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‘In hir best arraie’: Dress, Danger and Safety in Late Medieval England

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SHORT ABSTRACT

This thesis draws multiple disciplines and varieties of sources into dialogue on the topics of gender violence and dress history in late medieval England in order to interrogate the ways in which what one wore impacted or altered one's experience of gender violence. Arguing that dress history should be taken more seriously by all historians, in the Introduction I propose a new methodological approach and explore various linguistic challenges. I also lay out the thesis~~' '~~ scope: a focused exploration of how the visual, literary, secular and religious cultural ~~imagination~~ landscape of the late Middle Ages intersected with experiences of gender violence in England.

Chapter One sets up the importance of clothing within the medieval cultural imagination, demonstrating how dress was used to construct identities and embody emotion; it also traces the development of fashions.

Chapter Two looks at the elements of late medieval English patriarchy that made it distinctive and I examine different types of gender violence and how clothing was used by the victim/survivors as a method of self-protection after the fact, as well as a way of forming or reinforcing identity and agency.

In Chapter Three, I examine the case of Margaret Burgin and Margaret Usshar who used masculine clothing as a tool to enter a space that was forbidden to them due to their gender. I then draw on other instances of temporary cross dressing where masculine clothes were used to protect a woman's body in order to lead us into a more capacious understanding of gender, clothing and safety.

With Chapter Four, our focus turns towards a lack of clothing on the body and how the context for the removal of clothing, whether forcibly or voluntarily stripped, changed the way medieval audiences viewed the wearer.

Chapter Five reinforces the argument that clothing played a crucial role in creating and reinforcing unequal and even exploitative relationships. and that the exchange of clothing and textiles could contribute to strengthening or breaking relationships. I suggest that most women had a greater understanding of the sensory materiality of dress that imbued the textile gifts they made with greater emotional value but that these could be used against them in court.

I conclude by laying out how this thesis contributes to the fields of gender and dress history.

LONG ABSTRACT

This thesis uses an interdisciplinary approach to examine the relationship between gender, violence and dress in late medieval England. In the Introduction, I analyse the ways historiographies of multiple disciplines from material culture studies to gender studies have interacted and point to new pathways. I argue that dress history should be recognised as a key important source for historical discourse which further illuminates other fields of research such as the study of historical violence.

Chapter One sets out the ways medieval dress formed a silent language and argues that modern historians should aim to 'read' it through examination of where items of dress sat within the cultural imagination. It emphasises the meaning of clothing, particularly in making identity and holding emotion. By looking at the ways men and women were criticised for their dress, we can see how clothing was used as a means of coercion and adherence to societal norms through emotions such as shame and guilt, as well as a fear of sinning and the spiritual deterioration that accompanies it. This chapter then turns towards a chronology of dress history in England in order to show the evolution of dress and how the misogynistic discourses responded to the new styles.

Chapter Two analyses gender violence in the context of wider medieval patriarchal frameworks: it focuses specifically on sexual violence and its inclusion within the popular culture and media of the period. The analysis then turns to examine three different types of gender-based violence - murder, rape, and rape and theft - and the way the clothing of the victim/survivor interacts with it. Crucially, this chapter makes clear the ways that clothing could act as a witness to trauma and violence, both in the contemporary court records and in modern analysis of them. It also demonstrates the ways that clothing was used by survivors as a way of self-fashioning after traumatic events such as sexual assault.

Chapter Three uses the case study of Matilda Burgin and Margaret Usshar, then opening up into a wider discussion of cross dressing in the later Middle Ages. By examining the case of two women who temporarily adopted masculine clothing in order to enter an andro-exclusive space and drawing on cases of other women known to have taken part in temporary cross dressing, the ways clothing could be used as a tool for social freedoms become clear. By bringing in analysis of cross dressing within the cultural imagination, notably female saints who temporarily or otherwise adopted masculine dress as well as in conduct literature, I show how clothing could be a tool for protection.

