of the lives of many saints [and] solemn translations of relics" (56).

Like Thiofrid, then, Guibert is concerned with placing some institutional restrictions on the practices of relic cults, especially given the rapid influx of relics from the Crusades as well as the burgeoning cults of local saints in England, France and

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[85] For a consideration of the status of physical objects in an age of increasing literacy—and for Guibert's resulting challenges to written authentication of relics—see Stock (244-52).
[86] See also chapter five, "Traveling Relic Custodians."

Germany.[87] Guibert applies to relics "a critical methodology observable in other

religious conflicts of the period, namely simony, clerical celibacy, the eucharist and

investiture" (Stock 252). In Thiofrid's case, this attempt centered on demarcating the

differences between saints' bodies and other bodies, thereby justifying some of the

institutional practices (like enshrinement) of relic cults. Guibert similarly delineates a

somatic hierarchy, focusing on saints as intermediaries: "That which pertains to God is

divine, and what could pertain to God more closely than the people who share one body

[*unicorpores*] with him?" (trans. Rubenstein 126). Guibert's emphasis on the sanctity of

Mary's body also indicates that one of his primary concerns is to set the bodies of the

holy apart from other—polluted, defiled—bodies (I.490-573; trans Head 416-418). And

he distinguishes implicitly between notable and non-notable relics. Relics include

"saints' bodies, that is the smaller relics taken from them, which are put to similar use

[*cadavera sanctorum, ut pignera de iis videlicet, quae fuerunt in usibus ipsorum*]" (I.64-

65). Though Guibert here indicates that "*pignera*" are used similarly (*in usibus ipsorum*)

to "*cadavera sanctorum*," he also makes an important distinction between these kinds of

relics: "*pignera*" are, in this case, those (smaller, non-notable) relics that are taken from

(*de iis*) saints' bodies (from, that is, notable relics). Though he is still concerned with

maintaining the somatic hierarchy, then, Guibert indicates—by the very title of his

work—that he is primarily concerned with "pignera," that is to say, non-notable relics.

His treatise might thus be better translated as *On Saints and Their Non-notable Relics*.[88]

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[87] See Morris (56).
[88] As Prof. Jones points out, it is "often impossible to tell what *sorts* of relics even [the most] basic terms
refer to. *Corpus* can mean a bit of a body as well as a whole" (2), and *pignus*, originally a pledge-word,
was likely used elsewhere to refer to notable relics. Here, however, it seems clear that Guibert is using it in

The content and focus of Guibert's treatise bears out this distinction between

cadavera sanctorum and *pignera*, for his primary concern is not with notable relics

(though he abhors the translation and enshrinement of even these objects), but rather with

the attendant dangers of non-notable relics. Guibert underscores this difference between

notable and non-notable relics:

> Fraudulent deals are frequently struck—not so much in the case of whole bodies
> [*non de integris eorum corporibus tantae*], as in the case of limbs and parts of
> bodies [*quantae de membris et membrorum particulis fraudes fiant*]—and
> common bones [*ossa vulgaria*] are thus distributed to be venerated as the relics of
> the saints [*pro sanctorum pigneribus*]. (I.596-98; trans. Head 418)

Guibert here seems to equate "*sanctorum pigneribus*" not only with "*ossa vulgaria*" but

with "*membris et membrorum particulis*," again suggesting that Guibert's treatise is in

fact addressing the problem of inauthentic, *non-notable* relics. (Elsewhere, Guibert

distinguishes between "*corporum pignerumve sanctorum*" (I.697), again highlighting that

for him, *pignera* seems to mean non-notable, rather than notable (*corporum*) relics.)

Though Guibert is ostensibly concerned with authentication—he has no patience for cults

that rely on false documentation to continue and only "grudgingly" allows that pious

veneration of an inauthentic relic can be "meritorious" (Head 401)—his main objection is

that non-notable relics cannot be adequately authenticated and are most easily forged. As

Guibert points out (and surely Eadmer and Thiofrid would agree), "It is a profanity

[*prophanum*] to persist in placing among the highest thrones [*altissimos thronos*] of

heaven those people of whom no memory remains among the living as to their era

[*quorum tempus, natalis ac vita, dies quoque et qualitas mortium in nullius viventis

memoria resident*]" (I.122-25; trans. Head 407-8). In fact, the enshrinement, translation

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opposition to "*cadavera sanctorum*," and that he therefore means it as Head translates it: "*lesser relics*"
(trans. 406).

and veneration of non-saints would collapse all that Eadmer and Thiofrid have to say to justify the way in which saints' bodies are set apart from—and treated differently than—everyone else. Guibert gestures towards a point of real institutional anxiety, then: that inauthentic relics, if found to be false, could debase the entire range of religious practices surrounding saints and their cults. A fake saint in a holy container would pose a threat to the somatic hierarchy, after all. Guibert's response is analogous to medieval sumptuary laws: in both cases, the objection was to the idea that accoutrements could misidentify the status of a particular body or person.

Guibert therefore argues against translation and enshrinement because it endangers the "*cadavera sanctorum*" and exposes them to dismemberment, forgery and fraud. This argument is rare among treatises on relics or indeed in hagiographical documents that work to legitimate the practices Guibert finds repugnant. Nevertheless, Guibert's insistence that, because of this danger, notable relics should be kept hidden, is perfectly in keeping with the theological approach of someone like Thiofrid, who similarly argued that a saint's *thesaurus* ought to be hidden [*occultatur*].[89] That is, even while Guibert argues against enshrinement, he still argues for the occlusion of notable relics. For Guibert, all abuses in relic cults "stem from a perverse root [*a perversitate radicis emergunt*], which is nothing other than that [the bodies of the saints] are deprived

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[89] And Guibert does mention that pyxes cover (*contegere, retegere*) saints' remains. See Stock (248). Stock argues that Guibert's theology ultimately regards "physicality" as "ambivalent," but were this the case, I think it unlikely that Guibert would have emphasized the proper attitude to and treatment of relics (themselves physical objects). That is, in spite of his emphasis on signs as "merely external" that "cannot be relied up as evidence" since they were vulnerable to various abuses, Guibert's emphasis on covering relics up belies both a concern with illegitimacy (and the need for, as Stock argues, an "interpreter"), but also with the proper ordering of the somatic hierarchy. Regular bodies, that is, ought not to move or to have access to holy bodies. This explains Guibert's own exasperation with the discovery of St Exuperus' body by a *rusticus*—this violated the somatic hierarchy and allowed for "the replacement of common bones for holy relics (*ossa vulgaria pro sanctorum pignoribus*)" (Stock 250).

of that which all [who share in] human nature ought to be accorded as a common lot

[*commereri humana natura*]" (I.602-4; trans. Head 419); that is, burial in the earth and

disintegration into dust. Guibert then makes his objection to enshrinement theologically

explicit:

> As far as I know, God has not said to anyone yet living or to come: 'You are gold
> or silver, and to gold or silver you shall return [*aurum vel argentum es, in aurum
> vel argentum ibis*].' So why, I ask, should a human being be removed from the
> natural elements (still less by the order of God) and be enclosed in gold or silver
> cases [*aureis vel argenteis conculis inseratur*], which are not required for
> purposes of preservation [...] Surely if the bodies of the saints [*sanctorum
> corpora*] remained in the places assigned them in nature [*sua iuxta naturae
> debitum loca*]—that is, in their graves [*id est sepulcra*]—then errors of the sort I
> have encountered would not exist. But, as it is, these bodies are removed from
> their tombs [*tumulis eruuntur*], their limbs carried in every direction [*membratim
> huc illucque feruntur*], and, under the pretext of piety, opportunities arise to
> display them [*occasio circumlationis extiterit*].[90] (I.607-35; trans. Head 419)

For Guibert, the saints' position in the somatic hierarchy does not justify their

enshrinement, since scripture does not allow for any exceptions to the fate of flesh.

(Guibert makes no mention of incorruption.) In spite of his objection to the treatment of

saints' bodies—for which he uses Gregory the Great's sixth-century letter forbidding the

dismemberment of St Peter—Guibert makes it clear that one of his main concerns in the

translation of saints is that their relics are, as a result, made visible. Paradoxically,

Guibert's insistence that saints' bodies remain in their tombs thus highlights, rather than

effaces, somatic hierarchy. In their tombs, after all, saints' relics remain concealed from

those who would seek them out. Moreover, if saints' bodies stayed in their tombs, they

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[90] For an examination of the way in which Guibert's worry about the display of relics directly corresponds
to fake non-notable relics, immoral relic custodians and their deceiving rhetoric (to which Guibert also
refers), see chapter five. Suffice to say here that Guibert is not referring to the legitimate display of relics,
though again, his own fury reveals that demotic practice did not always live up to institutional guidelines.

would *never* run the risk of exposure—Guibert would thus have saints' notable relics even *more* carefully sequestered than they were in cathedral shrines.

To emphasize this point, Guibert refers to Gregory the Great's punishment *exemplum*: "According to the most illustrious Pope Gregory, those persons who unintentionally looked upon the bodies of the apostle Paul and the martyr Lawrence were very severely punished [*hi qui corpora Pauli apostoli Laurentiique martyris inscii conspexere gravissime sunt puniti*]" (I.647-48; trans. Head 420). Guibert also includes a miracle of St Edmund, who saw to it that an abbot (who was curious to see whether Edmund's severed head had been reattached) was "instantly punished [*punivit*] for his attempt with so great an infirmity that no movement remained in either of his hands [*ut in neutro ulla deinceps manuum remaneret utilitas*]" (I.691-96; trans. Head 421). Such *exempla* were common, and—like Eadmer's homily—were meant to enforce the appropriate behavior at a shrine and (when relevant) to justify relics' occlusion.

For Guibert—as for Eadmer and Wulfstan, above—appropriate behavior included faith and penitence, and Guibert emphasizes these virtues even as he argues against translation, enshrinement and other attempts to see or touch relics. From Guibert's point of view, the base abuses of relic cults are transcended by the supplicant whose faith is pure and affirmed by the superior (authenticated) body of the (authenticated) saint. The moral state of the supplicant is in fact so important to Guibert that he narrates several miracles that do not have to do with relics, but with faith. In the first of these, Guibert recounts the story of a closely related young man and woman who embark upon an incestuous affair. The woman becomes pregnant, and the two flee, fearing that their union (and its fruits) will be discovered by their neighbors. Before they leave, however,

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the young woman—beset by guilt and shame—confesses "with deep sorrow [*altissimi dolore*]" to the local priest (I.259; trans Head 411). As far as Guibert is concerned, her confession, along with her faith, saves her life: when the young man pushes her into a well and bombards her with rocks in an attempt to kill her (and thereby to erase his crime), the woman survives in the well for "almost forty days, with no other nourishment than" drops of water (411). Guibert makes the moral of the story clear:

> Behold how much value [*valuit*] lies in faith [*fides*] in doing penance [*paenitentia*], as well as in persevering in the desire to correct oneself. A person who places faith [*fidem*] in doing penance [*penitentia*], having accepted the grace of confession [*confessionis gratiam*] and with it a trustworthy forgiveness, will never have to despair concerning indulgence. [...] The faith of this young woman [*mulierculae fides*] seems to me to be particularly important, in that she faithfully and unswervingly turned to God in the moment of her need [*fidelis et irreverberatus in sua ad deum necessitate concursus*]. (I.292-300; trans. Head 411-12)

Guibert's treatise argues against what he sees as the more outrageous abuses of relic cults, but in this moment, Guibert articulates the primary conventions of the successful supplicant, instead: faith and penitence.

Hence, even as he rails against some of relic cults' accoutrements, Guibert is sure to delineate some of the most important conventions of relic discourse—and in so doing, reveals that his desire to inscribe limits on the cult of relics extends beyond institutional corruption to include pilgrim behavior. Guibert, too, recognizes the public aspect to the mores surrounding relic cults: though this woman's confession was in private, her rescue by a group of swineherds and shepherds [*subulci et opiliones*] was a public and widely publicized act.[91] In this instance, even though Guibert is not specifically talking about relics—even though he seems to be temporarily distracted from his topic, in fact!—he is

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[91] "*Qua exhibita et relato tantae salvationis eventu, non intra rus idem miraculi sese fama cohibuit, sed in remotas se regiones virtus isti tempori prorsus inusitata circuntulit*" (I.288-91).

still addressing explicitly two of the most important elements of a relic cult: the faithful behavior of supplicants, and the advertisement of a genuine miracle "in far-off […] places" [*in remotas [...] regiones*]." Guibert, along with Wulfstan, Eadmer and Thiofrid, articulates what seem to be long-term and pervasive ecclesiastical interests in "attempt[ing] to define the role of the shrine within the life of a monastic community" (Rubenstein *Guibert* 127). I would suggest that these writers also attempt to delineate the role of the shrine within the life of the local—and even national, as in Guibert's "*remotas [...] regiones*"—community. This concern seems not to have died out, but rather to have been augmented from the tenth through the twelfth centuries. As we shall see, in the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Lollard objections to orthodox practices, ecclesiastical governance of relics, if anything, became even more pronounced between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries.

Somatic Equality? Of Wyclif and the Lollard Response

In 1494 the disciples of Joan Boughton…[took relics the night after she was burned]: "the more part of the asshys of that fyre that she was brent in were hadd awaye, and kepyd for a precious relyk in an erthyn pott."
~Quoted in Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*

Item quod reliquie sanctorum, scilicet carnes et ossa hominis mortui, non debent a populo venerari, nec de monumento fetido extrahi, nec in capsis reponi.
~*The Norwich Heresy Trials*; one of John Skylly's (retracted) heresies

Relic cults and relic veneration were open to criticism from many quarters— Guibert of Nogent was not alone. Jay Rubenstein refers to a thirteenth-century Jewish manual which "suggests that the worship of bones was one of Christianity's most vulnerable practices" (124). The Lollard response, then—to some degree at least—was working within the intellectual history of relic cults. For some clerics' unease with relic cults inspired (as in Guibert's case) highly charged invective against abuses (or indeed

against the cults themselves). Moreover, in spite of the relatively consistent view of relic

cults expressed by medieval intellectual history, it is clear that institutional practices were

not always uniform or even successful in attempting to place restrictions on behavior at

relic cults—a problem I shall turn to in more detail in chapter three. Nevertheless, later

critics of relic cults did find many of the same problems as the commentators of the tenth

and twelfth centuries discussed here. Certainly Erasmus' accounts of Walsingham and

Canterbury indicate that, even while the conventions of relic discourse (restricted access

among them) were alive and well, so were many of the problems (avarice among them)

that Guibert had noted four hundred years earlier.

And yet, the Lollard response to relic cults seems to have been muted. Wyclif

wrote voluminously, but very little on relic cults. Recorded Lollard objections were often

to images, rather than to relics themselves—witness the 1389 burning of the wooden

statue of St Katherine by William Smith and Richard Waytestaythe, who then used the

wood for cooking fuel (Hudson 76).[92] Furthermore, some Lollards (far from objecting to

relics) are said to have gathered the ashes of Joan Boughton, herself a famous (and

famously executed) Lollard. Nevertheless, this chapter will end by exploring briefly

what the Lollards *did* say about relics. I argue here that their limited response indicates a

close association between relic cults and idolatry, which in turn illustrates the degree to

which relics had become associated with their (opulent) containers. Lollard objection to

relics, that is, frequently had less to do with the actual bones of saints and more to do

with the method of displaying these bones in shrines that were, as in Erasmus' sixteenth-

century description of Canterbury, in reliquaries that "shone and dazzled with rare and

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[92] See also Aston (*England's Iconoclasts* 133-34).

surpassingly large jewels [*gemmis raris ac praegrandibus collucebant, nitebant ac fulgurabant amnia*]" (490; trans. Thompson 645). In both Wyclif's *De ecclesia* and the Norwich heresy trials, reference to relics is brief but pithy, and indicates above all the Lollard belief that—contrary to institutional relic discourse, which worked to establish particular locations and people (such as relic custodians) as crucially important—no one place is holier than another. Lollard objections were most fundamentally to the containers (shrines *and* church buildings) in which relics were housed, and to the ways in which relics were manipulated for economic gain and earthly power.[93]

From 1428 to 1431, sixty heretics were prosecuted in the diocese of Norwich. Norman P. Tanner calls the trials the "most important record of Lollardy in East Anglia" and argues that the trials give us a sense of "how Lollards put their beliefs into practice, and give some idea of how the movement was organized and how it spread" (1-2). And

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[93] Cynthia Hahn makes an implicit distinction between relics and reliquaries/images. This is important to consider, even in light of Thiofrid's argument that the *virtus* of relics *transfundit* (is transferred) to their containers. See Hahn (*Portrayed on the Heart* 18-19). Her argument is borne out by Lollard and reform attitudes, which sometimes elide the distinction between relics' "roten bones" and their idolatrous containers. In Winchester in 1538, for example, a commission was sent to suppress Swithun's pilgrimage shrine. In the recorded letters of the commissioners, their expressed intention was to "swepe away all the roten bones that be called reliques" in order "to save the laity from '*thabomynation of ydolatry*' " (qtd. Drees 126, emphasis added; Wright 218-20). Here, the association between "reliques" and "ydolatry" is made explicit, and I think it is likely that, in articulating objections to idolatry, the commission was thinking of Swithun's shrine, rather than his "roten bones" (since the bones themselves were not exposed). Aston's summary of heretical objections to images associated with pilgrimage implicitly affirms this idea. She associates the attractions of pilgrimage with the lush gold and gems found at many medieval shrines and argues that "some of the extraordinary power of the saints was associated in popular thought with the wholly out of the ordinary richness of their seen presences" (*Faith and Fire* 221). Significantly, Aston does not mention relics once in this section, indicating again that, since notable relics were concealed within opulent (and often painted) reliquaries, relics were simply understood to be included in any discussion of images and idolatry. Elsewhere, Aston points out that anthropomorphic (i.e., body-part) reliquaries were considered images (*England's Iconoclasts* 21). Aston contends that Bernard of Angers' eventual acceptance of body-part reliquaries "directs our attention to the near relationship of image to relic" (25), though Hahn elsewhere shows that body-part reliquaries did not always replicate their contents ("Metaphor and Meaning" 240). And the Council of Trent, in its defense of traditional practices against reform impulses, also associated relics with their containers: it "upheld the value" of images and relics and their veneration (Aston *England's Iconoclasts* 44). Aston also suggests that in the 1420s, Sir John Oldcastle and his fellow rebels viewed images as more dangerous than relics (142)—this is possibly because the relics were contained within objects that they regarded as images.

indeed, there are no other extant manuscripts that record such an event. As Tanner notes, the trials are a document written for and by ecclesiasts, and "the lack of order and of neatness in the manuscript, as well as the incompleteness with which it records many of the trials, suggest that it would have been of much use only to somebody who had witnessed the trials" (5). Nevertheless, the trials do have a uniform format: each case gives a detailed list of the charges against the accused, the depositions of witnesses, letters from the bishop of Norwich and the parish priests of the accused, as well as the defendant's plea. If the defendant abjured immediately, the document also includes the entire abjuration—and in the case of lay heretics, the abjurations were recorded in the vernacular and "appear as the first-person statements of the defendants" (6-7). This manuscript is hence exceptional in the details it offers about heretical practices. Before I turn to the two trials in which relics appear explicitly, however, it is necessary to consider some common Lollard responses to saints' cults—and to consider whether (and how) relics appeared in these objections.

Wyclif's concerns with saints' cults were more with ornamentation and idolatry—with, ultimately, the way in which relics enabled local assertions of ecclesiastical primacy and power—than with the actual bones of saints. In his *Sermones*, he argues that "it would be to the honour of saints and the advantage of the church were the jewels with which the sepulchres of saints have been foolishly and uselessly adorned, to be distributed to the poor" (qtd. Aston, *England's Iconoclasts* 104). Wyclif makes no mention in this instance of the relics which these sepulchers contained. Moreover, Aston includes Wyclif's comment in her discussion of his response to images and saints' cults, not to relics in particular. She points out that Wyclif's "remarks condemning the

delusions of saints' shrines and sumptuous churches [...] were among the 267

propositions from Wycliffe's works censured in 1411" (104).[94] Wyclif was thus not

condemned for any particular denial of relics, but of the "shrines and sumptuous

churches" which had long been the cause for complaint. He, like the Lollards who

followed his example, deemed shrines' precious contents less offensive than the shrines

themselves—so much so that relics were not often mentioned at all by the Lollards who

found other conventions of relic cults objectionable. Wyclif is not, therefore, much

different than Guibert in his objections and associates shrines, not relics, with idolatrous

behavior. Wyclif does not deny the possibility of a communion of saints, but (not unlike

Skylly and Cavell, as quoted below) questions whether it is an effective or appropriate

focus for popular attention: "Unde talis culpanda cecitas, inordinatus ac *cupidus cultus*

circa reliquias faciunt in penam peccati populum multum falli" (*De ecclesia* 465). Such

popular attention leads to greed:

> In many countries greed often causes churches [*cupido pecunie facit in multis ecclesiis*] to buy parts of a human being so that he may be canonized as a confessor or martyr [*ut canonizetur pro confessore vel martire*] and is then more honored by pilgrimages [*peregrinacione*], by sumptuous offerings [*sumptuosa oblacione*] and by the ornamentation of his tomb with gold and precious stones [*sepulcri ornacione auro et lapidibus preciosis*] than the body of the mother of God herself [*quam corpus matris Dei* , or [the bodies] of the apostles Peter and Paul or of other famous saints. (465; trans. Stouck 597)

Wyclif associates relics with the "signs of an adulterous generation [*signa generacionis*

adultere]" in the Old Testament and argues that relics may cause "religion and the desire

for heavenly things" to be "set aside" (597). Here, Wyclif emphasizes some of the same

concerns articulated by John Skylly and Robert Cavell, below: that relics will lead to

idolatry. It is difficult to imagine this concern as attached explicitly to the saints' bodies.

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[94] See Wilkins (342, 349).

Instead, the objection seems to be to the financial transactions these bodies occasion.

And the vocabulary Wyclif associates with relic cults supports this suggestion: shrines

create ("facit," "faciunt") cupidity (*cupidus*, *cupido pecunie*), and saints are thereby

associated only with "sumptuosa oblacione et sepulchri ornacione auro et lapidibus

preciosis"; saints' cults, as a result, become about money (*pecunias*) and are not in

keeping with the law of Christ (*lege Christi*). Wyclif's primary concern, like those of

later Lollard dissenters, seems to be with the financial disorder caused by reliquaries and

pilgrimages.

Not surprisingly, the Lollard "Twelve Conclusions" elide any distinction between

relics and images and do not mention relics apart from images. H. S. Cronin dates the

conclusions, which are "contained in a manuscript of Roger Dymok's 'Against the XII

heresies of the Lollards,' " to 1396 or 1397 (293). The eighth conclusion contains the

relevant material:

> Þe viii. conclusiun nedful to telle to þe puple be gylid is þe pilgrimage, preyeris, and offringis made to blynde rodys and to deue ymages of tre and of ston, ben ner of kin to ydolatrie and fer fro almesse dede. And þow þis forbodin ymagerie be a bok of errour to þe lewid puple, 3et þe ymage usuel of Trinite is most abhominable. Þis conclusiun God opinly schewith, comandiing to don almesse dede to men þat ben nedy, for þei ben þe ymage of God in a more likeness þan þe stok or þe ston [...] For þe heye worschipe þat clerkis clepin *latria* longith to þe godhead alone, and þe lowere worchipe þat is clepid *dulia* longith to man and to aungel and to lowere creatures. Þe correlari is, þat the seruise of þe rode, don twyes euery 3er in oure chirche, is fulfillid of ydolatrie, for if þe rode tre, naylis, and þe spere, and þe coroune of God schulde ben so holiche worchipid, þanne were Iudas lippis, qwoso mythte hem gete, a wondir gret relyk. But we preye þe, pilgrym, us to telle qwan þu offrist to seyntis bonis enschrinid in only place, qweþir releuis þu þe seynt þat is in blisse, or þe pore almes hous þat is so wel enduiwid. For men ben canonizid, God wot how [...] (300)

The word "relyk" appears in this passage only once, and when it does, it demarcates a

(blasphemous) non-notable relic: Judas' lips. As I argue of Boccaccio's ridiculous list of

relics in chapter five, it is clear that here, the writer is making a kind of obscene joke (and simultaneously censuring, perhaps, the kinds of outrageous non-notable relics which Guibert found so offensive). The rest of the passage, however, emphasizes pilgrimage, prayers and offeringe to "ymages" of "tre and of ston"—and explicitly calls these acts "forbodin ymagerie," "ydolatrie and fer fro almesse dede." And when, near the end of the passage, "seyntis bonis" are mentioned, they are carefully associated first with their shrines and second with their particular physical location. Though there is no vindication of relics in this passage, there is clearly a greater focus on the other accoutrements of pilgrimage, including the waste of money on shrines and the valorization of place.

John Skylly's fifteenth-century testimony further indicates that in Lollard thought, relics were probably subsumed under a concern with reliquaries, which *were* regarded as idolatrous images. The overwhelming concern with images, then, may in the end have effaced Lollard focus on the relics themselves. Skylly's objections do differ from the criticisms of relic cults leveled by Guibert: Guibert is concerned with abuse but does not condemn the veneration of relics altogether; Skylly, however, is concerned that relics are venerated at all. His objection is appended to a section on pilgrimage: "Item quod reliquie sanctorum, scilicet carnes et ossa hominis mortui, non debent a populo venerari, nec de monumento fetido extrahi, nec in capsis reponi" (53). His recantation is almost word for word: "Also that Y held, taght and afermed that relikes of seyntes, that is to say flessh or boon of ony ded man, shuld not be worsheped of the puple ne shryned" (58). Skylly's critique of relic cults is actually more involved than his own abjuration acknowledges, however. First, he associates relics not with saints but with the flesh and bone of "*ony* ded man [hominis mortui]"; the implication is thus that enshrined bodies

80

might not be those of saints at all, but rather simply anyone. After all, once a body is "shryned," it is impossible to know what—or who—is inside. It is similarly important that the Latin renders Skylly's heresy as the refusal to venerate (venerari) saints' relics, but that Skylly's own recantation uses the word "worsheped"; this concern in particular implies that Skylly is concerned with some kind of idolatry, and that relics were being not venerated as God's servants but rather worshiped in place of God. His final objection could easily be found in Guibert: that bodies should not be exhumed and then translated. Certainly Skylly is concerned with whether relics themselves are "worsheped," but I think his focus on enshrinement and translation is not to be missed as evidence for a concern with idolatry and images. This is not to say that Skylly and other Lollards were fond of relics, but rather that they may have regarded relics as evidence for widespread idolatry within the institutional church. And not surprisingly, the rest of this section on pilgrimage censures not relics but images of Mary, the saints, or Jesus; Skylly argues it is better to refrain from giving oblations to the Church (presumably on a pilgrimage), since such donations render "presbiteros esse superbos" (53). The concern thus seems to be with the institutional trappings of pilgrimage, of which relics are only a part—though indeed they provided the impetus for priests to behave in such inappropriate ways.

The only other defendant to mention relics was Robert Cavell, pastor (*capellanus*) of St Mary in the Fields, Norwich. Cavell, like most of the accused heretics in this text, runs through a list of criticisms that are typically associated with Lollardy. He speaks against baptism, confession, resting on feast days, and giving oblations to the clergy. He similarly avers that priests are not able to effect transubstantiation: "nullus sacerdos secundum ritum Ecclesie ordinatus habet potestatem conficiendi corpus Christi in

sacramento altaris, sed post verba sacramentalia a tali presbitero prolata in altari purus

panis remanet materialis" (95). In this context, his objection to relics—which is brief—

does not necessarily stand out: "Item quod reliquie sanctorum, scilicet carnes et ossa

hominis mortui, nullo modo deberent a populo venerari, nec de monumento fetido

extrahi, nec in capsa aurea vel argentea recludi, quia sic facientes committunt ydolatriam"

(95). This section, up until "extrahi," mirrors Skylly's objection almost verbatim, adding

only the subjunctive (*deberent* for debent) and the intensifier "nullo *modo*."[95] However,

unlike Skylly, Cavell is not bothered that saints' bodies "in capsis *reponi*," but that they

are "in capsa aurea vel argentea *recludi*"—not that they are placed in reliquaries, but that

they are displayed (*recludi*) in golden or silver reliquaries. In this vein, Cavell sounds not

unlike Guibert, who similarly protested against ostentatious shrines: "As far as I know,

God has not said to anyone yet living or to come: 'You are gold or silver, and to gold or

silver you shall return' " (trans Head 419). Moreover, Cavell also sounds like Guibert in

his seeming concern that, by being placed in reliquaries, relics were inappropriately

exposed. Just how Cavell envisioned this exposure (*recludi*) is unclear. Guibert

associated display with immoral relic custodians and also with translation—perhaps

Cavell's objections are similar to these. It seems unlikely that Cavell could have meant

all reliquaries literally exposed their contents, though certainly some reliquaries were not

opaque (such as the Virgin's milk at Walsingham).[96] But Cavell is not specific about

which reliquaries he finds distasteful, and given his emphasis on shrines' decoration, it is

certainly possible that he is thinking of the gilded, opaque *feretra* of major, notable relics.

For it does seem unlikely that, were Cavell concerned with whether people could see

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[95] For a discussion of Lollard testimony as possibly formulaic, see Hudson (33-39).

[96] See above, nn. 28-29.

saints' bodies, he would emphasize their containers, which were "aurea vel argentea."
And finally, for Cavell, saints' relics comprise a symptom of avarice and idolatry: "quia
sic facientes committunt ydolatriam." It seems at least possible that relics themselves
were not paid more careful attention because their containers of "aurea vel argentea"
were regarded as derisively as other images in churches.

The relics, then, may have been incidental to the argument. Cavell's allusion to
exposing relics has one other interesting implication, however: when Lollards did object
to relics, they were not concerned with whether pilgrims had access to them. Lollards
objected more broadly to saints (since all were to have unmediated access to God). This
meant that, unlike so-called orthodox criticisms of relic discourse, Lollards would not
have cared whether people could approach relics—and this sets apart many medieval
writers (like Malory and Chaucer in chapters four and five) who considered the ways in
which the intellectual history of relics often worked to keep supplicants *away from*
material points of divinity. Lollard reasoning would have it that no such material points
existed. (Or, as with Cavell, that such so-called points, when exposed somehow, would
lead directly to idolatry.) Concern with access to relics in particular can hence be seen as
an indication of orthodox, rather than heretical, criticism of late medieval religious
practices: Chaucer and Malory certainly fall into this category.

In sum, Lollard objections to relics are tied up not so much in relics as in their
avaricious accoutrements: sumptuous reliquaries, pilgrim donations, priestly avarice.
Relics can be understood to be part of the Lollard critique of religious practices that held
place and hierarchy to be determining factors in sanctity. And in the Norwich heresy
trials, many defendants (implicitly or explicitly) denied the authority of the institutional

church (Tanner 16), arguing that "a hierarchy in the Church may have been justifiable in principle but its members could forfeit their authority by their evil living, as the present members had done" (18). The practices that distinguished some members of the church from others, including priests and saints, were thus denied as a part of the true church. For some Lollards, consecration, confession and pilgrimage alike had no place in the Christian faith. While Lollard belief would submit that the church building is no holier than anywhere else—as Skylly maintains, "material churches be but of litel availe [...], for every mannys prayer said in the feld is as good as the prayer said in the churche"— and argue against tithing, the saints' lives and miracles in chapter three will show that, within more orthodox discourse, relics allowed for ecclesiastical assertions of political dominance and physical power. Relics enabled, that is, writers to demonstrate that churches were holier than other places because of the relics they contained. Relics' mediation and miracles constantly affirmed this holiness, and in addition, conferred God's spiritual authority on the institutional church. Many clerical writers hence used relics and their miracles to express the special, spiritual power of their institution. In the texts of chapter three, relics permit Wulfstan of Winchester, and the various hagiographers of Erkenwald of London, to assert clerical dominance over secular earthly power.

CHAPTER 3

Relics, "Earthly Power," and "Heavenly Authority"[1] in Winchester and London

Loca Sanctorum: Relics as "Magnets for Those Seeking Protection"[2]

Medieval literary texts that deploy the discourse of relics exhibit time and again

the "idolatrous attachment to place" that so disturbed certain Lollards (Beckwith 24)—

though most of these texts do not present this attachment as "idolatrous."[3] The idea that

places could be sanctified via association with "holy matter" permeated medieval

Christian theology and literature.[4] In his influential study, *The Cult of the Saints*, Peter

Brown associates holy places most specifically with the bodies of saints, and coins a term

that allows him to discuss this connection.[5] "*Praesentia*" denotes the miraculous ability

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[1] I borrow these phrases, to which I shall refer throughout this chapter, from Claire M. Waters' article, "Power and Authority."
[2] I take this title from Thacker's "Loca Sanctorum: *The Significance of Place in the Study of the Saints*," and from David Hall's "The Sanctuary of St. Cuthbert" (426). On Hall's phrase, see below, n. 23.
[3] Some orthodox texts did present worshiping the saints themselves as "ydolatrie," however (*Speculum Sacerdotale* 1). For a discussion of idolatry and Lollard response to relics and holy places, see chapter two.
[4] Bynum discusses the significance of holy matter to the sacralization of place, and she outlines that in late antique and medieval Christianity, such matter was usually necessary to designate certain locations as more sacred than others. See *Wonderful Blood* (76-81).
[5] On *praesentia* see also Belting, Dahl, Finucane (89, 173), Kemp (6), Hahn (1080), and Dyas (59-63). Many primary sources do attest to the scholarly concept of *praesentia*. Hugh Candidus, for example, observed that he made a list of saints' burial places so that " 'whosoever desireth to visit some saint may know where he may seek him' " (qtd. Nilson 4). Similarly, an account of Thomas Becket's translation identifies his tomb as " 'the place where the glorious martyr abode' " (qtd. Nilson 4). At the end of the Katherine-group St Margaret, a dove prophesies that there will be miracles "wherever your body is, or any of your bones, or the book of your passion" (trans. Watson and Savage 303). These statements make it clear that there was indeed an association between the saint's body and his or her actual location on earth as well as in heaven. For the idea that *praesentia* was still powerful at the location of non-notable saints' relics, see Smith (320) and Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*. Nilson demurs from this view (as do I), believing

of a saint to be in two places at once, that is, to be present both in Heaven and, by means of his or her physical remains, on earth as well. These physical remains rendered the saints' heavenly power accessible in a special way to the community in which they were located. *Praesentia* is hence conceived of as being at its most powerful in the vicinity of a saint's relics or tomb, a belief which led early Christians to seek out the thaumaturgic power associated with the presence of holy bodies, and to consider the places where those bodies were located as holier than others. The desire to be close to the holy dead even inspired the Christian development of cities around cemeteries, sites that had up to that point been deemed uninhabitable (Brown 1-8).[6] People wanted to be close to a material source of power and healing, and saints were thought to be possessed of a localized sanctity that could convey concord to a community and healing to individuals (86-105).

Praesentia has been much emphasized in critical discussions of saints and their cults, and it was clearly an important concept for thinking about the spiritual importance of relics.[7] Relics' importance to place was emphasized through various theological developments and requirements: relics, for example, were often necessary to consecrate churches,[8] which were the architectural setting for the religious expression of a

that shrines with prominent relics were more significant than those with fragmentary relics because "major relics were physically distinguishable from other cult objects" (5).

[6] On the late antique development of cities around saints' cults and around the graves of martyrs, see Crook (*The Architectural Setting* 18, 47-48). For a discussion of the way in which the Christian cult of saints unseated traditional, pagan attitudes to the dead, see Dyas (60-61, 65). In early medieval England, this impulse manifested differently than in early medieval Francia, where indigenous cults with notable relics were proliferating in cities. In England, by contrast, saints' cults tended to be found in "rural cult centers" (Thacker, "Loca Sanctorum" 32), though many of these locations (like Canterbury) became the urban centers of later medieval England. Other medieval population centers, such as St Albans, seem to have developed around a particular (and sometimes, extramural) cult. On St Albans, see Rollason, *Saints and Relics* (12-18).

[7] See chapter one, especially the section entitled "Approaches to Medieval Relic Cults."

[8] Though the practice was uneven in the early years of Christianity (and even, as Crook cautions, into the tenth and eleventh centuries), by 787 A.D. relics were needed to consecrate any church. On saints' relics, altars and church dedications in England, see Thacker, "The Making of a Local Saint" (65-66) and

community.[9] Relics were also, as Patrick Geary so convincingly suggests, important as

local protectors and patrons, and as guarantors of prosperity and political distinction to

their locale.[10] But this political distinction also resulted in the careful regulation of

access to relics;[11] and ultimately, relics' importance meant that they could be used to

reinforce the "earthly power" of various groups.[12] And as the texts of this chapter show,

the depictions of relic cults at Winchester and London provide two representative

examples of some institutional embodiments of the intellectual approaches I outlined in

chapter two. Moreover, while institutional embodiments were necessarily varied, they

frequently expressed two of the most dominant intellectual concerns outlined by

Wulfstan, Eadmer, Thiofrid and Guibert: access and behavior. And as in this chapter,

these concerns sometimes served to enable the fiction that the abstracted *ecclesia* could

serve the needs of the disenfranchised laity more adeptly than the secular *curia* could

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Rollason, *Saints and Relics* (24-25, 41, 176-77). See also Crook, *The Architectural Setting* (1-9, 13-14, 66-68); Kemp (6, 15); Dooley (11-12), Hahn, "Seeing and Believing" (1098) and Geary (18). Mirk explains this practice in the *Festial*: "When a chyrch was halowed, and relekys of sayntys brought þedyryn […], God schewed opynly how þe fende by halowyng of þe chyrch was dryuen out of hur" (278).

[9] Crook argues that relics influenced the architectural structure of churches themselves. See "Enshrinement" (189-90) and *The Architectural Setting* (1-5). For a detailed exploration of English cathedral shrines, see Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines*; for more on relics and architecture, see Crook, *Architecture*; and McClendon (23-34).

[10] See also Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of the Saints*. For a discussion of some of the economic and political roles that relics played in Christian holy places and pilgrimage destinations, see Herrmann-Mascard (270-312, 339-63); Julia Smith, "Old Saints, New Cults"; Finucane (29); Ward (95); Rollason (*Saints and Relics* 106-13) and Geary (22-23). Rollason's comment about the spread of Cuthbert's cult in the early eight century has a more wide-ranging application: "When it came to promoting a cult wealth [...] could talk!" (*Saints and Relics* 106).

[11] Head acknowledges that lay pilgrims were not permitted to come into contact with a relic: "Not a single miracle story" from the Orléanais "describes a layperson as being present in the crypt of a church or as touching a reliquary. Canon law actually prohibited the laity from handling the *res sacra*. There was no trace of incubation, the practice of sleeping on the reliquary" (*Hagiography and the Cult of Saints* 166). Such data does not, of course, mean that no lay person was ever in the crypt; but it does suggest that, at the very least, lay behavior did not typically include incubation or the handling of relics. See also Herrmann-Mascard (201-3); Sigal, *L'Homme et le miracle* (35-40); and the discussion in chapter two.

[12] On monarchical deployment of relics for political ends, see chapter one, especially the section entitled "Relics and Macrohistory." Here, however, I will be focusing on the ways in which the church—broadly conceived—manipulated the spiritual authority conferred by relics as a way to assert its own superior earthly power.

dream of. The texts of this chapter deploy intellectual concerns with access and behavior

to show that, for the deserving and virtuous supplicant, relics in churches could serve as

the best mediator for justice—whether this be, as in the case of the alliterative Erkenwald,

justice for the virtuous heathen, or, in the case of Swithun's many justice miracles,

vindication for the wrongly accused. In this way, these texts suggest their own enabling

(and macrohistorical) fiction: the institutional church versus the disenfranchised laity.

In "Power and Authority," Claire M. Waters argues that saints' lives frequently

pit a saint's heavenly authority against earthly power, but that, nevertheless, power is

frequently associated with sanctity and authority with kingship.[13] Such binaries (power

versus authority, ecclesiastical or "church" authority versus secular authority) often

oversimplify vastly complex sub-groups (and Waters acknowledges this difficulty).[14]

However, it is still fruitful to think about the ways in which, via its saints' relics (rather

than their *vitae* alone), clerical sources attempt to define the position, broadly speaking,

of the church in relation to the "earthly power[s]" that be. For, though Waters refers

primarily to the king—whose relationship to relics would have been complex[15]—the texts

of this chapter show that saints' relics were frequently pitted against other "earthly

power[s]" as well, such as Wulfstan's reeve. In addition, saints' relics came to represent

not only heavenly authority, but also constituted, as Waters comments of hagiography, "a

tool that could critique or uphold various kinds of earthly power and authority" (71).[16]

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[13] Waters thus complicates the idea that " 'power' might most straightforwardly designate the ability to produce physical actions or effects, while 'authority' refers to the ability to influence actions, effect moral persuasion or inspire belief; medieval political theory tends to associate the former with earthly rulership, the latter with spiritual leadership" (71). On the use of these terms in medieval politics, see Ullmann (14-31).