In Chapter Four, I look at what it meant to be in a state of partial or total undress in the medieval cultural imagination and how this was transposed on to life. From being seen only in one's undergarments to being entirely naked, voluntarily or forcibly stripped, I examine the multiple, often converging, connotations of undress from erotic to religious, to exploitative or empowering. By taking a closer look at a number of cases of domestic violence in which the victim/survivor was forced out into the public sphere partially clothed or naked, we can see the many implications; her flight from her home might have been due to practicality but I also show how it could have been beneficial to her legal case with witnesses willing to speak to the terror she experienced that forced her out of her home in such a sartorially shocking manner.

Lastly, in Chapter Five, I return to the argument that clothing was deeply emotionally charged and could be used to underscored coercive or exploitative relationships. This, in turn, made gifts of clothing by women to men all the more potent as carriers of emotion and identity, while men tended to purchase gifts of dress and accessories, removing them from the direct process of meaning making.

I conclude by reviewing the multiple, converging and overlapping meanings that dress held for medieval women and suggest new avenues of multidisciplinary research into gender violence and material culture.

Declaration

An edited and condensed part of Chapter Three has been printed in an academic journal in 2024 but does not amount to more than the 10% that is permissible to be published prior to submission.

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To Issy, thank you for adopting me as part of your extended family and letting me think out ideas to you in your kitchen over baby formula and nappies. You, Josh, Orla and Sol have provided such a haven when the world felt tough, and I am forever grateful.

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This thesis is also dedicated to the countless women throughout our global history whose lives have been cut short and their bodies brutalised by an ideological system which places women below men.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in the notes and bibliography but in-text references are written in full.

BL	British Library, London
BnF	*Bibliothèque nationale de France*, France
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives, London
MED	*Middle English Dictionary*
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
YBI	York Borthwick Institute, York

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Introduction

> '…if only it were so simple
> If only we could
> end rape
> by changing clothes'[1]

These lines are from a poem by Mary Simmerling in which she details the clothing she was wearing on the night of her rape as a college student in 1987: 'a white t-shirt / cotton / short-sleeved / round at the neck'–' and so on. The poem inspired Jen Brockman and Mary Wyandt-Hiebert to create a powerful installation showcasing the clothing of different victims/survivors of college campus sexual violence.[2] It was debuted at the University of Arkansas in 2014, titled 'What Were You Wearing'–' and used the voluntary, anonymous accounts of the university's student body alongside the clothes they were wearing, pinned to the wall. The piece was a powerful visual demonstration of the way the person beneath the clothes is made invisible when that question is asked. The intention behind the piece, Wyandt-Hieber and Brockman have stated, was to interrogate the assumptions of the questioner who asks 'What were you wearing [when you were raped]?'–'and in so doing, to 'humanize the survivor in the answer'.[3] They note that while the question might be innocently asked or harmlessly meant, it can not only retraumatise the victim/survivor but more damagingly, it places the blame for the rape squarely with them and their clothing choices and not with the perpetrator.[4] The installation acknowledges how the quotidian normality of dressing contrasts starkly with dehumanising violence: 'The violation is not simply woven

[1] Mary Simmerling, 'What I was wearing', [undated], available online https://sapec.ku.edu/sites/sapec/files/files/Installation%20Poem.pdf, [accessed 2nd August 2024].
[2] Jen Brockman was director of Kansas University's Sexual Assault Prevention and Education Center, and Mary Wyandt-Hiebert who works for the University of Arkansas'–' Campus and Relationship Violence Center, https://sapec.ku.edu/wwyw [accessed 2nd August 2024].
[3] Ibid.
[4] Predating this installation, in Italy in 1992, an 18-year-old girl was raped by her driving instructor. The judge ruled that as she had been wearing tight jeans at the time of the rape, she must have helped the perpetrator remove them and this meant it had not been rape. This ruling caused outrage in the Italian Parliament and with activists starting 'Denim Day'–' which takes place every year on 24th April as a protest against sexual violence and victim blaming; https://denimday.org/why-denim, [accessed 2nd August 2024].

into the fabric of the material, it is a part of the survivor's new narrative.'[5] It reminds the audience that regardless of whether the victim/survivor was wearing a bikini, pyjamas or a white t-shirt and jeans, there is no clothing that justifies or excuses the rape of another. While this exhibition is situated firmly in the twenty-first century, alongside its engagement with contemporary rape myths and the misogyny that they buttress, it highlights the historical frequency with which sexual violence has touched the lives of innumerable women and men and the tactics used to carry it out.