[14] For more on this problem, see chapter one, especially the section entitled "Relics and Macrohistory."

[15] See chapter one (9-10); see also chapter two (30-31, especially nn. 6-9).

[16] In this assertion, Waters follows Aers and Staley (262).

Relics' demonstrations of heavenly power often endorsed clerical depictions of the church as able to harness God's power—"more generous[ly]" (73), in Waters' phrase about Chaucer's St Cecilia—than any denizen of "earthly power" (or "mortal mannes power," as Chaucer puts it [VIII.448]).[17] That is to say, the heavenly authority present in relics frequently enables the church to (try to) assert its own earthly power over every other kind of earthly power. Moreover, because the relics are present in particular church buildings, this power is place-specific. The texts of this chapter, ultimately, as Waters observes of the *vitae* she discusses, present "a relatively clear dichotomy between spiritual authority and earthly power in which the latter comes off very badly" (75)— except when it is the earthly power of the institutional church. This chapter will argue that this dichotomy—itself a kind of enabling fiction—applies best to particular places, and that claims to harnessing spiritual authority in Winchester and London frequently depended upon, first, the physical presence of Swithun's and Erkenwald's relics, and second, the use of the intellectual idea that relics and supplicants' behavior should both be carefully regulated.

This chapter shows the ways in which clerical representations of relic cults reveal, broadly speaking, a kind of typology of spiritual authority as it is associated with depictions of relics. The examples I have taken from the cults of St Swithun and St Erkenwald are not meant to suggest particularized and local phenomena, though the political and religious significance of Winchester and London would allow for this kind

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[17] This dynamic is certainly manifested by many saints' lives, especially, as many scholars have noted, in the lives of virgin martyrs. See especially Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs*. See also chapter one, n. 32. On the use of "church" and *ecclesia* throughout this dissertation, see chapter one, especially the section entitled "Relics and Macrohistory."

of approach.[18] Instead, these instances function as representative examples that can help

us begin to think about relics' roles in shaping the local (and even emerging national)

identity in England.[19] These roles were, as I discussed in chapter two, frequently

articulated by clerical voices. Hence, though many have addressed the regional

differences of saints' cults in England,[20] it is still a useful exercise to consider some of

the ways in which relics served to articulate the more macrocosmic intellectual

assumption that any church building (that housed relics) could serve as a special conduit

for "spiritual authority." Such a claim enabled the religious communities at Winchester

and London to advance their own internal, ecclesiastical agenda—which frequently

involved representing the (inferior) position of other "earthly power[s]" and, as I suggest

in the Introduction, of the "disenfranchised laity" as well (Introduction 9).

I focus on the ways in which relics in Winchester and London enabled some

clerical writers to claim spiritual authority for the earthly powers at the Old Minster and

St Paul's Cathedral, and thus to assert dominance over another kind of earthly power

(secular, and even monarchical). These relics do this cultural work primarily through

justice miracles, which can be seen to serve this agenda. In such miracles, a saint, often

specifically through his or her relics, extends mercy and forgiveness to a supplicant who

has unsuccessfully pleaded his or her case to secular authorities.[21] These miracles permit

clerical writers to assert the inadequacy of secular law, and also to suggest that earthly

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[18] See below (94-95, 111-12).
[19] On later *lives* of Anglo-Saxon saints as serving this function, see Lewis (132-40). Lewis speaks in particular about the importance of the south of England in this enterprise.
[20] See the chapter one, n. 14. See also, especially, Blair, "A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Saints" and "A Saint for Every Minster?"; and Cubitt. On saints' relics at Reading Abbey, see Bethell.
[21] Goodich similarly argues of Italy that some miracles provided "protection of both victim and accused against the vagaries of an unjust judicial or social system" (3), and calls such miracles "rescue" miracles. He suggests that the failure of the state in the fourteenth century occasioned the need for divine intervention (28).

power (in the form of secular law) had comparatively less recourse to the spiritual authority of the saints.[22] As a result, these clerical officers are able to suggest that their institution—which is, broadly speaking, the church—was the only earthly power able to give refuge to the wrongly accused.[23] (Accordingly, lay desire to access *praesentia* is repeatedly shown to be directed towards a church building as well as towards saints' relics, since the one was almost always found *inside* the other.) Justice miracles thereby work to affirm a clerical monopoly over spiritual authority, and thus they underscore some of the political stakes of literary representations of relics. In these instances, a relic's *virtus*—the miraculous power of a relic because of its *praesentia*—became the most obvious way to confirm the ability of the *ecclesia* to access divine grace and instruction. In this context, relics are positioned to signify ecclesiastical, not secular, "earthly power." A relic's *praesentia* therefore not only ratified the claims of a particular city or community to sanctification; it could also ratify the implicit claims of ecclesiastical, earthly power to interpret God's spiritual authority, mete out justice and serve the oppressed.

These *loca sanctorum* hence serve a macrocosmic institutional interest. Rather than "resolving the tensions between intertwined and potentially conflicting structures of power," as Brown argues of St Stephen's shrine (105), St Swithun's and St Erkenwald's remains frequently serve to underscore the *differences* between "conflicting structures of

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[22] Nevertheless, many monarchs and aristocrats themselves possessed relics. See chapter one, n. 23; see also chapter two, (30-31 nn. 6-9).

[23] The belief that saints' relics could provide justice and refuge from the secular *curia* seems closely related to the legal institution of church "sanctuary." Hall, commenting on St Cuthbert's cult, observes that the "possession of a sacred relic [...] would act as a magnet for those seeking protection" and that such protection "created" a "relationship" between the religious community and the " 'powers of this world' " (426). See also Flint (352); Hall (431-32); and Rosser (64-65). Flint in fact suggests exactly the kind of relationship between the community and church *against* the "royal officers of the law" that I am suggesting in this chapter (352).

power."[24] In this framework, relics do not represent or facilitate concord; they rather

provide a way for medieval literary texts to illustrate disunity and hierarchical

boundaries.[25] Of course, proponents of these cults were not always motivated by the

desire to create revenue and perpetuate assertions of dominance over their rivals. Lay

devotion is often presented as genuine and concerned, and some writers (such as

Wulfstan) seem to have been very interested in the plight of the supplicants whose stories

they record. In many of the miracles of St Swithun of Winchester, clerical writers show a

concern to criticize, as Valerie Flint similarly suggests of Cantilupe's dossier, "the king's

so-called supporters and law officers" (356). These writers do so, as I shall show here, in

order to suggest to lay supplicants that in a time of need, the *ecclesia*—through its saints'

relics—and not the secular *curia*, would be able to help them.

St Swithun of Winchester

Swithun, bishop of Winchester, died and was buried *c*.862 A.D. His

contemporaries knew very little about him, as Ælfric and other hagiographers attest.[26]

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[24] Flint's reading of Thomas Cantilupe's miracles—on which see chapter four—supports the idea that relics and their miracles served to assert the differences between power structures in medieval England. She argues that accounts "of the miraculous interventions of the would-be saint [Cantilupe]" can "inform us about how some sections of the English church viewed the king's criminal law" as inadequate, and that "Such stories may add, then, to our understanding of the relations between the Church and the state in England" (343). I would add that, in Swithun's miracles especially, the saints' relics are pitted against not only the king, but various administrators of secular law (such as the reeve). Flint similarly argues, "It is not the king, but the king's so-called supporters and law officers, who bear the brunt of [Cantilupe's] dossier's criticisms" (356).

[25] For a discussion of the ways in which Brown's theorizing of relics and *praesentia* resembles Victor Turner's ideas about pilgrimage and *communitas*—ideas which many scholars have identified as problematic—see chapter one, "Approaches to Medieval Relic Cults."

[26] It is likely that the establishment of Swithun's cult in 971 was motivated in part by the late tenth century Benedictine reform in England—Æthelwold of Winchester was one of the most involved reformers, and Winchester, like many reformed abbeys, had a vested interest in relic cults. See Rollason, *Saints and Relics* (174-86); and Yorke, Introduction (3-8); on Æthelwold and Swithun in particular, see especially Rollason,

Michael Lapidge, in his voluminous *The Cult of St Swithun*, argues for the likelihood that

Swithun was selected over other local bishops for sainthood because of his prominent

tomb:

> One cannot help thinking, perhaps cynically, that Bishop Swithun was chosen
> [from among other bishops Birinus, Hæddi, Frithestan] to become the focus of a
> new cult not because he had appeared in dreams, but because his tomb was
> situated in an extremely prominent position outside the west door of the Old
> Minster. (15-16)

Certainly the lack of information about Swithun prior to his translation and cult makes

this supposition plausible. Whatever the inspiration, Swithun's cult spread to Canterbury,

Rochester, London, Bedfordshire and Somerset.[27] Many churches in southern England

added St Swithun to their cycle of liturgical commemorations, and even acquired relics of

Swithun and dedicated churches to him, possibly in order to capitalize on his popularity

as a pilgrimage destination (25, 37).[28] His relics were not only venerated but also

carefully stored, first in a temporary reliquary after the *c.*971 translation, and then in a

shrine commissioned by King Edgar. Edgar invested 300 pounds of gold, silver and

rubies in this reliquary, which was melted down sometime after 1447 to build a new

shrine.[29] Swithun was translated to this new shrine in 1476.[30] His cult can thus be seen

to span at least 500 years, and there is no reason to suppose that it waned in popularity

before the destruction of his shrine in September 1538.

Saints and Relics (179-80, 182-86). See also chapter one, "From the Benedictine Reform (almost) to the
Reformation."
[27] See Le Couter and Carter (359).
[28] Lapidge notes that Swithun's dedications were "only slightly lower than that of dedications to St Thomas
Becket, the patron of what was indisputably England's most popular shrine" (47).
[29] For a full discussion of Swithun's reliquaries, see Le Couter and Carter, Crook ("King Edgar's
Reliquary") and Dodwell (198-200).
[30] Swithun was also translated in 971, 1093 and 1150. See Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* (9) and Crook,
"Swithun of Winchester" (57-68).

Swithun's popular reception, as well as his location in what was then the capital

of England at the center of Wessex, are good reasons to include him in a consideration of

the role that relics played, both in the construction and subsequent modification of

buildings, but also in the consecration of churches and sanctification—and even financial

prosperity—of cities and even of the nation.[31] Though there are fewer redactions of his

life than his popularity would seem to allow,[32] many of these accounts, including those in

some chronicles, speak directly to the rhetorical role of Swithun's relics in underwriting

both the spiritual authority of the *ecclesia* over extra-ecclesiastical earthly power, and

also the mediatory service of the *ecclesia* for the unjustly accused and/or oppressed.

Wulfstan's tenth-century Anglo-Latin poem, *Narratio metrica de S. Swithuno*, with

which John Leland, a sixteenth-century antiquary, was familiar, introduces this trend.

But later texts take up his concerns, indicating that to hagiographers and chroniclers

alike, relics were still seen as an effective means to underscore clerical and monastic

spiritual authority. These texts, including the *South English Legendary*, John of

Tynemouth's *Sanctilogium Angliae*, and the *Gilte Legende*, can all be traced to

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[31] Knowles remarks, "During the half-century that followed the expulsion of the clerks from the Old and New Minsters the two houses of the royal city [Winchester] were in many ways the cultural centre of England" (*The Monastic Order* 61). Rollason argues for the West Saxon dynasty as "an important background for understanding the function from a political viewpoint of the cult of saints in England in the period of the West Saxon and Danish kings" (*Saints and Relics* 134). On Swithun and the importance of local saints to English identity, see Cubitt (450-51); see also Rollason, *Saints and Relics*, whose chapter on local cults and the post-Viking era is fittingly titled "The Cult of Saints and the Unificiation of England" (133-63). Rollason addresses Swithun's cult in particular as well (*Saints and Relics* 182-83). Many redactions of Swithun focus explicitly on the saint's desire to build and consecrate churches while he was alive. He is even said to begin the construction of a much-needed bridge in Winchester, demonstrating that his saintly concern with architecture is not limited to holy places.

[32] These include Lantfred's tenth-century *Translatio et miracula S. Swithuni*; Wulfstan's 990s Anglo-Latin poem; Ælfric's account in his *Lives of the Saints*; the anonymous twelfth-century *Vita* and *Miracula S. Swithuni*, on which historians like William of Malmesbury depended. Later redactions include John of Tynemouth's mid-fourteenth century *Sanctilogium Angliae*, which is an abbreviated version of the twelfth-century *Vita* and *Miracula*; the *South English Legendary*, which also relies on the *Vita* and *Miracula*; the *Gilte Legende*, whose telegraphic version depended upon the *SEL*; and Caxton's 1483 *Golden Legend*. See Lapidge (66-73).

Wulfstan's Latin version. None of these can be seen to exhibit radically new concerns, and all point to Wulfstan as a fundamental, if diffused, influence in their deployment of relics as "magnet[s] for those seeking protection" from the secular law (Hall 426).

For Swithun's hagiographers, and certainly for Wulfstan, describing the sanctification of the Old Minster and later the new Cathedral by Swithun's relics constituted a way to represent spiritual authority over the secular law. Swithun's relics, in descriptions of their translation and miracles, were deployed as symbols of the relics' ability to extend both mercy and justice to members of its community. Wulfstan's narrative in particular shows not only a preoccupation with the relationship of Swithun's relics to buildings, however, but also with the way in which Swithun's relics, embedded within a particular church, were able to enact justice. By characterizing those accused by the secular court as innocent, or penitent and/or virtuous if guilty, and by underscoring the inability of the secular court either to perceive their innocence or to show them mercy, Wulfstan and Swithun's other hagiographers demonstrate the inability of secular law to render justice or perceive the truth. St Swithun, on the other hand, is always said to be ready to help the oppressed, and when a prisoner turns to Swithun for help, she is frequently presented as finding relief from her tribulation. The underlying assumption informing these accounts seems to be that the *ecclesia*, through the intercession and power of St Swithun's relics, can best judge those who are incriminated.[33] The narratives

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[33] Lantfred, for example, describes Swithun, the "venerable bishop," as able to comprehend "thought-processes by heavenly means [Venerabilis enim antistes, polose intelligens illius cogitationem]" (Lapidge 326-27).

in these texts show how relics can illustrate, as Whatley observes of the alliterative *St Erkenwald*, "the role of the saint as ecclesiast [...] at the expense of secular qualities of rational thought and inquiry" (341).

Swithun's Miracles of Justice

Almost every redaction of St Swithun's life and miracles manifests the concern—present in accounts of St Erkenwald—for the importance of bodies, specifically relics, to buildings. Wulfstan, writing in the late tenth century, is no exception. Wulfstan devotes entire sections to describing the dedication of the church after St Swithun's translation, including in these a list of the Old Minster's relics. He details the construction of the crypts (each of which contains an altar and relics). He specifies that Swithun's relics constitute "mighty treasures" that "surpass [...] silver and gold in value" (417, 411). Wulfstan's presentation should be read to imply that relics and buildings are interconnected, particularly since the Old Minster is refurbished *because* St Swithun's remains are translated into it. He is careful to detail lay participation and support in Swithun's translation, thereby identifying even at the beginning of his work the dependence of a relic cult on the participation of lay bodies. This participation, as I have outlined above, shows relics to be "magnets" for those who need help, and ultimately this participation works to demonstrate that relics could better administer justice than the secular law. The churches which housed relics thus become, by extension, the best physical places for supplicants to turn. Although Wulfstan articulates this possibility most expansively, I will begin with the texts of the fourteenth century before I go on to supplement this examination with Wulfstan's intricate text.

Wulfstan is transmitted to thirteenth- and fourteenth-century redactions largely

through the twelfth-century *Vita* and *Miracula*, both of which draw heavily upon his

Narratio metrica de S. Swithuno. These increasingly truncated accounts still manage to

demonstrate concern with holy bodies and buildings. The twelfth-century *Vita*, the first

account to include details about Swithun's life—and hence the account on which many

other hagiographers depended—describes Swithun's "burning desire to construct

churches [...] in those places where they previously did not exist; and where churches lay

in ruins, their walls collapsed and delapidated, he very eagerly restored them" (*Vita* 635,

37).[34] Though there is increasingly less attention paid in fourteenth-century accounts to

Swithun's posthumous miracles,[35] this preoccupation with St Swithun and buildings

persists in the *South English Legendary*, the *Gilte Legende*, and John of Tynemouth.

This preoccupation can be seen to demonstrate an ongoing engagement with the role of

relics in figuring the relationship between a church and the laity, particularly insofar as

relics position churches as agents of justice for the suffering laity. Because John of

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[34] Building churches is a common motif in saints' lives. In his life of Æthelwold, Ælfric writes, "Erat
Æthelwoldus magnus aedificator" (qtd. in Knowles, *The Monastic Order* 59, n. 2). Knowles observes that
Æthelwold "was a great builder wherever he went, and brief accounts remain of his buildings at Abingdon
and of Oswald's considerable church at Ramsey" (59). Wilfrid is also described by Eddius Stephanus as a
great builder—and certainly such an observation reflects Wilfrid's role in the construction of Ripon and
Hexham.

[35] It is worth noticing that fourteenth-century chronicle accounts do in fact narrate one of Swithun's
posthumous miracles—Queen Emma's trial-by-ordeal, which is to be found in Ranulf Higden's
Polychronicon. Higden's version of this miracle characterizes the king as a "simple" man who, along with
the living (and not saintly!) archbishop of Canterbury, Robert of Jumièges, charges his mother, Queen
Emma, with adultery. Emma endures an ordeal by hot ploughshares, and prays "at the tomb of St Swithun
of Winchester" that Swithun will prove her innocence by protecting her. She is vindicated, and the king is
punished by the bishop (Ælfwine) and by Emma as well. Such a narrative indicates the fallibility even of
bishops whose sanctity has not been demonstrated by posthumous miracles and powerful relics, as well as
the saving grace of a saint's relics to redress the injustice of the state. See Lapidge (161-63). This story is
to be found in Richard of Devizes' late twelfth-century *Annales de Wintonia*, as well as in Thomas
Rudborne's fifteenth-century chronicle.

Tynemouth renders the miracle of the innocent thief (Wulfstan 2.9), which is concerned explicitly with undermining the judgment of the secular *curia*, I shall begin with him.

John of Tynemouth's "Vita et miracula S. Swithuni" can be found in the *Sanctilogium Angliae, Walliae, Scotiae et Hiberniae*. This work includes 156 saints' lives, and has been dated to the first half of the fourteenth century. There are three surviving manuscripts, dating from the mid-fourteenth to the late fifteenth centuries; the importance of this work is borne out by Wynkyn de Wordes' 1516 print edition. It is an exceedingly telegraphic account, especially compared with Wulfstan's voluminous poem. Lapidge notes, "sometimes John's abbreviation is so drastic that his narrative loses all definition [...] at other times he reports miracles at considerable length, presumably because he was attracted by their content" (747). I present that it is no coincidence that one of these lengthier miracles is number 14, that of the innocent thief. The details of this miracle are identical to those in Wulfstan (and to those in the twelfth-century *Miracula*, which is John's most immediate source). This miracle is not only predicated on the poor ministration of justice by secular authorities, but also on the potential for injustice written into secular law. The miracle begins by stipulating that King Edgar "promulgated a law whereby anyone caught in the act of stealing would be deprived of his eyes," scalped, tortured by having his nose, ears, hands and feet cut off, and finally would be cast to the wilderness to be "torn apart" by "wild beasts and birds" (759). John, like Wulfstan, is careful to present Edgar's motivation as having been pure, explaining

that Edgar created this law because he was "concerned with the prevention of theft."[36]

However, even the good of the best of secular laws is here revealed to pale in comparison

with the evenhanded mercy of St Swithun.

Not surprisingly and in spite of the intentions that John ascribes to King Edgar,

the law is applied to a "certain innocent man" (759). He is blinded; his ears, nose and

hands are cut off. (He is evidently left with only his feet and scalp intact.) Although

shortened in comparison to Wulfstan's pathetic description, John still manages to suggest

sympathy for this man by his graphic, if brief, description of the man's (undeserved)

punishment.[37] Moreover, extra-ecclesiastical authority cannot in any way redress the

sufferings of this man. Faced with the possibility of continuing his life in such a

condition, he therefore turns to St Swithun for help. He travels to Winchester and

petitions St Swithun simply to restore his hearing. St Swithun, ever merciful in the name

of God and as a representative of the *ecclesia*, restores his hearing, his sight and his nose

as well. Even standing by itself, this miracle demonstrates that saints' relics, in churches,

are able not simply to grant, but to exceed, the prayers of its supplicants. By contrast,

secular adjudicators are presented as able to do nothing. This miracle alone shows an

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[36] Wulfstan's justification of Edgar's virtue is even more extensive. He explains that the law was "promulgated for the common weal" and gives many people "peace of mind" because they are able to travel safely (Lapidge 515). On judicial mutilations, including those described in the Swithun miracles, see O'Keeffe, "Body and Law."

[37] Again, Wulfstan's text is instructive in reading John's omissions. Wulfstan's adjective choices ("wretched"; "guiltless") indicate a sympathetic response to the plight of this innocent man. Like John, Wulfstan's graphic description of the man's punishment even points to an implicit criticism of Edgar's law, in spite of his earlier insistence that it serves the common good: "One eye-ball had been completely torn from its socket; the other hung down his face; taking pity on the man, a woman immediately took hold of it and replaced it in its socket" (Lapidge 517). The woman's pity is suggestive of the horror of this penalty, regardless of whether it is visited on the innocent. (The woman is not said to know whether this man is blameless.)

impetus to present Swithun's relics as more powerful—because they have recourse to spiritual authority, and hence are more just—than the secular authorities.

The structure of John's rendition is worth thinking about as well, since it juxtaposes the king's potentially problematic law at the beginning with God's mercy at the end. In fact, the first words of the miracle are "King Edgar (Rex Edgarus)"; the last clause includes the phrase "the Lord's mercy (Domino miserante)" (758-59). The mercy of God could not be, formally, further from even the most prestigious representative of extra-ecclesiastical authority (the king). Instead, the Lord's mercy is in close proximity to, and clearly associated with, St Swithun's oratory (*oratorium*). The afflicted man does not appeal to King Edgar—whose motives, as John has suggested, are pure. Instead, he travels with his kinsmen to the place where God's spiritual authority is made manifest and by St Swithun's relics. That is, he goes with his kinsmen "to St Swithun's oratory [...] to obtain what he sought." He appeals to the mercy of Swithun through his physical relics, and is healed. From the beginning to the end of his rendition, then, John's short account can be seen to underscore that secular law (*legem*) can be ill-applied, that extra-ecclesiastical authorities cannot redress this misapplication, and finally that secular law cannot hold up to the mercy of God as enacted through his servant, Swithun.

So, too, the other fourteenth-century renditions of Swithun's life and miracles, including those of the *South English Legendary* and *Gilte Legende*, present the authority of the *ecclesia* over extra-ecclesiastical institutions as dependent upon Swithun's presence in Winchester. As in the alliterative *St Erkenwald* (on which more, below), however, some of these miracles begin to emphasis the saint's power over the secular world during his life. Like John's text, the *SEL* "Life of St Swithun" is drawn

"unambiguously" from the twelfth-century *Vita* and *Miracula* (Lapidge 715). However, the *SEL* does not include any specific healing miracles, instead focusing on those miracles associated with the revelation of Swithun's sanctity, as well as with his translation. His body is therefore still a central feature of the *SEL* account. So, too, the *SEL* emphasizes St Swithun's spiritual authority. Swithun is presented as so influential that King Ecgberht not only "made him is conseiler and after is conseil drow" (l. 22), but also charged him with his son, Æthelwulf. When Æthelwulf becomes king, it is said that he makes St Swithun his advisor as well: "as Seint Swiþhan him gan rede, / after is conseil al he drou and dude goud dede" (ll. 29-30). The ability of secular authority to assert itself well and justly can thus be seen to depend, in this account, on its accordance with the *dicta* of a saint.[38] Even though Swithun is not here operating from Heaven and through his relics, the narrative impulse seems to be the same: to assert the ability of churches, because they house relics, to channel spiritual authority, and hence to suggest that the spiritual authority of the *ecclesia* trumps that of any other legislative body.[39]

Moreover, some of the miracles that St Swithun works suggest that ecclesiastical authority is augmented when a saint extends mercy to the Winchester laity. This can be seen in the *SEL* rendition of one of Swithun's most famous miracles, that of the woman and the broken eggs. In this miracle, a woman crossing a bridge is beset by a stonemason who breaks the eggs she is carrying; Swithun takes pity on her, and restores the eggs. This miracle is often read as indicative of the hagiographic tendency to emphasize

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[38] The *Gilte Legende* similarly presents the guidance of a saint as necessary to good governance: Swithun becomes Ecgberht's chancellor, and then Æthelwulf's advisor as well. Æthelwulf is said to have "governed the land well so that it prospered greatly in virtuous living, *through the counsel of St Swithun*" (Lapidge 771; emphasis added). Many saints of the Benedictine reform era are closely associated with kings; see Rollason, *Saints and Relics* (169-74).

[39] This is further emphasized when the *SEL* describes King Edgar as having taken advice from SS Dunstan and Æthelwold, who became bishop of Winchester decades after St Swithun died (Lapidge ll.92-94).

Swithun's humility. I would extend this claim a step further: in restoring the eggs,

Swithun more importantly manifests a concern for the laypeople in Winchester, and for

their ability to support themselves honestly. This impulse is not a far cry from

Wulfstan's concern to present the reapers and wayfarer in 2.8, which I discuss below, as

honest and hardworking. In both cases, St Swithun truly is a "magnet" for a beset

supplicant. Secular, extra-ecclesiastical earthly power, by contrast, is able to do nothing.

Wulfstan as Swithun's Impresario[40]

There are forty-one miracles in Wulfstan's *Narratio metrica de S. Swithuno*,

which was composed *c*.971. Of these miracles, ten address the inadequacies of secular

justice. These are the only miracles that deviate in a pointed way from the general

healing miracles that comprise the remaining stories, which tend to focus on the blind and

variously crippled. The justice miracles demonstrate time and again the way in which

relics both sanctify the church building, and also corroborate clerical, earthly power.

Central to Wulfstan's concern are the plight of the oppressed layperson and the power of

Swithun's body to intercede on his or her behalf. Swithun's relics allow Wulfstan to

suggest that holy bodies, representatives of the *ecclesia*, serve as advocates in a way that

is impossible for representatives of secular law. Several miracles in particular are of

interest, both because they provide good representative examples of Wulfstan's

presentation of the mediatory power of relics, but also because at least one appears in

John of Tynemouth. These miracles, conceived of as a type, support Rollason and

others' argument that from the Benedictine reform through the twelfth century, saints'

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[40] Rollason uses the term "impresario" to delineate the role of churchmen in advertising a cult, and he explicitly connects written *lives* to this process. See *Saints and Relics* (109-14).

cults followed roughly the same pattern.[41] In any event, Swithun's role as advocate for

the laity and champion for ecclesiastical authority was compelling enough to warrant the

inclusion of a posthumous justice miracle. A detailed look at two of these miracles will

help to establish that fourteenth-century manifestations of concerns with relics and justice

are representative of a theme, rather than anomalies.

In the first of these, Wulfstan 2.8, a man is tried by ordeal. The miracle is titled

"About the man who carried some red-hot metal in his bare hand."[42] In this case, only

the intercession of the (institutionalized) body of the saint makes it possible to preserve

this man from death at the hands of the secular court. The incident runs as follows.

There is a certain man in Winchester named Flodoald, described as a man who was "well

known in the town of Winchester [and] who handled himself cautiously in every business

dealing" (509). This man has a beloved servant, who "through a certain mishap"[43] is

accused by the local reeve and ordered to undergo trial by ordeal. Flodoald and others try

to bribe the reeve to release the servant, but "The reeve spurned them all, *exulting in his*

secular authority [*In uanum cuncti uotis precibusque laborant: / spreuit eos tumidus*

mundi pro fascibus omnes]" (509; emphasis added). The Latin is rendered more literally

as "swollen up by the power of the world [*mundi*]." Wulfstan's vocabulary, which

elsewhere figures God as "O Deus omnipotens, hominum sator atque redemptor [O

omnipotent God, creator and redeemer of men]" (l. 366), can be seen to present a contrast

between the "power of the world" (secular government) and the spiritual authority of

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[41] See Rollason, *Saints and Relics* (215-39). It is clear that the continuity Rollason observes from the tenth through twelfth centuries continues (and even expands) into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. See chapter one, "From the Benedictine Reform (almost) to the Reformation."

[42] This miracle is also to be found in the twelfth-century anonymous *Miracula S Swithuni* (Lapidge 667).

[43] It may be that Wulfstan elided this man's offense because it was sexual in nature. On the common use of trial by hot iron in cases of suspected adultery, fornication or bestiality, see Bartlett (13-19).

Heaven and its representatives (St Swithun, and, by extension, the Old Minster). The reeve, a representative of secular, earthly power, is unable to extend mercy to this man, instead depending upon his own (faulty) judgment and anger to make a decision. His attitude is contrasted with that of Swithun, whose bodily presence in the church building allows him to advocate for the accused.

Under the reeve's direction, "an immense fire is kindled" [*ignis adestque ingens*] (l. 337). The man is forced to carry the red-hot iron and his hand blisters and burns. The reeve, whose character is depicted as being less than exemplary, summons the man a day early (on the second, rather than third day following the trial). The blisters have not healed, and he is condemned. At this point, Flodoald gives up on the secular court, which has been demonstrably unjust and unfair, unable to follow even its own rules. Instead, this time, Flodoald turns to the intercession of St Swithun, and by the third day (the day when, legally speaking, the reeve should have examined the hand) the servant's hand has healed completely. This miracle is taken as evidence of the man's innocence, and everyone present shouts, " 'Who could cast any suspicion that he was deserving of death, whom we all see to have a guiltless hand and whom we see cleansed of guilt through the Lord's cleansing power?' " (513). Wulfstan asserts first the supremacy of God's miracles (mediated through Swithun's relics and, because of the relics' location, through a church building as well), and then the inferiority of judicial process. He writes that "this astonishing miracle excelled the norm" in its glorification of Christ, to whom "all Nature is subject," even to the point of abandoning "its customary laws [and]...chang[ing] into alternative forms at Your order" (513). Of the judicial process that would have condemned a man found by God to be innocent, Wulfstan is intolerant: "And he [the

104

reeve] who formerly refused to relinquish of his own accord the unfair judicial process, is

now compelled—through God's miraculous agency—to do without both the pound of

silver and the slave; and content with only his disgrace he returns in confusion to his

home" (513-15). The contrast between spiritual authority (and its clemency towards the

laity), as mediated through Swithun's relics, and the arrogance of the secular court, could

not be clearer. Wulfstan clarifies that not only does God have power over Nature itself,

but contrasts this power ("God's miraculous agency") with the "unfair judicial process"

meted out by the reeve. The reeve is contrasted to Swithun (and by extension, to

Swithun's physical presence in Winchester in his relics), and accordingly found lacking

in insight, justice and mercy. By extension, Wulfstan may be implying that because the

Old Minster—and possibly even, more abstractly, the *ecclesia*—is the repository for this

spiritual authority, the monastic community at the Old Minster, like Swithun's relics,

should be contrasted with "unfair judicial process." Wulfstan is certainly, in any case,

presenting Swithun's relics (in the Old Minster) as "magnets" to those who need to be

rescued from the secular law.

Wulfstan's concern with the judicial inadequacy of the secular court is also

exemplified in miracle 2.10. There, Wulfstan devotes 165 lines to the story of a wayfarer

who "ingentem cippvm modico precidit cvltello" [cut through an immense beam with a

tiny knife]. The wayfarer enables Wulfstan to assert the power of Swithun and his relics.

He also serves as a means for expressing Swithun's, and therefore God's—and implicitly,

the *ecclesia*'s—approval of the hardworking honesty of the story's reapers. These

reapers are said to "bend over their work dripping with excessive sweat, and [to] gather

the crops eagerly, so that they will not by chance be slowed down by rainfall or by

105

sudden showers" (519). Because he describes them not simply working, but dripping

"with excessive sweat," Wulfstan suggests that the reader ought to be sympathetic to

these reapers. Their response to the hungry wayfarer, the protagonist of the miracle,

underscores Wulfstan's depiction of the reapers as characters to pity and to emulate.

When the wayfarer—a man so impoverished that he has had trouble feeding his family—

asks for food, the reapers do not hesitate to help him: "Moved by pity for the poor man

(*miseri pietate coacti*) they take up his request and give him three sheaves of wheat"

(Lapidge 519). The generosity of these reapers, whose own wealth cannot have been

great, is contrasted by the stinginess of the reeve in this miracle. Wulfstan's concern for

the inability of secular representatives to render justice is obvious.[44]

Wulfstan's reeve is "incensed with fury and rage" when the wayfarer will not

betray the (hard-working, charitable, even Christ-like) reapers. The wayfarer is cruelly

bound and tortured "mortetenus"—to the point of death. Just as he is about to be

decapitated—again, as Wulfstan has established, for an insignificant crime undertaken to

provide for his family—he is taken to another prison in Kingsclere, where he is tightly

fettered and tortured again. The prison is dank and dark; the man they have captured, it is

clear from Wulfstan's presentation, does not deserve such a wretched punishment.

Wulfstan even characterizes the wayfarer as asking for the knife of the title, ostensibly to

cut his bread, with "gentle words" (521). He then "calls upon the saint," through whose

intercessory power the knife miraculously cuts through the beam to which he is chained.

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[44] Wulfstan substitutes a reeve ("presidis" and "prefectum" in 2.viii, and "dispensator...regius") for the steward ("echonomi," that is, "economus") in Lantfred's miracle 27. Lantfred refers to the reeve in miracle 25 as "gastoldus," "preses," "prefectus" and "prepositus," and to the steward in miracle 27 as "economus"; he never uses the same term for both. Wulfstan, on the other hand, seems clearly to be presenting a reeve in both cases. It may be imagined that Wulfstan does so in order to emphasize the uniformity of secular injustice.

He escapes through the guards, who are all sleeping "by God's contrivance." When he comes to the front door, which is securely fastened, the wayfarer "becomes frightened" and appeals to Swithun again, this time petitioning to the saint's "customary mercy (*solita pietate*)" (523). The bolt locking him in the room falls away and the door opens effortlessly. St Swithun's mediatory, spiritual authority over secular, earthly power is immediately clear in this example. Swithun, not the reeve, is God's emissary. Swithun, not the reeve, is able to channel God's grace and power to the deserving supplicant, thus ensuring his release and granting him his life.

The wayfarer's final actions can be seen to underscore the association in this miracle between St Swithun's relics and the Old Minster. The wayfarer is said to go immediately to Winchester to "give thanks for so great a gift" (527). He is not described as praising and thanking secular authority, so clearly demarcated by Wulfstan as merciless. Instead, he thanks St Swithun—which he could have done anywhere—by giving thanks in the location where Swithun's relics lie. The implication is that the divinely authorized, earthly power of the Old Minster (and even, perhaps, of the institutional *ecclesia*) is not at odds with justice nor with the poor, represented in this miracle both by the wayfarer and the reapers. Instead, Wulfstan's presentation suggests that because the Old Minster physically incorporates a saint's body into its midst, it is able to serve divine justice. Without relics, it is unclear whether the Old Minster (or the *ecclesia*) could be figured as a mediator in this way. Because of St Swithun's body, however, Wulfstan's narrative can be seen to present a divide between the merciful *ecclesia* and "incensed" representative of secular authority, as well as a divide between extra-ecclesiastical structure and the beset wayfarer. But by identifying "customary

mercy" and spiritual authority with St Swithun, Wulfstan's narrative attempts to figure

ecclesiastical, earthly power as advocating for, not against, its congregation. The

embodied presence of St Swithun in the Old Minster in Winchester allows the *ecclesia* to

appropriate lay suffering for the purpose of advertising its own kind of earthly power and

(bodily-) conferred spiritual authority. In this way, though Wulfstan attempts to present a

more human and sympathetic face to the *ecclesia*, such a human face, serving as it does

the economic and political solvency of the Old Minster, may be co-opting human

suffering for its own ends. So, too, the alliterative *De Erkenwaldo* (hereafter referred to

as *St Erkenwald*) can be read as co-opting the suffering of a virtuous heathen in order to

show that God's spiritual authority, conferred on the *ecclesia* through His saints (and

their relics), can best minister to the patently inadequate (and clearly secular) earthly

power of a pagan judge.

St Erkenwald of London: The Alliterative *St Erkenwald* and "Matchless Justice"[45]

The late fourteenth- early fifteenth-century *St Erkenwald* is most often read as a

redaction of the virtuous heathen *topos*—and rightly so.[46] As in other accounts of

Erkenwald, however, *St Erkenwald* is also suggestive of the complex relationship

between ecclesiastical and extra-ecclesiastical assertions of authority. The narrative in

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[45] I borrow the phrase "matchless justice" from Whatley ("Heathens and Saints" 342). *St Erkenwald* survives in one sixteenth-century manuscript, MS Harley 2250, fols. 72v-75v. See Peterson for a full description of the manuscript context of *St Erkenwald* (1-11). Peterson has identified its composition date as sometime between 1380 and 1420.

[46] The alliterative Erkenwald is often taken as a presentation of a debate about the righteous heathen. See Whatley, "Heathens and Saints"; and Morse (19-31). Otter argues that the poem is "also about (if not primarily about) the hermeneutical questions of how we relate to our past and how we read the discoveries we make about our past" (405). I would suggest that the poem is also about ecclesiastical assertions of authority in the present, and the ways in which Erkenwald's body enables these assertions. For the argument that literary presentations of the virtuous heathen constitute a *topos*, see Grady (6-12).

this text presents holy bodies as channeling spiritual authority, and thereby as enabling the *ecclesia* to extend mercy to the deserving. The body of the virtuous pagan judge is especially in need of this mercy, particularly because, as a pagan, he embodies the most extreme manifestation of extra-ecclesiastical justice. His paganism neatly underscores the futility of his virtue, since as a pagan he has no access whatsoever to God's grace or guidance, which is here, as elsewhere, mediated exclusively by the agents of the institutional church.

His character therefore suggests that secular justice is equivalent to pagan justice in its inability to access God's word. To be sure, this is an example of the righteous heathen whose baptism finally earns him salvation. However, the judge's inability to save himself—even though he is presented as having been just—is also indicative of the failure of secular law to render justice to those who deserve it. In this way, even the bodies of the virtuous, if not saintly, dead are shown to be reliant on the mercy of the saints (and by extension, on the mercy of the agents of the *ecclesia* who interpret the God's spiritual authority). Erkenwald's pity for the judge becomes the conduit for the judge's passage to Heaven: like Gregory's for Trajan, Erkenwald's tears serve as the vehicle for his baptism. Erkenwald's body and its functions, though very much alive in this rendition, are still portrayed as the means through which, via holy bodies, the *ecclesia* extends mercy (even justice) to the most unlikely supplicant: a dead pagan.

St Erkenwald, bishop of London and of the East Saxons from 675-693 A.D., was the patron saint of medieval London. His cult, devoted primarily to the veneration of his relics, flourished from the seventh through the sixteenth centuries, and there is ample

evidence that it still held popular sway in the fourteenth century.[47] Both Latin and

vernacular accounts of his life and miracles indicate that he was "a very British saint and

no obscure one" (Grady 40).[48] Correspondingly, Erkenwald was translated in 1140,

1148, and on 1 February 1326, when another shrine had been completed. The first

translation followed the completion of Erkenwald's shrine after a fire in 1087. As

Whatley presents it, the fire proved the *virtus* of Erkenwald's relics, the survival of which

was a testimony that, regardless of a lack of information about his life, he was worthy to

be venerated as a saint. This event probably inspired the eleventh-century *vita* of St

Erkenwald, and Arcoid's later, twelfth-century work also seems to have been motivated

by the practical implications of this fire: the need to build a new, more lavish reliquary

(*ferculum* or *theca*) and shrine for Erkenwald's relics.[49] There is evidence of lay

donations for this shrine, and Arcoid specifies that the poor contributed a significant

amount.[50] Moreover, the 1326 translation was conducted at night, allegedly to avoid the

"mass hysteria that would have resulted if the relics had been exposed during the

daytime" (Whatley 66-67). Lections were kept up-to-date, and records survive of lay

offerings to his shrine in the 1390s. Lawyers especially seemed to have been devoted to

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[47] Hughes is alone in his observation that "apart from a sophisticated saint's life" there is "little evidence"
for a popular cult of St Erkenwald (319). For more optimistic critical assessments of Erkenwald's cult, see
Whatley, *The Saint of London*; Grady (40-41); and Morse (13-15). Two proclamations in 1386 and 1393,
both made by Bishop Braybrooke further point to the continuing relevance of Erkenwald's cult and feast
days (Grady 40, 145 n. 65). Excluding saints' lives and miracles, Erkenwald figures in Bede, William of
Malmesbury, Matthew Paris, the *Flores Historiarum* and John of Tynemouth. Erkenwald's probable
popularity is attested by the many other places where he was venerated: St Albans, Winchester,
Westminster, Bury, Chertsey and Barking (Whatley *The Saint of London* 60).
[48] It is likely that the Latin lives of saints were read aloud in the vernacular in many of these places. See
Whatley for a list of extant editions of Erkenwald's life and miracles (*The Saint of London* 69). For a more
detailed consideration of pastoral use of eleventh-century Latin hagiography, see de Gaiffier and Stock.
[49] As Whatley points out, *ferculum* is an unusual term, and it must be assumed to stand for the more
common *feretrum* (*The Saint of London* 223 n. 2). *Theca*, however, is a common reliquary or casket term.
[50] For some of the dangers in reading history out of hagiography, see Ashley and Sheingorn; see also
Delehaye (214-31). Here it is at least worth noticing that at least one extant will corresponds to Arcoid's
claims about lay participation in the fundraising.

St Erkenwald, and St Thomas More exhibits this devotion in *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, wherein he cites one of Erkenwald's miracles (68). St Erkenwald never did reach the status of a St Thomas of Canterbury, but the evidence suggests that his cult was important nonetheless.

In at least three redactions of Erkenwald, the *Vita*, *Miracula* and the alliterative *St Erkenwald*, there is a persistent literary concern with the impact that holy remains had on space and place, and by extension with the way in which relics could illustrate that a church's representatives were more powerful than the secular authorities. These three works offer a glimpse of the ways in which relics allowed writers to depict the *ecclesia*— literally in the form of church buildings and their contents—as best equipped to minister to the lay members of the community. In *St Erkenwald*, the city takes center stage from the beginning, which enables the poet closely to associate ecclesiastical power with England's capital and suggest that ecclesiastical power not only eclipses secular (civic, national) authority, but that to some degree, it comprises civic and national authority. The poem opens by describing the importance of St Augustine of Canterbury and St Erkenwald in re-establishing Christianity in England. In describing the Christianization of England, the poet connects the episcopacy with London even by the alliterative line: "At London in Englonde noȝt fulle longe sythen— / [...] / Ther was a byschop in þat burghe, blessyd and sacryd" (1-3). Of course, the bishop is Erkenwald, and in line three of the poem, his episcopal office is associated with the city and with sanctity: "byschop," "burghe" and "blessyd" delineate this relationship. Moreover, the poet suggests that Erkenwald is necessary not only to the sanctification of London but, by associating him with Augustine's mission, to the Christianization of the entire country. The focus on

relics and holy bodies in this poem makes sense in light of the practice of rededicating

pagan temples to Christ—such rededication often entailed depositing relics in churches in

order to drive out demons.[51]

There is hence an architectural clearing of the landscape in this poem, and many

pagan temples are "drawen doun, þat one dole, to dedifie new" (6). The laity are actively

involved in the reconstruction of St Paul's cathedral, and their discovery of the pagan

body affords Erkenwald the opportunity to demonstrate his divinely given power in the

first place. Lay involvement in constructing "Saynt Paule mynster" (35), as well as lay

agency in the discovery of the incorrupt body in its foundation, suggest that lay

participation is, practically speaking, essential to advertising and maintaining a relic cult.

The time the poet devotes to descriptions of building and construction, and the detail he

offers even of the tools that the masons use, suggest the importance of lay participation in

popularizing a cult (there could be no cult, after all, if no supplicant ever came). The

emphasis on the lay masons' "eggit toles [sharp tools]," can even be read to show the

dependence of church hierarchy on lay labor. The *ecclesia* could have no buildings, that

is, unless the masons obliged by constructing them with their "eggit toles" (40) in the first

place.

Nevertheless, these layfolk—like the lay crowd in Erkenwald's Latin *Vita*,

below—affirm the supremacy of episcopal authority when they find the body. As they

dig the foundation for the new church, they find the pagan judge buried in "a ferly faire

toumbe," which is "enbelicit wyt bryȝt golde lettres" (46, 51). Significantly, this pagan

body is situated in a tomb that, like reliquary coffins, is beautiful and glossed with an

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[51] Liturgical books of the English Middle Ages show that relics were used in church dedications from the
tenth and eleventh centuries (Rollason, *Saints and Relics* 176-77). See above, n. 8.

explanatory note.[52] Neither the masons nor the clerks know what to make of this

discovery, however, and "Quen tithynges token to þe toun of þe toumbe wonder / Mony

hundrid hende men highide þider sone" (57-58). Among these men are "burgeys"

(including merchants and other craftsmen) and "bedels" (heralds)—and "mony a mesters

mon of maners diuerse" (60). People stop working; they come to see the "toumbe

wonder" and converge on the decimated temple with "ryngande noyce" (62). As in

Arcoid's *Miracula*, below, the lay response here gives voice to ecclesiastical insistence

about the importance of a holy body's physical location, which in this case happens to be

at the site of the future St Paul's cathedral. This is, without a doubt, a crowd scene: "Þer

commen þider of alle kynnes so kenely mony / Þat as alle þe worlde were þider walon

wytin a honde- quile" (63-64). Moreover, once the crowd is assembled, the poet no

longer describes them by trade, but as a group, a throng: they all stand there together as

lay members who are excluded from the privileged knowledge and spiritual authority of

the representatives of the *ecclesia*. No one particular class is able to read the situation

better than another nor is said to be closer to the tomb than another. Instead, London's

populace, "so kenely mony," is depicted as waiting together for episcopal guidance. This

moment is very like that in the Latin *Vita*, in which the London townsfolk are guided by

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[52] As Otter points out, the invention of the pagan judge's tomb, and the manner in which the tomb is
described, follows the conventions of *inventiones* more generally, and that of St Alban (whose tomb is
designated by the phrase "ossa martyris") in particular (391-94). It is also clear that this discovery is
modeled on other famous, indigenous translations, such as those of Æthelthryth's and Cuthbert's incorrupt
bodies, on which see Thacker, "The Making of a Local Saint." Thacker, "The Making of a Local Saint"
and Crook, "Enshrinement," both show that these translations followed Merovingian, not Roman, practice,
and that the English customs of translation and elevation continued almost uninterrupted through the
fourteenth century. This is in marked contrast with Carolingian practices, which followed Roman
encryption rather than elevation and translation. The discovery of an incorrupt body should hence be seen
in part as reflecting hagiographic conventions that were particular to England. See also Rollason, *Saints
and Relics* (34-44).

the words of the episcopal preacher.[53] In both cases, the laity know they are in the

company of a remarkable physical presence; in both cases, too, the laity are in need of

episcopal guidance to interpret some aspect of the "toumbe wonder" for them.[54]

Once the tomb has been opened (at the request of the mayor, who thereafter takes

his place behind Erkenwald's authority, instead), "ylka weghe askyd" whether the

incorrupt body, dressed in regal clothes, might have been a king. No one—not even the

mayor, representative as he is of secular authority—can parse out the mystery. They send

for St Erkenwald: "Þe bodeworde to þe byschop was broght on a quile / Of þat buriede

body, al þe bolde wonder" (105-6). The implicit assumption is that in this case, only a

representative of the institutional church will be able to interpret the mystery through a

miracle. And in this poem, as in the Latin *Vita* and *Miracula*, only the representatives of

the *ecclesia* are able to access God's grace and enact justice for the unfairly suffering

(like the pagan judge in this case). Erkenwald, having heard "such a cry aboute a cors"

(110), heads immediately from Essex to London. He is said to arrive, admit his

unworthiness, and then to ask God for "an ansuare of þe Holy Goste" (126). Once

Erkenwald has made this request, the poet describes his preparation for a kind of

intercessory prayer that only a priest could make: the Mass. Here, too, the poem asserts

the ordered hierarchy of access to God (and, by extension, to divine knowledge and

justice): once Erkenwald has arrived and Mass has begun, the poet outlines explicitly and

differentiates between the appearance of Erkenwald and other aristocratic classes. He

describes "Þe prelate in pontificals was prestly atyride" (130), and mentions that "mony a

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[53] See below (123-25).
[54] Whatley similarly observes that this moment of confusion shows "the poet's concern to display the
limitations of natural intelligence and to dramatize the inferiority of secular modes of thought and action"
(338), and he compares the alliterative poem to the Latin *Vita* as well (356).

gay grete lorde was gedrid to herken hit / (As the *rekenest* of þe reame repairen þider

ofte)" (134-35; emphasis added). Suddenly, instead of emphasizing "ylka weghe" and

the common "cry aboute a cors," the poet underscores the differences in the "grete prece"

or crowd—those differences that highlight the interpretive authority of the ecclesiast in

their midst, St Erkenwald.

After Mass is over, there is an ordered procession to the tomb. In this procession,

the poet emphasizes Erkenwald's majesty and authority over those in positions of secular

authority. The "gay grete lorde[s]" present at the Mass are said to have "plied to hym,"

that is to have made way for Erkenwald, whose splendor is demarcated by his clothing,

his costume: he is "riche reuestid" (139).[55] Erkenwald is preceded by the mayor and his

"macers," men who carry maces and other symbols of civic authority. The saint is

accompanied by barons. The "grete prece" of the tomb's discovery is demoted to the end

of the procession: "Bot pyne wos wyt þe grete prece þat passyd hym after" (141).

Erkenwald's presence is the occasion not simply for the assertion of ecclesiastical

authority, but for the hierarchical order of society—an order that was very temporarily

suspended upon the discovery of the tomb, but highlighted by the general confusion that

resulted from this discovery. Erkenwald, as representative of ecclesiastical authority and

justice both, however, by his very presence causes the re-division of the "grete prece"

into class again. The people—those masons who first found the body among them, it

may be supposed—who were so actively involved in the first speculations about the

incorrupt body, are now in a position not to have a voice at all.

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[55] Cf. Thiofrid's justification for relics' shrines in chapter two (54-66).

Not surprisingly, it is another church authority figure—the dean of canons—who speaks to the crowd once the procession arrives at the "toumbe wonder." Like the episcopal preacher in the *Vita*, this dean speaks for Erkenwald and allows the poet to iterate what has been discovered, to speculate on its significance, and to underscore that nobody knows who the pagan is or how long he has been there. He refers to the body as that of a "kynge" and assumes that the body must have "layne here so longe... / To malte so out of memorie" (157-58). The dean thus assumes the role of summarizer, not interpreter—very like the preacher of the *Vita*, who steps in not to advise the crowd what to do with Erkenwald's body, but to suggest that the crowd pray for God's guidance. In this alliterative poem, however, only Erkenwald, representative of the institutional church and living saint both, is able to mediate God's wisdom for the crowd that is gathered. He admits his own inadequacy and informs the crowd that he will turn to God for help: "To seche þe sothe at oure selfe ȝee se þer no bote, / Bot glow we alle opon Godde and his grace aske / Þat careles is of counselle and comforthe to sende, / And þat in fastynge of ȝour faithe and of fyne bileue" (170-73). Erkenwald here asserts his own ability to mediate God's wisdom, but he also ascribes God's "counselle and comforthe" to the faith and belief of all those present. He thereby makes two assertions simultaneously: that the institutional church has authoritative access to God, but also that by remaining faithful in their belief and adherence to the tenets of the institutional church, the laity can access God's grace and mercy as well. Erkenwald's intervention and prayer depicts the *ecclesia* as being authoritative because it can access knowledge, an ability that the secular, earthly power in this poem is not said to have. (The mayor, after all, is said to have been as confused as the rest, and does not have recourse to "Þe comforthe of þe creatore" (168).)

116

The pagan himself is made to underscore the distinction between the *ecclesia* and

secular authority, and in so doing, he also emblematizes the central role of bodies in texts

that underwrite ecclesiastical superiority. Like the lay voices who similarly work to

articulate the position of the institutional church, this virtuous pagan judge concedes—as

only a secular judge can—that there is an authority, represented by Erkenwald, far above

him (and by extension, far above all secular authority). Once Erkenwald promises that

the Creator will help them to solve this riddle, he addresses the corpse directly and

commands it to speak. The body immediately grants that, because of "þe name

["Jhesus"] þat þou neuenyd" (195), Erkenwald has authority: " 'Bisshop,' quoþ this ilke

body, 'þi bod is me dere' " (193). The pagan judge recognizes immediately the authority

wielded by Erkenwald in Christ's name—he recognizes, that is, that the *ecclesia* and its

agents have recourse to the final judge and "Creator." The inability of secular authorities

to identify the body indicates that only the church is able to access God's "counselle and

comforthe"; only the church, therefore, is able perfectly to mete out justice. The body's

words underscore the inadequacy of secular authority, since it recognizes the bishop as an

emissary of Christ whose "bod is me dere." And if this assertion were not enough, the

body proceeds to identify itself as a pagan judge, one whose own justice and authority as

a representative of secular law is unable to free him from his state. By investing the

pagan with speech, the poet is able to use a body to articulate the relationship between

ecclesia and not-*ecclesia*, between ecclesiastical structure and secular imperfection. It

makes no difference that it was "noȝt but fife hundred ȝere þer aghtene wontyd / Before

þat kynned ȝour Crist by Cristen accounte" (208-9): the inability of secular authority to

work as a channel for Christ's grace and mercy is borne out by the failure of the mayor to

intercede on behalf of the pagan judge. It is not only the pagan judge, that is, who is

unable to render justice absolutely, but any representative of secular authority.

That this judge is deserving of a better fate is evinced first by his words, and then

by the emotional response of those who are present, who "still as þe ston stoden" and

"wepid ful mony" (219-20). The judge's case has rendered those present speechless,

unable to respond except by silence and weeping. While this response confirms the

judge's pitiable state, it cannot *change* his state. St Erkenwald, on the other hand, is not

left speechless, and prods the body to narrate more fully his regal burial. The judge of

course obliges, and describes his virtue in more detail:

> And for I was ryȝtwis and reken and redy of þe laghe
> Quen I deghed for dul denyed alle Troye.
> Alle menyd my dethe, þe more and the lasse
> And þus to bounty my body þai buriet in golde. (245-48)

Even his beloved position cannot earn him salvation, however. All he merits for his

trouble is incorruption, which he identifies as a gift from "þe riche kynge of reson"—

God. But when Erkenwald asks about the state of his soul, the judge groans and laments

to God: " 'Maȝtu maker of men, thi myghtes are grete— / How myȝt *þi mercy* to me

amounte any tyme? [...] / Allas þe harde stoundes!' " (283-88; emphasis added). The

judge again pleads for mercy at line 286, and identifies the injustice of his "merciles"

punishment when he lived his life so well (300). The crowd is again said to weep, as is

Erkenwald, at the pagan judge's fate. To be sure, as has been argued, the Londoners'

empathy communicates a medieval impetus to incorporate pagan ancestors into Christian

discourse.[56] But this moment is indicative of more than simply the superiority of

Christian mercy over pagan so-called justice. Instead, this moment points to the *ecclesia*,

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[56] See Grady (1-16).

in the person of Erkenwald, as the only possible structure for the administration of justice *and* mercy. The judge is in misery not only because he was pagan, but also because until Erkenwald arrives on the scene, there is no ecclesiast to help him.

Erkenwald is so perfectly the conduit for mercy that his tears free the judge from his torment. He speaks the words of baptism, and "teres trillyd adoun and on þe toumbe lighten, / And one felle on his [the judge's] face and þe freke syked" (321-23). With Erkenwald's tears, the judge's " 'spyrit wyt vnsparid murthe / Into þe cenacle solemply þer soupenalle trew [...] / I heere þerof my heghe God *and also þe bysshop*, / Fro bale has broȝt vs to blis; blessid þou worthe' " (335-40; emphasis added). His body dissolves into ashes once his soul has ascended into Heaven for its reward. Once the miracle has been worked by Erkenwald—simultaneously the reigning bishop and, extratextually to any fourteenth- or fifteenth-century reader, the focal point of his own relic cult—the crowd is again divided according to its relationship to ecclesiastical authority. There is no further mention of barons, mayors or civic authority. Instead, the poet says simply that "Þai passyd forthe in processioun and *alle þe pepulle* folowid" (351; emphasis added). The elision of any difference between various laypeople surely illustrates that, next to the institutional church, any secular authority or position should necessarily come second. The poem thus reaffirms the position of the *ecclesia*, and it also aligns the deficiencies of secular law with those of the pagan world. Neither are easy channels for grace or salvation; neither has unfettered access to the truth of God. And because neither can see into the hearts of men, even in instances—like that of this pagan judge—where justice appears to have been served, mercy is presented as necessarily absent.

Sanctioning Ecclesiastical Authority in the Latin *Vita* and *Miracula*

The Latin *Vita* and *Miracula* illuminate some of the ideas present in the

alliterative poem, which makes bold statements about the role of relics in asserting the

inadequacies of secular—therein represented as pagan—authority. In this section, I

therefore examine the anonymous eleventh-century *Vita*, as well as Arcoid's *Miracula*

Sancti Erkenwaldi, in order to consider some of the ways in which these earlier, building-

focused accounts of Erkenwald's miracles set the stage for the alliterative account's

presentation of buildings and holy bodies. The difficulties in examining the history of a

saint's cult and its narratives that cover a 500-year period are perhaps obvious.[57]

However, later redactions of Erkenwald's life and miracles, such as *St Erkenwald*

(discussed above), or the *Gilte Legende* "St Erkenwald," depend intimately on the earlier

eleventh- and twelfth-century Latin accounts of the saint.[58] More to the point, these

earlier versions directly inform later presentations of Erkenwald's *relics* in the *Gilte*

Legende and in the alliterative *St Erkenwald*. The Latin *Vita* and *Miracula* are

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[57] Redactions of his life and miracles are extant in texts from the eleventh through sixteenth centuries.
These include the eleventh-century anonymous Latin *vita*, which is extant in three manuscripts, two from
the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, and one from the early fourteenth century. There is also one
seventeenth-century print edition that is still extant. Arcoid's late twelfth-century *Miracula* survives in
only one late twelfth-century manuscript. It must have been more widely circulated, however, since the
Gilte Legende rescension draws so heavily on it. The *Gilte Legende* version is based upon the *Vita* and
Miracula, but also on John of Tynemouth's *St Erkenwald* (Whatley, *The Saint of London* 69). Even the
alliterative *De Erkenwaldo* foregrounds the issues of bodies and buildings that are so important in earlier
versions of Erkenwald's life and miracles. For a bibliographical summary of recent work on Erkenwald,
see Peterson (145-47) and Whatley, "Heathens and Saints" (331).

[58] For the ways in which the Latin *Vita* and *Miracula* influenced later presentations of Erkenwald, including
that of the pagan judge, see Whatley, "Heathens and Saints" (354-62). There, Whatley argues for the
poem's reactionary and conservative presentation of the virtuous heathen motif. Whatley argues that the
poem, in contrast to other scholarly readings of it, presents the heathen as needing the sacramental
mediation of the "visible church" (338), and he is clearly correct. Whatley speaks specifically to
sacramental authority as it relates to the poem's deployment of the Gregory/Trajan legend, however. I
would submit that the assertions of ecclesiastical supremacy that permeate the poem are also in keeping
with those of relic discourse, and that it is helpful to consider the poem's relationship to relic discourse and
the cult of Erkenwald as well as to its sources and analogues.

indispensable to understanding the presentation of bodies and buildings in *St Erkenwald*, and thus they are important to any analysis of the way in which saints' bodies confer spiritual authority on the churches in which they reside.

The *Vita sancti Erkenwaldi* is, for the most part, a conventional account that relies on hagiographical *topoi* where no biographical information is available. In it, Erkenwald is figured forth as young in years but mature in mind, and as valuing the inner, spiritual man over "all transitory and worldly things" (Whatley 87). His purity inspires in him the desire to live in the wilderness rather than in the company of men, and when he becomes bishop he does not abandon this impulse. As bishop, "he utterly avoided all public and worldly display, taking care to show forth in his works whatever he preached as doctrine" (89). To this point, Erkenwald's is a fairly typical saint's account, relying on the commonplaces of the genre, such as holy youth and contemplative interest, to propel the narrative forward.

The more interesting part of the *Vita* is its account of Erkenwald's translation to London. To be sure, many aspects of this account are likely derived from commonplaces associated with translation and invention accounts.[59] These include, for example, the storm that arises when Londoners carry off the body, as well as the miracles Erkenwald works once he has been brought to the city.[60] (Such miracles were generally thought to exhibit the saint's approval of his or her new home.) Two-thirds of the translation concentrates on describing the quarrels over Erkenwald's body, however, which seems to

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[59] For these commonplaces, see Aigrain (186-92); Brown (88-105); Cubitt (423-24, 436); Geary, *Furta Sacra* (12, 119-20); Hayward; Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints* (161-64); Leclercq, "Translations" (cols. 2695-99); Otter (391-96); and Thacker, "Loca Sanctorum" (12-13, 69, 72) and "The Making of a Local Saint" (48-49). Thacker in particular discusses the relationship between translation and ecclesiastical power.
[60] For a reading of the storm as the failure of "ordinary human methods to solve the mystery" see Whatley, "Heathens and Saints" (356).

121

suggest that the more logical reading of this section is the assertion of the importance of bodies to place. The story renders the canons, nuns and monks as incredibly invested in the physical location of St Erkenwald's remains. As soon as the London canons and the Chertsey monks hear that Erkenwald has died, they immediately descend to Barking, "so that they might remove the body" (91). The nuns of course object, and an argument between the nuns and the monks ensues over the relative importance of Erkenwald to the Chertsey monastery and to Barking church, both of which the saint had founded. (Were holy bodies not important to places, this debate would make no sense.) Then, those who are making a case for London enter the fray. These are said to be the "clerics and people of the city of London [*clerus ac populus urbis lundonie*]" (91).[61] It is of no small importance that the people of London, as well as its clerics, are said to be present. Earlier only London's "canons [*canonici*]" are said to hear about Erkenwald's death and seek out the holy body. Suddenly, however, the people of London, whose interest in the case is more difficult to quantify (they cannot argue for Erkenwald having founded the city, for example), are equally impatient to make away with the relics. Such a desire provides early evidence for a literary interest in lay access—and even control over—relics.

And in fact, in this particular text, the laity manage successfully (if briefly) to influence the destination of a saint's relics. For, once the clerics of London have asserted their right, based on ancient custom, to Erkenwald's body, a heated argument ensues. While all the religious argue, "the lay folk [*plebs*] of London ran forward eagerly and, with divine consent, carried off with them the body of their bishop" (91).[62] The nuns and

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[61] *GL*: "Then the clergy with alle the people of London" (50).
[62] *GL*: "While these wordis were in sayng, the people of the cyte ranne to the body and toke it vp and bere it towarde London" (51).

122

monks from Barking and Chertsey follow weeping. (It may be imagined that the London

canons had no objection!) When a storm prevents the Londoners from crossing the river

easily, the monks and nun make a (divine) case for their claim on Erkenwald. The

Londoners will have none of their accusations, of course, and assert their belief that

Erkenwald belongs in the "church metropolitan [*ecclesia metropolitana*] which he

governed with justice and holiness [*iuste et sancte*] for a long time" (93).[63] Their concern

is presented as being not simply with whether Erkenwald belongs in his see, but with the

greater need in a metropolis for the physical presence of one who was "just and holy" in

life. The suggestion seems to be that Erkenwald's relics can physically transfer his

justice back to London, and the presentation of Erkenwald's relics in this particular text

associates justice [*iuste*] with the presence of an ecclesiastical saint's body.

From the beginning, the laity acknowledge the importance of episcopal power,

authority and protection, both in the person of their current bishop (whose representative

resolves the initial conflict between the monks, nuns and Londoners) and in the body of

their episcopal saint. The redactor thus manages to suggest that ecclesiastical justice was

recognized, and even embraced—enthusiastically—by these layfolk, whose desire to

have the relics is explicitly associated with their desire (or even nostalgia) for

Erkenwald's "ecclesia metropolitana." And although for a moment, spiritual authority

seems to have been conferred on the lay advocates who win the right to Erkenwald's

body, the narrative quickly presents a preacher "in the retinue of the bishop [*in*

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[63] Whatley explains the word "metropolitana" as follows:

> Bede [...] calls the city of London itself *metropolis*, i.e., chief city of the *prouincia* of the East
> Saxons. The Londoners are here referring to the people of the city and of its diocesan province,
> i.e., mainly Essex, and the city's church, which is *metropolitana* not because the bishopric is
> highest in rank but because the city is a "metropolis."

See *The Saint of London* (211 n. 24).

disciplinatu ipsius pontificis]" as the only one able to resolve the conflict (95). In this way, the *Vita* emphasizes that representatives of the *ecclesia* mediate the divine will. Not surprisingly, following the preacher's importuning, a miracle indicates God's desire for Erkenwald's relics: the river blocking the way to London divides and provides a path for them to cross. Though the entire crowd prays for this miracle, it is significant that they only do so at the bishop's preacher's bidding; such guidance demonstrates the need of such "townsfolk [*ciues ludonie*]" for ecclesiastical guidance. This preacher is the sole character able to restore order to the growing mêlée surrounding Erkenwald's body; his depiction thus ratifies ecclesiastical mediation, even as the lay voices, on whose behalf he in part arbitrates, are presented (in their desire to have Erkenwald's relics and restore justice to the "ecclesia metropolitana") as sanctioning such mediation. Indeed, these lay voices, associating justice with Erkenwald's ecclesiastical city, suggest that by itself, the "metropolitana" cannot administer justice and holiness simultaneously.

In this vein, and perhaps to suggest lay desire to access a saint's relic, the narrative suddenly omits any mention of the London canons.[64] These canons are first introduced as wanting a share in Erkenwald's body, and figure (at first) centrally into the debate with the monks and nuns. They are also said to argue alongside the people of London ("clerus ac populus urbis"); but once the laity "carried off with them the body of their bishop," the canons are not mentioned again. They seem simply to disappear from the account.[65] And when the crowd arrives at London, "the people who had remained in

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[64] And indeed, this concern is borne out by the *Gilte Legende* version, which similarly effaces the London canons in favor of presenting the London "cytezyns" as arguing for the "precyous...body" (51).
[65] It is never specified that the London canons are no longer there, which would be a narrative impossibility. But beyond their role in the initial conflict with the monks and nuns, they are never mentioned explicitly.

124

the city [*qui erant in ciuitate*]" run out to meet the "holy prelate" (97). Here, too, the

canons and other religious are glossed over, and the description of those who remain in

London is ambiguously inclusive as well: "qui erant in ciuitate."[66] In the absence of

explicitly religious responses, the *Vita* presents the lay members of the community as

arguing most persuasively for their community's need for relics and as responding most

enthusiastically when those relics arrive safely.

The *Vita*, that is, uses lay concerns (such as patronage and physical healing), in

order to illustrate the appropriate role of *ecclesia* in a relic cult. For the redactor suggests

that without the intervention of an episcopal preacher in this particular translation—that

is, were lay participants left to their own means—the conflict between the Londoners,

monks and nuns would have escalated. Though the layfolk are ultimately presented as

having been in the right (Erkenwald's body ends up at St Paul's in London), their initial

concerns with Erkenwald's relics do not result in concord, but rather in "uproar and

confusion [*tumultuaretur*]" (93). Hence, the inclusion of an episcopal mediator (and at

the most heightened moment in the debate over Erkenwald's relics) renders lay impulse

as good, perhaps, but as ineffectual without episcopal guidance. Fittingly, the final

concerns of the *Vita* are with the location of Erkenwald's body and with the regulation of

lay behavior. The narrative ends not by describing manifestations of Erkenwald's cult

around the city or in the homes of laypeople, but by assuring the reader that "daily even

now *at his tomb* [*ad tumbam eius*] health is restored to the sick, provided they ask him in

purity of heart and the Lord Jesus Christ consents" (97; emphasis added). Lay behavior

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[66] They are similarly glossed over in the *Gilte Legende*: "And then thaye toke vp this holye bodye and bare it fulle reuerently to the cyte of London, and þer *alle the cyte* met with this holy body" (53; emphasis added).

is circumscribed (it must be "pure"), and while Erkenwald's sanctity is surely accessible everywhere, in this case only his "tomb" is mentioned, highlighting the importance of Erkenwald's relics and his physical location at St Paul's.

Arcoid's twelfth-century *Miracula sancti Erkenwaldi* similarly emphasizes the importance of relics to establishing the spiritual authority of the *ecclesia*.[67] There, Arcoid recounts many miracles that Erkenwald is said to have effected—both to heal and to punish the laity. Like the writer of the *Vita*, Arcoid uses lay voices, lay participation in Erkenwald's cult, and lay punishment as a means of demonstrating relics' power. In effect, Arcoid frequently utilizes lay characters to quash debates about the sanctity of relics and miracles and to assure his readers that Erkenwald's cult is justified and effective.[68] Moreover, Arcoid figures Erkenwald's relics as enabling St Paul's to advocate for the laity (or alternatively, to assert its unequivocal spiritual authority over the laity). As Whatley argues, the "patterns of conflict between cleric and layman" in the *Miracula*, and the "pervasive concern to celebrate and defend the mediatory function of the established church help us to see why its saintly subject, Erkenwald of London, was such an appropriate choice to represent *ecclesia*" (359). Though he does not outline explicitly the ways in which Erkenwald's relics are used to represent ecclesiastical power, Whatley here gestures towards the importance of relics in representing and advocating for the authority of *ecclesia*—authority over the lay participants in the cult, and over figures of secular authority as well.

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[67] For a reading of Arcoid as a "conservative, even reactionary" hagiographer, see Whatley, "Heathens and Saints" (358).

[68] See Whatley, *The Saint of London* (41-55). As Whatley observes elsewhere—though he is not speaking explicitly of Arcoid's *Miracula* in this case—"The miraculous 'works of God' could be and frequently were used as propaganda to promote political viewpoints as well as religious devotion, and to defend ecclesiastical privileges and possessions" (*The Saint of London* 25).

Not surprisingly, Erkenwald's body features in every miracle in the collection. It is not simply St Erkenwald, but St Erkenwald's relics, housed in a church in London, through which God heals the afflicted or punishes the deserving. Arcoid comments about Erkenwald's relics in Miracle 4 that "Someone who shines forth so gloriously in the heavens should surely not be buried in such a foul garment as the earth" (121). It is no surprise then that Arcoid devotes time to describing Erkenwald's silver shrine (surely not a "foul garment!"), and hence to distinguishing Erkenwald from the lay bodies of the community.[69] In Miracle 6, Arcoid presents one such lay body, a man who prevents his wife from donating money to build Erkenwald's shrine. Arcoid's opinion about appropriate lay responses (to donate money) and behavior is obvious, and he presents Erkenwald's justice in the service of a greater political and economic investment (to raise the necessary funds to build a shrine).[70] Arcoid prefaces this account by emphasizing lay participation, and in particular that of the poor and oppressed, in subsidizing the shrine: "Although the wealthy citizens contributed little or nothing, the generous hand of the poor set up collecting stations throughout the city" (133-135).[71] The husband who "rebuked" his wife for wanting to donate to this cause is thus set up as a disobedient, irreverent anomaly, and he is duly afflicted with stomach problems for his transgressive attitude. His stomach pain, of course, only ends when he, newly repentant, is carried "to

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[69] For theological perspectives on fitting ways to store saints' bodies, see the discussion of Guibert of Nogent and Thiofrid of Echternach in chapter two.

[70] Whatley argues that Arcoid undertook the entire project in order to raise money for the construction of the reliquary (*The Saint of London* 60-65).

[71] *GL* renders this simply as "dyuers men were meovid to yefe of þere goodis" in order to honor St Erkenwald "with precyous stonys and with other rychesse" (499-500). Though the *GL* makes no mention of the poor, it is still noteworthy that it identifies "dyuers men" as the benefactors of Erkenwald's shrine, thereby underscoring the involvement of the *entire* (dyuers) laity in the construction of the shrine. The importance of Erkenwald's relics to the accounts in the *GL* is similarly emphasized by the recurrence of the word "relyques" throughout "St Erkenwald," at lines 274, 327, 356 and 424.

the saint's sepulcher [*ad ipsius mausoleum*]" (135). As at the end of the *Vita*,

Erkenwald's power is here figured as most powerful in the vicinity of the shrine—which

seems especially significant given that Arcoid may have written the *Miracula* to advertise

Erkenwald's upcoming translation.[72] His concern would hence have been most

specifically with Erkenwald's relics, their importance to the *ecclesia* and their physical

environment at St Paul's.

Miracle 10 is similarly didactic, and it also narrates the consequences of lay

misbehavior. This punishment miracle involves Eustace, a silversmith who pays "silly

visit[s]" to the place where the silver reliquary (*theca*) is being constructed.[73] Eustace is

depicted as a drunkard who distracts the other silversmiths from their important task,

which is to cover the "wooden sepulcher [*sepulchrum ligneum*]" with "silver and gold

[*argento et auro*]" (143). Arcoid records that Eustace

> began to make disgraceful remarks about the wooden shrine but also with
> wild presumption and daring he raised the wooden lid and hid himself
> inside as though he were the saint's body at rest; and thus he spoke: "I am
> the most holy Erkenwald: bring me gifts; ask for my help; make me a
> sepulcher of silver!" (143)[74]

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[72] Arcoid's emphasis on miracles at or near the shrine is in keeping with other eleventh- and twelfth-century miracle collections, which Head argues tend to focus on cures performed at shrines. See Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints* (138). Nevertheless, Arcoid seems to have had a specific reason for this emphasis, and his campaign to raise money for Erkenwald's shrine—in addition to his staunch position on miracles, relics and the appropriate lay (and clerical) responses—should be thought of as political as well as pious or even conventional. See Whatley, *The Saint of London* (41-55).

[73] It is a testimony to the important literary function of this silversmith that Whatley was unable to find "contemporary references to a silversmith named Eustace" (*The Saint of London* 226 n. 1). There need have been no such character. As I am arguing here, Eustace is more important as an exemplar of the proper attitude the community is to have to Erkenwald's relics, which are the corporeal expression of ecclesiastical authority.

[74] This miracle is remarkably similar to one of Ælfric's accounts of St Swithun. (This miracle does not appear in Lantfred's or Wulfstan's Latin.) In Miracle 19, Ælfric tells of a "sum dysig mann plegol ungemetlice (a certain foolish, exceedingly jocular man), and to ðam mannum cwæð—swilce for plegan— þæt he Swiðhun wære" (Lapidge ll.152-53). This particular man repents, however, and so does not pay for the impersonation of a saint with his life.

To the modern reader, Arcoid's account reads like a comedy sketch rather than a moral lesson. Nevertheless, this (joking, silly) man dies "within a few days, by the stroke of divine judgement" because of his transgression (143). Arcoid here asserts (as he does throughout the *Miracula*) the somatic hierarchy of *ecclesia*. Eustace's body is clearly differentiated from Erkenwald's holy (sober) remains. Relics here enable Arcoid's reminder to his audience that not all bodies were equal, and that lay bodies ought especially to be controlled and reverential at a saint's shrine. Arcoid's venom is reminiscent of Wulfstan's presentation of Eadsige and the slave girl, discussed above: the marked difference is that the slave girl, unlike poor Eustace, is sober, virtuous and long-suffering. In both cases, however, these supplicants are perceived as violating the hierarchical order and as suggesting equivalence, rather than difference, between the bodies of saints and lay bodies. Arcoid lets this miracle serve as a reminder that a relic cult is nothing to laugh at, and that the relics' power affirms the ascendancy of the churches in which they are housed over the surrounding lay congregations. And as Arcoid emphasizes in miracle 5, this particular relic cult is located in London, the capital of Britain—and it is greater than any other relic cult.

In miracle 5, which details the re-construction of St Paul's after the devastating fire of 1087, Arcoid presents Erkenwald's relics as the material objects upon which the sanctity and authority of St Paul's rests. The expansion of the church on behalf of Erkenwald even justifies ecclesiastical incursion into lay territory: Maurice the bishop "acquired, at his own expense, the broad streets around the church which had previously been occupied by the houses of the laity [*ante domibus laicorum obsesse fuerant*]" (129-31). Arcoid includes in this account Erkenwald's healing of an Italian woman "whom the

129

world with all its relics [*cum suis reliquiis*] had rejected"—but "divine providence" had

reserved her for "Erkenwald so that Britain might recognize the wonderful working of

God in his saints" (131). This woman has looked for healing, unsuccessfully, at other

shrines. Arcoid clearly has national and civic importance in mind as he writes this, and

he emphasizes the woman's visit to Erkenwald's tomb [*ad sancti tumulum*] (133), located

in Britain's capital city. She is healed by Erkenwald, who, Arcoid submits, "possess[es]

the capital city of Britain all alone," and "among men lie[s] at rest in the Lord, in the city

of London" (133). The woman's miraculous healing is hence tied in not only to

Erkenwald's relics, but to the city in which they are located.[75] Arcoid thereby presents

Erkenwald's relics as justifying Maurice's construction of a magnificent cathedral, but

also as affirming London's political importance as Britain's capital. Arcoid situates

Erkenwald's relics at the center of the civic (and even national) community, and his

subsequent description of the walls of the church and the streets around the church can be

read as moving centrifugally from Erkenwald's body. In this way, Arcoid figures

Erkenwald's body as the reference point for secular and ecclesiastical authority, both

locally and nationally. Erkenwald's justice miracles help to illustrate the way in which

his relics are used to validate the spiritual authority of the institutional church.

Arcoid's justice miracles, in which a member of the laity is actually saved from

some kind of extra-ecclesiastical punishment, are few in comparison with the miracles

that highlight divine retribution or didactic punishment. Nevertheless, in miracles 1 and

3, Arcoid—having elsewhere thoroughly established the holy terror of Erkenwald's relics

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[75] It is certainly a commonplace for a supplicant to seek healing (unsuccessfully) at other shrines. Here,
however, Arcoid's emphasis on London as the capital city—and his juxtaposition of London with Rome
and its martyrs, rather than with another local, British relic cult—is unusual.

on the one hand, and their supreme thaumaturgic power on the other—presents virtuous (or at least repentant) layfolk who are rescued from the clutches of an imperfect, human justice. In these cases (as in those of Swithun, above) secular justice has little recourse to the divine will. Extra-ecclesiastical punishments, in contrast to those meted out by God when the foolish do not treat Erkenwald's cult with the requisite deference, are not necessarily just. And when these secular punishments are ill-deserved, God, through Erkenwald's relics (housed in St Paul's cathedral, as Arcoid reminds us repeatedly), is able to rescue the supplicant from the clutches of an unjust and persecutory extra-ecclesiastical verdict. Miracle 1 depicts a schoolboy who, having failed to learn his lesson, flees from an ireful schoolmaster to "avoid and escape punishment" (105). Because he seeks refuge at "the church in which rested the body of St. Erkenwald [*ad ecclesiam in qua sancti erkenwaldi requiescit corpus peruenit*]," and "prostrated himself at St. Erkenwald's side" (105), he is spared beating: he receives instruction through divine grace and, when the teacher finds him, he is able to recite not only the lesson for that day but "at length and completely from memory what the teacher had been about to give him for the next assignment!" (107). A teacher is not, of course, an instrument of secular law; but his authority is here presented in contrast with the spiritual authority and mercy shown by God through Erkenwald's relics.

Miracle 3 similarly underscores Erkenwald's "matchless justice" in comparison to the extra-ecclesiastical judicial system, which has no recourse to God's will or to God's divine mercy.[76] In it, a prisoner repents wholeheartedly at Erkenwald's shrine on Erkenwald's feast day and asks to be released from captivity. Just as his "prison-guards

[76] See above, n. 45.

131

[*eius custodibus*]" come to take him away, his fetters burst apart—and to underscore just who is in charge, here, Arcoid is careful to explain that when the bishop hears of the miracle, "he issued an order [...] to the effect that since St. Erkenwald had seen fit to set the said man free he forbade anyone to wrong him with further imprisonment" (119). In this moment, an episcopal *dictum* places the relics of his cathedral above the justice of the secular law. There is no question that for Arcoid, Erkenwald's mercy—and his punishment—is infinitely more just than any reward or determent given by extra-ecclesiastical authority. And there is similarly no question that, even as he manipulates the miracles of this text in order to advertise Erkenwald's cult and raise money for a reliquary, Arcoid also emphasizes the political centrality of England's premiere cathedral in the country's capital city—and that he does so via episcopal relics. Here, as in the alliterative Erkenwald, relics enable patronage and ministry, but they are very particularly used to bolster assertions of institutional power and governance, as well.