In these modern responses to sexual violence, it is possible to see how rape culture and victim-blaming rely on tropes about the victim-survivor's clothing. This practice is made all the more stark when contrasted with medieval attitudes to clothing in cases of sexual or physical violence, where there is no obvious assumption that a woman's clothes drove men to rape – although men could be driven to sin by women's clothing. Modern responses to sexual violence also help to frame questions with which we can approach past societies; in what ways did victim-survivors of the medieval period articulate their responses? How did legal framings try to shift blame by focusing on clothing? How was clothing embedded in narratives of rape?

Rape victims/survivors were not usually asked 'What were you wearing?~~' in~~', in the Middle Ages, but clothing was nevertheless interwoven in numerous other ways that medieval culture placed the blame for sexual violence on the victim rather than the perpetrator. This research will demonstrate that late medieval English culture had a complicated, nuanced understanding of, and relationship to, gender and sexual violence. It will also expand on the ways dress, and in some cases the lack of it, was used by medieval women, fully aware of its visual, cultural, semiotic and legal significance, to carve out social and religious freedoms, as a way of gaining the upper hand in transactional relationships and

[5] 'Installation Intent', https://sapec.ku.edu/wwyw, [accessed 2nd August 2024].

as a device for self-fashioning and creating their identities within a society that largely tolerated violence against them.

Recent exhibitions like 'What Were You Wearing' and the '#Metoo' movement which began in 2017 are responses to the misogynist culture which has led to 71% of women in the UK reporting being subjected to some form of sexual harassment or which led to the murder of 147 women by men in Britain in 2021 alone.[6] A recent Guardian article has stated that from January to August 2024, 50 women had been killed by men and over the last few years on average one woman has been killed by a man every three days.[7] The deaths of Sarah Everard and Sabina Nessa, as well as 145 other women in 2021 at the hands of men, did not happen out of nowhere. The bodies of Sarah Everard and Isabel Carpenter, lay violated and discarded in woodland 100 miles and 592 years apart, both victims of a misogyny present in their respective cultures.

The court case of Isabel Carpenter, a young woman murdered in the fifteenth-century and discussed in Chapter Two is a potent one. In drawing attention to recent high-profile deaths of women and the statistics relating to the murders of women by men in recent years and bringing them into relief alongside the murder of a medieval woman, I wish to draw attention to the link between a key manifestation of medieval and modern patriarchal ideology: violence. Judith Bennett has written with great effect on the changing faces of patriarchy, noting that while 'the concept of patriarchy is singular…its manifestations certainly are not'.[8] These manifestations might include legal or educational restrictions, constraints within family, restrictions on finances or access to work. Violence is a further

[6] UN Women UK, 'Prevalence and reporting of sexual harassment in UK public spaces: A report by APPG for UN Women', PDF published March 2021, https://www.unwomenuk.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/APPG-UN-Women-Sexual-Harassment-Report_Updated.pdf, [accessed 27th July 2024].

[7] Alexandra Topping, Mabel Banfield-Nwachi, Geneva Abdul and Rachel Hall, 'Killed Women Count: 50 women allegedly killed by men in UK so far in 2024', *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/ng-interactive/2024/mar/08/killed-women-count-a-project-highlighting-the-toll-and-tragedy-of-violence-against-women-in-the-uk [accessed 13th August 2024].