David Rollason and Nicholas Vincent argue that the miracles of the saints—indeed, pilgrimage itself—can be seen to serve and ratify the authority of some kings, particularly Henry II and the kings of the West Saxon dynasty. From a historical perspective, these arguments are compelling and crucial. Nevertheless, the hagiography of Winchester and London manages to suggest that the miracles worked by relics undermined, rather than underscored, secular authority, including that of some kings (like Edgar). In so doing, these saintly remains suggest that the *ecclesia* is the best (or only) advocate for the laity. Ultimately, Swithun's and Erkenwald's relics affirm that God confers spiritual authority, via relics, to the representatives of the Old Minster and of St Paul's, and not to the secular authorities in these texts. Relics hence sometimes function

132

to suggest that the only earthly power capable of channeling spiritual authority is the institutional church. The case studies of the remaining chapters take up this idea as it is explored by Chaucer and Malory in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. For the institutional practices discussed here—depending as they do on the intellectual paradigms set out in chapter two—were open to criticisms and commentary. Malory, in his exploration of the connection between relic custodians and supplicants, shows that it is necessary to read relic culture diachronically and macrohistorically. Malory's concerns with pilgrim behavior and access to the Grail may be questioning whether representatives of the *ecclesia* always did have direct recourse to spiritual authority, and whether, instead, relics and miracles were used to justify the earthly power of, in this case, relic custodians.

CHAPTER 4

Supplicants and Relic Custodians: The Knights of the Grail Quest, Gilbert of Chevening

and Joseph of Arimathea

This chapter presents the first of two case studies. Here, I show the ways in

which Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, the fourteenth-century romance *Joseph of Arimathie*,

and Thomas Cantilupe's canonization dossier manifest—and sometimes, challenge—the

méntalites of access and behavior articulated by the theologians of chapter two, and

ratified by some of the institutional practices of chapter three. The relic cults at London

and Winchester demonstrate that the communities at the Old Minster and St Paul's

implemented, at least to some degree, the theological views that relics should be

occluded, regulated and pilgrim behavior carefully monitored. The texts of this chapter

show that this dynamic persisted through time—and may have caused, at least by the

fourteenth century, a certain amount of tension at a saint's shrine. Relic cults were of

national and civic significance; and the highly personal and charged interactions at

individual shrines further demonstrate the way in which relics helped certain churches

and ecclesiastical representatives to figure forth their roles as the denizens of spiritual

authority. We have already seen the ways in which some texts could deploy saints'

miracles in order to affirm, simultaneously, the authority and mercy of the *ecclesia*. The

miracle of the innocent thief is one such instance.[1] Literary depictions of interaction

between supplicants and relic custodians illustrate churches' need for lay adherents to a

cult, and show the need to regulate, often strictly, the conduct of the lay faithful.

Such regulation is most obvious in the physical set up of a major relic cult (with

notable relics). As I have presented elsewhere in this dissertation, notable relics were not

easily accessible to the supplicants who sought them out.[2] They were, practically

speaking, impossible either to reach or to see. People standing at the base of an eleven-

foot high shrine would not even have been assured that they could view, unobstructed,

the top of the reliquary, or *feretrum*, let alone see the relics at all. The relics themselves

were kept entirely hidden from view in elaborate *feretra* (reliquaries).[3] Relics'

inaccessibility was compounded by the increasingly politicized process of canonization,[4]

which meant that very often, lay supplicants—because they could offer the testimony

necessary for a successful canonization—were treated merely as tools for authenticating a

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[1] See chapter three (97-100).
[2] See the discussion in chapter two, "Access and Occlusion: Notable versus Non-notable Relics."
[3] See chapter two, n. 35.
[4] See Cole "Grosseteste" (4-7); Daly (126-27); Farmer; Heffernan, "Political Canonization" (182); Kemp (76-78, 82, 121-124, 133-36, 138-40); Malden; McKenna, Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims* (173-39); and Vauchez. Lagorio discusses the way in which even a legendary saint such as Joseph of Arimathea could serve the political interests of the English nation. Kemp's discussion of St Osmund underscores the political and financial commitment that pursuing canonization required. Osmund died in 1099, and his sanctity was first investigated by Gregory IX in 1228. In spite of petitions that included royal support, Osmund was not canonized until 1456 (138-40). Kleinberg remarks that canonization "was an expensive and lengthy process that most communities avoided" (13). Nilson concurs that canonization unofficially required power, money and patience (*Cathedral Shrines* 14). Therefore, when Grosseteste's and Dalderby's canonization attempts both failed, John de Schalby and others were despondent and suspicious. John, "writing about 1330, refers sadly to the business [of Dalderby's canonization] and says that God alone knows why it had come to nothing" (Kemp 119). Higden in the *Polychronicon* attributes Grosseteste's failure to be canonized to the bishop's *Epistola* on papal abuses (Nilson *Cathedral Shrines* 14). One wonders whether the fact that Lincoln already had a major shrine—that of St Hugh, who, unlike Grosseteste, was an unflagging advocate for ecclesiastical jurisdiction (Farmer, Introduction xviii-xix); and who, unlike Thomas Becket, was able to challenge Henry II and remain in the king's good graces (Adam of Eynsham, *Magna Vita* I.113-19)—also played a part. Hereford, for example, had no major saint before the (successful) canonization proceedings of Thomas Cantilupe. See Coldstream, "Medieval Tombs" (324). See also Swanson and Leping, who comment, "The canonization of Thomas Cantilupe in 1320 temporarily made Hereford one of England's leading pilgrimage sites" (48).

parish's most lucrative source of income: a major shrine. The miracles that they are said to have experienced are thus not personal narratives, in any sense, but rather constitute proof of a patron's ascendancy, and of his or her relics' power. Moreover, supplicants seeking miracles had to meet numerous criteria in order to take advantage of this power at all: they had to be humble, penitent or innocent, virtuous, unworldly, and obedient. These criteria not only demand that recipients of miracles be deserving, but also (implicitly) discount those who did not receive a miracle as *not* deserving. Not surprisingly, then, many pilgrims and supplicants seem to have been excluded from experiencing the salvific power and healing grace that these relics channeled, even as the experience of pilgrimage was presented, rhetorically speaking, as a moment that would enable the most intimate access to thaumaturgic power possible. A list of characteristics appears, in this case, peremptorily to excuse the practice of keeping most pilgrims—who, it may be assumed, were regarded as proud, idolatrous, worldly and disobedient—as far from the relics as possible.

This chapter is concerned primarily with three texts, Malory's *Le Morte D'arthur*, *Joseph of Arimathie*, a fourteenth-century romance, and the early fourteenth-century canonization proceedings of St Thomas Cantilupe, each of which illustrates the tension between the pilgrims or supplicants who so badly wanted access to the relic, on the one hand, and the relic custodians whose job it was to care for and limit contact with the shrine on the other. I also use some *miracula* and other hagiographical texts as supplementary evidence for the practices of supplicants and relic custodians, and to show that the presentation of supplicants and custodians in Malory, *Joseph*, and in the hearings for Thomas Cantilupe is entirely conventional, and, therefore, constitutes an important

136

indication of their roles as figured by the discourse of relics. In order to explore the

literary ideas of lay access to holy bodies and their accompanying *virtus*, I devote time to

considering an actual relic custodian, Gilbert of Chevening, insofar as existing

documentation makes this possible. Examining these characters enables a more complex

understanding of these figures as they are deployed in literature, and as they are related to

shrines and relics, whose embodied power becomes a way for the *ecclesia* tacitly to

communicate its dominance both over the laity (who are not allowed direct access to the

very bodies from which they hope to obtain healing), and also over the extra-

ecclesiastical institutions that, according to many miracles, oppress the laity.[5]

Relic custodians, often called *custodes tumuli*, feretrars, or *custodes pignorum*, are

understudied and neglected literary and historical characters. Custodians appear at

shrines, invariably, wherever there is a shrine that is popular enough to attract pilgrims.[6]

Their role as personal gatekeepers of the shrine works in tandem with the architectural

structure and occlusion of the shrine's position in the church. That is, one of relic

custodians' primary jobs was to keep supplicants *away* from the shrine (which was often

safely out of reach, regardless). The space between a custodian and supplicant can be

thought of more broadly as a "contact zone," a "social space" where, as Mary Louise

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[5] For a discussion of justice miracles as serving this function, see chapter three.

[6] Cynthia Hahn speculates that relic custodians were responsible for restricting access to the saint, as well as for "creat[ing] certain expectations" such as recounting appropriate miracle stories or even presenting "bodily decorum" ("Seeing and Believing" 1087). Medieval English relic custodians included those at the shrines of Robert Grosseteste and John Dalderby, both bishops of Lincoln, as well as of Hugh of Lincoln. See E. W. Kemp (120). Nilson details other shrine sites with surviving documentation of relic custodians, including that of Edward the Confessor and St Cuthbert (*Cathedral Shrines* 131-33), St Etheldreda's shrine at Ely (115) and, of course, St Thomas at Canterbury (96, 129). St Chad's head at Litchfield was popular enough to warrant its own custodian (55), as was St Hugh's head at Lincoln. See Hewitt (73). Rollason argues that at Durham, St Cuthbert's relic custodians—whom he calls "porters"—were integral in establishing the continuity of Durham's communal history. See *Saints and Relics* (199-200). For an account of the duties of Canterbury's relic custodians, see Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* (147-54).

Pratt explains, "cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (35). Though Pratt is

thinking primarily in post-colonial and auto-ethnographic terms, her conception of a

"contact zone" can be seen to apply to the dynamic at a shrine between those who had

access to and control over the relics, and those who did not. This clash is represented by

the characterization of supplicants, and their relative access to the Grail, in Malory's

Grail Quest. It is similarly illustrated by the presentation of supplicants' testimony on

behalf of Thomas Cantilupe. Before I turn to explore these texts and their characters

more carefully, however, and in order to configure this "social space" more exactly, I will

first briefly review the physical spaces in which relics were located, and consider a

representative example from Wulfstan that illustrates the roles of custodian and

supplicant.

The *Haliwerfolc* and the Relic Custodian[7]

Geary's observation, "close contact with [relics] or possession of them was a

means of participating in [supernatural] power" ("Commodities" 176), is especially

limited when it is remembered that most laity were unable to see relics, let alone to

access them, and were hence unable to have "close contact" with holy remains or to

participate intimately in the holy power associated with relics. A miracle narrative in

Wulfstan of Winchester's tenth-century *Narracio metrica S. Swithuno* illustrates very

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[7] "*Haliwerfolc*" is a term outlined by Rollason, who defines this word as equivalent to the Latin "populus
sancti," or "folk of the holy man" (*Saints and Relics* 206). "*Haliwerfolc*" referred specifically to adherents
to St Cuthbert's cult at Durham, but it is a useful term for thinking about the role of the lay devotees to a
particular cult, as well. In this chapter, I hence use "*haliwerfolc*" to refer not only to the residents of a
particular geographical area, but to any supplicant.

well how certain notable relics were carefully guarded and difficult to access.[8] This

anecdote, in which a slave-girl is miraculously transported to the innermost sanctuary of

Swithun's shrine, effectively brings out the conventional roles of both the supplicant and

the relic custodian. Wulfstan does not mention the slave-girl's fate, thus ensuring that

Swithun's relics and the slave-girl's proximity to them (which she is exceptionally

granted because of her exemplary moral state), are the central features of the miracle

story. This young woman has been stolen from her original owner and then sold in

Winchester. As is typical of his attitude to the oppressed, Wulfstan presents her

sympathetically, pointing out that even though she has been "separated from her native

land," she is faithful to her new owner, "obeying all her commands and not neglecting

anything which was asked of her" (trans. Lapidge 497). Her attentiveness and obedience

suggest that, although she has been stolen and relocated, she has not, nor would she,

attempt to run away. Wulfstan even seems to imply that "separated" as she is "from her

native land," it would be understandable if she did try to escape. When she seeks out her

former owner, who has traveled to Winchester, she "converses [...] unconcernedly

[*secura suum*]" with him. Her lack of anxiety indicates yet again the nobility of her

intentions. Surely were she to have planned a getaway, she could not have so

composedly interacted with a former owner in a public place.

Indeed, the place of their meeting is so public that before long, her new mistress

hears about her slave's tête-à-tête. This woman, characterized by Wulfstan as "beastly

[*effera*]," is infuriated and sends a deputy to fetch the slave—a young woman already

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[8] Wulfstan, who was a monk at Winchester in the late tenth century, wrote the *Narracio Metrica Sancti Swithuno* in celebration of the Old Minster's patron saint and erstwhile bishop, St Swithun. His account is remarkable not only for its style, which Michael Lapidge identifies as sophisticated, but also for its length and detail. See chapters two and three for other narratives from this collection.

established to be without blame—"with persuasive deception" (497). As soon as the

slave arrives home, she is tied up and her "bruised feet" are "thrust into an immense

shackle." She is quite clearly presented as undeserving of such treatment. A "miserable

wretch" under the circumstances, she pleads with Swithun to help her, turning in prayer

"to the holy church—in whatever way she could manage—in which [*in quo*] the kindly

bishop is venerated" (497-99).[9] In this moment, her physical orientation affirms

Swithun's mediatory power (she faces his relics) and establishes the Old Minster as the

repository for that power (his relics are located in the church). The text hence presents

the Old Minster as the gateway to Swithun's miraculous power—as the mediator for the

mediating saint, so to speak. There is, then, a strange tension between the saint's power

to intercede for the oppressed supplicant and the supplicant's need to subject herself to

the Church in order to access that mediatory power. In this case, the slave-girl is almost

immediately transported by an angelic apparition (presumably St Swithun himself, as

later redactions interpret him to be) to the "innermost shrine, which was closed by lock

and key, and next to the holy altar where the holy body lay" (499).[10] She has thus

penetrated one of the holiest sites in the church, a place that is generally speaking locked

and kept under careful surveillance.[11]

At this point in the narrative, Wulfstan introduces Eadsige, a monk who has been

entrusted with guarding Swithun's remains. Eadsige figures importantly in Wulfstan's

narration of the discovery and translation of St Swithun's body. Before the translation, St

Swithun appears "to a certain smith in a vision" and instructs the smith to seek out

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[9] See chapter two (51-54, 72-74); see also below (143-45).
[10] For another instance of miraculous transportation to a shrine, see Jessop and James (289-94).
[11] See chapter two, n. 31.

Eadsige, who has been expelled from the Old Minster "along with his colleagues who were wicked with a similar inclination" (413). Eadsige is presented as neither upstanding nor virtuous, to the point that he has been excluded from the community.[12] When Swithun chooses him as a holy messenger, then, he sets Eadsige apart for the possibility of reconciliation. By making this narrative decision, Wulfstan highlights the unitive function of Swithun's relics—so powerful that they can inspire penitence in a man whose sins are "unspeakable," and restore concord to the community of the Old Minster.[13] In any event, the smith, having been exhorted by Swithun in two subsequent visions, finally reports the miraculous apparition to one of Eadsige's retainers. When after several days the retainer recounts the vision to Eadsige, the ex-canon is still too "devoted to the things of this world" and mired in "the byways of this deceptive life" to listen to Swithun's message (415). He is said to harbor resentment towards his erstwhile fellow monks and canons at the Old Minster, and to hate Bishop Æthelwold and King Edgar, both of whom were instrumental in his expulsion.[14] He is so bitter, Wulfstan explains, that he does not reveal the contents of the vision for two years. At this point, he abandons his

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[12] It is a strong possibility, however, that Wulfstan is referring to the expulsion of the secular canons under Æthelwold's institution of Benedictine reform at Winchester. The expulsion took place on 21 February, 964, when, as Rollason comments, Æthelwold "ruthlessly expelled the secular canons in order to replace them with Benedictine monks from his reformed abbey at Abingdon" (*Saints and Relics* 182). As Knowles shows, the secular canons all left, and only three—one of whom was Eadsige, as recorded by Ælfric in his *Lives of the Saints*—returned (*The Monastic Order* 41). For the unwillingness of the secular canons to leave without coercion, see Yorke (65). Wulfstan also wrote a *Vita S. Æthelwoldi*, which further demonstrates Wulfstan's support both of the Benedictine reform and of his former teacher. See Lapidge, "Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher" (89-90). Wulfstan, himself a Benedictine monk, would certainly have had ample motivation to portray his predecessors as undeserving of a place in the newly reformed Benedictine monastic community. For a more general discussion of the influence of the Benedictine reform on the cult of relics in England, see chapter one. Rollason refers to Æthelwold as one of the "prime movers" of ecclesiastical reform in England (*Saints and Relics* 166, 176-80); see also Cubitt (450-51).
[13] In such a moment, relics can be seen to function as harbingers of the kind of unifying function detailed by Bynum and Brown. It is crucial to remember, however, that relics enable this concord within a religious community, and not between the religious community and its *haliwerfolc*.
[14] Both Æthelwold and Edgar had crucial roles in promulgating the tenth-century Benedictine reform in England. See above, n. 12; see also chapter one, "From the Benedictine Reform (almost) to the Reformation."

"wantonness," "devote[s] himself to God," and returns to the Old Minster where he becomes a Benedictine monk. Eadsige is presented as a man reformed, and thereafter as a monk who guards Swithun's relics zealously and walks "through the straits of the narrow gate" (499).

In this particular instance, Eadsige does not simply marvel that this woman has been locked within "the holy enclosure," but accuses her of "presumption [*presumptio*]":

> "Tell me, woman, who locked you in this chamber, in which all of us now see you standing? What presumption persuaded you to enter the holy enclosure in which the bones of our wondrous patron lie in peace? By what means were you able to conceal yourself when the sanctuary was closed, since I didn't see you when I locked these doors shut?" (501) [15]

It is clear from Eadsige's response to the slave that, generally speaking, supplicants were not to approach the shrine so closely. Hence, Eadsige accuses her of disrupting Swithun's "peace" ("requiescunt") and of violating the integrity of the "closed" ("clauso") and "locked" ("clausi") sanctuary ("claustrum"). Such a moment illustrates the contradictory ways in which many supplicants were expected to relate to the relic of a saint. At feretory chapels, supplicants would often be expected to seek close physical contact with relics and would be expected to venerate them;[16] on the other hand, they would be expected to keep a safe distance. Eadsige's outburst to the slave affirms that it is his job to control access to Swithun's body, and that usually, he prevented supplicants and pilgrims from approaching this notable relic as intimately as she did.

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[15]   O mulier, quis—fare mihi—te clausit in isto
          uestibulo, cuncti in quo te nunc stare uidemus?
          Quae te intrare sacrum suasit presumptio claustrum,
          in quo mirifici requiescunt ossa patroni?
          Qua poteras clauso ratione latere sacello,
          te quia non uidi claue hec cum limina clausi? (*The Cult of St Swithun* 159-64)

[16] See Wilmart, "Edmeri Cantuariensis" (184-85).

This miracle details the two dominant characters in relic discourse (the relic custodian and the supplicant or *haliwerfolc*), and delineates the conventional roles for both. The supplicant, as has been discussed in chapter three, is presented as desiring access to the relic and its *praesentia*. She therefore turns in the direction of the actual relic while she prays for release; in this compulsion she emblematizes the Christian impulse to be close to the holy dead in order to access their thaumaturgic power. She is presented as virtuous and blameless—as deserving, in short, of the miracle worked by Swithun on her behalf, without whose help she would have been entirely at the mercy of her patently unjust slave-owner. There is no question that she merits close contact with his saintly remains. Moreover, she is not said to turn in the direction of Swithun's remains, but in the direction of the church where these remains are enshrined. She is thus representative not only of a supplicant's desire to access God's grace and the saint's *praesentia*, but also of a supplicant's implicit recognition that grace and *praesentia* are necessarily channeled through a church building. She can even be seen to represent the qualities presented as necessary to access that grace: virtue and humility.

The conventionally appropriate behavior and attitudes for pilgrims and supplicants is widely attested. In fact, some punishments underscore the idea that pilgrims were not to see the relics, as when people who "had opened the tomb of St Lawrence and gazed upon his bones had died within ten days" (Crook, *The Architectural Setting* 34). Even abbots were not immune from saintly retribution. When Abbot Loefstan at Bury St Edmund's finds Edmund's corpse incorrupt and its head reattached to the body, Loefstan tries to pull the head from body. For his trouble he is struck blind, dumb and his hands are withered. He is eventually healed, but his withered hands are left

143

"as a reminder of his impertinence" (Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* 27). Justice miracles,

such as that of the slave and Eadsige, provide excellent evidence of the rhetorical

expectations of pilgrims and supplicants. Of the people who receive miraculous help, all

are said either to be innocent (like the slave-girl) or penitent. Queen Emma, whose

chastity earns her saintly intervention in a trial-by-ordeal, is one such innocent supplicant

(trans. Lapidge 150-53). Those pilgrims and supplicants who access the relic, or who

experience healing, are generally specified to have at least one of the qualities I list

above. In Lantfred, for example, St Swithun is said to heal a man who

> had deserved to obtain his health *because he did not waver in his faith* but
> persevered in his prayers [*quia non dubitauit in fide*, sed permansit in prece]. If,
> when the first night had passed, he had left the tomb of the glorious bishop and
> had not kept vigil during the second or third nights, he would not have obtained
> the health he longed for. But because he persevered in his faithful hope, he
> achieved through pure faith and received through bounteous love that which he
> wished for with all his heart. (trans. Lapidge 283; emphasis added)

By contrast, Lantfred describes a woman who does not persevere and is not obedient:

"She apparently lost her mental faculties since, being forgetful of God's bounties to her,

she did not observe the promises to which she had committed herself, and did not repay

to God the thanks which were due—*as would have been appropriate*" (293; emphasis

added). When she relapses, she "straightway acted in penitence as best she

could...[begging her attendants] to transport her as quickly as they could to the place in

which the holy man was lying in peace, so that through God's mercy she might again

recover her health" (293).

Eadsige, a representative of the institutional church, has an important

conventional role to play as well. He is Swithun's relic custodian, and as such,

constitutes the gatekeeper of the relics, and hence of their *praesentia* and attendant

144

power. His role in maintaining the integrity of Swithun's shrine is made clear by his

response to her physical proximity to the relics: he is appalled. She, a layperson and

member of the community, ought not to be there. He is concerned that by her presence,

the *ecclesia* and its somatic hierarchy has been violated (by *haliwerfolc*). He conveys

this sentiment by accusing her of "presumption" to approach so closely Swithun's

"bones" [*ossa*]. Indeed, her proximity to Swithun's bones is demonstrably Wulfstan's

main concern in this miracle. Because Wulfstan never tells the reader the young

woman's fate, he is able to put the emphasis of the miracle squarely on her physical

location within the shrine's inner sanctuary, and not on her own body or circumstances.

He thereby foregrounds the physical realities experienced by pilgrims at the shrine, and

even offers an implicit critique of Eadsige's harsh response. In the tenth century, then,

the accessibility of shrines appears as a literary concern, even for those writers who, like

Wulfstan, are trying to promote a particular saint. In this case, Wulfstan demonstrates

that the supplicant, presented time and again as desiring to be close to the relics in order

to attain healing, or even simply to experience material contact with divine grace, is in

fact often prevented from approaching the shrine too closely. Wulfstan's characterization

holds true for most depictions of supplicants, pilgrims and their (expected) behavior at

any given shrine. It especially holds true for the knights of the Grail Quest, whose

respective virtue, penitence and perfection determines whether they are to have any

access to (whether they are able to see) the Grail at all. In the context of relic discourse,

Malory's knights play the conventional role of the supplicant or pilgrim layperson, whose

contact with the material holy is carefully regulated.

"Eagerness for Encounter"[17]: The Sangreal as Occluded Relic

> Through all its manifestations in medieval literature, the Grail itself remains [...] shrouded in the veil of allegory. We are presented with detailed descriptions of its various epiphanies, yet a clear perception of its actual substance remains elusive. Indeed, the crucial question, 'what is the Grail?', must be addressed.
> ~Anne Marie D'Arcy, *Wisdom and the Grail*

To be sure, the Sangreal in Malory is "shrouded in allegory," and D'Arcy's question—"what is the Grail?"—cannot be answered simply or definitively.[18] It is read, variously, as representative of a hermeneutic system, as a Eucharistic vessel or as the Eucharist itself, as pagan and ritualistic, or even as mimetic of the knightly body.[19] I have no wish to limit the Grail to one interpretation, nor to discount these valid and interesting readings of its significance. However, because scholars tend to refer to the Grail only casually as a relic, an entire interpretative system (relic discourse) has been overlooked in readings of Malory's Quest.[20] It is my contention that the ideological discourse surrounding the Grail in *Le Morte D'arthur* meets almost every criterion of

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[17] Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* (86). I am grateful to Lisa J. Kiser for her suggestions and guidance on my treatment of Malory.

[18] Fanni Bogdanow also comments, "there is no consensus of opinion as to the interpretation either of the Grail or the overall meaning of the *Queste*" (23). D'Arcy, who is concerned with the concept of the vessel, provides a useful overview of Grail scholarship (22-28). See also Tiller (84) and Kraemer (2-13). Much of this scholarship has to do with whether Malory has foregrounded the chivalric romance or the religious Quest in his translation of the French text. See Benson, Ihle and Mahoney for this discussion.

[19] Tiller's considers the Sangreal as representative of a "desire for disclosure" that is "more than a knight's [...] Quest for the true vision of the Grail" (83). Tiller argues that this desire to see and failure to do so is representative of a hermeneutic system. His argument is compelling, but overlooks in its rhetorical focus the very real, material, *but inaccessible* quality of actual relics and shrines, and the correspondence between these shrines and the inaccessibility of the Grail. Tiller's closing statement—"Readers finally have to wonder, after the short-lived vision of the Grail, *if what we have seen beneath the 'precious covering' is anything more than another cover*" (93; emphasis added)—is hence, given the elaborate canopies that covered reliquaries (which covered the relics), more astute than his argument allows. Other readings of the Grail have focused on Malory's recuperation of Lancelot over the French version (Whitworth *passim*); the Grail as Eucharistic vessel (Mann 206; Ihle 41, 43; D'Arcy 173, 322-31); as mimetic (Mann 208); as Eucharist (Anitchkof; Pauphilet 21-22; Rubin 139-42); and as pagan and ritualistic (Weston, *passim*).

[20] See Pauphilet (22). Lagorio, in her discussion of Joseph of Arimathea and Glastonbury, calls the Precious Blood relics the "most prized relic[s] of Christ's Passion and Death; and monasteries that possessed it, such as Hailes in England and Fécamp in France, not only enjoyed sanctity and fame, but also a lucrative pilgrimage business" ("Legend" 67). Riddy and Lagorio both refer to the Grail as a reliquary ("Glastonbury" 284, "Vita" 54, 61), and Riddy specifies that it is John of Glastonbury who renders the Grail as "a reliquary rather than the cup of the Last Supper" (284). Lagorio cites Robert de Boron and the *Estoire* as treating the Grail as a reliquary of the Precious Blood ("Vita" 62). See also Matarasso ("Introduction" 12-13).

relic discourse. Relic discourse, for example, requires that the relic be inaccessible, even

invisible, and it also requires that only certain supplicants be virtuous enough to access

the relic or experience a miracle. So, too, the Grail in Malory is usually not-visible, if not

fully invisible, and only Galahad, Percival and Bors are able to access it fully.[21]

Certainly this inaccessibility should also be considered representative of the denial of the

Eucharistic blood to the lay faithful,[22] but especially given Joseph of Arimathea's role as

the Grail's relic custodian (on which more below), it strikes me as even more crucial to

consider the Grail as a relic of the holy blood. One way to parse out the Grail-allegory is

to think about the Grail as a relic, the knights as supplicants, and those who control

access to the Grail and to various "relics" in this section of the *Morte* as relic custodians.

To imagine the Grail as a relic may seem unnecessary in light of the fact that it is

so often envisioned by scholars as another religious object of devotion: the Eucharist.

The Grail as Eucharist may seem an especially compelling reading given that, at the

climax of the Grail quest, the Grail knights—Galahad, Percival and Bors and the nine

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[21] D'Arcy points out that the Grail's invisibility is unique to Malory. She does not, however, connect this invisibility to a discussion of relics and their inaccessibility to most pilgrims, though she does acknowledge that Gawain is not necessarily referring to the Mass in his frustration at not being able to see the Grail (322-23). See also the discussion of Gawain, below. Riddy identifies the Grail Quest as one of "exclusion rather than participation," though she ascribes this characteristic of the Quest only to the Eucharist (*Malory* 129-30). D'Arcy concurs that the truth of the Grail, "though veiled and inaccessible [...] is the Real Presence in the Eucharist," and that Malory figures the Grail as covered because "the Mass cup was denied him" (327).

[22] On the denial of the cup to the lay faithful—and the response of some groups, such as the Utraquists, who wanted access to both Eucharistic species—see Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* (34, 92-95); see also Vincent, *The Holy Blood* (120-23). D'Arcy (327-29) and Riddy, *Malory* (135) both relate the inaccessibility of the Grail to the "laity's sense of exclusion from the sacrament" (D'Arcy 327). Riddy is surely right in her observation that "The emphasis throughout the quest is on exclusion rather than participation and on isolation rather than community" (*Malory* 129-30). It seems clear to me, however, that while the Grail can fruitfully be considered to contain the Eucharistic blood of Christ, its history as a carefully guarded blood relic better explains the behavior of the knights and of the Grail's various relic custodians. The Grail as blood relic makes even better sense in light of the prevalence of blood relic cults at houses of Cistercian nuns in Germany (since Cistercians were the first responsible for writing the Grail quest). On the Cistercian blood cults, see Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* (52-68, 249).

others (from Gaul, Ireland and Denmark)—all experience a vision of the Christ-child at the moment of consecration:

> And than the bysshop [Joseph of Arimathea] made sembleaunte as thoughe he wolde have gone to the sakeryng of a masse, and than he toke an obley which was made in lyknesse of brede. And at the lyftyng up there cam a vigoure in lyknesse of a chylde, and the vysayge was as rede and as bryght os ony fyre, and smote hymselff into the brede, that all they saw hit that the brede was fourmed of a fleyshely man. And than he put hit into the holy vessel agayne, and than he ded that longed to a preste to do masse. (II.1029)

Two decisive factors in this scene should deter us from too readily reading the Grail itself as Eucharist, however. First, the miraculous vision of the Christ-child is associated with the Host (the "obley" or "brede"), not with the chalice. Though medieval doctrines of concomitance were clear in their assertions that the Host contained the blood, as well as the body, of Christ, medieval debates surrounding lay access to the Holy Blood reveal that not everyone readily accepted concomitance as sufficient justification for denying the Blood to the laity.[23] Moreover, Malory's Grail is specifically associated with Christ's wonder-working blood, spilled at the crucifixion.[24]

Second, medieval theories of Eucharistic visions were generally associated with the Host and not with the Holy Blood; such limitations were undoubtedly the result, at least in part, of limited lay access to the blood. The *locus classicus* for this kind of miracle is, of course, the Gregorymass, which was discussed and depicted from the thirteenth century onwards.[25] However, these Eucharistic visions were often regarded skeptically by medieval theologians (particularly Dominicans such as Thomas Aquinas or

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[23] On concomitance, see Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* (92-96); see also Zika (38 n. 41). On lay access to the chalice, see above, n. 22.

[24] See D'Arcy (330-35). The bleeding Christ was, moreover, typically associated not with the Eucharist, but with relic cults of the Precious Blood (Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* 12).

[25] See Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* (11-12).

Nicholas of Cusa), who insisted that what the vision presented was not actually there, but actually placed the viewer at two removes from the body and blood of Christ (Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* 86-91). As Bynum summarizes,

> The viewer does not, in a eucharistic vision, see 'what is really there' but sees something at two removes so to speak rather than one, because he sees neither the unseeable substance nor the seeable accidents but an appearance substituted by God for the accidents in order to indicate the unseeable substance beneath. (88)

Hence, the vision in Malory is actually less indicative of the privileged access that the knights have to the Grail than their ability to see the Grail itself (and not some vision of the bleeding Christ). That is to say, their vision is no more privileged than many lay and clerical visions of the Host as transformed—and such visions were not understood to provide more intimate access to the body and blood of Christ, which were figured as being concealed both by the Host itself, and then again by the vision. Most importantly of all, however, the Grail knights' vision of the Christ-child is, again, tied up in the Host, not in the chalice, with all its attendant problems of access and exclusion.

Readings that identify the Grail as Eucharist are hence particularly problematic, conflating as they do the moment of consecration and/or the Host with a blood-relic of Christ, examples of which were still in existence (at Hailes and Westminster, for example) when Malory was writing.[26] As evidence for the Grail as Eucharist, Riddy

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[26] Pauphilet refers to the Grail as relic *and* Eucharist: "Les grandes scènes de Corbenic et surtout de Sarras peuvent donner à pense que le [mystère du] Graal est, sous l'apparence particulière d'une relique [...] n'est autre que celui même de l'Eucharistie (The scenes in Corbenic and throughout Sarras give us the sense that the mystery of the Grail is, under the guise of a relic, nothing other than that of the Eucharist)" (22). D'Arcy, quoting this section of Pauphilet's argument, seems to agree, citing the "concept of the eucharist itself as a relic" (173, 322-32). She refers only to Geary and Bynum on this point, neither of whom adequately explores the complex *differences* between relics and the Eucharist—difference that are as crucial as the similarities between these two centerpieces of medieval devotion. Bynum implicitly asserts this position at length in *Wonderful Blood*, wherein she details many of the theological debates that regarded relics of the Holy Blood as problematic (99-111); elsewhere, however, Bynum re-asserts Snoek's and others' idea that, because the Eucharist and relics were treated similarly, they were the same (77, 91).

quotes the knight who is healed while Lancelot sleeps: " 'Fayre swete Lorde whych ys

here within the holy vessell' " (qtd *Malory* 132). It need only be remembered that relics

were always treated as the location of the saint whose remains they were—in this case, of

Jesus Christ Himself—to contextualize the knight's comment and to correct Riddy's

misreading. That is, in contrast to Riddy's assumption, the knight is not referring to the

vessel as though it contained the Eucharistic mystery, but to it as a container for a blood-

relic of Jesus Christ.[27] Moreover, the Grail is consistently described in terms consonant

with relics (and not consonant with the Eucharist). When it appears, it is accompanied by

"suche a savour as all the spycery of the worlde had bene there" (II.793). Incorrupt

Though Bynum nowhere cites him, Thiofrid's attitude to relics and to the Eucharist underscores the
distinction between relics and the Host or the chalice. Though Thiofrid, who does not accept blood relics
as legitimate, compares the veiling of the Eucharist to a reliquary, he never identifies the Eucharist as a
relic (see chapter two, 54-66). Rubin in fact cites Geary to argue that the Eucharist was *different from*, not
the same as, relics (341-2, 348). In fact, as early as the tenth century, St Walburgh is said to have appeared
at Cluny to object to her relics being placed on "the Lord's altar," a place reserved for the consecrated Host
(Crook, *The Architectural Setting* 68; Geary, *Furta Sacra* 25; Herrmann-Mascard 173). Moreover, Nilson
explains that, in many cases when relics were said to be placed *super* or *supra altare,* beyond rather than
'above' or 'on' is meant. For example, "Dugdale referred to Erkenwald's shrine 'above the high altar,'
meaning beyond the reredos" (*Cathedral Shrines* 65). See also Nilson *Cathedral Shrines* (66-68). That the
practice of displaying reliquaries on altars occasionally persisted should not be seen to indicate that relics
and the Eucharist were thought to be the same thing (Crook, *The Architectural Setting* 68). Neither should
Snoek's categorical similarities, which include miracles in which the Eucharist and relics fight fire, be
accepted as absolute evidence that the Eucharist was regarded as a " 'relic,' unique in as far as it was the
most precious as the 'body of Christ,' but alienated from its sacramental function and meaning" (Snoek
386). The division between relics and the Eucharist is incredibly complex, and I do not wish to simplify it.
Nevertheless, the Grail ought not so easily be considered relic *and* Eucharist without, at the very least,
acknowledging the complex debates about whether blood relics of Christ could even exist—and without
also acknowledging that, very often, once the Eucharist was transformed into a blood relic, it was no longer
exactly considered to be the Eucharist—priests were frequently expected to consecrate another Host in its
place (Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* 90-92). See also Dinzelbacher, "Die 'Realpräsenz' der Heiligen"; Ferrari,
"Lemmata Sanctorum" (222-24); Rubenstein, *Guibert of Nogent* (138-41) and "Liturgy against History"
(294).

[27] In fact, there was a relic custodian for the blood relic at Hailes (Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* 130). Lagorio
associates Joseph of Arimathea with the legend of a pious Jew who cared for blood relics of Christ: "The
well-established tradition of the relic of the Precious Blood at the Abbey of Hailes was supported by an
apocryphal account of a pious Jew who preserved the blood of Christ" ("Legend" 65). She also identifies
Joseph as the "collector and preserver of the Precious Blood" and cites the "growth of the Cult of the
Precious Blood" as a reason for Joseph's importance as Grail-keeper ("Vita" 61, 62-64). The Grail's
association with relics of the Precious Blood is attested by Robert Grosseteste's account of the "translation
of a Precious Blood relic to England in 1247" (67). See D'Arcy (331-35). Launcelot at one point actually
refers to the Grail as "the holy bloode" (II.896). See Vincent and Bynum more generally on the importance
of the Holy Blood as relic.

saints' bodies were often said to smell of spices, and although scholars have occasionally

explained this smell as a by-product of embalming, or even of later stages of bodily

decay, the lovely odor emitted by holy bodies is one of the most important conventional

motifs in hagiography.[28] It is not to be missed that the Grail here is described in exactly

the same terms, for holy relics were said not only to smell pleasant, but also to smell of

spices.[29] The Grail is furthermore presented as "the rychyst thynge that ony man hath

lyvynge" (II.793). Holy bodies are similarly described as, if not the rich*est* things, than at

least as exceedingly valuable, as even more valuable than gems and gold.[30]

Its apparition to the knights of the Table Round at Camelot offers the possibility

not only of reading the Grail as a relic, but also of reading the knights as supplicants

whose vision is, in the presence of a relic, useless. In this instance, the Grail is, for the

most part, occluded:

> In the myddys of the blast [of thunder] entyrde a sonnebeame, more clerer by
> seven tymys than ever they saw day, and all they were alyghted of the grace of the
> Holy Goste. *Than began every knyght to beholde other, and eyther saw other, by
> their semyng, fayrer than ever they were before.* Natforthan there was no knyght

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[28] See Mirk (244), and Nilson (*Cathedral Shrines* 28-29). Nilson comments on the "odor of sanctity" as
well as on possible scientific reasons for incorruptibility: "It is possible that the natural chemical by-
products of long term decomposition can have a sweet and not unpleasant smell" (29). I am less interested
in whether these attributes of saintly bodies can be explained—either in scientific or miraculous terms—
and more concerned with their consistent appearance as conventions of relic discourse, as assertions of the
way a body can be preserved if it is adequately seen to be in line with institutional structure. See also
Bynum, "Bodily Miracles" (70); and Hermann-Mascard (68-69).
[29] See Hahn (1079). Later, when the Grail appears to Bors, it is said that "there was such a savour as all the
spicery in the world had been there" (615).
[30] For a discussion of saints' relics referred to as treasure, or *thesauri*, see chapter five, "The Pardoner's
Tale and Its 'Tresor.' " Nilson discusses those saints whose bodies were depicted as having monetary
value (17-18). He cites references to SS Thomas of Canterbury, Edward the Confessor and Erkenwald as
well, of whom Arcoid exclaims, "Someone who shines forth so gloriously in the heavens should surely not
be buried in such a foul garment as the earth" (trans. Whatley 119-20). Swithun's remains are described
similarly, and are said to be "such mighty treasures full of divine healing-power that, whatever mass of
silver, shining gems or gold is buried in all the earth, it will become thoroughly trivial in the sight of men
and grow wholly cheap once they have seen the beauty of my relics" (trans. Lapidge 417). As Hahn
argues, not only was "ornament itself [...] perceived as a mark of the sacred," but also "the saint without
such accoutrements was deemed unworthy of veneration" (1083). Nevertheless, such metaphors were often
used to justify ornate reliquaries and the occlusion of the relics they contained (see chapter two, 54-66).

that myght speke one worde a grete whyle, and so they loked every man on other as they had been doome.

> *Than entird into the halle the Holy Grayle coverde with whyght samyte, but there was none that myght se hit nother whom that bare hit.* And there was all the halle fulfylled with good odoures, and every knyght had such metis and drynkes as he beste loved in thys worlde.
>
> And whan the Holy Grayle had bene borne thorow the hall, than the holy vessell departed suddeynly, that they wyst nat where hit becam. Than had they all breth to speke. (865; emphasis added)

This passage calls attention to the importance of vision. Regardless of their relative moral states (Galahad, for example, is present), no knight can, at this point, see the Grail, which is completely concealed. Just as the reliquaries and shrines of medieval English cathedrals were entirely obscured by their architecture as well as by the canopies (of silk and, in the case of the cover for the *feretrum*, of wood),[31] the Grail is here covered "with white samite." At this point, the knights may almost be imagined to be waiting in the nave of a cathedral—from which no pilgrim, no matter how prestigious, could have seen the shrine he or she sought—to catch a glimpse of the relic. This hidden quality of the Grail will inform every subsequent appearance of the holy vessel in the *Morte*—except, that is, in its later appearances to (the clerically figured) Galahad, Percival and Bors.

Gawain is not satisfied with this encounter with the Grail, and his objection to its occlusion motivates the Quest for the Sangreal:

> "But one thyng begyled us, *that we myght nat se the Holy Grayle: hit was so preciously coverde*. Wherefore I woll make here a vow that to-morne, withoute longer abydynge, I shall laboure in the queste of the Sankgreall, and that I shall holde me oute a twelve-month and a day or more if nede be, and never shall I returne unto the courte agayne *tylle I have sene hit more opynly than hit hath bene shewed here*." (866; emphasis added)

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[31] See Nilson (40-41, 51).

Gawain's motive is a curious one.[32] He does not seek to be healed, nor to fulfill a

penitential vow, nor even to go on holiday. Instead, he claims only to want to *see* the

Grail. According to what Gawain says, he is entirely uninterested in the Grail's

thaumaturgic power. (This power has already been introduced to the reader in the

healing miracles of Lancelot, Percival and Ector.)[33] Most interesting of all, however, is

that there is no objection to Gawain's desire. That is, in spite of the Grail's obvious

power to act as a vehicle for healing grace, it seems to come as no surprise that Gawain—

and indeed, the other knights who embark on the Grail Quest—is most concerned with

whether he can see it. Vision, not healing, is figured as the ultimate goal of the knights

who pursue the Grail. Assuming this to have been a goal of many medieval pilgrims, not

all of whom would have been diseased supplicants, it is easy to imagine that thwarted

expectations at an occluded shrine would have been met with a response very like

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[32] Mann argues that Gawain's desire to see the Grail reflects "the same impulse towards closeness that characterizes knightly engagement in adventure elsewhere" (211). It strikes me, however, that there is more than knightly convention at work in Gawain's sentiments. Mann's claim treats the Grail as though it were the object of an ordinary Quest—and clearly, as Arthur's dismay should indicate, the Quest for the Sangreal is anything but ordinary. Furthermore, Gawain's desire to see the Grail can be read as a manifestation of curiosity—a trait not to be found in devout pilgrims (Webb, *Medieval European* 45, Zacher *passim*). Zacher cites St Augustine of Hippo's association between curiosity and "lust of the eyes" or "*concupiscentia oculorum*": *Curiositas* is "the 'desire—cloaked under the name of knowledge and science—not for fleshly enjoyment, but for gaining personal experience through the flesh' " (21-22). Zacher explains that this is "more complicated than lust of the flesh [...] because it begins as an appetite of the body, *specifically of the eye*, but culminates as an affliction of the mind" (22; emphasis added). Augustine believed that "the curious eye and mind take delight in any experience, pleasurable or not" (22). Vision is hence presented as a dangerous and undesirable sense, though one that Zacher associates with relics only in passing. This is especially unfortunate, since Augustine also railed against *concupiscentia oculorum* when he delineated appropriate behavior at martyrs' shrines, explaining that venerators ought to celebrate the martyr's relics inwardly, rejecting the "love of the world," particularly "the lust of the flesh [...] and the lust of the eyes" (qtd Miller 29). Miller explains that "redirecting the lust of the eyes was of paramount importance" (29). Gawain's desire to see the Grail could also be representative of medieval desire to access the chalice—though, of course, Gawain's determination is less readily accorded with the later medieval so-called frenzy to see the consecration of the Host (Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* 87; and Zika 30-31), since the Grail is not the "ostery." See above, n. 22.
[33] Malory (I.85, II.816-817, 824, 828).

Gawain's at Camelot: why am I prevented from seeing this shrine or relic?[34] Such a

question is even more meaningful given that, first, Malory's Grail, unlike that of the

French *Queste*, is invisible[35]; and second, that some privileged knights are eventually able

to see it. Malory thereby sets forth a hierarchical equation, one that carefully sets apart

institutional and clerical structure from the *haliwerfolc* based on vision and access.

Gawain, Lancelot and Galahad: the Devaluing of Communitas[36]

Ah lords, said [the good man], ye be welcome; now wot I well ye be the good knights the which shall bring
the Sangreal to an end; for ye be they unto whom Our Lord shall shew great secrets.
~a priest speaks to Galahad, Percival and Bors

That the grail could not be seen by the eyes of sinners, like the Blood of Hailes, was evidently for Malory
an important sign of its holiness.
~Anne Marie D'Arcy, *Wisdom and the Grail*

Galahad's position in the Quest as über-knight affirms the operation of a kind of

hierarchical discourse in the Grail Quest. This discourse—commensurate with the

conventions of relic discourse—explains the relative, subordinate positions of Percival

and Bors in the triad who achieve the Grail. Galahad is figured as perfect; Percival as

nearly so; Bors as virtuous but, as in Gawain's vision, spotted by his solitary sexual

encounter with a woman. (Their hierarchical relationship is reflected by their respective

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[34] One miracle of St Winifred, recorded in Mirk, attests to the importance of sight. In this miracle, a dumb
man is cured when, at the celebrations for Winifred's feast day, "Seynt Wenefryd come to hym, and bad
hym drynke of þe water þat her bonys wern waschyn yn, and he schuld be hole of his spech and of anoþer
euyl þat he had" (*Festial* 181). Having been healed, the man explains that "he come not thydyr for non
odyr thyng, *but only forto se þe solempnite*" (182; emphasis added). This statement is clearly meant to
establish the man's virtue, but I would also suggest that his impulse—to *see* what is going on—is critically
important.
[35] "When we compare the Pentecostal event in the *Sankgreal* to that in the *Queste*, it is not true that the
'details of the incident are the same [...],' since Malory makes two significant changes. First, *his grail is
invisible*" (D'Arcy 320-21; emphasis added). Second, "it is 'carried invisibly' " (321). It is crucial that the
changes Malory makes have to do with vision. D'Arcy clarifies that these alterations are not present in any
other version of the Grail Quest, citing the *Lorgaireacht* as well as Hardyng's *Chronicle*.
[36] For scholarly approaches to "communitas" and "structure," see chapter one, "Approaches to Medieval
Relic Cults." Here, the term functions to illustrate Turner's paradigm as imperfectly applying to the
dynamics of a relic cult, since "communitas" in Malory repeatedly functions to delineate hierarchical
differences between those who have access to relics and those who do not.

154

ends: Galahad's soul is transported to heaven; Percival first becomes a hermit and then

dies as well; Bors, the most worldly of the three, is also the only one to return to

Camelot.) Galahad's and Percival's virginity (and Bors' near-virginity) express more

than metaphorical wholeness, as Riddy argues (*Malory* 117-18). Instead, it is clear that

virginity is, somehow, a requisite quality of the structural elite—a quality that, not

coincidentally, corresponds to that of the clergy of the later Middle Ages.[37] In their

chastity, that is, Galahad, Percival and Bors can be thought to represent the similarly

chaste and contemplative monks, or even bishops, whose job it was to care for relics.

This kind of requirement is perhaps no surprise given that Cistercians are thought to have

composed the Grail Quest.[38] However, chastity and hierarchy can be seen to operate in

insidious ways in the Grail Quest, as markers of those members of the ecclesiastical elite

whose positions of power—and not necessarily of virtue, though the knights are so

presented here—allow them access to relics.[39] The possibility of living such a life of

celibacy-clergy-structure is denied to those knights whose worldliness keeps them from

the Grail, and implicitly denied to (lay) readers of Malory's text.

Galahad's privileged status as the holiest of the three Grail knights is beyond

question. Unlike every other knight on the Grail Quest, Galahad has no need for

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[37] Kennedy comments, "The *Queste* condemns the sinful earthly chivalry of Arthur's court and places it in opposition to the spiritual chivalry of the three Grail knights, Galahad, Percival and Bors" (265). Malory's presentation of his Grail knights is in keeping with this tradition.

[38] See D'Arcy (27-29, 75-164), Matarasso ("Introduction" 20-21) and Pauphilet (75-83 and *passim*). I think it cannot be coincidental that Bernard of Clairvaux also wrote extensively against *curiositas* (Zacher 23-27 and Gilson 155). Bernard "personifies curiosity with the portrait of a monk who wanders with inquisitive eyes"; it "is through the eyes, then that the world and sin enter the mind" (Zacher 25). On Cistercian blood relic cults, see above, n. 22.

[39] See Nilson (*Cathedral Shrines* 24-25). Galahad's ancestry in fact ensures his success: "Throughout the Estoire, a prophetic leitmotif foretells how the last of Joseph's descendants, Galahad, will not only be the best knight in the world, coming from the high lineage of King David and Joseph of Arimathea, but alone will achieve the quest of the Holy Grail" (qtd Lagorio "Vita" 56). See also Lagorio ("Vita" 67).

sacramental absolution.[40] He is consistently described in saintly terms—"he worchith all by myracle," according to the Queen of the Waste Land (II.906), and is the only one of the three Grail knights to do so. He heals Evelake, for example, who has lain in blindness and torment for three-hundred years because he dared approach the Grail too closely (II.1031).[41] He is said to calm the boiling water of a well—the "hete myght nat abyde hys pure virginité" (II.1025)—and to quell the torment of one of his ancestors, who suffers in a fiery tomb because he sinned against Joseph of Arimathea (II.1026). The newly calmed well is "takyn in the contrey for a miracle, and so ever afftir was hit called Galahaddis Welle" (II.1026). Galahad even heals a cripple once he arrives in Sarras, simply by telling him to "aryse up and shew thy good wyll!" (II.1033). He is time and again figured as elevated even beyond Bors and Percival; he is even said to be able, like many saints in hagiography, to choose the time of his death. In this way, just as hagiographers present their saints as *imitatores Christi*, Malory presents Lancelot's son as very similar to the holy body he seeks.[42] It is no surprise that Galahad's body is figured as virginal, as more spiritual than worldly, and so as more like a holy body than a regular body. He is thereby presented as a perfect representative of the life of structure, a life of austerity, privation and privilege. As a result, he can legitimately access the Grail.

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[40] At the first hermitage, in fact, Galahad is not required to confess and is instructed to go on an adventure (Malory II.982-83)—something that Gawain is told he cannot do because of his sin. Galahad is also called "the holy knyght" (II.886).

[41] Earlier in the Grail Quest, a cleric explains Evelake's condition to Percival:

> Ever he was bysy to be thereas the Sankgreall was. And on a tyme he nyghed hit so nyghe that Oure Lorde was displeased with hym, but ever he folowed hit more and more *tyll God stroke hym allmoste blynde*. Than thys kynge cryed mercy and seyde,
>
> 'Fayre Lorde, lat me never dye tyll the good knyght of my blood of the nyneth degré be com, that I may se hym opynly that shall encheve the Sankgreall, and that I myght kysse hym.'
> (II.908; emphasis added)

Interestingly, Galahad is here treated as a substitute for the relic that Evelake cannot approach.

[42] For a very general discussion of hagiographical conventions in Malory, see Kraemer. See also Lagorio, "Vita."

The difficulty of attaining Galahad's (or even Percival's or Bors') status is illustrated by Lancelot's penance and by his ultimate failure to achieve the Grail perfectly. Though he has the requisite characteristics of a successful pilgrim—faith and penance among them—Lancelot is never able to compensate for his worldly and fleshly sins. The inadequacy of Lancelot's penitence belies the suggestion, throughout the Quest, that confession is the single most important qualification to accessing the Grail.[43] Only those knights who have been chosen, *a priori*, as the Grail knights, are able to make confession count. Bors, for example, makes a successful confession once he has been instructed by a hermit that "shall none attayne hit [the Sangreal] but by clennes, that ys pure confession" (II.955). Bors complies, and goes with the hermit to a chapel where "he was clene confessed" and instructed not to eat meat and to wear a "scarlet cote" as penance (II.955). Bors, however, has only sinned once, as Malory repeatedly reminds the reader. Lancelot is another case altogether, and Nacien informs even Gawain that though Lancelot "hath takyn upon hym to forsake synne," he "ys nat stable" (II.948). Lancelot's inability to see the Grail can thus be seen to demonstrate that, in spite of Nacien's assertion, confession by itself is not enough. Celibacy in particular is the prerequisite for seeing the Sangreal, even for those who are willing to repent.[44]

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[43] As D'Arcy points out, "Malory places his emphasis squarely on Lancelot's need to do penance" (334): " 'I go, sir, to seke the adventures of the Sankgreall.' 'Well,' seyde he, 'seke ye hit ye may well, but thoughe hit were here ye shall have no power to se hit, no more than a blynde man that sholde se a bryght swerde. [...] Were ye confessed synne ye entred into the quest of the Sankgreall?' " (II.927)

[44] When Percival is healed by the Sangreal, and before the onset of the Quest, he has a "glemerynge of the vessell and of the mayden that bare hit, for he was a parfyte mayden" (II.816). Ector, however, who is with Percival at the time, does not see the Grail at all, and observes, "Hit may nat be sene [...] but yff hit be by a parfyte man" (816). Moreover, of the three who achieve the Grail, Galahad, Percival and Bors, Merlin had prophesied that "the two sholde be maydyns and the thirde sholde be chaste" (906). See also (933-35, 945-49).

As a result, Lancelot's affair with Guenevere (surely not his only sin) is the focal

point of the hermits who hear his confession. Because of his lascivious desire for a

woman, Lancelot is usually characterized as too worldly to pursue something as

spiritual—if, in its way, material—as the Grail. Lancelot's experiences with the Grail,

once he has embarked on the Grail Quest, bear out the hermits' assessment of his

condition. In the first of these, Lancelot is sleeping by a stone cross when a sick knight,

borne on a litter, is healed by the holy vessel. Lancelot cannot see the Grail; he is so

overcome by sin that he cannot even fully wake:

> With that sir Launcelot sye the candyllstyk with the six tapirs cam before the
> crosse, and he saw nobody that brought hit. Also there cam a table of sylver and
> the holy vessell of the Sankgreall which sir Launcelot had sene toforetyme in
> kynge Pescheors house. [...] So whan the holy vessell had bene there a grete
> whyle hit went unto the chapell with the chaundeler and the lyght, so that sir
> Launcelot wyst nat where hit was becom; for he was overtakyn with synne, that
> he had no power to ryse agayne the holy vessell. (II. 894-95)[45]

The healed knight quickly assesses Lancelot's state:

> 'I have mervayle of thys slepyng knyght that he had no power to awake whan
> thys holy vessell was brought hydir.' 'I dare well sey,' seyde the squyre, 'that he
> dwellith in som dedly synne whereof he was never confessed.' (II.895)

In the first place, then, the squire foregrounds confession. In this context, it is evident

that confession is necessary not only to obtain a miracle from a relic, but also to see it,

and even to venerate it (Lancelot cannot move even to do that). The healed knight steals

Lancelot's horse, and when Lancelot wakes he is dismayed and declares himself to be

"moste unhappy of all knyghtes" (895). Unlike Gawain, however, whose self-pity does

not inspire him to persevere, Lancelot identifies his problem:

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[45] Matarasso identifies the wounded knight as Lancelot's "mirror-image," who, unlike Lancelot, "knows
where to turn for healing and is not slow to implore it" (*Redemption* 120).

> 'My synne and my wyckednes hath brought me unto grete dishonoure! For whan
> I sought worldly adventures for worldely desyres I ever encheved them and had
> the bettir in every place, and never was I discomfite in no quarell, were hit ryght
> were hit wronge.' (II.896)

Lancelot here distinguishes between the worldly and the spiritual, and acknowledges his

worldliness. By characterizing Lancelot in this way, Malory sets him in direct contrast

with the spiritual Galahad, but also with the unrepentant, worldly Gawain. Lancelot can

be seen to represent—as it may be imagined did many medieval pilgrims—the mixed life,

both worldly (active) and spiritual (contemplative), but finds that his failure to

correspond perfectly to the model set forth by the structural elite shuts him off from the

relic he seeks.[46] Having realized his position, Lancelot asks to be shriven of his sexual

trespass when he arrives at a hermitage.

The hermit whom Lancelot meets is quick to affirm Lancelot's self-assessment,

allowing that while Lancelot is the best knight where worldly pursuits are concerned, his

sin is great:

> 'And for youre presumpcion to take uppon you in dedely synne for to be in Hys
> presence, where Hys fleyssh and Hys blood was, which caused you ye myght nat
> se hyt with youre worldely yen, for He woll nat appere where such synners bene.'
> (II.896)

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[46] Tiller observes that Lancelot's "mode of reading [...] incorporates both the spiritual and the secular" (88).
Riddy identifies Lancelot's character in Malory as influenced by "a revaluation of the *vita activa*" (*Malory*
123). To her view, he represents a middle way: "Gawain and Lionel can be seen as the sinners who will
not amend their ways, Lancelot is associated with penitence and active virtue, and Galahad, Bors and
Percival with different levels of contemplation" (125). The devaluation of the active life is made clear by
Hilton in a passage that Riddy cites:
> Actyf lyfe...longeþ to worldly men and wymmen whuch are lewed, fleschly & boistous in
> knowyng of gostly occupacion, ffor þei fele no sauour ne deuocion be feruour of loue as oþur men
> don, þei can no skile of hit, and ȝit neuerþeles þei han...desyre for to plese god & for to come to
> heuene, & a good wille to heore euencristne. (qtd. 127)
It is clear, then, both by Malory's portrayal of Gawain, Lancelot and Galahad, that the contemplative is
valued over the active. See also D'Arcy (31-74). I would take this one step further, and notice that the
contemplative is associated with structure, hierarchy and virginity in this text. Those who inhabit the
undifferentiated world of *communitas* and sexual expression, that is, have no place in the Grail Quest, nor
hope of achieving it.

This hermit, too, emphasizes the correspondence between worldliness, sin, and inability

to see the Sangreal. Lancelot is in this respect no different from any of the "black"

knights of the Round Table, none of whom were able clearly to view the Grail in Camelot

(II.933-35, 945-49). Lancelot confesses and agrees to do penance. Nevertheless,

confession will not prove to be enough to purify Lancelot, whose adulterous affair with

the queen, according to the hermit, has tainted him beyond measure. This much is

confirmed by the next hermit's response to Lancelot:

> 'Well,' seyde he, 'seke ye hit ye may well, but thoughe hit were here ye shall
> have no power to se hit, no more than a blynde man that sholde se a bryght
> swerde. And that ys longe on youre synne, and ellys ye were more abeler than
> ony man lyvynge.' (II.927)

The "good man" imposes still more penance on Lancelot, instructing the long-suffering

knight to avoid eating meat, and to wear a hairshirt for the duration of the Quest.

Lancelot agrees meekly, but in spite of his devotion to asceticism and penance, a

gentlewoman is not much more encouraging about his chances of seeing the Grail. She

allows, "I wote what adventure ye seke, for ye were beforetyme nerar than ye be now,

and yet shall ye se hit more opynly than ever ye dud" (II.928). This is no great promise,

however, and Lancelot's penance clearly cannot put him on the same level as the perfect

supplicant, whose body is depicted as, in the case of Galahad, incidental to his spiritual

Quest (or, as in the cases of Bors and Percival, as something they are able to overcome).

As in *miracula* that underscore the difference between holy bodies and lay bodies—the

difference, to some degree, between structure and *communitas*, between the white knights

and the black knights whose sin is said to prevent them from approaching the Grail—

Lancelot's state emphasizes the difference between the penitential pilgrim and the

member of the structural elite, whose status as much as his virtue enables him to access, and even serve as a mediator for, relics.[47] Those knights, such as Gawain, who refuse even penitence have no hope of success.

Of all the knights on the Quest, save perhaps Lionel, Malory presents Gawain as the most likely to fail. Of the individual knights whose adventures Malory narrates, in fact, Gawain is figured as the most sinful and unwilling to repent, and also, fittingly, as the most headstrong and the most willing to give up the Quest at the first signs of failure (and boredom). He repeatedly commits murder, and refuses confession at every opportunity. Not coincidentally, he is the one to complain that the Grail is "coverde" when it appears at Camelot, and he even identifies the Grail's occlusion as a moment of deception: "one thyng begyled us, that we myght nat se the Holy Grayle: hit was so preciously coverde" (II.866). It seems to me unlikely that Gawain, who objects so vociferously to the Grail's covering, is by chance the knight to fail the Quest most utterly. Moreover, most of what Gawain does is misguided; it may be inferred that his frustration at not being able to view the Grail is similarly misguided and worldly (he wants to see it *physically*), and hence sinful. Paradoxically, his desire and as his failure to see the Grail can both be seen as an indication of his sin—as well as a moment representative of censure of the other knights at Camelot, most of whom are later identified in visions as "black" and ridden with their own sin.[48] By inculcating Gawain—a knight who

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[47] Ultimately, this state permits him only partial access to the Grail. When, having seen only a "grete clerenesse" or light, he attempts to approach it, he catches only a glimpse of the Grail (II.1015). He tries to enter the chamber wherein he sees the Grail, and is struck down by "a breeth that hym thought hit was entromedled with fyre, which smote hym so sore in the vysayge that hym thought hit brente hys vysayge. And therewith he felle to the erthe and had no power to aryse" (1016). He looses his sight and hearing, and he is taken for dead. Such are the consequences for members of *communitas* who approach the material holy too closely without permission.
[48] See Malory (II.933-35, 942-43, 945-49).

repeatedly refuses to fulfill the duties of a faithful Christian—with the desire to see a relic, Malory's presentation suggests three possibilities: that pilgrims *should not desire to see*; that those who do so desire actually lessen the possibility that they will; and finally, that those who *will* actually see are somehow distinguished from the everyone else by their exemplarity.

If there were any doubt of Gawain's moral state, or the likelihood that he or any of the "black" knights will complete the Quest, Malory presents a series of hermits and recluses, each of whose prophecies are gloomy and unpromising. These religious assure Gawain that Galahad "woll nat of youre felyship" because Gawain is "wycked and synfull, and [Galahad, by contrast] ys full blyssed" (II.890). Gawain, naturally, responds by helping Gareth and Uwaine kill the seven knights of the Castle of Maidens, and refuses to repent when a hermit convicts him of murdering these knights, and of having "lyved myschevously many wyntirs. And Sir Galahad ys a mayde and synned never, and that ys the cause he shall enchyve where he goth that ye nor none suche shall never attayne [...] for ye have used the moste untrewyst lyff that ever I herd knyght lyve" (II.891-92). Gawain gestures to penitence and remorse—"Sir, what penaunce shall I do?" (892)—but does not follow through, commenting, " 'I may do no penaunce, for we knyghtes adventures many tymes suffir grete woo and payne.' 'Well,' seyde the good man, and than he hylde hys pece" (892). Malory renders Gawain's response such that the reader will not miss his pride and sinfulness, nor his casual dismissal of the hermit's advice. If Gawain's own words were not enough (refusing penance is clearly not a good thing), the hermit's disapproving response, to say nothing of his understanding that he

162

will not be able to move Gawain otherwise, illustrates Gawain's disorder: " 'Well,' seyde the good man, and than he hylde hys pece." Gawain goes on to slay Uwaine, and rejects other opportunities to be confessed, as well.

In one of these opportunities, Nacien the hermit explains that confession is a necessary prerequisite of completing the Grail Quest: " 'And the blacke bullis whych seyde, "go we hens," they were tho whych at Pentecoste at the hyghe feste toke uppon hem to go in the queste of the Sankgreall withoute confession' " (II.946).[49] The old hermit could not be more clear: confession (and, presumably, penance) cannot be avoided on the Quest to see the Grail. Those pilgrims who are not confessed—who are, it may be extrapolated, not behaving according to the conventions for a supplicant or pilgrim—are characterized here as black bulls, and elsewhere are specifically said not to be able to see or speak in the presence of the Grail. Importantly, the field of black bulls that Gawain sees is completely homogenous, except for the three virtuous, white bulls that represent Galahad, Percival and Bors. Gawain's vision, then, in spite of the hermit's interpretation, implies that confession will not transform the black bulls into white bulls.[50] Bors, it will be remembered, confesses—but in Gawain's vision, he is still figured as the only white

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[49] For the importance of confession to being granted an indulgence for visiting a shrine, see Nilson, "Medieval Experience" (114), and Vincent "Some Pardoners' Tales (54-55). The author of the *Speculum Sacerdotale* affirms the importance of confession in a sermon focused on penance. There, the laity are given instructions on how to give a good confession—which should under all circumstances be rendered without "excusatorie wordes and colours" (65). Moreover, the sermon connects confession with pilgrimage, which is said not to be profitable "but 3if he absteyne hym fro his vice" (73). It is possible that such emphasis on confession resulted from the Fourth Lateran Council, which imposed yearly confession on the laity (Duffy, *Stripping* 54). See also Rawcliffe (119, 123). Roger of Wendover affirms that supplicants must see a priest who will "hear their confessions and grant absolution *before* they approached the shrine, 'it being sometimes happening that some, their sins...being the cause, are unable perfectly to look upon the said piece, thereby sometimes incurring infirmities of divers sorts' " (qtd. in Rawcliffe 123; emphasis in original).
[50] Nacien confirms that confession is not enough. He describes the benefits of Lancelot's physical penitence (wearing a hairshirt), and makes it clear that the knights will fail if they are "of pore fayth and of wycked beleve," or if they fail in "charité, abstinaunce and trouthe" (II.948). These qualifiers are so general as to explain away with ease any knight who does not achieve the Quest as inherently immoral.

bull with a black spot. Given that, as Turner specifies, *communitas* implies a lack of

differentiation, a kind of homogeneity, and structure heterogeneity and hierarchy, it

seems clear from Gawain's vision not only that he will not complete the Quest, but that

no member of *communitas* (here figured by the homogenized black bulls) will ever be

able to do so.

Gawain's subsequent refusal to be confessed is therefore simultaneously

paramount and immaterial, and he becomes with each passing scene in the *Morte* a kind

of anti-pilgrim. Nacien describes him in the terms that are applied to knights who will

fail the Quest, as a "grete murtherar," an "untrew knyght," and a "synner" (II.948).

Instead of being convicted of his shortcomings, Gawain makes more excuses: " 'Sir,'

seyde sir Gawayne, 'and I had leyser I wolde speke with you, but my felow sir Ector ys

gone and abithe me yondir bynethe the hylle' " (949). Nacien is not so deferential as

Gawain's last hermit, however: " 'Well,' seyde the good man, 'thou were better to be

counceyled' " (949). Nevertheless, Gawain leaves, a failed pilgrim in every respect, and

one who has tired of the pilgrimage itself: " 'Truly,' seyde sir Gawayne, 'I am ny wery of

thys queste, and lothe I am to folow further in straunge contreyes' " (II.942). Gawain's

weariness is the direct result of his sinfulness, which prevents him from encountering any

adventures whatsoever. His exhaustion can also be read as a sign of his lack of

perseverance—another feature that contrasts with those that define good pilgrims.

However, Gawain's own vision indicates that, even if he were penitent and enterprising,

his status as black bull would prevent him from achieving the Grail. Confession is a

paradoxical requirement in the Grail Quest, then, one that is presented as paving the way for a knight's success, but one that does not practically ensure anyone will reach the Grail.

The *Morte* presents a literary contact zone, in which knights compete to speak the language and deploy the discourse of sanctity and penitence in order to access that which relic custodians like Joseph of Arimathea and his descendents—and less directly, the hermits whom Lancelot and Gawain meet on the way—control. Many knights of the Grail Quest are told that they will only be able to achieve the Grail if they behave, in the area of the contact zone, according to the dictates of structure. In spite of this promise, however, the only knights who succeed the ones who are set apart from *communitas* in Gawain's vision of the white and black bulls. Galahad, Percival and Bors are, that is, set above all the other knights at Camelot. They are the most prestigious members of what is supposed to be a society of equal members, but is in fact a hierarchical set-up. Their ability to meet the criteria of the successful supplicant is not, therefore, coincidental. They are *a priori* the best knights; they are not really members of *communitas* at all. In this way, Malory's Grail Quest suggests that access to the world of pilgrimage and relic veneration is dependent on status, prestige and spiritual perfection. It also suggests that the kind of spiritual perfection necessary to access objects of devotion is unattainable for most. Hence, the Grail Quest expresses a tension that is fundamental to relic discourse: the desire of those who have no access to *gain* some kind of access to the holy and privileged *locus* of a relic, coupled with the latent knowledge that they will not be able to achieve this kind of access at all.

Gilbert of Chevening and Joseph of Arimathea: The Affirmation of Structure[51]

And sith, the holy relikis, ech man with his mowith / Kissid, as a goodly monke þe names told & tau3t.

~*The Tale of Beryn*

The likelihood that average pilgrims to Canterbury would have been given any

relics to kiss is, as I have discussed elsewhere, relatively slim. However, these sorts of

"goodly monke[s]" or, at secular cathedrals, canons, were present at every major shrine,

and were generally referred to as *custodes tumuli*, *scrinii*, or *feretri*.[52] These terms have

various translations, including feretrars, shrine-keepers, shrine-wardens, or, as I designate

them here, relic custodians. Relic custodians allowed for the careful surveillance of

pilgrims at a given shrine.[53] As Nilson outlines in his short but useful section on relic

custodians, these particular clerics were responsible for overseeing the daily operation of

the shrine:

> There are several reasons why shrines needed to be incorporated within the
> organisation of a church. The precious metals and gems of the feretrum, not to
> mention the other valuables in and about a shrine, could form a significant
> proportion of a religious community's total wealth and clearly required guarding
> and managing [...] Activities taking place in the feretory chapel also needed
> monitoring and organisation; people had to be found to watch and guide pilgrims,

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[51] Medieval English relic custodians included those at the shrines of Robert Grosseteste and John Dalderby, both bishops of Lincoln, as well as of Hugh of Lincoln. Pilgrimages to Grosseteste's shrine were so common in the late thirteenth century that "for some years the shrine had its own keeper. An ordinance of Bishop Sutton's in 1295 mentions the *custos capitis et feretri beati Hugonis* and the *custos tumbe beati Roberti* [...] The chapter acts show that in 1324 there were keepers of [John Dalderby's] shrine" (Kemp 120). See also Foster (ii.305), Stocker (146), *The Book of John de Schalby* (28) and Cole "Grosseteste" (5). Lesser shrines or relics were often kept in the sacristy and, hence, were cared for not by relic custodians, but by sacristans or treasurers instead (Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* 129). See above, n. 6.

[52] See Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* (130).

[53] I see no reason why Nilson's observation—that "offering money was collected by the shrine custodian and not the chaplain of the tomb" (*Cathedral Shrines* 61)—should be read as an indication that "pilgrims had access to the shrine" (61). The assumption that, simply because relic custodians collected pilgrim offerings, pilgrims were able to access the shrine, is entirely dependent upon relative definitions of "access." If, as I contend here, the most important part of access is vision—and if, as I also contend, pilgrims sought the relics as much as the shrine—they certainly were not permitted access at all. Moreover, Nilson elsewhere notes that access to the shrine "through the choir was generally organised *under the supervision of the shrine-keeper*" ("The Medieval Experience" 100; italics added), and that pilgrims were always supervised (101).

while the ceremonies performed in the shrine chapel required priests to officiate and oversee. (*Cathedral Shrines* 128)

Hence, relic custodians ensured that the shrine was "properly maintained," which included raising funds to build an appropriate shrine, as well as (presumably) cleaning shrines once they were completed (136). Although relic custodians were not always the treasurers for a shrine, they had "authority over shrines" and ensured that the appropriate offerings were made (129).[54] Relic custodians even slept at shrines in order to supervise pilgrims, and likely often watched them from observatory booths above the feretory, two examples of which survive today at Oxford Christ Church (St Frideswide) and St Albans.[55] Many relic custodians, like Gilbert of Chevening or Benedict of Peterborough, also became responsible for recording or presenting evidence of miracles at a given shrine. That relic custodians would keep a record of miracles is unsurprising, since they would have been present at the shrine whenever pilgrims were there. Moreover, they must have understood the importance of accumulating miracles to the livelihood of their parish, particularly as canonization became a formalized and papal event. It is logical that, given the duties that relic custodians typically performed, at least one would be involved in a canonization hearing.

Thomas Cantilupe's canonization investigation took place in London and Hereford from July to November 1307. The miracles recorded in the written record of

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[54] See Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* (105-110). Nilson suggests that at major shrines, "an offering was an indispensable part of any pilgrimage regardless of whether of not a miracle was sought. Although a gift was probably not mandatory, later shrine-keepers no doubt exerted considerable pressure on visitors to pay" (105). Moreover, access to the shrine "through the choir was generally organised under the supervision of the shrine-keeper" (Nilson, "The Medieval Experience" 100), and pilgrims were always supervised (101). Moreover, relic custodians often received their yearly stipend from the shrine offerings (*Cathedral Shrines* 136).
[55] Observatory booths, two examples of which survive today at Oxford Christ Church (St Frideswide) and St Albans, sometimes aided in supervising pilgrims. See Heath (280); Knowles, *The Monastic Order* (481); Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* (52-53, 142); and Webb, *Pilgrimage* (84).

this event are particularly interesting because they introduce a myriad of supplicants, of

course, but also because they introduce a historical relic custodian: Gilbert of Chevening,

who was custodian of St Thomas Cantilupe's shrine in 1287 and possibly later, and canon

of Hereford Cathedral until at least 1307,[56] after which point he disappears from recorded

history. Gilbert provides a fascinating test case of the role of an actual relic custodian in

the official process of declaring someone a saint. For in the hearings, Gilbert is not just

"*custos tumuli*," but also "*procurator*"—that is, the local representative to the papal curial

investigators.[57] He is not only a curator of the shrine, in this case, but a gatekeeper and

advocate for Thomas' sanctity as well. In the person of Gilbert, it can be seen that the

relic custodian could take on enormous hierarchical power. He sometimes speaks for the

supplicants whose miracles are used to make Cantilupe's case; and even when these

people speak for themselves, their testimony, given in French, English or Welsh, was

rendered in Latin.[58] The very supplicants whose miracles ensured Cantilupe's

canonization, that is, would have been unable to access the document that contained their

testimony. Gilbert is hence not just a gatekeeper for Cantilupe's relics, but for the very

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[56] See Nilson (*Cathedral Shrines* 132), Finucane ("Cantilupe as Thaumaturge" 138-39, 142). Gilbert is also
mentioned in Emden:
> Gilbert de Chyveninge (Chiveninge, Chyvenigke). Vicar of Lydney, Gloucs., adm. 3 Oct. 1287;
> allowed 8 marks a year from the income of the benefice while studying at Oxford 28 Feb. 1289;
> still vicar in 1291 [...] rector of Much Marcele, Herefs., pr., adm. 6 Feb. 1303. (422)

See also *The Register of Richard de Swinfield* (15, 212, 227, 256, 526). Barrett explains that the custodial
duties at Hereford continued even after the Reformation, mentioning that William Ely was relic custodian
of Cantilupe's relics after the shrine's destruction in 1538. Ely died in a Hereford jail in 1609 (181-82).
Barrett claims that "the names of the priests and custodians of the relics who succeeded William Ely" are
still extant (182), but gives no citation.

[57] Gilbert is variously referred to as "*domino Gilberto procuratore capituli Herefordiensis*" (*AASS* 631);
"*presbyter, perpetuus vicarius ecclesiae de Magna Markele*" (622). This is the same person: Gilbert of
Cheveninge, vicar of Much Marcle parish is also a postulator for Thomas Cantilupe, as is attested by a
reference to Gilbert, "*dominus [...] vicarius de Magna Marcle, et Thomas de Guynes, procuratores in isto
negotio capituli Herefordiensis*" (641). Gilbert of Cheveninge is also said to be "*ipso existente custode
tumuli dicti domini Thomae*" (622). It can therefore be relatively certain that Gilbert of Cheveninge played
one of the most instrumental roles in the canonization of Thomas Cantilupe, as relic custodian, postulator to
the papal curia, and beneficed canon.

[58] See Finucane *Miracles* (176) and Richter (*passim*).

proceedings that guaranteed his official place in the calendar of saints, thereby guaranteeing economic stability for Hereford Cathedral as well.

Unlike Wulfstan's careful descriptions of Eadsige's conversion and repentance, no writer or scribe specifies whether Gilbert is zealous or lax in his religious practice.[59] Gilbert of Chevening appears in several documents of the early fourteenth century, most notably in *The Register of Richard de Swinfield* and in Thomas Cantilupe's 1307 canonization proceedings. His case is interesting in part because there is so little documented evidence, and virtually no hagiographic inclusion, of other medieval relic custodians. Gilbert of Chevening is an exception because of the varied documents that contain proof of his existence and job. Eadsige, a tenth-century custodian, is an earlier exception, and though most miracle collections depend implicitly upon the relic custodians whose job it was to record miracles and collect donations, they are usually background characters, understood to be there but seldom foregrounded. Cases like that of Gilbert, Eadsige and Joseph of Arimathea are hence crucial to understanding what may have actually gone on at shrines in medieval England. Gilbert's role as relic custodian at Cantilupe's shrine and then as postulator in Cantilupe's canonization proceedings offers compelling evidence for the central role that relic custodians played in medieval relic cults and saint-making. Such characters are essential to envisioning the pilgrim experience in medieval England.

It is not known when Gilbert was born, though it seems clear that he was from Chevening, in northwestern Kent, twenty-two miles from London. The Chevening parish

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[59] There is, however, at least one known document surviving at Worcester that outlines desirable qualities of a relic custodian: "The convent for its part, should choose honest clerics or monks as custodians" [et conventus pro parte sua, quos voluerint custodes honestos clericos vel monachos deputabit] (qtd Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* 134).

register, St Botolph, unfortunately dates only from 1561, and there is no record of

Gilbert's participation in his local parish, nor of his parentage.[60] He appears for the first

time in Bishop Richard Swinfield's register in the entry for 6 April 1283, when Swinfield

traveled to Leominster "in order to visit the monks and the priory of that same place [*scil*.

Leominster][*causa visitandi monachos prioratus loci ejusdem*]" (15). Gilbert is only

mentioned in passing, as a member of a large group; he is referred to as "Gilbertus de

Chyvenkngke, capellanus" (15). As it is recorded in the register, Gilbert receives his first

benefice on 3 October 1287, when he is appointed to Lyndney by the dean and chapter of

Hereford cathedral (526). It is unclear exactly when Gilbert became a secular canon at

Hereford. R.C. Finucane observes that Gilbert was the relic custodian for Thomas

Cantilupe from 1287 until at least 1307, and though there is no evidence to dispute this, it

is equally clear that a relic custodian need not always be present at the shrine ("Cantilupe

as Thaumaturge" 138). This explains in part the longer list of "custod*es* tumuli" in the

canonization proceedings (*AASS* 641; emphasis added). Gilbert is recorded as leaving

Lydney on 28 February 1289 in order to pursue studies at Oxford. He is listed as having

attended Oxford in *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500*.

(Many Hereford canons were Oxford educated.[61]) Another canon, Roger de Sevenake,

takes over the benefice in the meantime, though Gilbert is allowed 8 marks a year from

the income of the benefice. And indeed Roger's vicarage was brief, as in 1291 Gilbert,

present at the resignation of Richard de Pudlestone, a canon of Hereford, is again referred

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[60] However, as Swanson and Lepine write, "though we know relatively little about [the] social origins [of Hereford canons], it is clear that the chapter was mainly drawn from the upper, landowning levels of medieval society" (57). The chances are thus good, if not definitive, that Gilbert also came from this class.
[61] See Swanson and Lepine, who explain that two-thirds of Hereford canons had a university degree, usually from Oxford, and that this percentage increased as time progressed (59). Also like Gilbert, many Hereford canons tended to acquire "several" benefices (60).

to as "vicario ecclesie de Lyndeneye" (256). It would appear that Gilbert was at Oxford until around this time, since in 1289 he is simply referred to as "domini Gilberti de Chiveninge," and has no other explicit title nor attachment to any parish.