[8] Judith Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p.58.

manifestation of patriarchy as it has been used to force or coerce women, and to a lesser extent men, to adhere to the broader framework of patriarchy and it is a useful theme with which to think about continuity or change within history. Bennett has argued that historians should be alert to changes in women's experience and how it relates to 'transformations in women's status'–' and has used the example of female brewsters in England in the late Middle Ages.[9] This 'experience vs status'–' question is useful in pinpointing the uniqueness of medieval gender violence and differentiating it from the gender violence of the twenty-first century. To be sure, the status of women in England has improved; medieval women were largely excluded from formal education and had only a shrunken pool of employment options open to them, which would be unthinkable to most modern British women. And yet while modern women broadly benefit from societal condemnation of violence against women which is upheld by the law, the threat of violence is still present at a personal level in the lives of women who carry their keys between their knuckles as they walk home and do not leave their drinks unattended in pubs. Thus, while modern women's *status* has changed, their *experience* of violence has not.

This thesis intends, then, to examine specifically medieval violence against women in England. It incorporates the complementary strand of dress history to gain a deeper, more nuanced set of insights: it explores the reasons why victim/survivors were so often blamed and how women tried to protect themselves using dress as a key tool. It is through casting our attention towards a greater range of source materials - from material history, legal cases, visual sources and popular literature - that we can recover the subjective experiences of these women. Dress history is a crucial aspect of this research because clothing formed an important aspect of how accounts of violence were narrativized, perhaps in part because clothes, and especially fashion, has long been seen as something bound up with women and

[9] Bennett, *History Matters*, p.62. She has noted that their early success within the trade was met with subsequent restrictions placed on them by authorities concerned about female independence and financial freedom, a phenomenon she terms the 'patriarchal equilibrium', pp.77-78.

their physicality. Indeed, while in this period men were very much also interested in fashion, it was medieval women's interest in and desire for the latest fashions which confirmed misogynist beliefs around their innate covetousness, avarice and pride.[10] Whether it be the production or buying of fashionable items of dress, adherence to and the consumption of fashion has, by wider society, incorrectly been assumed to be purely a woman's preoccupation which has made it a tool for the control, condemnation and oppression of women.[11]

A key focus of this thesis is the manifold forms of gender violence that existed within the patriarchal structure at the time. However, it would be entirely remiss not to acknowledge the spaces within which women could and did act with agency to subvert expectations and undermine authority. This research has found a number of instances where women rebelled through dress, used dress to self-fashion in the face of trauma or used their own lack of dress as a tool to escape abusive relationships. I also discuss evidence of women using dress to strengthen homosocial relationships, thereby undermining male authority. By examining cases of violence and trauma enacted on women's bodies, the spaces where women were able to evade or rebel against expectations and assert their agency are starkly contrasted. This research makes clear that despite the threats of violence and condemnation, there was potential for women to create spaces within which to exercise their own agency.

This research examines different forms of violence that were inflicted upon medieval women from sexual assault, rape, murder, physical assault, domestic violence as well as

[10] For example, Pride is personified as one of the daughters of Satan in 'A late medieval sermon' from Oxford Bodleian Library MS e Museo 180, f.69v-75 and translated by Louise Sylvester in *Medieval Dress and Textiles in Britain: A Multilingual Sourcebook*, eds., Louise Sylvester, Gale Owen-Crocker and Martin Chambers, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), pp.156-157.

[11] In much the same way that cooking is seen to be a traditionally domestic and therefore feminine task yet most celebrity chefs are male, so too do we see the same trend in the fashion industry, with most famous fashion designers being male but the assumption that the domestic construction of dress and the interest in fashion lies primarily with women, with fashion magazines aimed at a majority female audience; Ieva Zubaviciute, 'A Gender Gap: Why Do Men Still Run The (Fashion) World?', *Not Just A Label*, (2021), https://notjustalabel.com/editorial/gender-gap-why-do-men-still-rule-fashion-world, [accessed 17th April 2025), Claire Finney, 'The Female Chefs Lifting The Lid On Sexism In The Kitchen', *The i Newspaper*, (2025), https://inews.co.uk/inews-lifestyle/female-chefs-lifting-lid-sexism-in-kitchen-3552863?srsltid=AfmBOopnTvNF-pZLc-_bXy2cgE43KugIE2Xvx_WRwvlmsRvtsjks3tkx, [accessed 17th April 2025].