By 1303, Gilbert had acquired (at least) his second benefice; it is not clear whether he abandoned Lyndney when he was assigned to Much Marcele on 6 February 1303 by the abbot and convent of Lyre (534). Gilbert had also acquired an important title by this point: that of "priest." It seems reasonable to suppose that he was ordained after 1291, since in 1291, the last date he is mentioned before 1303, he is not called a "priest." Neither is he so called in the recording of his first benefice in 1287. Hence, he must have been ordained sometime after 1287, though his ordination may not have taken place until after 1291. Given that Gilbert's title may not have been included in the 1291 entry, it can be assumed that, at the outside, he was ordained sometime between 1287 and 1303.[62]

He was still pastor at Much Marcele when the canonization hearings began in London in July 1307. In the recorded miracles from this hearing, Gilbert's parish is called Magna Markele.[63] Before Cantilupe's case could make it as far as London and Hereford, however, he needed an influential group of lobbyists. Patrick Daly explains the complex juridical procedures involved in such a canonization hearing, the importance of postulators to making the case for canonization at a local level, as well as the essential participation of the clerical and aristocratic elite in the petitions sent to Rome: the number

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[62] It is slightly unusual that Gilbert likely held the office of relic custodian either before or immediately after he was ordained a priest. At Durham, the "most successful" relic custodian, John Burnby, "became feretrar *only* sixteen years after ordination" (Nilson *Cathedral Shrines* 131; emphasis added). Evidently, most relic custodians had longer to wait between the time they were ordained and made relic custodian of a shrine.

[63] Of 207 miracles recorded in the local investigation (Finucane *Miracles* 177-78), only twenty-six were selected for the official Vatican dossier (Goodich, "Reason or Revelation?" 185; Vauchez 540-54). Of these twenty-six, ten were included in the canonization bull (Goodich 195).

of letters mattered less than the prestige of the petitioner. For a petition to be successful,

moreover, supporters had to include bishops, religious communities, local nobility and

the monarch as well. In Cantilupe's case, letters were sent to Rome from Richard

Swinfield, Cantilupe's episcopal successor, Edward I, archbishops of York, and from

fifteen bishops, seven abbots, eleven counts and other barons and nobles, all of whom

"attest[ed] to Cantilupe's virtues and miracles" (Daly 127). In 1305, Edward I joined this

influential and wealthy group in advocating for Cantilupe's "virtue and miracles" (Daly

127). These letters ultimately prompted a local investigation, though (in part because of

Franciscan opposition to Cantilupe's canonization, and no doubt because of Edward I's

1305 petition) the hearings were not underway until seventeen years after Swinfield sent

the first letter. Even at the nascent stages of canonization, then, proceedings depended

not simply on legal process, but on structure's heterogeneity and hierarchy.[64] Compared

to this group of influential and wealthy patrons of Cantilupe, Gilbert of Chevening,

regardless of his watch over Cantilupe's relics, must have been relatively unimportant at

this stage.

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[64] Daly, *passim*. Cantilupe's case can be seen to follow the formulaic pattern for canonization petitions, which by this point required a written *vita* and *miracula*, as well as witness testimony overseen by papal legates, who could not canonize without a papal mandate (Kemp 57-93, *passim*). Goodich outlines the procedure as investigating the exact circumstances of miracles, requiring reputable and reliable witnesses, determining the natural means used to try to cure an ailment before the saint did so, and demonstrating a conversion experience or strengthening of faith as a result of the miracle (181). This is clearly a demanding set of requirements. Nilson specifies even further, outlining the following steps: 1. Letters of postulation to papal court, written by prominent people, often even the king. The letters for Cantilupe were sent in 1290, 1294, 1299 and 1305. For an example of one of these letters, see *The Register of Adam de Orleton* (76-77). Robert Grosseteste's petitions were sent in 1288 and 1289, with letters from dean and chapter of Lincoln and bishops of Worcester, Lincoln, Hereford, St David's, Durham, Ely, and the Archbishop of York among others. 2. By the mid-thirteenth century the pope passed these testimonials, letters and *vitae* to a committee of cardinals. 3. If the cardinals were positive, the pope appointed a commission of three or four people to investigate further. In the case of Wulfstan of Worcester in 1202, this commission consisted of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of Ely, and Abbots of Bury and Woburn. For Hugh of Lincoln in 1219, Archbishop Langton was among those investigating. 4. These commissioners interviewed people "and examined testimonials of miracles but did not pass judgement" (*Cathedral Shrines* 13). This confirms observations in n. 4 above, that lobbying for canonization was an incredibly demanding political and financial commitment.

If the petitions to Rome were successful—and in Cantilupe's case, they obviously

were—a papal delegation would be sent to the saint's diocese to carry out a local inquiry,

called a *processus informativus*. The papal commissioners assigned by Clement V were

William Durand, bishop of the French diocese of Mende, Richard Baldock, bishop of

London, and William de Testu, papal nuncio in England. Of these, only Durand was

consistently present to hear local testimony.[65] Their job was

> To interview those most intimately connected with a would-be saint, those who
> either knew him personally or were familiar with his popular reputation.
> Secondly, the aim was to receive statements from and examine those who claimed
> his miraculous intercession in their favour. These inquiries [...] always took place
> in the city or place where the putative saint had lived and/or was buried, or in
> areas where he was well known. (Daly 129)

The *processus informativus* was, at least theoretically, accessible to lay participation.

Any lay person who had experienced a miracle or who had known Thomas Cantilupe

could, according to the purpose of the process, participate, regardless of his or her

relative status. It should come as no surprise that in fact these lay voices were subjected

to hierarchical and linguistic barriers of the Church structure. Moreover, one of the most

instrumental of these occluding barriers was Gilbert of Chevening, a postulator

(*procurator*) in Cantilupe's case.[66]

Even the opening lines of the 1307 *processus informativus* foreground the

procurators of the hearing. The role of the *procuratores*, identified by Michael Richter as

the "main partner[s]" of the Roman delegates in Hereford, was to present the case for the

saint (53). Both Richter and Daly acknowledge only one postulator, whom Daly

identifies as Henry de Schorne, canon of Hereford cathedral and doctor of canon law.

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[65] See Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims* (176).
[66] See Vauchez (41) and Brentano (38-48) on the importance of procurators to canonization proceedings.

The text belies this assertion in its first miracle, however: "Nobilis vir Adamus le Schirreve [...] productus a *procuratoribus* capituli Herefordensis" (*Acta Sanctorum* Oct. I 610; italics added). There can be no mistake that "procuratoribus" is plural, not singular, and that therefore it is impossible that there is only one procurator in Cantilupe's case. Because these people are often referred to as "praedicti procuratores" or "praedictus procurator," it is impossible to say exactly how many postulators were involved. The evidence of this text indicates that there were *at least* two, and given the duration of the hearings—four months—it seems reasonable to suppose that there were more. For now, however, it will suffice to indicate that Gilbert of Cheveninge, as well as Henry de Schorne, were postulators on behalf of Cantilupe.

Gilbert's role as custodian and postulator for Thomas Cantilupe can be seen to align him with structure at the expense of *communitas*. Gilbert is mentioned by name in, among other miracles, the cure of a crippled woman: "*Dominus Gilbertus de Chevenigh presbyter, perpetuus vicarius ecclesiae de Magna Markele [...] requisitus, ut narraret, si quid sciebat de miraculo, quod in personam Julianae Kock dicitur contigisse*" (622). Here, Gilbert is said to deposition himself so that he might narrate a miracle. His position as active participant is contrasted with the position of witnesses, such as Robert and Laetitia, whose active engagement in Cantilupe's case is unclear. In this case, Gilbert does give testimony to a miracle that he experienced, but rather a miracle that he witnessed and sanctioned as Thomas Cantilupe's relic custodian [*ipos existente custode tumuli dicti domini Thomae*]. The cripple of whom Gilbert speaks, Juliana Kock, is not present to speak for herself. In fact, there is no mention of her whereabouts in 1307. The report allows only that she "lived for twelve years, as it was reported by many from the

aforesaid parish Eton, after the following miracle [*supervixit per duodecim annos, ut audivit referri a pluribus de parochia praedicta de Eton, post miraculum antedictum*]" (622). It would appear that she has died between 1299 and 1307, and that this is the reason Gilbert testifies for her, since he witnessed her cure as a younger man in 1287 when it happened. Her death is never mentioned, however, and her voice is thus more conspicuously absent from Gilbert's second-hand testimony than it would be if he had explained that she could not be there to testify herself. Gilbert's observations of Juliana's cure are further ratified by Henry of St Alban's, who was "at that time the custodian, with that same witness, of the aforesaid tomb [*custodi tunc cum ipso teste* [*scil*. Gilbert] *dicti tumuli*" and by Roger of Sevenake, "*tunc canonico Herefordiae, jam defunctis*" as well (622). Representatives of structure, Gilbert particularly, are foregrounded in this miracle. The member of the haliwerfolc who actually experienced the miracle is not present—and her nonattendance is never explained.

Gilbert is similarly assigned the power of confirmation in the case of another miracle, in which two blind children have been cured.[67] In this case, he "brought forward witnesses [*produxit testes*]" of the miracle. The mother of the boys, Margaret, is the witness in this case, and she describes the initial health of her children. Adam, for example, "had beautiful eyes, and he saw everything for his first three years [*habuit pulchros oculos, et vidit fere per triennium*]," at which point "ill humors flowed from his eyes [*mali humores effluebant ex ejus oculis*]" (638). His brother, Roger, is able to see

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[67] Gilbert's task is carefully outlined in the end notes to this miracle: "Ad quae probanda dominus Gilbertus procurator Capituli Herefordiensis produxit eosdem Adam *et* Rogerium, *et* matrem eorum, *et* dominum Willelmum de Bradewere cappellanum, curam ad tempus gerentem dictae parochiae de Strangeforde, Jacobum de la Pini, Daniëlem Tudenar, *et* Willelmum de Kilpek eusdem parochiae: qui quidem testes, praesente eodem procuratore, tactis *etc*, juraverunt *etc*" (*AASS* 640, note i). Elsewhere, Gilbert is responsible for corroborating a witness' testimony (641).

clearly with his eye [*cum utroque oculo*], but is injured by Margaret's midwife. The boys

are both brought "*ad tumulum dicti S. Thomae*" and measured to the saint; candles are

made with the "*fila*," or string that was used to measure them. They are subsequently

cured. Gilbert's role in affirming the restoration of Adam's sight in particular is

emphasized: Gilbert, "then custodian of the aforesaid tomb [*tunc custos dicti tumuli*] [...]

produced witnesses to this miracle [*produxit testes super hoc miraculo*]" (638). Gilbert's

role as both custodian and postulator is implied by this simple statement. As postulator,

it is his responsibility to find witnesses for the papal legates. Such testimony was, by the

fourteenth century, crucial in making the case for a saint's legitimacy. Gilbert's job was

thus integral to the proceedings in Hereford. Moreover, his job as "*custos dicti tumuli*"

may well have been what led to his role as postulator. As relic custodian, that is, Gilbert

can claim to have been present at many of the miracles used in the canonization

proceedings. He is therefore able to choose his witnesses, and—as in the case of Juliana,

above—even testify for them if necessary. He is, in effect, an extra eyewitness to the

power of the saint's body.

Gilbert of Chevening is first mentioned as a witness in one of Cantilupe's justice

miracles, which involves the resurrection of an infant who is accidentally crushed to

death by his parents' ox-cart. The narrative of this miracle, in the context of Gilbert's

participation and role in the hearings elsewhere, indicates that perhaps witnesses were

regarded as important only insofar as their testimony could benefit the church and shrine.

As they recount what happened, Robert explains that he and his wife were devastated by

their loss, but also (implicitly) worried by the laws of *deodand*, "whereby the instrument

which brings about a death must be given [...] to the king's officers" (Flint 348). They

176

therefore worry about the danger and expense [*periculum et dispendium*] of seeking out the king's court [*curia regia*]; if they are open about what has happened, they run the risk that they will be incarcerated [*incarcerati*] and that the oxen, cart and all their goods confiscated [*boves et plaustrum et alia bona eorum confiscata*] (621). Robert and Laetitia decide to keep the accident quiet and hope for a miracle, which, once their son Geoffrey is measured to Thomas Cantilupe, they indeed get.[68] Their testimony is moving and contrasts perfectly the papal curia with the injustice of the king's court, "*curia regia*." This miracle neatly underscores the argument in chapter three, that the relics of a saint can be seen as embodied mediators, and even activists, on behalf of the Church and the laity in the face of extra-ecclesiastical injustice.

The opening lines of the record complicate this simple dynamic, however. In them, Robert "productus *a procuratore, et* requisitus, ut narraret, si quid sciebat de miraculo supradicto" (621; italics added). To be sure, this text often deploys the perfect passive and indirect discourse in its descriptions. It usually does so when describing the testimony of a witness, which seems to suggest that these supplicants do not necessarily have *active* access either to the saint or to the papal curia. They are not, that is, grammatically said to speak for themselves. Indeed, in the case of Robert, they are not even said to arrive of their own volition (though one may suppose that at least some of the people who testified wanted to do so): Robert is led forth *by* the postulator [*procuratore*] and depositioned [*requisitus*] so that he might narrate [*ut narraret*] what he knows [*sciebat*] about what had happened to him. I do not wish to make too much of

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[68] On the practice of measuring people to a saint, see Nilson, "Medieval Experience" (106-107) and Finucane, *Miracles* (95-96). Measuring involved taking a piece of string, literally measuring it to the height of a supplicant, and then offering this string to the saint. The string (*filum*) was most often wound in a coil and dipped in wax to make an offertory candle.

grammatical convention, but it will be noted that, in the miracle he accounts for above, Gilbert is said to speak for himself, and is not led forth "*a procuratore*" (since, after all, he *is* the postulator). He is much more clearly the agent of his testimony (on behalf of an absent witness) than the witnesses in Robert and Laetitia's case.

Robert's level of engagement with Thomas Cantilupe's cause is hence impossible to ascertain. It certainly may be imagined, as he recalls horrific details—"And that very witness, turning and looking at the wheel of his cart [...] saw the aforementioned wheel descend directly and roll over the head of the aforesaid Geoffrey [*Et ipse testis inclinans se et respiciens ad rotam ipsius plaustri [...] vidit dictam rotam recte transeuntem et descendentem super caput dicti Galfridi*]" (621)—that he is thankful and relieved, and that he came to tell his story willingly. Certainly Robert and Laetitia's devastation is expressed by the tears [*cum lachrymis*] they are said to shed as they pray for their son's life. The fact remains, however, that it is impossible to tell for certain why they came to narrate this miracle. They are thereby exposing themselves to questioning about what must have been an incredibly traumatic moment for them. This is further complicated by their fear of the "*curia regia*"; one wonders whether they broadcast the miracle even after it happened, for fear of disbelief and the consequences of *deodand*. In such a context, the perfect passive, coupled with indirect discourse, seem ominous and telling. It could even be read to imply that the *procurator* has somehow convinced them to come, perhaps even by force or bribe.[69]

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[69] Vauchez explains that many procurators were remunerated for their trouble. In 1320, for example, "a few months before the canonization of St Thomas Cantilupe, the bishop of Hereford, Adam of Orleton, guaranteed annual pensions to those cardinals who worked for the success of the cause" (65). In the case of John of Dalderby, the procurator was given a "detailed contract" which included money for traveling, lodging and other expenses (65). See also Cole, "Dalderby." Vauchez also argues that postulators do not

Joseph of Arimathea as Relic Custodian

Joseph's predominant role [was] as [...] guardian of the Grail, apostle of Britain, and founder of the line of Grail keepers who would continue their sacred trust until Arthur's reign and fall.
~Valerie M. Lagorio, "The Evolving Legend of St Joseph of Glastonbury"

And, bot þou and þi sone me no mon touche [the Grail].
~Joseph of Arimathie: A Romance of the Seint Graal

A relic custodian, like Gilbert of Chevening, functions to enforce the physical barrier of the shrine, and to affirm the power of the relics located there. He sometimes records the miracles in a collection that, in the later Middle Ages, often met the first requirement in a canonization dossier. A custodian is central, therefore, to the legal, theological, physical and economic functioning of the shrine. And yet, it is very difficult to locate him in many hagiographical texts, particularly in *vitae* and *miracula* of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. That is, in spite of the relic custodian's indispensable part in canonical procedure—and just as his role extended from the practical maintenance of the shrine to the legal processes of the papal curia—he is not present in any later medieval saints' collection. One tantalizing exception in the *Gilte Legende* is in the story of St Erkenwald. There, when "a certein felouship" decides to steal Erkenwald's relics from St Paul's Cathedral, "the *keper* of the churche awoke and cryed oute vpon them, but [he] durste not go downe to them" (66; italics added).[70] This is the only relatively concrete example in English or Anglo-Latin hagiography. To the best of my knowledge, no others exist.

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normally try to manipulate witnesses' evidence, however. Whether this can be considered universally true is difficult to decide, since the only evidence extant of witness testimony is recorded by papal legates, and sometimes, as in Cantilupe's 1307 hearings, was given by the postulator instead of the witness.

[70] In fact, the *Gilte Legende* "keper" seems to be an amalgamation of Arcoid's young church guards and the "eight priests" who, after the attempted theft, were appointed "to be watchmen [uenerabili thesauro custodes]" over the "precious and holy treasure" (trans. Whatley 153).

The paucity of relic custodians in saints' *vitae* and *miracula* is interesting, and difficult to explain. It is striking that such a character would be entirely absent from the very texts that promote devotion to saints' cults, and hence, implicitly, to relics. It is a good possibility that these relic custodians are missing because they are meant to be invisible, meant to be occluded. Were their presence highlighted—were pilgrims actually presented as waiting in the nave for long periods, only to be ushered through the cathedral and shrine by a custodian whose concerns were perhaps as much financial as spiritual—it may have been too evident that cathedrals and their shrines did not offer the kind of accessibility and protection that was promised to those who worshipped there. Moreover, it may also have been evident that, unlike most pilgrims, relic custodians were permitted to see and even, occasionally, to touch the relics that were their charge. Those relic custodians who appear in romance and fabliaux hence become even more interesting and important in the absence of other concrete examples of relic custodians. Joseph of Arimathea is one such custodian, and his appearance in Malory, as well as in the fourteenth-century alliterative romance *Joseph of Arimathie*, affords evidence that not only confirms the duties of relic custodians I have listed above (such as guarding the relic), but also illuminates the kind of privileged access that relic custodians were thought to have to relics and shrines.

Joseph of Arimathea is first presented at the end of Tristram de Lyones:

Here folowyth the noble tale off the Sankegreall, whyche called ys the holy vessell and the sygnyfycacion oof blyssed bloode off Oure Lorde Jesu Cryste, whyche was brought into thys londe by Joseph off Aramathye. Therefore on all synfull, blyssed Lorde, have on thy knyght mercy. Amen. (II.845-46)

Even these introductory words establish Joseph's central role in caring for the Grail; he is

figured as so prestigious that he is able to translate the Holy Vessel to another continent

altogether. He is also carefully presented as Galahad's ancestor: "Syr I brynge here a

yonge knyght the whyche is of kynges lygnage and of the kynrede of Ioseph of

Aramathy, where bythe mervayles of this courte and of stronge realmys shall be fully

complevysshed" (II.859).[71] In fact, Galahad is the last of Joseph's line (II.881). Before

Galahad, Percival and Bors achieve the Grail (by accessing its power), this is the most we

hear of Joseph and his role as relic custodian of the Grail. Joseph hence seems to be

situated at the periphery of the Grail Quest, and as a result is readily forgotten. Galahad's

prestige and position as Joseph's descendent ought to provide a clue as to Joseph's own

eminence,[72] but it is easy to discount the hermit's words to Camelot as an introduction of

Galahad's exceptional status only, and not as meant to give the reader information about

Joseph as well. This would be a mistake, and would bypass one of the most telling

characters in the legend of the Grail, one who underscores the Grail's status as a relic, as

well.

Malory never explicitly refers to Joseph as a relic custodian, feretrar, shrine-

keeper, or *custos*. Nonetheless, Joseph and his son, Joseph—in keeping and creating

other relics, such as Galahad's shield (II.877-82), as well as in their roles as Grail-

keepers—are rendered as relic custodians, as mediators between even the successful

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[71] For the ways in Galahad's and Lancelot's ancestry also underscores English assertions of national supremacy over Rome, see Lagorio (73-74, 77). See also *The Chronicle of John Hardyng*, first presented to Henry VI in 1457 and later printed twice in 1543 (Riddy "Glastonbury" 269). John Hardyng includes "the accounts of Joseph of Arimathea's bringing Christianity to Britain and of Galahad's Grail Quest" (Kennedy 250).

[72] Of course, Lancelot must also therefore be Joseph's descendent. However, Lancelot is never connected explicitly with Joseph. Since Galahad's lineage is mentioned outright several times throughout the Grail Quest, it can be extrapolated that he shares a closer affinity with Joseph and his role as relic custodian.

knights and the Grail. It is even less surprising, then, that Joseph's son is presented as

"the firste bysshop of Crystendom" (II.1029). That is, Joseph is not only presented as

relic custodian but as member of the *ecclesia*. The one (custodian) in fact seems to

necessitate the other (*ecclesia*). Joseph celebrates the Eucharist, which, once

consecrated, he dips into the Grail. He then vanishes (II.1030), only to appear again

when Galahad is King of Sarras:

> Galahad [...] arose up erly and hys felowis, and cam to the paleyse, and saw tofore
> hem the holy vessell, and a man knelyng on his kneys in lyknesse of a bysshop
> [...] And so he cam to the sakerynge, and anone made an ende. He called sir
> Galahad unto hym and seyde,
> 'Com forthe, the servaunte of Jesu Cryste, and thou shalt se that thou has
> much desired to se.' [...] 'Now wotist thou what I am?' seyde the good man.
> 'Nay, sir,' seyde sir Galahad.
> 'I am Joseph, the sonne of Joseph or Aramathy,[73] which Oure Lorder hath
> sente to the to bere the felyship. And wotyst thou wherefore He hathe sente me
> more than ony other? For thou hast resembled me in to thynges, in that thou hast
> sene the merveyles of the Sankgreall, and in that thou hast bene a clene mayde as
> I have be and am. (II.1034-35)

In this particular exchange, Joseph articulates what has been before only implied: that his

affinity with Galahad lies not only in their blood relation, but in their mutual chastity and

ability to see the Grail. Joseph thereby suggests that Galahad, who is like Joseph

presented as a saint, is himself a relic custodian, indeed the last custodian of the Grail.

The Grail's translation to Heaven upon Galahad's death—never again to be seen on

earth—is the final indication that, in the absence of relic custodians, the relic cult itself

cannot continue.

The relationship between Joseph and Galahad, and the role of both men as

custodians, is also presented in some of the romances and *vitae* of Joseph. These are

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[73] The Caxton version identifies this "bysshop" as Joseph of Aramathie, not Joseph's son. See *Le Morte d'arthur* (781-82)

printed in Walter W. Skeat's invaluable volume *Joseph of Arimathie: Otherwise Called*

The Romance of the Seint Graal, or Holy Grail. This collection includes the more

truncated versions printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1520 and Richard Pynson in 1516, as

well as a slightly longer poem printed by Richard Pynson in 1520.[74] Because it is longer

and more extensive in detail, I will focus on the alliterative romance composed sometime

around 1350 (Skeat x). The poem, which survives in a unique copy and precedes the A-

text of *Piers Plowman* in the "celebrated Vernon MS" (vii), concentrates, for the most

part, on the conversion of King Evelake and his brother-in-law Seraph, and on their battle

with King Tholomer. Joseph and his son Joseph (generally spelled "Josaphe") seem at

first to figure rather less importantly in this version, except as they are instrumental in

Evelake's and Seraph's conversions. (The two men are then re-christened as Mordrains

and Naciens.) In spite of the fact that this work is regarded as a romance and not a saint's

vita, the elements of Evelake's conversion in particular depend heavily upon

hagiographic convention.[75] The debates Evelake has with Joseph, for example, focus

heavily on Evelake's difficulty in understanding the Trinity and Virgin Birth, two aspects

of Christian doctrine that are often expounded by saints to doubting pagans.[76]

Furthermore, Evelake even brings in several clerks to dispute with Joseph: "þe kyng

hedde geten him a clerk on of þe beste, / nouȝwhere in heore lawe was such a-nother

holden, / to take Joseph in his tale ȝif he wrong seide" (327-29). This is clearly

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[74] As Lagorio explains, these sixteenth-century texts were the first examples of religious *vitae* of Joseph of Arimathea in England. Neither Aelfric, the *South English Legendary*, Mirk's *Festial*, or Tynemouth's fourteenth-century edition of the *Sanctilogium* featured lives of Joseph. Prior to this, "Joseph's growing popularity was manifested primarily in secular fiction" ("Legend" 77). She attributes the later tendency to include Joseph in hagiographic collections to "an even greater desire to anglicize sanctity" (78).
[75] The work is clearly a hagiographical romance. See Delehaye (3-4).
[76] See *vitae* of St Cecilia and St Katherine of Alexandria, for example.

reminiscent of Katherine of Alexandria's extensive debates with expert scholars. Though

these points are only peripheral to Joseph's and his son's roles as relic custodians, their

presentation as saints does underscore that they are deserving of such a prestigious

occupation. That is, like Galahad, their holiness provides justification for their position

as members of the structural elite. The implication in the cases of Joseph, Josaphe and

Galahad, is that if they were not so holy, they would (like Gawain) never be in the

position to see the Grail in the first place.

Joseph's and Josaphe's holiness is affirmed early on in the poem, when Christ

speaks to Joseph and requests that a reliquary be made for the Grail:

> Þenne spekes a vois to Ioseph was Ihesu crist himselue,
> "Joseph, marke on þe treo and make a luytel whucche,
> Forte do in þat ilke blod þou berest a-boute;
> Whon þe lust speke with me lift þe lide sone,
> Þou shalt fynde me redi riȝt bi þi syde
> And, bote þou and þi sone me no mon touche." (38-43)

Christ's words are able to establish some important facts about Joseph and Josaphe as

relic custodians. First, and most importantly, Christ asks that Joseph make a reliquary for

the Grail, "Forte do in þat ilke blod þou berest a-boute." This "luytel whucche," made of

wood, is clearly meant as a carrying container for the Grail. Skeat defines "whucche,"

which also appears as "wȝucche" as "a hutch, ark, [or] large wooden box" (92).[77] Hence,

what Skeat describes as an ark for the Grail is probably shaped very like the *feretra* that

were so common in major (and minor) shrines in medieval cathedrals. These, too, were

large, gable-shaped wooden boxes. By asking Joseph and Josaphe to construct such a

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[77] The word is listed in the MED as "whicch(e)," from the OE noun "hwicce" or "hwæcce," meaning "chest, box." And in fact, one definition for "whicch(e)" is a reliquary. The *MED* renders this word as "A storage container, bin, or locker; a chest; also, a coffin" ("whicch(e)" 1a); "a structure devoted to a saint, sanctuary, shrine" ("whicch(e)" 3a). For definition 3a), the *MED* cites the *South English Legendary*: "Þo men founden þis holie ȝwuchche In a fair place stonde with þis holie bodi a-boue þe se al on druye londe."

reliquary, Christ is presented as affirming the importance of keeping relics hidden.

However, like the reliquary that Galahad, Percival and Bors build for the Grail in

Malory—which is described as being "a cheste of golde and of precious stonys that

coverde the holy vessell" (Malory II.1034)[78]—Joseph's reliquary is not meant to hide the

Grail *from the deserving*, in this case, from the relic custodians. Indeed, Christ specifies

that Joseph and Josaphe will be able to access the Grail whenever they choose to do so:

"Whon þe lust speke with me lift þe lide sone, / Þou shalt fynde me redi riȝt bi þi syde."

That is, Joseph and Josaphe can view the Grail at their leisure and access Christ at the

spot of this relic. This "whucche" is not locked to the relic custodians; or at least, it may

be imagined, they will be the possessors of a key. Christ's final words to Joseph on the

subject cement Joseph's and Josaphe's privileged positions as relic custodians: "And,

bote þou and þi sone me no mon touche."[79] Nobody else is to have access to the Grail

but those who are charged with keeping it. Like the relic custodians at cathedral shrines,

Joseph and Josaphe find themselves in a position of privileged access, and also find

themselves as the gatekeepers to that access. (Presumably, Christ would not have needed

to tell them that only they can touch the Grail unless others would want or try to do so.)

And, in direct contrast to Evelake's legendary fate, Joseph and Josaphe are

rewarded with access (rather than punished for attempting it). Josaphe "to his whucche

weendes," where "feole preiers he made" (237-38). There a voice confirms that Josaphe

(like Galahad) is "Iugget clene, / And art digne þer-to" (251-52). As a result of this and,

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[78] Galahad, Percival and Bors pray at the Grail reliquary "every day" (II.1034).

[79] Galahad is included in this privilege, as is indicated by a "vois" from Heaven: "Go þou most to þi wyf gete þou most nede / A child, Galaad schal be hoten þat goodnesse schal reise / þe Auenturus of Brutayne to haunsen and to holden" (230-32). Galahad is, in this text, presented as though he were another of Joseph's sons, rather than one of Joseph's descendants only. This presentation renders the relationship between the two custodians and saints as even more intimate than their relationship in Malory.

presumably, of the promise Christ is said to have given Joseph earlier, Josaphe is able to "lifte vp and þe lide [of the reliquary] warpes" (257). At this point, were Josaphe unworthy (not digne), he would, like Lancelot, be instructed to leave or, like Evelake, struck down by blindness. Instead, he has a vision of Christ on the cross surrounded by angels, each of whom bears a relic: the true cross, the nails, the crown of thorns, the lance, and the burial cloth. (That is, Josaphe has a vision of even more relics.) Josaphe at first "falles for fere forþ wiþ þe wȝucche" (267), but he rises again. He is still staring into the reliquary when Joseph arrives: "þenne þei loken in atte wȝucche loueliche boþe" (281). At this point, Joseph and Josaphe have another vision, this time one that is remarkably like the appearance of the Grail in Malory: they see eleven more angels, two of which appear with a silver basin, holy water, and incense (285-93). Once the "disch wiþ þe blode" is placed upon the altar, the nails and lance on the other end and a "vessel of gold" in between, Josaphe is consecrated a bishop by Christ himself (299-300). Such a scene of privileged access—"bote þou and þi sone me no mon touche"—is also, in this case, the scene for creating a privileged member of the structural elite. Such a confluence of events, it seems to me, is not coincidental, and illustrates the interdependence of relic cults on structural integrity and occlusion. The relic is necessary for Josaphe's consecration; so, too, Josaphe's consecration is necessary to maintain the relic cult. The contrast between Joseph and those of his descendants who are able to see the Grail openly, and those knights who cannot access the Grail at all, is all too clear. It is not surprising that this contrast can be seen to have its genesis in stories of Josaphe as the first bishop, consecrated by Christ, or in legends of Josaphe's chastity. Such characteristics are commensurate with the practices of the structural elite whose efforts

birthed the Grail Quest: the Cistercian monks whose piety and austerity are well known.

Joseph and the *Morte* both present clerical ideals as necessary for access to relics, just as

Victricius of Rouen did when he "described the crowd [awaiting the arrival of relics]

almost completely in terms of various kinds of renunciation: 'throngs of monks refined

by fasting,' a 'chorus of devout and untouched virgins,' 'multitudes of celibates and

widows,' and married women who have 'condemned intercourse' " (qtd Miller 49).

Victricius overwhelmingly emphasizes physical chastity as the defining characteristic of

the faithful who are waiting to catch a glimpse of the relics.

　　　Both Cynthia Hahn and Thomas Head, among others, discuss what Head

identifies as "resistance to pilgrims" at early medieval saints' shrines (qtd Hahn 1099).

Hahn explains this resistance as follows: "For most viewers [...] contact with the saint

was [...] radically circumscribed"; "the layperson would see the relics or the reliquary

only on feast days or when they were carried in procession" (1099). Head affirms that

early pilgrims had only restricted access to shrines in Orléans: "Not a single miracle story

from the region [...] describes a layperson as being present in the crypt of a church or as

touching a reliquary" (165-66). Head notes that "canon law forbade the touching of the

res sacra by laypersons" (Hahn 1099). In fact, "resistance to pilgrims" involved ensuring

that pilgrims could not access the relics that they had traveled to see. Hahn poses a

question: "Could such a resistance take the form of disallowing access to the saintly

body?" (1099-1100). It seems to me that the answer to this question is yes. The

tendency to circumscribe behavior at shrines was advocated by the intellectual responses

to relic cults in chapter two and manifested at the cults in chapter three. And as this

chapter has shown, this practice continued in England throughout the Middle Ages:

shrines at cathedrals across England allowed no one but the custodian to approach a shrine unattended. Pilgrims could approach tombs and shrines, but the shrines' physical construction and surveillance ensured that the saint's body remained occluded and completely inaccessible to those who sought it out. Hahn further identifies "the disappearance of tombs from view as a clericalization of care for the saintly dead" (1100). In light of the privileged position of monks and canons at medieval cathedral shrines, Hahn's argument can be seen to apply to shrines I have explored in chapters three and four—those of SS Swithun, Erkenwald, and Thomas Cantilupe. Moreover, her argument and its application across time take on added significance given that the exploration of access and restriction to relics permeates Malory and the alliterative *Joseph of Arimathie*. It may not be coincidental, then, that the presentation of the Grail Quest found its origins in the writings of Cistercian monks, whose asceticism and privileged access to "the saintly dead" may have converged to inform a discourse that presented relics as elusive to all but those who, like Galahad, imitated their strict Benedictine call to holiness.

In this chapter, I explored the ways in which the relic custodian and supplicant reveal the assumptions—that supplicants wanted, but could not have, access to relics—upon which relic discourse depends. These characters force writers who deploy relic discourse to indicate, perhaps inadvertently, the inaccessibility of relics to the very laypersons who want access to them so badly. This is in direct contrast to the paradigm that was discussed in chapter three, wherein writers, on behalf of their cults (and even on behalf of *ecclesia*), present relics as signifying unity with the haliwerfolc, one which allows *ecclesia*-as-structure to incorporate the laity in a way impossible for extra-

ecclesiastical institutions. Given the actual *lack* of lay access to physical relics, however,

this rhetorical move breaks down in the case studies of this chapter, and reveals a

carefully structured *ecclesia* that, while it gestures towards lay participation, is never able

to circumvent the hierarchical systems it has in place. In such a context, holy bodies are

set apart from lay bodies—though some writers can (and do) gesture to embodiedness as

an equalizing force.

In spite of such gestures, however, holy bodies in shrines act to underscore the

hierarchical chain of command in place at many churches, even as they are

simultaneously presented as allowing lay access to the saint's monopoly on salvific and

healing grace. This is nowhere more compellingly illustrated than in Malory's *Le Morte

D'arthur*, wherein only the knights who are demonstrably different from all the other

knights of the Round Table (the white bulls in a field of black bulls) are able to attain the

Grail. The relic, in the *Morte*, is out of reach for *communitas*, which is presented as

homogenized and black. Conversely, it is within the grasp of those knights who are

heterogenized and white, for those knights whose status as the best knights in the world

marks them as representatives of structure (marks them, again, as not so very different

from cloistered monks). The interdynamics of supplicants, relic custodians, and relics,

are of course more complex than discussions of hierarchy and power would allow. Many

supplicants thought themselves to be, or were, healed. Supplicants and pilgrims may not

have thought of themselves as oppressed, and many miracle stories from the early years

of particular saints' cults indicate that people may have been permitted to approach the

saint, and even had visions of his very personal and healing aid to them. Nonetheless, the

necessity of the virtuous supplicant on the one hand, and the relic custodian whose

morality is not known, on the other, constitutes an indication of an imbalance of power

between the laity who sought out *praesentia* and the representatives of the *ecclesia* who

controlled access to it. This disparity can ultimately be understood to overlay, and

perhaps even to inspire, literary depictions of immoral relic custodians, whose goal is

financial profit and whose attitude to their supplicants (or, in the case of the Pardoner,

audiences) is less than complimentary.

CHAPTER 5

Relics on the Road to Canterbury

When the monks of this monastery desired to extend their church, they sent the tooth of their patron the
blessed pope Nicholas into different provinces, using for the purpose certain secular priests, who were
eloquent speakers, and skilful in getting money. Now this tooth was inclosed in crystal. One day when
these preachers were carrying round the vessel of this holy relic, and extorting money by behaving
dishonestly, the crystal cracked, as if the most reverend Pontiff could not endure their blasphemies. When
the monks saw this miracle, they took home the tooth, nor did they ever suffer it to be taken out of the
monastery again for such a purpose.
>   ~Caesarius of Heisterbach, *The Dialogue on Miracles*, trans. H. von E. Scott and C.C.
>   Swinton Bland

Chapters two and three focused on the ways in which relics ensured financial and

political solvency for the churches in which they were located. Nonetheless, as the case

studies of chapter four show, relics themselves were not accessible to the very laity that

shrines were supposed to protect and defend and were, as a result, the occasion for

conflict between relic custodians and pilgrims. Because many relics were encased out of

reach and view, that is, and because only those specifically designated as custodians were

ever allowed to approach shrines, relics do not simply, as many miracles (and even

modern scholars) would have it, serve as mediatory aids for the laity, but also as a way to

bolster church wealth and authority.[1] It is easy to imagine, in light of such

inaccessibility, why texts that decried relic custodians as greedy, pompous and obsessed

with rhetoric circulated. These sorts of relic custodians, like the monks in Caesarius'

account above, are often depicted as "carrying round the vessel of [a] holy relic, and

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[1] See chapter one, "Approaches to Medieval Relic Cults."

191

extorting money by behaving dishonestly." In this chapter, I contend that Chaucer's

Pardoner is one such character, whose rhetorical manipulation of his supposedly holy

objects serves to mock and even to undermine material occlusion at shrines. What relic

culture accomplished visually through opaque shrines, the Pardoner accomplishes

through his rhetoric. By placing Chaucer's Pardoner in conversation with his European

analogues, Brother Onion in Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Girolamo in Masuccio's

Novellino, I demonstrate here that the Pardoner's relics are crucial to understanding his

character, and that relic discourse permeates the Pardoner's Prologue and Tale. His

position as (illegitimate, immoral, parodic) relic custodian is central to thinking about the

importance of Canterbury, its shrines and its relics, to the *Canterbury Tales*.

When Chaucer-the-pilgrim introduces the Pardoner in the General Prologue to the

Canterbury Tales, he makes it clear that we should pay special attention to the Pardoner's

relics. The General Prologue portrait affiliates the Pardoner with relic cults and

pilgrimages by the pilgrim souvenir he wears,[2] but even more so by the relics he carries:

> For in his male he hadde a pilwe-beer,
> Which that he seyde was Oure Lady veyl;
> He seyde he hadde a gobet of the seyl
> That Seint Peter hadde, whan that he wente
> Upon the see, til Jhesu Crist hym hente.
> He hadde a croys of latoun ful of stones,
> And in a glas he hadde pigges bones.
> But with thise relikes, whan that he fond
> A povre person dwellynge upon lond,
> Upon a day he gat hym moore moneye
> Than that the person gat in monthes tweye;

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[2] This souvenir or badge is a "vernycle […] sowed upon his cappe" (I.685). All citations are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. L. D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Boston, 1987). "Vernycle" was the common name for the Veronica icon, a cloth that Veronica was said to have used to wipe Christ's face as he carried the Cross to Calvary. An imprint of the suffering Christ was supposedly left on the cloth and subsequently venerated as a relic.

> And thus, with feyned flaterye and japes,
> He made the person and the peple his apes. (I 694-706)

Of the forty-five lines allocated to describing the Pardoner, four describe his singing, three his traveling companion and personal history, fourteen his physical appearance (including Chaucer's narrator's notorious speculation that he is a "geldyng or a mare"), and six his ecclesiastical role and preaching. Chaucer devotes no fewer than eighteen lines to describing the Pardoner's relics, and in his own Prologue, the Pardoner himself calls attention to his "sholder-boon / Which that was of an hooly Jewes sheep" (VI 350-51), among other relics. The amount of space allocated to relics clearly shows their importance to Chaucer's conception of the Pardoner.

In the sixteenth century, neither John Heywood nor Thomas More missed this emphasis. Heywood's 1533 play, *The Pardoner and The Frere*, satirizes a corrupt pardoner who, like Chaucer's Pardoner, uses relics to make money. Heywood lifts from Chaucer phrases such as "Here is a mytten eke, as ye may se" (97)[3] and "I shewe ye of a holy Jewes shepe / A bone" (96), and he augments the General Prologue's eighteen lines on relics to eighty-one. Relics are paramount even in Heywood's stage directions: "In the meane whyle entreth the Pardoner with all his relyques, to declare what eche of them ben, and the hole power and vertu thereof" (95). And in More's 1529 *Dialogue against Heresy*—a work which, unlike Heywood's play, defends relics and their appropriate veneration—the Messenger, a character who questions the More-persona on matters of orthodoxy and faith, dismisses relics by observing that people often venerate "some olde rotten bone that was heppely some tyme *as Chaucer sayth* a bone of some holy Iewes shepe" (98; emphasis added). As Alastair Minnis has observed, the Messenger is very

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[3] Cf. *Canterbury Tales*, VI.372.

"aware of Chaucer's Pardoner" ("Once More into the Breech" 6).[4] I would add that both

More and Heywood were very aware of Chaucer's Pardoner's *relics*, and that they

highlighted these relics at the expense of some of the Pardoner's other attributes.