discrimination based on gender. I examine the ways in which medieval women were condemned by their peers and damned from the pulpit for the way they chose to clothe their bodies and the ways this top-down misogyny filtered through into the lived experience of the women whose ordeals and trauma were recorded in legal casebooks. Additionally, I have paid close attention to the presence of gender violence in the popular literature and religious texts from the mid-thirteenth to sixteenth ~~centuries, and~~centuries and looked at how authors used descriptions of clothing to convey certain traits in characters or to influence an audience's perception of them. This multifaceted approach allows me to 'translate~~'~~' the semiotics of medieval dress and transfer this from the medieval cultural imagination to cases of gender violence in which women talked about their own dress or where their dress is described: whilst literary texts do not reflect contemporary realities, they both engage in and develop semiotic codes, including around dress. I~~. Thus i~~n this research, I have begun to 'read~~'~~' medieval dress in order to more fully recognise the ways dress, violence and gender intertwined in the lives of women in medieval England.

Terminology

This thesis will be looking at a variety of types of gender violence from rape and sexual assault to domestic violence and uxoricide. To do so fully, we must understand the complexities and changes of language which have occurred over the centuries. It must be acknowledged, however, that modern terms and understandings of gender violence will be employed as it makes sense to use terms intelligible to a modern audience while acknowledging the need to contextualise terms and explain where modern phrases fall short of fully incorporating medieval understandings.

As will be shown in Chapter Four, modern definitions of domestic violence do not align with medieval understandings of acceptable and unacceptable levels of violence

towards a woman by her partner.[12] However for the purposes of this research, I have included any forms of violence that were non-consensual, or caused pain, trauma or emotional harm to a woman and have employed the term victim/survivor for this where the woman has survived her ordeal. This is to ensure that her identity as a victim of male violence is not her only identity and this terminology allows me to acknowledge her life after the event. Where women have been killed, I refer to them as victims alone.

In many ways, the legal language of the Middle Ages compounded violence against women by making it difficult, if not wholly impossible, for women to prosecute perpetrators as their actions had to sit within strict parameters. With regard to sexual violence, Corinne Saunders has noted that for two legal jurists, Ranulf de Glanville (d.1190) and Henry Bracton (1210-1268), '*raptus*' was translated as 'rape' although both the Statues of Westminster, in 1275 and 1285 respectively, conflated rape and abduction under the term 'ravishment'.[13] This obfuscation of terminology has made it difficult for modern historians of sexual violence to tease apart what exactly happened to a woman in this period.

Modern terminology for gender experiences, presentations and identities does not neatly correlate with pre-modern ideas about it which has made the topic a sprawling and ongoing discussion amongst historians of sex and gender. Greta Lae Fleur has argued persuasively against labelling people who lived in the past with modern terms that they would never have heard and likely would not have understood.[14] I have taken a similar approach in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, where I discuss a number of individuals who appear from the records to make up a demographic of people with marginalised gender identities. I have

[12] Sara M. Butler, *The Language of Abuse: Marital Violence in Later Medieval England*, (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p.2.
[13] Corinne Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England*, (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), pp.53, 55. Gwen Seabourne's 'Rape and Law in Medieval Western Europe' is also an immensely useful text and can be found in *A Companion to Crime and Deviance in the Middle Ages*, ed. Hannah Skoda, ed. Hannah Skoda, (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2023), 342-357.
[14] Greta Lae Fleur, 'Epilogue: Against Consensus' in', in *Trans Historical: Gender Plurality before the Modern*, ed. Greta LaFleur, Masha Raskolnikov and Anna Klosowska eds. Greta LeFleur, Masha Raskolnikov and Anna Klosowska, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 366-377, p.368.

resisted labelling any of them with terms such as ‘intersex’, ‘transgender’ or ‘non-binary’ as I do not presume to have any authority to speak for them.

The larger part of this research focuses on people who were recognised by their communities as being women, and more importantly who identified as such. I also look at cases where a person’s gender identity as understood by modern historians is less clear cut and in doing so I acknowledge that gender is a spectrum with people presenting in more feminine or more masculine ways, with clothing being a key tool in gender expression.[15] That being said, although medieval understandings of gender were more expansive than we might expect and a range of non-binary identities and experiences were recognised, valued and rejected, there were strict external qualifiers that made someone a ‘woman’.[16] These ranged from how they conducted themselves, the work they took on as well as biological indicators such as going through pregnancy and childbirth. Dress played a crucial role in forming and performing womanhood and indeed, manhood, in the medieval sense through ‘the gendered stylization of the body’.[17] Sartorially for women, this meant at least to have long hair, to wear a head covering after marriage, and a garment with a skirt to cover the legs. Behaviourally, it meant a set of virtues in line with Christian ideals such as modesty, sexual continence and obedience to male family members. This is certainly not to say that all or even most women behaved in this way and the presence of conduct books, which attempted to ‘contain female behaviour in oppressive, even violent, ways’ and sermons reinforcing the benefits of such behaviour are testament to the fact that it was felt that women needed reminding.[18]

In this thesis, the term ‘medieval cultural imagination’ is used to refer to the social, cultural, religious, visual, material and literary landscape in which the people here studied

[15] Judith Butler’s work is very instructive on this topic, having stated that ‘gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body’, *Gender Trouble*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), p.xv.
[16] For discussion of the term ‘hermaphrodite’ in’, in the medieval context, see Leah DeVun, *The Shape of Sex: Nonbinary Gender from Genesis to the Renaissance*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), pp.5-7.
[17] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), p.xv.
[18] Glenn D. Burger, *Conduct Becoming: Good Wives and Husbands in the Later Middle Ages*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), p.5.

lived. I use at as an expansion of the 'horizon of expectations,', a theory which refers to the judgements, interpretations and reactions by a community in response to a literary text.[19] I use the 'medieval cultural imagination' as a more encompassing term to refer to the tangible, intangible, behavioural, legible world in which the men and women examined here moved and lived.

Historiography

In the years after the Second World War and with the influence of successive waves of feminism, women's history has garnered public as well as scholarly interest, with particular focus on the intersections of gender, economic power (or lack of) and social status. Eileen Power was one of the forerunners in creating scholarly discourse on medieval women, particularly religious, using a range of legal, epistolary and literary sources to reconstruct their lives.[20] In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the field of women's history expanded enormously with scholars interrogating sources related to all aspects of medieval women's lives and the work of a number of academics has been particularly formative including Barbara Hanawalt, whose examination of non-elite rural and urban women has been extensive.[21] Ruth Mazo Karras'~~–~~' work on this demographic has also been insightful, and her work on medieval sex workers in *Common Women* and a range of articles on John/Eleanor Rykener ~~, who will be discussed in Chapter Five,~~ has been discerning and has demonstrated the breadth of gendered experiences in the period.[22] Judith Bennett's work on

[19] Hans Robert Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p.15.

[20] See Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries: c. 1275 to 1535*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922).

[21] Barbara Hanawalt, *Of Good and Ill Repute: Gender and Social Control in Medieval England*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); *Crime and Conflict in English Societies, 1300-1348*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (London: Harvard University Press, 1990); *The Ties That Bound: Peasant Families in Medieval England*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[22] Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Ruth Mazo Karras and Tom Linkinen, '~~'~~John/Eleanor Rykener Revisited'~~,'~~, in ~~eds.~~ *Founding Feminisms in Medieval Studies*, ed. Laine E. Doggett and Daniel O'Sullivan, ~~, eds. Laine E. Doggett and Daniel O'Sullivan, ((~~(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 111-121.

rural, peasant and working women especially, as well as women who were part of the underbelly of society in her article with Shannon McSheffrey, has been foundational in highlighting women's economic contributions to medieval society.[23] Bennett's influential *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* has guided many later scholars, including myself, in approaching historic women through a feminist lens.[24]