Unlike Heywood and More, modern readers of Chaucer have often passed over

the Pardoner's relics.[5] Indeed, most medieval scholarship on Chaucer's Pardoner has not

taken into account the significance of relics within late medieval culture in general.[6] Few

studies have examined the Pardoner's relics (and the Pardoner's presentation of them)

with reference to medieval devotional practices—and those who have, frequently elide

distinctions among various kinds of relics.[7] Siegfried Wenzel has sought to counter some

inherited assumptions about relics in general (including the notion that pardoners were

never associated with relics); Wenzel also debunked the idea that the Pardoner sells

relics.[8] However, his work does not incorporate the conventions of relic cults into an

interpretation of the Pardoner and does not examine the relics Chaucer's character claims

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[4] My thanks to Prof. Minnis for so generously sharing his work-in-progress.

[5] Thanks to scholars like Minnis, however, the Pardoner as purveyor of indulgences is no longer overlooked or understudied. See most recently "Reclaiming the Pardoners," *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33 (2003): 311-34; and see also "The Construction of Chaucer's Pardoner."

[6] Monica McAlpine argues that relics were only a "marginal expression of the church's life" (16). This statement hardly accords relics the importance that they deserve, particularly as the centerpiece of medieval pilgrimage. Carolyn Dinshaw similarly does not contextualize relics historically (156-84). For a critique of her approach to the Pardoner's relics, see Lee Patterson, "Chaucer's Pardoner on the Couch" (658-59).

[7] Melvin Storm contends that the Pardoner, as a walking shrine, "endangers the pilgrimage realistically as well as symbolically, threatening to halt the pilgrims long before they even approach Canterbury by persuading them that they have reached an equivalent goal" (810). (Eugene Vance makes a similar argument in "Chaucer's Pardoner: Relics, Discourse, and Frames of Propriety.") However, Storm's statement, and indeed his argument, assumes that the Pardoner's fake non-notable relics can stand in for the legitimate, notable, and famous relics at Canterbury—and assumes that the Canterbury pilgrims would have been naive enough not to know the difference. Daniel Knapp, who offers an excellent reading of the significance of Becket's breeches to the exchange between the Pardoner and the Host, nevertheless concludes that because Becket's breeches are the subject of derision, Chaucer could never have intended the pilgrims to arrive at Canterbury. See "The Relyk of a Seint: A Gloss on Chaucer's Pilgrimage" (1-26). For a similar argument, see Kamowski.

[8] See Wenzel, "Chaucer's Pardoner and His Relics" (38). G. R. Owst also documents pardoners who carried and displayed relics. See *Preaching in Medieval England* (108-10). For a more recent examination of pardoners and relics, see Vincent, "Some Pardoners' Tales" (54-55).

to have. Nor does Seeta Chaganti explore the history of relics and their cults in her

assessment of the Pardoner; instead, she focuses on the ways in which relics and

reliquaries correspond to poetic language.[9] Chaganti and Wenzel are nonetheless

exceptions to a critical discussion that foregrounds the Pardoner's gender-identity and

sexual proclivities;[10] his status as a preacher; his moral decrepitude; and the quality of his

rhetoric.[11] These issues are vital to the Pardoner's character, and the Pardoner cannot be

adequately understood without taking into account his physicality, morality, preaching

and even sexuality. But it is equally difficult to understand the Pardoner's character

without taking into account his relics and how he handles them. By making Canterbury

the destination of the pilgrimage, Chaucer identifies relics and relic shrines as the

ostensible reason for his characters getting together in the first place. And of these

pilgrims, the Pardoner is the most explicitly associated with relics; in fact, he manipulates

his relics (physically and rhetorically) in order to make a living.

In this chapter, I will argue that Chaucer depicts the Pardoner as a parodic relic

custodian.[12] A relic custodian's special job was to care for the remains of the saints: he

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[9] Seeta Chaganti's unpublished dissertation maintains that "by juxtaposing relics with a portrayal of death in figurative terms, the *Pardoner's Tale* creates a language with which to describe the functioning of metaphor [...]. Metaphor, as it is conceived in the *Pardoner's Tale*, reflects material objects which employed diverse strategies for representing and interpreting death" (85). Her argument rarely focuses on or mentions the Pardoner's relics, however, and instead relies on assertions of enshrinement and containment as they are related to metaphorical constructions of death and change. These claims are interesting and important, but do not further an understanding of the Pardoner's relics in relationship to medieval devotional practices.

[10] See most recently Glenn Burger, *Chaucer's Queer Nation*; Richard Firth Green, "Further Evidence for Chaucer's Representation of the Pardoner as a Womanizer"; Steven Kruger, "Claiming the Pardoner: Toward a Gay Reading of Chaucer's Pardoner's Tale"; and Minnis, "Chaucer and the Queering Eunuch."

[11] Vance relates the Pardoner's (failed) preaching to his "spiritual inability to retain the character of ordination" (736), and Patterson, to the Pardoner's spiritual sterility (661-64). Minnis suggests that the Pardoner has "usurped the noble office of preacher" ("Chaucer's Pardoner" 90).

[12] Relic custodians were generally referred to as *custodes tumuli*, *scrinii*, or *feretri*. These terms have various translations, including feretrars, shrine-keepers, shrine-wardens, or, as I designate them here, relic custodians. See Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines of Medieval England* (130) and Wall (30-33).

guarded, regulated and controlled relics, and access to them.[13] Relic custodians kept

careful surveillance over pilgrims as well; hence their presence was crucial to the

devotional practices of relic cults.[14] The Pardoner in some ways resembles such an

officer: his occupation similarly requires him to control his relics and dictate the

conditions of access to them. He can be thought of as a kind of private entrepreneur, who

tries to capitalize on a well-established system relating to the custody of relics. Though

his relics are fake, his character still serves to satirize relic custodians, who similarly

guarded and regulated contact with their (presumably real and supposedly holy) objects.

More to the point, the Pardoner, his legitimate, historical counterparts, and his European

analogues in Boccaccio and Masuccio sought to occlude relics, whether by rhetoric, as in

the Pardoner's case, or by means of elaborate shrines, as in the case of (for example)

cathedral relic-keepers. The power relics were thought to have should thus be understood

as political as well as spiritual, since by controlling relics (through the relic custodian) the

institutional Church served as a gatekeeper between God's grace and the pilgrim or

supplicant. The Pardoner's position as an illegitimate, immoral relic custodian thereby

enables—even necessitates—a discussion of relic-keeping at Canterbury Cathedral.

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[13] See chapter four. For an account of the duties of Canterbury's relic custodians, see Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* (147-54).

[14] See Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* (105-110). Nilson suggests that at major shrines, "an offering was an indispensable part of any pilgrimage regardless of whether of not a miracle was sought. Although a gift was probably not mandatory, later shrine-keepers no doubt exerted considerable pressure on visitors to pay" (105). Moreover, access to the shrine "through the choir was generally organised under the supervision of the shrine-keeper" (Nilson, "The Medieval Experience at the Shrine" 100), and that pilgrims were always supervised (101). Observatory booths, two examples of which survive today at Oxford Christ Church (St Frideswide) and St Albans, sometimes aided in supervising pilgrims. See Heath (280), and Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* (53).

Relics at Canterbury

At least from the eighth century until 1538, relics were a central feature of Canterbury Cathedral. Canterbury's relics obviously played an integral part in drawing pilgrims to its locale—and Chaucer would have expected his readers to be aware of this as they began to read the *Canterbury Tales*, even before they met the Pardoner. And in case there were any doubt, Chaucer announces from the outset of the *Tale* that the pilgrims travel to Canterbury the "hooly blisful martyr for to seke / That hem hath holpen whan that they were seke" (I.17-18). From the beginning, then, Chaucer-the-pilgrim underscores the goal of this pilgrimage: to reach the shrine at Canterbury, and as was required of any virtuous supplicant, to offer due thanks to St Thomas for his miraculous works.[15]

Even before Becket's death in 1170, Canterbury Cathedral was the center of medieval Christianity in England. The Cathedral (and the Abbey as well, of course) had been from its inception associated with St Augustine of Canterbury and, although *in absentia*, with St Gregory the Great as well. Its splendor would probably have been overwhelming: tombs of kings and of saints, including St Alphege, St Dunstan, and St Anselm;[16] relics extending to include the arm of St George, patron saint of England; a thriving tourist industry, largely dependent on the pilgrims who made the visit to their city; and by 1220, St Thomas' shrine and the promise of healing and relief from any number of maladies. A testament to the history of Christianity in England, the Cathedral provided a concrete reminder of St Augustine and St Gregory the Great, and by the mid-

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[15] In fact, Benedict of Peterborough includes several instances of healed supplicants who are either punished or remonstrated for not making their way to Canterbury to give thanks at Becket's shrine. See *Materials* (2:230-31) and (1:273-74).
[16] See Adair (69).

fifteenth century, of the Black Prince and Henry IV as well, whose monuments flanked St Thomas' shrine.[17] In *Historical Memorials of Canterbury*, Arthur Penrhyn Stanley argues that Cathedral churches only gradually took the place of the Abbey churches associated with them, and that this growing prominence was directly related to the possession of relics (185-86). In the Cathedral's earliest years, prelates were buried outside the city walls, in accordance with Roman practice.[18] This meant that no one would have been buried within the Cathedral; as a result, the Cathedral itself would not have housed any saints' bodies, and so had to look elsewhere for relics. Aside from the "natural pre-eminence [...] of the original Church of Augustine [the Abbey] over that in which his see was established by Ethelbert [Canterbury Cathedral]," then, in its earliest years the Abbey was considered holier than the Cathedral *because of its relics* (186). These relics included the body of St Augustine of Canterbury, who was buried at the Abbey, *not* at the Cathedral.

But in 760 A.D., Archbishop Cuthbert insisted that he be interred inside the Cathedral, and so began the tradition of burying primates on Cathedral grounds and within the city walls, rather than outside the city in the monastery adjacent to the Cathedral.[19] Cuthbert's request had to be carried out in secret, and he ordered that the death bell not be tolled until the third day "after his death and burial" to prevent the

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[17] On Canterbury before St Thomas Becket, see especially Stanley, chapter one. See also Brooks, who outlines the ongoing struggle between the Church at Canterbury and the state—a struggle that was, of course, picked up by Thomas Becket in the twelfth century. In fact, the power of the Mercian kings depended largely on whether they could control Canterbury (9ff). Hence, in its Anglo-Saxon years, Canterbury dominated England "in an age of fluctuating political fortunes" (Brooks 5). Brooks attributes this domination to the wealth of the first episcopal see in England—but he also acknowledges that the books *and relics* that the early Roman monks brought with them contributed to the importance of the site (3).

[18] See Brown, *Cult of the Saints* (1-22). There, Brown details the Roman tradition to bury *all* the dead, regardless of their sanctity, outside of the city walls.

[19] See Stanley (188ff).

monks from the Abbey from claiming their requisite prize (188).[20] Once the Cathedral

had holy objects of its own, there appears to have been a decrease in *furta sacra*:

"Hitherto the monks of the Cathedral had been compelled to content themselves with

such fragments as they could beg or steal from other churches, but now the vacant spaces

were filled with a goodly array, not only of illustrious prelates, but even of canonised

saints" (189).[21] The outcome of Cuthbert's decision demonstrates that, for the Cathedral

to take its (rightful) prominent place in Canterbury, it needed to have relics of its own. It

is doubtful whether the Cathedral could have become such a prominent place had

Cuthbert not paved the way for its impressive collection of tombs and relics. After all, if

Cuthbert had not legitimated the burying of saints and prelates at the Cathedral, it is

likely that Thomas Becket's body would have been, like those of his successors before

Cuthbert, buried at the abbey outside the city walls.[22] In any event, by the time Chaucer

wrote the Canterbury Tales, Canterbury had been firmly established as a preeminent site

of European pilgrimage because of its relics, and its pilgrims would have seen, if not the

relics themselves, the "elaborate reliquaries" in which they were contained (Geary,

"Commodities" 174).

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[20] Cuthbert also unwittingly set the stage for the expansion of the Cathedral itself. He "built a church
dedicated to St John the Baptist as close as possible to the sanctuary of the Cathedral church, with the
intention that it should serve as a baptistery and as a place of burial for the archbishops. The latter function
made subsequent extensions necessary" (Brooks 36).
[21] Though there seems to have been an increase in competition between shrines vying for the attention of
pilgrims—St Cuthbert, for example, was regarded as the chief rival of St Thomas Becket (Adair 145).
[22] It was not unheard of to bury a primate within a church. Gregory the Great—notorious for his refusal to
dismember the bodies of saints (McCulloh *passim*)—"himself cites an example of the translation of an
episcopal corpse: the body of bishop Herculanus, which had lain in a temporary resting-place outside the
walls of Perugia, but was finally interred within the church of St Peter" (Petersen 146). The importance of
this to the establishment of churches and even cities is obvious in Petersen's discussion of the translations
of many martyrs to Constantinople: "The motive for these transfers was clearly to make the new Rome as
rich in martyrs as the old" (146).

"Elaborate" feretory chapel reliquaries—and indeed, many of the reliquaries found in cathedrals—were constructed of opaque wood, gilded and decorated with silver or gems. This is the kind of reliquary that Chaucer's pilgrims would have found waiting for them at Canterbury.[23] Erasmus' account testifies to the predominance of such reliquaries there, where even he was not allowed the privilege of seeing Becket's bones. Many prestigious relics at Canterbury were kept out of the sight and reach of most pilgrims,[24] and Becket's many relic custodians would have participated in the occlusion of his relics by the way in which they controlled pilgrim behavior at the shrine. As early as 1315, the Cathedral boasted over four hundred relics and had been known for our "holy blissful martyr" for almost 150 years. J. Charles Wall comments on the sheer number of relics at Canterbury:

> Erasmus said that the exhibition of relics [at Canterbury] seemed likely to
> last for ever, they were so numerous; and his testimony is born out by the
> inventory contained in one of the cartularies of Christchurch, which
> enumerates no fewer than four hundred items. (13)

Moreover, this list designates the preeminence of some of its relics by the order in which it presents the Cathedral's holy artifacts: it "commences with a list of twelve bodies of saints" (13), beginning with St Thomas, and then proceeds to list arm relics in "jewelled

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[23] See Wall (13-16, 19-24, 148-75). In these sections, Wall details Canterbury's many relics, affirms that these were usually kept in opaque chest-reliquaries, and describes the major (opaque and gilded) chest shrines there. Throughout *Shrines of British Saints*, Wall demonstrates that such reliquaries were in common use across England throughout the Middle Ages, in cathedrals as well as in monasteries. Furthermore, Nilson (*Cathedral Shrines* 57-62) and Wall (19-25) both discuss the probability that smaller shrines were "perched" on top of beams and reredoses, at Canterbury and elsewhere (Nilson 57). Such a location—overhead—may not have kept relics in glass or crystal reliquaries hidden, but it certainly would have kept the relics out of reach for all but a giant-sized supplicant. Finally, the less important (and often anonymous) relics that Erasmus was allowed to see at Canterbury are in stark contrast to other kinds of primary relics.
[24] Knapp, who lucidly observes that Becket's breeches "were among the very few intimately personal relics of [Becket] that the pilgrims were allowed to see" ("The Relyk of a Seint" 9), unfortunately makes nothing of his own remarks about access and instead concludes that "the thematic opposition" of the *Canterbury Tales* "is between the Canterbury journey on the one hand and the journey to 'Jerusalem celestial' on the other" (18).

silver-gilt shrines" (13), three heads, and then some of the smaller, non-notable relics kept together in movable feretra (14).[25] Above all else at Canterbury, however, was the shrine of St Thomas, bejeweled, enormous and kept carefully under a gilded canopy and sequestered in the Trinity Chapel at the far eastern end of the Cathedral.[26]

Medieval accounts focus on the shrine's opulence and enormity. Matthew Paris commented that the "body of the shrine [was] of the purest gold of Ophir and precious stones, and of workmanship even costlier than the material" (qtd. Blick 408).[27] Wall, following the account of Erasmus and others, describes the shrine as follows:

> The lower part of the shrine was of stone with recesses all round, into which ailing pilgrims pressed the diseased limb, the nearest contact possible to the healing body of the saint. Above this was a wooden box-like structure or case suspended by a rope to a pulley in the roof by which it was drawn up or lowered. When raised it exposed to view the feretory containing the relics, to the accompaniment of the music of silver bells attached to the canopy, which the act of moving set ringing. [...] Then was seen a magnificent sight. The feretory was covered with gold plates, and over it was a gold wire netting on which was fastened a wealth of jewels. (159)

The surviving illustration in Cottonian MS., Tiberius E., f. 269, supports this description, depicting as it does the shrine covered by the gilded wooden canopy, both of which are seated on a large, stone shrine base with its niches (designed for kneeling pilgrims).[28] It

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[25] Wall details Canterbury's many relics, affirms that these were usually kept in opaque chest-reliquaries, and describes the major (opaque and gilded) chest shrines there. Throughout *Shrines of British Saints*, Wall demonstrates that such reliquaries were in common use across England throughout the Middle Ages, in cathedrals as well as in monasteries (though he does not make any issue of restricted access). Furthermore, Nilson (*Cathedral Shrines*, at 57-62) and Wall (19-25) both discuss the probability that smaller shrines were "perched" on top of beams and reredoses, at Canterbury and elsewhere (Nilson 57). Such a location—overhead—would have kept the relics out of reach for all but a giant-sized supplicant.

[26] Many scholars argue that in traveling to Canterbury, pilgrims would have experienced an intimate encounter with St Thomas. See, for example, Lamia and Harris. Such a view focuses on Peter Brown's important idea of *praesentia*—and may indeed account for some pilgrimage experiences at a shrine—but does not allow for the way in which the physical structure of the shrine and its guardians would have probably prevented such an intimate encounter from taking place.

[27] For other medieval accounts, including those by Friar Simon Fitzsimmons and Aeneas Sylvius (who was to become Pope Pius II), see Blick (408-12).

[28] See Wall (162) and Lamia (41).

is significant that descriptions of the shrine do not mention St Thomas' relics—for the

relics remained completely hidden even while the feretory was displayed.

In setting forth the general security around major shrines, Ben Nilson remarks,

"Erasmus reported that St Thomas of Canterbury's bones were not permitted to be seen"

(*Cathedral Shrines* 35).[29] Erasmus' text runs as follows:

> Ogygius: He opened for us the chest ("aperuit thecam") in which the holy man's
> body is said to lie ("in qua reliquum sancti viri corpus quiescere
> dicitur").
> Menedemus: You saw the bones ("Vidisti ossa")?
> Ogygius: No, that's not permitted, nor would it be possible without the use of
> ladders ("Id quidem fas non est, nec liceret nisi admotis scalis"). But the wooden
> chest conceals a golden chest; when this is drawn up by ropes, it reveals
> inestimable treasure. (*Peregrinatio religionis ergo*, 3:490; trans. Thompson
> 40:645).

Erasmus here refers to the canopy which covered Becket's shrine—Becket's relics were

hence contained in a "chest within a chest" (Thompson 671), completely sequestered

from the pilgrims who visited Canterbury. Other accounts similarly emphasize seeing the

feretory and its gems, and do not even mention Becket's relics; one Venetian pilgrim

details carefully the "precious stones" he viewed on the shrine and, pointedly *not*

mentioning Becket's relics, comments that "*everything* is far surpassed by a ruby" (Wall

160; emphasis added)—known as the Regale of France—which was given by the King of

France. The shrine itself was surrounded by an iron grill and, according to Henry of

Avranches' account, was well fortified:

> Near to the altar, there rises a catafalque (tomb) of sculpted marble, borne aloft on
> marble columns. In the midst there is a tomb made of marble, a work strong
> enough to deter theft, and to endure for all time, thanks to the iron bars and the
> marble which covers the wood; the whole is covered by a magnificent cannister,
> which the hand of craftsmen adorned with gems and with gold. (qtd. Blick 409)

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[29] For a more detailed account of intellectual attitudes to saints' relics and the ways in which notable relics
were kept hidden from pilgrims, see chapters one and two.

The sheer height of the shrine was emphasized by John Stow, who recorded a description

of the shrine in 1592, some fifty-four years after the shrine's destruction.[30] In *The*

Annales of England, Stow describes the shrine as opulently decorated and resting on a

"stone base the height of a man" (Blick 411).[31]

Blick shows that pilgrim badges support as forcefully as written accounts the

base's enormity, and she explains that "English shrines formed impressive architectural

monuments":

> Most stone shrine bases measured 2.45 m in height with the feretories placed on
> top to keep their jewels away from thieves. The stationary position of the shrine
> was emphasized by wooden or cloth covers which were winched upward on a
> rope attached to a pulley in the ceiling above. The shape of the shrine base
> evolved to facilitate the pilgrimage practice of trying to get close to the relics of
> the saint. In the later Middle Ages, the dividing line between relic and reliquary
> diminished, especially for the common pilgrims who were never permitted to
> handle the relics directly. For them, the visual and tactile sensations of the shrine
> formed their experience of the sacred. (429)

Becket's shrine was thus in keeping with many other cathedral shrines in England at the

time, the height of which often made a ladder necessary to reach the feretrum.[32] It is

important to remember another practical consequence of the shrine's size, however,

which in addition to deterring theft, would also have kept pilgrims from, as Blick allows,

handling "relics directly." Neither Blick nor Nilson makes enough of this impediment,

and given Thiofrid's careful justification for encasing relics in shrines, it seems that there

was a more immediate institutional investment in keeping relics hidden than the simple

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[30] Blick observes that "it is possible that Stow might have seen the shrine as a child [...] but there is no
proof that he ever visited Canterbury" (411).
[31] Sarah Blick reconstructs Becket's shrine based on surviving pilgrimage badges (Blick 419-38); she
argues that these badges prove an exception to the general rule that "imitation in the earlier Middle Ages
was done on a less precise basis than modern-day viewers expect" (420). She describes Becket's shrine as
"sumptuous" and "lavish" (408).
[32] Nilson (48).

need to keep them safe. I remain unconvinced that for every pilgrim, seeing the shrine

would have been comparable to seeing the relics—and as I show in this chapter, the

exchange between Chaucer's Pardoner and the Host points to this difficulty.

The *Canterbury Tales* is set against a backdrop of relics; but the Pardoner's relics,

unlike the famous relics at Canterbury, were non-notable (and fake). As Spurrell points

out,

> In theory even the smallest relic was sacramental of the power and presence of the
> saint concerned: in practice during the Middle Ages a knuckle bone of one of the
> apostles was not accorded the care and reverence which the whole relic of a much
> lesser saint attracted, nor was it as potent a miracle worker. [...] Miscellaneous
> relics could be in the possession of an individual who carried them about the
> country. Chaucer's Pardoner is a fraudulent example. (67-68)

It is important to remember that, as Spurrell implies here, "relik" is a complex term.[33] It

is hence essential to keep its sub-categories in mind when pilgrims or supplicants succeed

or fail to access relics in medieval literary texts. This is important for the Pardoner, for

his relics were certainly available (in some rather insidious ways) to his audiences. His

artifacts—and the relics of other traveling and immoral relic custodians, as Guibert so

forcefully declares—are not notable relics, however. Instead, they are (fake) non-notable

relics, and as such were not regarded as seriously as the relics carefully enshrined in

cathedrals.[34] It is thus no surprise that it was not difficult for the pilgrims to approach the

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[33] See chapter two, "Access and Occlusion: Notable versus Non-notable Relics."

[34] Guibert underscores this difference between notable and non-notable relics:
> Fraudulent deals are frequently struck—not so much in the case of whole bodies ("non de integris
> eorum corporibus tantae"), as in the case of limbs and parts of bodies ("quantae de membris et
> membrorum particulis fraudes fiant")—and common bones ("ossa vulgaria") are thus distributed
> to be venerated as the relics of the saints ("pro sanctorum pigneribus"). See Guibert of Nogent, *De
> Sanctis*, 596-98; trans., 418.

Guibert here seems to equate "sanctorum pigneribus" not only with "ossa vulgaria" but with "membris et
membrorum particulis," which suggests that Guibert's treatise is in fact addressing the problem of
inauthentic, *non-notable* relics. Elsewhere, Guibert distinguishes between "corporum pignerumve

Pardoner's relics, and it makes sense that he is not typically thought of as hiding his wares. He has elaborate methods of displaying his relics, in fact, and by his own account, he exhibits them, dips them in wells to make healing potions, and offers them for veneration when it suits him to do so. At first glance, in other words, what the Pardoner does with his relics seems hardly in keeping with the hidden and guarded relics at Canterbury Cathedral. This is, however—as I shall argue here—a crucial part of the point. By creating a character who is modeled on historical relic custodians, but who carries and permits his audiences to see patently fake, non-notable relics, Chaucer works within a literary and historical tradition that was concerned with whether pilgrims and laypeople would get too close to relics on the one hand, and concerned on the other that, when pilgrims or other laypeople were offered the chance to get close to non-notable relics, the relics could well be fakes. By contrast, notable relics believed to be genuine (such as Becket's bones at Canterbury) were often jealously guarded and rarely exposed to the public-at-large.

Traveling Relic Custodians

Traveling relic custodians, on the other hand, frequently exposed relics and (according to Guibert and others) used language in order to mislead their audiences about the relics they carried.[35] In *De sanctis*, Guibert complains,

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sanctorum" (Book I, 697), again highlighting that for him, "pignera" seems to mean non-notable, rather than notable ("corporum") relics. See also chapter two (66-74).

[35] Nor is Guibert unusual in his venom over immoral relic custodians. Relic custodians' abuses became a common criticism of relic cults in the twelfth through fifteenth centuries, and immoral relic custodians are featured in Caesarius of Heisterbach, Étienne de Bourbon, Jacques de Vitry, Boccaccio, Masuccio and Chaucer.

> We repeatedly see [the cult of saints] trivialized through gossip and made
> an object of ridicule through the dragging around of reliquaries. Daily we
> see someone's pockets completely emptied by the lies of those whom
> Jerome called 'rabble rousers' from their rabid style of speech. (trans.
> Head 414)[36]

Moreover, Guibert worries that such traveling relic custodians expose their wares: "the bare bones of the saints [are placed] in boxes made of ivory and silver, and then, when requests flow in on them, they uncover [these bones] at certain times and places" (420). Guibert criticizes immoral relic custodians, like the one who accepts money from Bishop Odo for a relic of St Exuperius. The relic custodian, however, does not upset the relics of his church to obtain a relic; instead, he substitutes the body of another Exuperius, cleverly promising the bishop that " 'this is the body of Exuperius, but I can say nothing about his being a saint' " (418). In his criticism of the popular practices of relic cults, however, Guibert also alludes to the traveling relic custodians and the relic quests of the eleventh and twelfth centuries (414).

Such quests were typically motivated by a need to raise money or to advertise a saint.[37] This tradition in France and in Flanders is well documented.[38] Nicole Herrmann-Mascard comments that the questers perhaps "ne pas se contenter d'attendre les oblations

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[36] "Crebro teri perspicimus ista susurro et facta feretrorum circumlatione ridicula et eorum, quos a rabie declamandi rabulos Ieronimus vocat, mendaciis cotidie cernimus alieni marsupii profunda nudari" (Huygens I.395-98).

[37] Sigal identifies three primary "motifs du depart" ("reasons for leaving"): first, if the community were in danger of falling into ruin and it was therefore worth it to risk traveling with "les précieux ossements" ("the precious bones"); second, to raise money to build "un ouvrage particulier" ("a particular work or building"); third, to obtain greater fame for their saint. Sigal also explains that a "voyage" could be undertaken to reclaim usurped territory (78). Herrmann-Mascard focuses on the financial aspect of these quests: "tout ces quêtes ont eu pour but d'obtenir les fonds nécessaires à la construction, reconstruction ou à l'embellissement d'églises" ("all these quests had the goal of obtaining the funds necessary for constructing, reconstructing or embellishing churches") (298). See also Kaiser (207). The relics were usually carried, "sur des épaules humaines" ("on human shoulders") (Sigal 84), in elaborate shrines "et non de simples coffrets de voyage" ("and not in simple portable chests") (Herrmann-Mascard 304). On Laon, see also Ward (134-42) and Rawcliffe (108).

[38] On Flanders, see Koziol, trans., "The Miracles of St Ursmer on His Journey through Flanders" (*passim*). There is a long history in Flanders of using relics as political instruments; see Bozóky.

des fidèles" ("were not willing to wait for the oblations of the faithful") but instead went

out in search of donations (296). Pierre André Sigal is more forgiving, however, and

suggests that religious communities often felt their need justified the decision "à risquer

sur les routes les précieux ossements" ("to risk the precious relics on the road") ("Les

Voyages" 77). Laity often accompanied such quests—which could be, as when the

canons of Laon journeyed to England in 1113 with "diverses reliques de la cathédrale"

("various relics from the cathedral [Notre-Dame de Laon]") (76), as long as 2000 km

(1243 miles) and five months—as did preachers "pour mieux célébrer les vertus du saint"

("to better advertise the wonders of the saint") (78). Guibert refers explicitly to the

campaign of Laon in 1113, undertaken because of a disastrous fire, and calls their

preacher or custodian a "*prolocutore*," which Head engagingly translates as a "public

relations specialist" (Huygens 98; trans Head 414). Guibert accuses this

preacher/custodian—whose job traveling with and preaching about relics ought to call to

mind that of the Pardoner—of "circumlocution" and of "proclaim[ing] heretical things

about our faith" (Head 414).

Not surprisingly, these quests were often associated with immoral relic

custodians, as well as with confession and absolution in the service of economic gain:

> As early as 1086, the monks of Marchiennes had attempted, with
> disastrous lack of success, to raise money from England with a tour of the
> relics of St Eusebius. The subsequent evidence for fund-raising by the
> canons of Laon Cathedral and the monks of Provins, touring England
> before 1160 with or without relics, is probably only the tip of a much more
> considerable iceberg, and suggests both that the authors of such itinerant
> quests were keen to recruit the support of the English bishops, and that
> those bestowing alms were encouraged to confess their sins, much as those
> obtaining indulgence were expected, by definition, to be penitent and
> confessed. Like indulgences, the itinerant relic quest was a phenomenon
> that first appears in the eleventh century: both quest and indulgence, let it

be noted, were dependent upon there being a ready supply of surplus cash within the economy. It is not until the 1160s, however, that we have any certain proof of an association between foreign *questores* and English indulgences. (Vincent, "Pardoners" 40).

These quests were criticized in the thirteenth century because of the abuses associated with "des quêteurs."[39] The Pardoner clearly belongs to this tradition (though it is not clear how frequently English clerics traveled with relics in order to raise money). The context of the *Canterbury Tales*, however, places him in the tradition of cathedral relic custodians as well, and it is certainly possible that Chaucer is commenting on the relationship between these two (problematic) devotional practices.

As Guibert and others complained, these traveling relics were advertised as holy (were "ornamented," so to speak) by what was said about them. In such cases, language—what and *how* something is said about a relic—works to demarcate a relic as holy, and hence accomplishes rhetorically what reliquaries do materially: it identifies a particular relic as worthy of veneration. Put another way, there are two kinds of occlusion: the material/physical occlusion of notable relics, advocated by Guibert of Nogent, Thiofrid of Echternach and other agents of the institutional church; and the linguistic occlusion of exposed, often non-notable (and even fake), relics, put to use by

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[39] "Jacques de Vitry [...] décrivent en termes comparables ces 'miserables homines' qui, pour extorquer aux imprudents de l'argent, vont sonner les cloches dans les villages, montrent sur les places publiques, dans les églises et dans les tavernes, de prétendues reliques dont ils proclament par serment l'authenticité" ("Jacques de Vitry describes [les quêteurs] as wretched men who, to extort money from the imprudent, ring village bells and show fake relics, which they claim to be authentic, in public places, in churches and in taverns") (Herrmann-Mascard 306).

the Pardoner and his European analogues.[40] In the case of the Pardoner and his European

analogues, such linguistic occlusion is unscrupulously deployed to value non-notable

fake relics (or simply outrageous ones) as genuine.

In this vein, Boccaccio's Fra Cipolla (or Brother Onion) successfully presents a

peacock feather as St. Gabriel's feather—one wonders what he could have done with the

Pardoner's pillow-case or sheep's shoulder-bone. (One also thinks of the Host's *reductio*

ad absurdum, when in a moment of anger he speculates that the Pardoner would try to

pass off even his befouled underwear as a relic.[41]) In the European analogues to

Chaucer's Pardoner, immoral relic custodians use relic discourse to portray common

objects as relics, in effect hiding what these objects actually are by placing them in

rhetorical reliquaries, so to speak. These texts often satirize relic cults' corruption and

relic-keepers, but they also, by analogy, problematize material occlusion, which could

actually (just like obfuscating rhetoric) misidentify the object contained in a shrine by

hiding it from view.[42]

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[40] See Guibert of Nogent, *De Sanctis*, Book I, 602-35, and Thiofrid of Echternach. *Flores Epytaphii Sanctorum*, Book II, *passim*. Guibert argues that saints' bodies should never be translated—hence notable relics would always remain completely hidden and never be open either to exposure or to abuse. He would thus have saints' notable relics even *more* carefully sequestered than they were in cathedral shrines.

[41] These famous lines run as follows: "Thou woldest make me kisse thyn olde breech, / And swere it were a relyk of a seint, / Though it were with thy fundament depeint!" See *Canterbury Tales*, VI.948-50.

[42] The entire body of St Alban, for example, was claimed by more than one monastery. Alban's relics were stolen and carried to Denmark in 795 but were subsequently re-stolen (possibly by one of the English relic-keepers, Ergwin) and taken back to St Albans. Later, when the monastery was threatened by Danish invasion, Ælfric hid Alban's body in the wall of St Albans and pretended to give the precious relics to Ely. When the threat of invasion had passed, the monks at Ely are said to have returned fake bones to Albans and then claimed to have the real relics themselves. This conflict between Albans and Ely went on for some four hundred years, and when Pope Adrian IV forced Ely to confess its deception, the shrine at Albans was rebuilt. See Wall (36-39).

From Material to Rhetorical Occlusion: The Pardoner's European Analogues

The Pardoner and his European analogues are immoral relic custodians whose livelihood depends upon—as Caesarius of Heisterbach observes of corrupt relic custodians—"carrying round the vessel of [a] holy relic, and extorting money by behaving dishonestly."[43] These analogues highlight the importance of the Pardoner's relics and of the Pardoner as relic custodian, since in these tales, fake relics and immoral relic custodians (rather than pardoners in particular) are the central concern.[44] Both Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Masuccio Salernitano's mid fifteenth-century *Novellino* present immoral relic custodians whose methods are remarkably like those of Chaucer's Pardoner. Boccaccio's Brother Onion and Masuccio's character, Girolamo, can be considered parodic relic custodians who dictate the conditions of access to the relics they carry. But they do not control access by physical or material occlusion. Instead, they use rhetorical occlusion or ornamentation in the place of ornamented and "elaborate reliquaries or containers."[45] They are thereby able to profess their artifacts to be valuable, and in so doing, they actually hide what their supposed relics really are (certainly not authentic relics!). These characters affirm Guibert's objection that it is not difficult to profit via non-notable relics. Guibert fretted that non-notable relics were falsely advertised and then exposed; so, too, these immoral characters (in contrast to relic custodians in charge of the opaque and gilded shrines of notable relics), physically expose their (non-notable, outrageous and patently fake) relics, even as they rhetorically occlude what they have by telling a lie about it.

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[43] Caesarius of Heisterbach (2:70).
[44] I am indebted to Prof. Minnis for drawing these continental analogues to my attention.
[45] Geary, "Commodities" (174).

Brother Onion appears in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, in the tenth story of the sixth

day. Onion's job, traveling to raise money for his order, takes him to Val d'Elsa, where

the people are "stupid enough" to pay him for the privilege of seeing his alleged relics

(Musa and Bondanella 109).[46] These include Onion's "most holy and beautiful relic"

("santissima e bella reliquia"), which is supposedly St. Gabriel's feather (Branca 762;

trans. 109); a finger of the Holy Spirit; one of the ribs of the True-Word-Made-Flesh-at-

the-Windows; Vestments of the Holy Catholic Faith; beams from the Star of Bethlehem;

a phial of St Michael's sweat; St. Lazarus' jaw bones; the sound of bells from Solomon's

temple in a phial; the wooden shoe of St. Gherardo da Villamagna; and finally, the

charcoal used to roast St. Lawrence.[47] His list could not be more ridiculous, and with it

Boccaccio mocks the practice of venerating exceedingly implausible relics. But

Boccaccio also focuses on Onion's method of displaying his relics. In fact, the plot of

this story revolves around whether Onion can successfully present a piece of coal as a

relic—whether he can rhetorically occlude the coal so that the audience will venerate it as

a relic. This situation comes about when two of his friends decide to test his rhetorical

skill by playing a joke on him. They steal his "most holy and beautiful relic," which is

actually a peacock feather, and replace it with a lump of coal. Their challenge is blatant:

Onion needs to be able to manipulate this object rhetorically in order to construct it as a

relic, but also to conceal what it actually is (just a lump of coal courtesy his friends).

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[46] "Nel quale, per ciò che buona pastura vi trovava, usò un lungo tempo d'andare ogni anno una volta a ricoglier le limosine fatte loro dagli sciocchi un de' frati di santo Antonio" (Branca 760).

[47] "Il dito dello Spirito Santo cosí intero e saldo come fu mai, e il ciuffetto del serafino che apparve a san Francesco, e una dell'unghie de' Gherubini, e una delle coste del Verbum caro fatti alle finestre, e de' vestimenti della Santa Fé catolica, e alquanti de' raggi della stella che apparve a' tre Magi in oriente, e un ampolla del sudore di san Michele quando combatté col diavole, e la mascella della Morte di san Lazzaro e altre" (Branca 771; trans., 111).

Onion occludes his lump of coal, not by placing it in an opaque and locked

container, but by narrating his method of obtaining it. His story, which includes a visit to

Jerusalem and the description of many (implausible) relics, serves (like a reliquary) to

identify his relics as precious and worthy of veneration. Once Onion has explained the

provenance of the coal, he "opened the box, and displayed the charcoal. The foolish

throng gazed upon it in reverent admiration" ("aperse la cassetta e mostrò i carboni a

stolta moltitudine ebbe con ammirazione reverentemente guardati") (trans. 115; Branca

773-74). Presumably the notable relics in cathedral reliquaries were often authentic

relics, unlike those Onion claims to have. But Boccaccio nevertheless uses this moment

to suggest a parallel between physically concealed relics, however genuine, and fake

relics concealed by rhetoric. A believer in Onion's audience may "see" a precious relic,

but this is not, in fact, what Onion has—as the reader knows from the very outset. His

rhetoric accomplishes what a physical reliquary might: it affirms that the "throng" has

gathered for a purpose, and that the object of their veneration is genuine and worthwhile.

That is to say, here in the *Decameron*, rhetoric functions as a reliquary—figuratively,

rather than literally, ornamenting and occluding an object of veneration.

Masuccio Salernitano's mid fifteenth-century *Novellino*, published (probably

posthumously) in 1476,[48] operates similarly, featuring an immoral relic custodian who

occludes (and valorizes) an object by categorizing it as something else. Masuccio tells

the tale of an "unscrupulous Franciscan friar" named Girolamo, who "deceives credulous

people with a spurious relic and a fake miracle" (Minnis, "Construction" 170). Girolamo

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[48] Masuccio Salernitano, born Tommaso Guardati, vanished from public record in 1474; his date of death is uncertain. Canon 62 of the Fourth Lateran Council, reflecting the opinion of earlier theologians such as Augustine, expressly forbade the selling of relics (Kemp, *Canonization and Authority*, 105).

is clearly identified as an immoral relic custodian. Masuccio rails against greedy and

ambitious friars, who "by hook or by crook" win "for themselves a bellyful of florins, in

spite of the fact that such traffic [of relics and indulgences] is expressly forbidden by the

most sacred rules of their religion" ("ancora che da loro santissime regule espressamente

gli sia proibito") (trans. 65; Mauro 43). In this story, the money-hungry friar comes

across the body of a knight,

> which either because it had been very well preserved, or peradventure on
> account of the temperate manner of life used by the knight while he was
> living, or for some other reason, was still in so sound and perfect a state,
> that not only was every bone thereof well settled in its right position ("che
> non solamente ogn'osso stava al suo debito seggio collocato"), but the
> skin was in so little degree fallen to decay ("ma la pelle in maniera
> immaculata") that, by touching the head, the lower parts of the body
> would move themselves. (trans. 64; Mauro 42)

In this body Girolamo sees a relic in the making. He decides to steal part of it "to be

styled by him a sacred relic" ("sotto nome de reliquia") and thereby to "sweep into his

purse hundreds and thousands of ducats" (trans. 64; Mauro 43).[49] Masuccio's criticism

of Girolamo, an immoral relic custodian who profits by what "is expressly forbidden,"[50]

is certainly a satire of clerical corruption in general, but it is also a challenge to the

manipulation of access to relics in the service of power and revenue in particular. For

Girolamo does not simply steal a body-part and "style" it an anonymous, non-notable

relic. Instead, Girolamo steals a large enough portion of the body to make the implicit

claim that the relic he has and exposes is notable.