Although women take up comparatively little space within the breadth of medieval legal sources, one of the main ways they appear in the records is through cases relating to their marriages. Some of the fascinating studies of women's lives have come through interdisciplinary research which intersects with legal history or canon law such as Richard Helmholz's *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England* in which the use of court records has shown a less formalised practice of marriage than might have been assumed.[25] Christopher Cannon's work on women's experiences in medieval law courts has highlighted the need to question the records themselves to gain deeper insights into the events they record.[26] James Brundage's lifetime of work on medieval marriage, law and sexuality has also opened further avenues into medieval women's lived experiences.[27] Bronach Kane's work on defamation, memory and gender in the law courts and wider medieval life has revealed the importance of social representations in legal proceedings.[28] Sarah McDougal's work has looked largely at canon law in medieval France but, as with Skoda's work, provides useful frameworks which

[23] Judith Bennett and Shannon McSheffrey, 'Early, Erotic and Alien: Women Dressed as Men in Late Medieval London', *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 77, (2014), 1-25.
[24] Judith Bennet, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).
[25] Richard Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).
[26] Christopher Cannon, 'The Rights of Medieval English Women: Crime and the Issue of Representation', in *Medieval Crime and Social Control*, ed. Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace, eds., Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).
[27] James Brundage, 'Domestic Violence in Classical Canon Law', in *Violence in Medieval Society*, ed. Richard W. Kaeuper, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2000), 184-195; *Sex, Law and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, (Great Britain: Variorum, 1993); *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
[28] Bronach Kane, 'Defamation, Gender and Hierarchy in Late Medieval Yorkshire', *Social History*, vol. 43, no. 3, (2018), 356-374.

can be applied to medieval English cases.[29] Caroline Dunn's monograph, *Stolen Women in Medieval England: Rape, Abduction, and Adultery, 1100-1500*, has demonstrated not only the prevalence of these forms of gendered violence but also the ways in which medieval women knowingly inverted forms of gender violence such as abduction in order to have their consensual marriages with their supposed abductors validated.[30] While the examples Dunn provides do seem to support her argument convincingly, we must be careful as historians not to make assumptions around consent and be alert to the potential for coercion to have played a significant role in a medieval woman's life.

Not only are legal sources an invaluable route into the ways medieval women contracted marriages, but this vast corpus also provides evidence for when women faced violence at the hands of their husbands, lovers or even strangers. For discussion of domestic violence in particular, an abundance of research has been produced in recent years which has challenged assumptions about the permissibility of domestic violence in this period, with a particular scholarly focus on where courts drew the line on tolerating it. Philippa Maddern has noted the role domestic violence played in demarcating one's place in the social order, which meant this type of violence could be perceived as having a societal benefit.[31] In accordance with Maddern's work, albeit approaching the topic from a criminology foundation, Elise Impara has noted that violence in the Middle Ages could be seen as positive in certain contexts as it was violence that led to the death of Christ and the salvation of mankind.[32] Emma Hawkes~~'~~' research has articulated well the bias in medieval law courts towards men, putting women

[29] Sarah McDougall, 'Women and Gender in Canon Law~~'~~', in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. Judith Bennett and Ruth Karras ~~, eds., Judith Bennett and Ruth Karras, ((~~Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016*)*, ~~p.~~163-180.

[30] Caroline Dunn, *Stolen Women in Medieval England: Rape, Abduction, and Adultery, 1100-1500*~~,~~ ~~((~~Cambridge~~, U.K.~~: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[31] Philippa Maddern, ~~'~~'Interpreting Silence: Domestic Violence in the King~~'~~'s Courts in East Anglia, 1422-1442~~'~~', in *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, ed. ~~ed.~~ Eve Salisbury, Georgiana Donavin and Merrall Llewelyn Price~~, ((~~Florida: University Press of Florida, 2002), 31-56, p.39.

[32] Elise Impara, ~~'~~'Medieval V~~v~~iolence and Criminology: U~~u~~sing the Middle Ages to U~~u~~nderstand C~~c~~ontemporary ~~"~~"M~~m~~otiveless~~"~~" C~~c~~rime~~'~~', *Journal of Theoretical & Philosophical Criminology*, ~~(2016),~~ vol. 8, no. 1~~, (2016),~~ 26-36, p.30.

and their appeals at a disadvantage which can be seen in the legal sources used in this research.[33] Hannah Skoda's analysis of French legal records pertaining to domestic violence, while geographically removed from this research, provides adaptable methodologies for seeing 'deviant'' or acceptable instances of it in English records.[34] Sara Butler's extensive research on the topic, which includes several articles and a monograph, has shown that if applications for divorce included evidence of 'cruelty and adultery', it was granted at twice the rate for other separations.[35] This analysis of the qualifiers for medieval divorces is crucial as it is the clothing of the victim/survivors of domestic abuse cases which signified the cruelty of the relationship, a topic I explore more fully in Chapter Four.