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[49] For a detailed study of shrine accounts and offerings, which explains the financial importance of shrines
to their cathedrals and relic custodians, see Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* (144-67; 182-90).
[50] Caesarius of Heisterbach (70). This reference is presumably to the illegitimate trafficking in relics, but
also to their unlawful use, both of which were forbidden in Canon 62 of the Fourth Lateran Council.

In order to do this, Girolamo (like the Pardoner, below) claims a relationship to institutional authority, by professing that the relic has been passed along to him through a Patriarch and a Vicar. By extension he insinuates that these powerful men approve of his enterprise. More importantly, Girolamo emphasizes the physical importance of his artifact:

> I am now minded to bring before your eyes a most marvelous relic [...].
> This relic is nothing else than the arm and the entire right hand of that
> most excellent and glorious writer of the words and deeds of Christ Jesus
> our Redeemer, Saint Luke the Evangelist, which precious thing the
> Patriarch of Constantinople gave to our Father Vicar. Whereupon this
> latter despatched me into Calabria therewith, for the reasons aforesaid,
> forasmuch as there has never been in this province up to the present time
> either the body or the limb of any saint whatever. On this account, my
> friends here gathered together, let each one of you in devout fashion
> uncover his head before looking at this precious treasure which our great
> God, more through the working of a miracle than through any act of mine,
> has granted you leave to behold. (trans. 68)[51]

Girolamo's claim is not as impressive as (though it is eminently more practical than) having St Luke's entire body. Nevertheless, it does seems as though Girolamo is suggesting that what he has is very powerful—for surely the forearm that wrote the Gospel would have been considered important.[52] Girolamo maintains that his body-part relic is not small; he is careful to say that he has "the arm and the *entire* right hand" ("cioè un braccio con la mano destra *intera*"), which St. Luke used to write the Gospel. This is no small claim for *any* relic. Finally, Girolamo reminds the audience that there has never been a notable relic (not "the body or the limb of any saint whatever") in their area of the country. This is, therefore, according to the friar, a momentous occasion. If

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[51] "Vi voglio mostrare per augmento de vostra divozione una mirabile reliquia, cioè un braccio con la mano destra intera de quello eccellente e glorioso cancellere del nostro redentore Iesú Cristo misser san Luca evangelista [...] imperò che in tale provincia non fu mai corpo né membro d'alcun santo [...] che isso Idio piú per miracolo che per mia operazione di vedere vi ha concesso" (Mauro 45).
[52] See chapter two, "Access and Occlusion: Notable versus Non-notable Relics."

his claims were true, he would be right on more than one count: first, because such a relic had never before been there, and second, because such relics were not normally displayed openly. Moreover, his emphasis on sight in this passage ("monstrare"; "di vedere vi ha concesso") is especially tantalizing, since he is promising to expose the very kind of relic that would normally have been most sequestered and most inaccessible.[53]

The Pardoner's Relics

The Pardoner similarly uses rhetoric to conceal his counterfeit relics, and Chaucer exploits the ambiguity of the word "male" to suggest a relationship between the Pardoner's rhetoric and reliquaries. For "male" certainly denotes "bag, pouch" or "packsaddle," as it is glossed by the *MED*[54]—but it should also be understood to connote, second, the "store-house" of memory, and third, "reliquary." It may not literally mean "store-house" or "reliquary," that is, but its close association with relics (as I shall discuss below) invites a comparison between "male" and "reliquary." The word "male" is twice associated with the Pardoner: once in the General Prologue and once in the Pardoner's Tale. Both times, the word signifies a container for the Pardoner's relics: "in his male" the Pardoner carries "a pilwe-beer, / Which that he seyde was Oure Lady veyl" (I 694-95); and the Pardoner himself claims that he has "relikes and pardoun in my male, / As faire as any man in Engelond" (VI 920-21). It seems reasonable that, since it is where he keeps his relics, "male" could represent a kind of reliquary, and not his saddlebag alone.

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[53] For the dangers (and punishments) often associated with viewing notable relics, see Crook, *The Architectural Setting of the Cult of Saints* (34). See also Rhys (19). Moreover, the desire to see a relic was often represented as a manifestation of curiosity—a sin devout pilgrims should resist. See Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage* (45) and Zacher (*passim*). See chapter four, n. 32.

[54] See also *The Riverside Chaucer*, Glossary (1267).

The second connotation of "male"—the "store-house" of memory—associates "male"

with another term that, metaphorically, referred to both memory and also to relics or

(metonymically) to reliquaries—"thesaurus."[55] Thiofrid and many others regularly call

relics "thesauri," or treasure.[56] "Thesaurus" and "male" should hence be understood as

relic / reliquary words, as well as money bag or store-house words. The Pardoner's

"male" should thus be read more loosely than the *MED* allows, as it could refer to any of

three things: a saddlebag (as it is illustrated in the Ellesmere manuscript), his memory, or

relics / a reliquary.[57] The word's very ambiguity enables Chaucer to play with the

concept of relics and their occlusion in various "strong-boxes" across England.

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[55] Carruthers refers explicitly to the Pardoner's "male" and suggests that although "The Middle English word *male* [...] is a 'travelling-bag' or 'pack' of leather," it was also used as a metaphor for the repository of memory. Carruthers argues that "male" should be understood to mean "a leather strong-box bound with a buckle"; opening this box by extension "becomes an English version [...] of the speaker-composer opening the organized compartments of his memory to disclose the store of its riches" (41). On "thesaurus" as the treasury of memory, see Carruthers (33). Carruthers does not, however, make the connection between "male," "thesaurus" and relics or reliquaries.

[56] On the ubiquity of "thesaurus" and other treasure words for relics, see Jones (2-7). Nilson cites references to SS Thomas of Canterbury, Edward the Confessor and Erkenwald as well (*Cathedral Shrines* 17-18), of whom Arcoid exclaims, "Someone who shines forth so gloriously in the heavens should surely not be buried in such a foul garment as the earth" (Whatley, *The Saint of London* 119-20). St Swithun's remains are described similarly, and are said to be "such mighty treasures full of divine healing-power that, whatever mass of silver, shining gems or gold is buried in all the earth, it will become thoroughly trivial in the sight of men and grow wholly cheap once they have seen the beauty of my relics" (Lapidge, *The Cult of St Swithun* 417). "Thesaurus" identified as "trésor," but also as "reliques, corps saint" or as the "trésor d'une église" (Blaise "thesaurus"). See also Thiofrid, *Flores* (Book II, Chapter 2, lines 33-34, 53, 66 and 81). See also (II.3.13). So, too, in Lantfred of Winchester's *Translatio et miracula S Swithuni*, Swithun refers to his own relics as "treasures ("thesauros") so priceless and so precious, that anything anywhere made of gold or jewels will grow vile in comparison with them" ("*thesauros* tam inestimabiles tamque pretiosos, ut quicquid usquam est auri et gemmarum uilescet in comparatione horum") (Lapidge, *The Cult of St Swithun* 262-63; emphasis added). See also Jones (1-15). In the appendix at 1, Jones lists "thesaurus" as one of the common metaphorical "treasure" words associated with relics of the saints. I am grateful to Prof. Jones for making this essay available to me. See also chapter two (54-66).

[57] "Male" (as distinct from the gender) appears in the Chaucerian corpus six times: twice in *The Romaunt of the Rose* and four in the *Canterbury Tales*. In *The Romaunt of the Rose*, "male" is clearly associated with the mind or imagination. Reason says of "Wikked-Tunge" that "So moche tresoun is in his male / Of falsnesse, for to seyne a tale" (B 3263-64). In this instance, "male" (which is not glossed in the textual notes to this passage) must indicate mind. In the second instance, "male" turns up in Fals-Semblant's sermon when he talks about the way in which his "word" is "unlyk [...] to my dede" (C 6360): "For I dide hem a tregetery. / But thereof yeve I lytel tale; / I have the silver and the male" (C 6374-76). Here, "male" is associated with "silver" and with Fals-Semblant's (dishonest) money-making enterprises—indeed "male" might here be understood best as "treasure," or even as "thesaurus." The association between

The polyvalence of the word "male" also allows us to understand the Pardoner's

"store-house" of memory as a rhetorical reliquary. Put another way, the Pardoner reaches

into his reliquary, his "male," to pull out his relics; he also reaches into his "male," his

"store-house" of memory, to mystify these objects rhetorically. He obfuscates what he

has so carefully that, when the Pardoner exhibits his relics to solicit money, he follows a

specific procedure:

> First I pronounce whennes that I come,
> And thanne my bulles shewe I, alle and some.
> Oure lige lordes seel on my patente,
> That shewe I first, my body to warente,
> That no man be so boold, ne preest ne clerk,
> Me to destourbe of Cristes hooly werk.
> And after that thanne telle I forth my tales;
> Bulles of popes and of cardynales,
> Of patriarkes and bishopes I shewe,
> And in Latyn I speke a wordes fewe,
> To saffron with my predicacioun,
> And for to stire hem to devocioun.
> Thanne shewe I forth my longe cristal stones [...]
> Relikes been they, as wenen they echoon. (VI 335-49)

Before he brings out his supposedly holy objects, he predisposes his audience, by his

rhetorical strategies, to believe the relics he will show them are real. He is specific about

the order in which he does this, explaining to the pilgrims that "*First* I pronounce

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"male" and the mind, treasure, money or "thesaurus" is even more pointed in its instances in the *Canterbury Tales*. In the Parson's Prologue, the Host exhorts the Parson to "Unbokele and shewe us what is in thy male" (X 26). Such a line has a clear double-entendre: "male" must simultaneously mean the Parson's mind or imagination; but given a similar line elsewhere in the *Tales*, "male" must also refer to a purse or moneybag (and hence to a holder for treasure). At the end of his tale, the Pardoner addresses the Host as follows: "Come forth, sire Hoost, and offre first anon, / And thou shalt kisse the relikes everychon, / Ye, for a grote! Unbokele anon thy purs" (VI 943-45). And in the Miller's Prologue, the Host delights that the game has begun: "Unbokeled is the male" (I 3115). The echo between these three phrases— "Unbokele anon thy purs," "Unbokele and shewe us what is in thy male" and "Unbokeled is the male"—is unmistakable. Moreover, the Latin *bursa* (purse) was another metonymic word for reliquary, as it meant "purse," "treasury," "coffre-fort" ("strong-box"), or "trésor." "Purs" and "male" are thus related as "strong-box" words but also as reliquary / relic words. See Blaise ("bursa"). See also Latham ("bursa"). For a historical exploration of the medieval purse reliquary, see Hahn, "Metaphor and Meaning" (243-49). For other literary instances of the word "male," see Carruthers (41).

whennes that I come"; "*Thanne* my bulles shewe I"; and that before he brings out his

relics, he "shewes" his patent "*first*." These actions serve to establish his authority and to

demonstrate his rhetorical skill (it seems he always performs these actions in the same

order). He continues to detail the sequence of information he gives the pilgrims: after

identifying himself, showing his "bulles" and patent "*thanne* telle I forth my tales"; and

finally, "*Thanne shewe I forth* my longe cristal stones / […] / Relikes been they, as wenen

they echoon." It is clear, based on the sequence here and the Pardoner's repeated use of

the words "thanne" and "first" that the Pardoner does not expose his relics until this point

in his performance. Furthermore, his language—"shewe I" and "first"—indicates his

(usually) careful control of the situation. The Pardoner "shewes forth" his relics only

once his audience has been adequately prepared to see them as such—only once, that is,

he has placed them carefully within rhetorical reliquaries.

     He has thus rhetorically primed his audience to "see" his relics (which, as

Chaucer-the-pilgrim tells the reader, are the worst kind of fakes) as legitimate:

> Thanne shewe I forth my longe cristal stones,
> Ycrammed ful of cloutes and of bones,—
> Relikes been they, as wenen they echoon.
> Thanne have I in latoun a sholder-boon
> Which that was of an hooly Jewes sheep. (VI 347-51)

The Pardoner goes on to claim that this sheep-bone, if dipped in "any welle," will cure

livestock (VI 353). In addition, if the owner of these sheep and cattle drinks from the

well, "His beestes and his stoor shal multiplie" (VI 365). The Pardoner then introduces

the "miteyn eek, that ye may se," which multiplies grain. Already, the Pardoner has

spent a considerable amount of time (forty-one of fifty-nine lines) delineating the

miraculous powers of his relics. Like Onion, Girolamo, or Heywood's Pardoner,

Chaucer's Pardoner carefully regulates the display and use of his relics. His vocabulary in this instance is crucial: "Thanne shewe I" and "Thanne have I" indicate the Pardoner's possession ("have") and control ("shewe") of his relics. He furthermore exhibits these objects in a particular order—first his bulls, then one relic, then another. The Pardoner manifests the attitude of the seasoned relic custodian here, who orders and orchestrates his display of relics to garner the best profit possible.

By revealing his "entente" to the other pilgrims, he also reveals his intimate understanding and expert deployment of relic discourse, as well as his expert rhetorical occlusion of his relics (VI 423). He is, on his own account, a very good relic custodian. Moreover, the Pardoner capitalizes on traditions of control and access in order to profit by his relics. He refers expressly to limiting access to his relics:

> Goode men and wommen, o thyng warne I yow:
> If any wight be in this chirche now
> That hath doon synne horrible, that he
> Dar nat, for shame, of it yshryven be,
> Or any womman, be she yong or old,
> That hath ymaked hir housbonde cokewold,
> Swich folk *shal have no power ne no grace*
> To offren to my relikes in this place. (VI 377-84; emphasis added)

The Pardoner does offer a remedy for this problem (he will absolve them of their sins). But by positioning himself as the pilgrims' intermediary, the Pardoner places himself between the pilgrims and his relics; they must pass by him if they are to "offren to my relikes." More than this, he demarcates the difference between those who, like him, have access to and control over relics and those who are dependent upon hierarchical power to access relics at all. Such people, if they do not follow the requirements of the church (like confession), "shal have no power ne no grace" to access relics. And regardless of

whether the Pardoner is actually authorized to absolve sin, he knows very well that

confession was typically presented as necessary to accessing relics.[58] The Pardoner, in

this moment, articulates one of the key terms for relic custodians, supplicants and indeed

for relic discourse as well: "power." For the Pardoner, no matter his state of sin, always

has the "power" to access his relics. The pilgrims, on the other hand, are at the mercy of

a corrupt relic custodian whose conditions dictate whether they will have any "power" to

access his relics at all.

As Cynthia Hahn argues, relics are "transmitters and indicators of power."[59] The

Pardoner's emphasis on access and control (and indeed, his own choice of words) thus

underscores one of the most important features of relic discourse: power. And yet,

despite his self-identification as a man endowed with the "power" and "grace" to control

relics, he is connected to the other pilgrims in his orientation to the Canterbury relics,

which surely have a more commanding presence than the Pardoner's fake artifacts.

When the company arrives at Canterbury, neither the pilgrims nor the Pardoner will be

permitted to see the most important relics, any more than Erasmus was granted access to

such a politicized *locus* of power as Becket's bones. Moreover, when the Pardoner offers

his relics to Harry Bailly, it can be read as a moment in which the Pardoner offers the

Host the one thing that the Host, as a man who is leading pilgrims to Canterbury, would

have known he could not get: intimate contact with notable relics. In the infamous

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[58] Onion makes use of this trope, as well, and before he exhibits his relics,), he first "fatta prima con grande solennità la confessione" [has the audience recite their confession with grand solemnity] (768). Girolamo, for his part, promises remission of sins—"remissioni di peccati"—for those who give alms (46). For confession as integral to obtaining an indulgence at a shrine, see Nilson, "Medieval Experience" (114). For more on the connection between confession, indulgences and relics, see Vincent, "Some Pardoners' Tales" (23-58).

[59] See Bynum and Gerson, "Body-Part Reliquaries" (6).

exchange between the Pardoner and the Host, then, the Host could well be reacting to the

offensive idea that access to patently fake relics could somehow make up for the

obfuscation of many of the real relics at Canterbury.

It is not difficult to see that a consideration of relics can enhance most readings of

the Pardoner. Relic custodians, for example, were typically required to be chaste, which

could inform our thinking about the historical importance of the Pardoner's "coillons"

and his sexuality. The intellectual and institutional history of relics illuminates, for

example, Glenn Burger's observation that "Fragment VI represents a certain dismissal of

lay desire, and its necessary emphasis on the value of embodiment, in its return to high

medieval clerical values" (*Chaucer's Queer Nation* 122). Indeed, the "dismissal of lay

desire" that Burger notes applies especially to the Pardoner's relics in their devotional

contexts, which frequently necessitated a "dismissal of lay desire." So, too, with

Burger's observation,

> The Pardoner [...] makes explicit what the Physician and Host dare not
> acknowledge: the activity of the objectifying desire of his audience being written
> on him and the body of his text even as he stands in for 'the father' and existing
> ideological configurations. (138)

I would supplement "the father" with "the relic custodian"—and I do think that

overlaying Burger's reading with the "ideological configurations" of relic cults in

particular only enhances his reading of the Pardoner.[60] So too, relics and their devotional

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[60] Burger gestures in this direction, commenting, "The tremendous appetite for the benefits of indulgences and pilgrimages at all levels of the church and society in the later Middle Ages was fueled, at least in part, by the believers' deep and wide-spread desire for the greatest possible return with the least expenditure of time and money" (151). Moreover, as Burger so rightly observes, the Pardoner "exposes to the pilgrims" their "worldly desire"—to buy pardons. It is clear that Burger's observation might also apply to the pilgrims' possible desire to approach and even to touch relics, as well.

practices can be seen to illuminate the centrality of confession and preaching to the tale.[61]

And certainly relics' devotional contexts can help us to understand the infamous

exchange between the Pardoner and the Host, which foregrounds and even makes fun of

one of the most paradoxical moments of pilgrimage: that pilgrims and supplicants travel

many miles to get close to an object which, at journey's end, they may be neither able to

see nor touch. By considering the Pardoner as a parodic relic custodian, we can entertain

the possibility that, even for those who acknowledged the healing and divine power of

relics and took no issue with their display or use, the infrequent display and strict control

of relics was cause for frustration. In this context, saints' relics, even fake ones, appear in

moments of intense struggle and conflict, moments that show the ways in which, in the

Canterbury Tales, the community is sometimes cut off from what they desire to see.

The Pardoner's Tale and Its "Tresor"

The Pardoner's Tale features the consequences for accessing relics illegitimately,

and further shows the Pardoner to be intimately familiar with the demands and

conventions of relic discourse, but especially aware of relics' careful regulation—as any

relic custodian should be. And by making the riotoures' goal twofold (to destroy death

and then, to take control of the treasure they find), the Pardoner aligns their quest with a

pilgrimage to see relics (which were themselves called, metaphorically, treasure).[62] The

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[61] This seems especially important, given the emerging connections between relic translations, confession and indulgences in England in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. See Vincent, "Some Pardoner's Tales" (54-55). It would hence be fascinating to consider the relationship between the Pardoner as purveyor of indulgences and as a manipulator of relics. On indulgences, see most recently Minnis, "Reclaiming the Pardoners." Moreover, preachers typically accompanied relic quests (Sigal, "Les voyages de reliques," 78; see above "Traveling Relic Custodians")—the more careful examination of such characters might similarly illuminate readings of the Pardoner's preaching.
[62] See the discussion of "male" and "thesaurus," above.

Pardoner's Tale features three gluttonous "riotoures" whose pilgrimage (of sorts) to murder death indeed closely resembles a pilgrimage to relics (*Canterbury Tales* VI.661).[63] The pilgrims to Canterbury go there, the narrator explains, in search of the martyr "that hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke" (I.18). St Thomas of Canterbury, that is, has the power if not to destroy death, than at least to prolong life by healing sickness.[64] Since bodily resurrection is often associated with relics and shrines, a saint's relics theoretically represent the destruction of death, as well. When the three ne'er do wells of the Pardoner's Tale hear that one of their friends has been murdered by "a privee theef men clepeth Deeth, / That in this contree al the peple sleeth" (VI.675-76) and decide to hunt down and "sleen this false traytour Deeth" (VI.699), they do not differ fundamentally in their intention from pilgrims who seek to circumvent mortality or sickness. And, also like pilgrims to shrines, the rioters' seek to access their goal: they surely cannot kill Death if they cannot get close to it.

The Pardoner knows, however, that the rioters cannot succeed in their goal, because they, like the Canterbury pilgrims, do not have the (hierarchical) "power" to do so. Hence, when the rioters ignore their hierarchical position, pursue "Death" to its supposedly physical location, and decide to claim the gold they find in its place for themselves, they face disastrous consequences. The Old Man, whom they meet on their

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[63] Sedgewick discusses some of the analogues to the Pardoner's Tale (431-33). As far as I am aware, none of the analogues deploys the kind of language so intimately concerned with the practices of relic cults—language which is indeed present in Chaucer's version of the tale. For the printed versions of the Pardoner's Tale's analogues, see *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales* (279-319).

[64] Storm also advances the idea that the rioters are on a sort of pilgrimage to conquer death, but are distracted—like the pilgrims in the later Middle Ages—by the more materially accessible chest of gold, and hence settle "for a physical objective instead of a spiritual one" (814). I demur from Storm's advancement of the idea that relics represent a simple binary (material versus spiritual). Nonetheless, his association between the treasure and relics is a salient one. Moreover, this association is not present, to my knowledge, in any known analogue to the Tale. See also Pittock (108).

adventure, tells them that they will find death under an oak tree—a place where death is

enshrined, so to speak. In the context of the Tale, it is clear that these three men actually

will die; the Old Man's words hence resound as a warning rather than as a promise.

Moreover, the analogy between relics (a *locus* of "Deeth" and, as I outline above, the

promise of its abasement) and the buried treasure (which the Old Man calls "Death")

reveals the Pardoner to be exploring the consequences of approaching treasure that is off-

limits for most.[65] Relics functioned as a *locus* both for death and its defeat. However,

they also feature as the *cause* of death or disfigurement in those who sought illegitimate

access, or, even more pointedly, in those who *saw* them openly, outside of their

reliquaries or shrines.[66] The rioters' thrill at seeing the treasure (they are "glad […] of

that sighte"), and their subsequent fate illustrate the consequences for those who, in spite

of their lack of "power" and "grace", seek close contact with relics.

  At least one of the rioters (the "worste of hem") presents knowledge that they are

subverting their (subordinate, powerless) hierarchical position:

> But trewely, by daye it may nat bee
> Men wolde seyn that we were theves stronge,
> And for oure owene tresor doon us honge.
> This tresor moste ycaried be by nyghte
> As wisely and as slyly as it myghte [...]
> And two of us shul kepen subtilly
> This tresor wel [...] (VI.788-99)

His speech aligns his plan with relic translations, which were highly regulated and

controlled ceremonies. In fact, these ceremonies attempted to exclude just this kind of

"rioter" from attending, let alone carrying out a translation. Relic translations

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[65] See above, n. 56. It is not a stretch here to suggest that, given the common metaphor of treasure to describe relics, the Pardoner's own close association with relics, and the rioters' pilgrimage, that the treasure they find is meant to represent relics.

[66] See chapter two (51-54, 72-74) and chapter four (143-45).

traditionally "began with exhumation of a corpse" (Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* 26), which

was often carried out at night to avoid attracting needless attention. As Nilson suggests,

this precaution was allegedly taken in order to guard against theft, and to prevent those

with no "power ne no grace" from seeing the contents of the tomb.[67] At St Erkenwald's

nocturnal exhumation in 1140, for example, local people somehow caught wind of the

event, and when "crowds" arrived at the cathedral, they "tore doors off hinges in their

eagerness to see the event, causing the priests to flee with the lead coffin to its new

home" (26-27). Erkenwald's 1326 translation was also conducted at night, allegedly to

avoid the "mass hysteria that would have resulted if the relics had been exposed during

the daytime" (Whatley, *The Saint of London* 66-67). Not surprisingly, nighttime

exhumation was sometimes regarded with suspicion, as in the "nocturnal transfer of St

Cuthbert" in 1104 (Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines* 27). The important point here, however, is

that translation at night, in order to secure against theft—or, I would add, against the idea

that the community, as well as the parish church or cathedral, owned the relic—was not

uncommon.[68] The Pardoner, by overlaying the rioter's speech with the conventions of

relic translation, offers a pointed commentary on those who subvert hierarchical barriers:

they are rioters and even thieves, who will come to no good.[69]

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[67] This is certainly plausible, though I would add that it seems equally likely the exhumation was
undertaken at night to keep the relics hidden. On translation, see chapter two, n. 4 and chapter three, n. 59
[68] The *Gilte Legende* account of Thomas Becket's 1220 translation identifies the anxiety of exposing relics
in the presence of a crowd. Ostensibly to avoid bedlam, and as in the exhumations of SS Cuthbert and
Erkenwald, those in charge decide to disinter the body at night: "At Caunturbury was so greet prese that the
bisschoppys and the lordys wyste not how for to do thys dede to haue the bones owt of the erthe. But
Richard bisschop of Salisbury counseylid that *it schulde be do by nyght whyle the peple slepte*, and so yt
was doon" (318; italics added). John Mirk's *Festial* similarly identifies Becket's exhumation as having
taken place at "ny3t", and details the vigil kept by the clerics who "helde þe scryne wyth cloþes of gold,
and settyn torches brennyng about tyl on þe morow, and lafte men þerwyth to wake" (199). This is all in
contrast to Geary's statement that "at a public ceremony, they open the tomb with reverence and remove
the body" (*Furta Sacra* 12).

The Pardoner's commentary on access to his own relics hence undermines the

(sinful, despicable) rioters' vigil over their treasure.[70] They are not officiants or clerics,

and they do not have any legitimate claim (neither "power" nor "grace") over the gold

they have found. Identifying the gold as "oure owene tresor" is thus not only risky, but in

the context of the Pardoner and his Tale, threatening to the established order of relic

cults, which dictates that any notable, valuable relic must be housed in a church and

guarded by a relic custodian. The subsequent fate of these three thieves, gamblers and

murderers can be read not only as an indictment of their behavior, but also as a corollary

of their, in Eadsige's words, "presumption" in attempting to occupy a position that, in the

course of a relic translation, would have been reserved for the clergy.

"He saugh that al the peple lough"[71]: Why Humor Is not Heresy

Under the rubric of gender or homosexual or hegemonic discourse, the Pardoner

becomes the symbol for what the Canterbury pilgrims—indeed, society at large—wants

to, in Glenn Burger's words, keep "secret."[72] This cannot be the case for relic discourse,

since the Pardoner so blithely exposes its (corrupt) operation. This exposure does

nothing but solicit anger from the Host and laughter from the other pilgrims; no one

seems concerned about keeping relic discourse a "secret." Relic discourse, however,

could be seen to indicate that Chaucer was at least a dissident if not a heretic; Chaucer

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[69] In fact, it is possible that the Pardoner is parodying a *furta sacra*, or relic theft. See Geary, *Furta Sacra* (113-118 and *passim*).
[70] Relic translation also necessitated a vigil on the eve of the translation ceremony. Here, the two remaining men are instructed to "kepen subtilly / This tresor wel." Vigils were an imperative part of any translation ceremony, and monks or clerics were usually appointed to keep watch over the relics for the knight to guard against theft.
[71] For an account that treats this moment as carnivalesque, not funny, see Masri.
[72] For more on Burger's treatment of the Pardoner, see above (220).

could be condemning not just the Pardoner, as Kittredge so famously suggested, but all of the pilgrims for their collusion in the evils of pilgrimage, relic veneration—in the evils, that is, of relic discourse. And indeed, some approaches to the Pardoner and his relics argue that Chaucer's treatment of relics occasions a failed pilgrimage.

The Host's infamous allusion to Becket's breeches has received the most attention on this front. Daniel Knapp, who first noted the allusion to Becket's breeches, contends that the altercation between the Host and the Pardoner undermines St Thomas' sanctity. Knapp concludes that Chaucer himself probably thought Becket's hair breeches to be a "pious fraud" (16)—just because the Host made (yet another) dirty comment—and that Chaucer, while no heretic, was writing a text that challenged the overly greedy and material context of the pilgrimage.[73] However, even in the infamous parody of a trip to Canterbury—*The Tale of Beryn*—the pilgrims manage to venerate Becket's relics in spite of the bawdy humor.[74] Certainly the danger that laypeople would recognize, expose and then undermine relic discourse was real; Arcoid's accounts of vengeful miracles at St Erkenwald's tomb and its environs indicate that there was at least a perceived threat in laity who did not follow the rules. Chaucer was very likely aware of these clerical responses to uppity laypeople and pilgrims alike; but this awareness need not indict the Pardoner, his relics and exchange with the Host sully pilgrimage or even relic veneration so completely.

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[73] For further discussion of Chaucer as a critic of the overly material focus of pilgrimage, see Storm.
[74] For an extensive discussion of the humor of the end of the Pardoner's Tale, see Green, "The Pardoner's Pants (and Why They Matter)." There, Green identifies another analogue to the Pardoner in the French *Le Pardonneur, Le Triacleur et la Tavernière*, wherein the Pardoner and Triacleur leave the Innkeeper with a pair of stained breeches in place of what she thinks is a holy relic. This analogue is less important to the character of the relic custodian, since neither the Pardoner nor the Triacleur is really giving a sermon; but it is significant in underlining the joke that Chaucer is making.

To be sure, the conventions of pilgrimage and relic veneration are often mocked and parodied (e.g., in *The Tale of Beryn, Le Pardonneur, Le Triacleur et la Tavernière,* or in *any* of the Pardoner's analogues), and these parodies can certainly tell us something important about the actual practices of a given faith community—and even what a particular faith community may have found unacceptable. Such parodies do not necessarily indicate an attitude of unorthodoxy or proto-protestantism, however, and it is important to keep in mind that parody need not serve a corrective function. Parody, that is, *may* offer implicit criticism of a certain religious or political convention; but it also may simply be exploiting the humanity of that convention to make a joke without condemning its subject.[75] It is doubtful that Chaucer meant the Tale of Sir Thopas to imply that the entire romance tradition was without merit. It is, I would suggest, equally doubtful that Chaucer—or even the author of the *Tale of Beryn*—meant to suggest that pilgrimage, or even relic veneration, was dangerous or undesirable. Rather, the Pardoner's Prologue and Tale expose the sorts of dicta by which the pilgrim community, and even the faith community at large, lived. It exposes the problems with these tenets, not least in the problematic character of the Pardoner himself. But a joke (or even an explicit critique) does not unequivocally indicate the political objective of its writer; too often this has been assumed to be the case. No two writers demonstrate this more assuredly than St Thomas More and Desiderius Erasmus, both of whom wrote about relics and pilgrimage in the very context that Chaucer is supposed to forerun: the

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[75] Here I am in agreement with Kittredge, who characterizes the Host's response to the Pardoner a joke: Harry Bailly "answers [the Pardoner] with rough jocularity" and then, when the Pardoner's anger takes over, bows out by saying that he " 'won't joke…with a man that cannot keep his temper' " (*Chaucer and His Poetry* qtd 217). I quibble with Kittredge's assumption that Bailly "means no offence"—many jokes are meant to be insulting—but the tenor of his observation, that Bailly is joking, is borne out by the pilgrims' response to what the Host says.

Protestant reformation. If even Erasmus and More—the one a dissenter but still a

Catholic, the other an apologist who was willing to die for his convictions—can crack a

joke about the institutional (and demotic) abuses associated with relic cults, it is the more

reasonable to suppose that Chaucer may have done the same. More and Erasmus set the

stage to show that the Pardoner hardly undermines the pilgrim's destination so

completely that Chaucer could never have intended his pilgrims to arrive at Canterbury.[76]

Erasmus hardly seems content with the system the way it is; he hardly seems to be

endorsing what he regards as a corrupt practice, and it is easy to see why Erasmus'

writings led to the adage, "Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched." Indeed, Margaret

Aston describes *A Pilgrimage for Religion's Sake* as a "wittily scathing account of

pilgrimage paraphernalia, illuminating that combination of devotion, credulity, and greed

which multiplied the relics of saints and brought pilgrims and enrichment to the great

European shrines" (197). And yet, Erasmus' own response to the nascent reformation

(and its destruction of the bulwarks of Catholicism) adds another layer to his scathing

wit. Even those surmised to have published the English translation of *A Pilgrimage* in

1527, "very probably under the direction of Thomas Cromwell's circle," were careful to

note that "Erasmus was no indiscriminate iconoclast" (198).[77] Moreover, in spite of the

fact that some described Jean Colet as "some Wycliffite, I suppose,"[78] Erasmus insisted

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[76] See Knapp (26).
[77] On the early sixteenth-century translation of many of Erasmus' works, see also Yost (267). Yost details the ways in which these Protestant humanists used Erasmus for their own ends: "In Taverner's translations Erasmus became an advocate of Protestant moderation" (269); "Taverner thus made Erasmus a supporter of Henrician reform as well as humanist Protestantism" (271).
[78] See Aston, *Lollards and Reformers* (213).

on his own concern for the iconoclasm around him (199).[79] He was devastated by the

iconoclastic riots in Basel, and was relieved to be in Catholic Freiburg afterwards.[80]

Despite his own sentiments, however, some of his contemporaries, and

certainly those who followed him, insisted on using his wit and rhetoric in support of a

cause that Erasmus had abhorred. His jokes were turned on their heads; his protesting

Virgin Mary in the *Pilgrimage*, an irreverent and hilarious account, became evidence for

his implicit support of a campaign that sought to destroy what he had mocked and

critiqued, to be sure—but what he had still held in reverence. As Dave Barry points out

in "This Column is Funny," just because some people are "humor impaired" and "miss

[the] point" of humor entirely doesn't mean it was intended as such to begin with.[81]

Barry rounds out his column by using his own invented "closed-caption[ing] for the

humor impaired. After each attempted joke, the humor element will be explained in

parenthesis, so that you humor impaired individuals can laugh along with the rest of us."

If only Erasmus had done the same. Really, could a man who scripted a letter from a

statue of the Virgin take himself so seriously? I rather doubt it.

St Thomas More suffers from a similar predicament—again, understandably so.

More, after all, was serious enough about what he thought and wrote that he was willing

to die for it; hardly a laughing matter. However, to indict More for an inability to be

irreverent, devout and orthodox though he was, would be a mistake. In the *Dialogue*

concerning Heresies, wherein More very seriously defends the various tenets of the

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[79] Carlos Eire introduces the very weeping Catholics in Basil whom Erasmus would probably have seen:
"The Catholics, grief stricken at the sight of the iconoclastic ravages, shed 'tears of blood' " at the
destruction (119). Erasmus' response to such violence was to suggest tolerance (Phillips 152).
[80] "Utinam contingat rerum tranquillitas! Placet hec civitas bene morata; non audio quemquam do qoquam
male loqui" (trans in Phillips, *Erasmus and the Northern Renaissance* 150).
[81] *Dave Barry Talks Back*

Catholic faith against Tyndale and other dissenters—and wherein More is careful to point

out the danger of taking "the reuerence from all relyques bycause that som be doubtfull"

(*Dialogue concerning Heresies* 217)—More is not above what Minnis (rightly)

characterizes as "(often earthy) humour" ("Once More into the Breech" 11). There, More

does not avoid the potentially ribald accounts of St Valery or St Uncumber, and deals

with likely objections to these saints in a surprisingly earnest way. St Valery's shrine

was associated with diseases of the urogenital tract; pilgrims often left votives of their

genitals there, and monks were even foresighted enough to "have catered for two sizes of

male genitalia" (9): there were two differently sized silver rings through which the

suffering man would put his genitals. Which ring? It all depended on his bulk (or lack

thereof). St Uncumber (also known as St Wilgefortis) was so known because she would

supposedly "uncumber" dissatisfied wives of their husbands. Whether More rejects St

Valery or Uncumber is difficult to say, and his defense of them certainly seems serious

enough. That he includes these stories at all, however—fodder for a reformer, surely—is

a testimony to his own attitude to his faith: that there could indeed be "*mery* matters of

saynt wallery" (*Dialogue* 234; my emphasis). To be sure, More concludes his discussion

of these two rather questionable saints with the observation that "A few dotynge dames

make not the people" (237)—but the fact remains that, even in his earnest defense of the

Catholic practice of pilgrimage and relic-veneration, More still managed to approach his

subject by recognizing its potential for "mery"ment.

Moreover, More—serious apologist—and Erasmus—tongue-in-cheek, wily

critic—have in common not only their (differently expressed) devotion to the Church, but

also their humor about it. And they have this in common with Chaucer. For none of

these men did orthodoxy mean taking accepted popular or institutional practices without

the occasional smirk. Hence, while the Pardoner's fake relics and those at Canterbury

can and do tell the reader something about the faith community—and even about the

varied problems that many intelligent thinkers had with the inaccessibility or incredulity

of many relics—they also set the stage for one of the finest comedic moments in the

Canterbury Tales, a moment that depends on and hearkens towards the bawdy *fabliaux*

and *novellae* that went before and came after it. The Pardoner and his fake relics are

undeniably "called in question";[82] but this is another matter—one for the court jester, not

for the heretical stake.

Such an exposition is not necessarily a threat to the pilgrimage itself, however,

nor to the idea that there may still, among pilgrims who knew better, have been devotion.

A friend of mine recently made a pilgrimage to Guatemala to see a relic of the Virgin

Mary; when she was forced to speed past the relic on (literally) a conveyor belt, she was

furious. Rather than give up, however—rather than decide that because the relic was

presented in brochures as accessible even though it was not—she dressed up as part of

the cleaning crew and snuck in later that night. This kind of behavior is, to be sure,

radical, and it is unlikely in any case that many pilgrims would have been able to open

reliquaries even if they had managed to sneak into a feretory chapel. But it is equally

unrealistic to expect that either Chaucer or other medieval pilgrims would necessarily

have rejected pilgrimage and its accoutrements outright had they only recognized that it

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[82] "The authenticity and valence of the relics which await Chaucer's fictional pilgrims at Canterbury are never *called in question*; there is no suggestion whatever that the spiritual treasures of Becket's shrine are in any way 'doubtful' or have more attributed to them than is proper" (Minnis, "One More into the Breech" 2; my emphasis).

rested on a system that was hierarchical and unjust. The discourses of sex and gender

would have it that the Pardoner's deviancy reflects that of the other pilgrims, and that,

since he threatens to expose the "secrets" of the community," he poses the greatest threat

to the pilgrimage.[83] These arguments do not fundamentally move away from George

Lyman Kittredge's position that the Pardoner is the only "lost soul" on the pilgrimage

("Chaucer's Pardoner" 832)[84]: both lines of thinking depend on reading the Pardoner as

inherently "other," as a separate (misunderstood, subversive, damned) entity on the

pilgrimage.[85] The historical context of the Canterbury relics—surely important for the

entirety of the *Canterbury Tales*—exposes the flaw in the assumptions of this kind of

scholarship. The devotional contexts of these relics (and indeed, of traveling relic

custodians) reveal that in his relationship to Canterbury, the Pardoner is just another

pilgrim; one well versed in the rules of relic discourse, perhaps, but one headed towards

the occluded and notable relics at Canterbury all the same. Not even a holy Jew's sheep

bone can make up for that.

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[83] Glenn Burger discusses the danger the Pardoner poses to the Canterbury community by threatening to expose its "secrets" (Burger, *Chaucer's Queering Nation passim*).

[84] Elsewhere, Kittredge—in a move that anticipates the kind of scholarship that has since been produced on the Pardoner—refers to the Pardoner as "the most abandoned character among the Canterbury Pilgrims" (*Chaucer and His Poetry* 211). Kittredge also lambastes the Pardoner as being "a vulgar, prating rascal, not only destitute of moral and intellectual dignity, but so lacking in common sense that he cannot hold his tongue about his own impostures" ("Chaucer's Pardoner" 830).

[85] Robertson also focuses on the Pardoner's immorality and singular otherness: "He appeals to their cupidity and encourages it, at the same time seeking to satisfy his own" (333). Robertson regards the Pardoner as a personification of cupidity of course, but when he notices that the Pardoner preys on the pilgrims' cupidity, he is not so very far away from those who, like Storm, Vance or Burger, argue that the Pardoner is dangerous to the community because he exposes a hegemony based on, among other things, material gain. Robertson's conclusion is more ominous, of course, and he identifies in the Pardoner an illustration "of what happens to those who deny the spirit of Christ […] and devote themselves to the pursuit of the corporal rather than the intelligible" (334).

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