Casting our academic eyes back to the gender violence of the medieval period, scholarly discourse has leaned most heavily on the corpus of literature and on legal records in which sexual violence occurs. Kathryn Gravdal's early work on rape in the pastourelle genre, a topic I discuss in Chapter Two, drew academic attention to the group of texts on which other scholars, including perhaps most notably Carissa Harris, have built arguments around consent and sexual violence in popular culture.[36] Harris argues that rather than viewing the genre as an exercise in voyeuristic and titillating sexual assault, some of the poems seem to speak directly to female audience members who may have experienced similar events to comfort

[33] Emma Hawkes, ''The ''Reasonable'' Laws of Domestic Violence in Late Medieval England',' in *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, ed. Eve Salisbury, Georgiana Donavin and Merrall Llewelyn Price, (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2002), 57-72.

[34] Hannah Skoda, ''Violent Discipline of Disciplining Violence? Experience and Reception of Domestic Violence in Late Thirteenth- and Early Fourteenth-Century Paris and Picardy'', *Cultural and Social History*, (2009), vol. 6, no. 1, (2009), 9-27.

[35] Sarah Butler, *Divorce in Medieval England: From One to Two Persons in Law*, ((Oxford: Routledge, 2013), p.32. Butler's other important works on this topic include *The Language of Abuse: Marital Violence in Later Medieval England*, ((Leiden, Brill: 2007); ''Abortion Medieval Style? Assaults on Pregnant Women in Later Medieval England'', *Women's Studies*, (2011), vol. 40, no. 6, (2011), 778-799 and ''Spousal Abuse in Fourteenth-Century Yorkshire: What Cean Wwe Llearn from the Coroners'' Rolls?'', *Florilegium*, vol. 18, no. 2, ((2001), 61-78. I thank Sara Butler for her thoughts and advice on this aspect of my research.

[36] Kathryn Gravdal, ''Camouflaging Rape: The Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in the Medieval Pastourelle'', *Romantic Review*, vol. 76, no. 4, ((1985), 361-373 and Carissa Harris'' most recent work on the topic, ''Voicing Violence: Reading Rape Survival in Premodern Lyrics' in', in *Rape Culture and Female Resistance in Late Medieval Literature*, eds. Baechle, Sarah, Carissa M. Harris and Elizaveta Strakhov, *Rape Culture and Female Resistance in Late Medieval Literature*, ed. Sarah Baechle, Carissa M. Harris and Elizaveta Strakhov, (Philadelphia: Penn State University Press, 2022), 44-58.

them and reassure them they were not alone.[37] Rape and sexual violence in Chaucer's work has also gained wide scholarly interest, perhaps in part due to possible comparisons drawn between his work and the possible rape the author was accused of committing against Cecily Chaumpaigne, but also because the popularity of his work amongst his contemporaries speaks to the tolerance and even amusement in literary sexual violence.[38] A new discovery at The National Archives in 2022 has thrown doubt on whether a rape ever occurred at all and that the confusion may have stemmed from a misunderstanding around what the term '*raptus*' referred to.[39] As Gwen Seabourne has summed up, the key phrase might actually have related to a legal battle with a Thomas Staundon on one side and Chaucer and Cecily together on the other. Rather than an act of sexual violence, it seems that Cecily had left the household of Staundon where she had been his servant and joined that of Chaucer before she was officially entitled to.[40] This would mean the term '*de rapto meo*' which had for so long been interpreted as relating to the rape of Cecily actually referred to '*raptus*' in', in the sense of her 'removal' from Staundon's employment. Corinne Saunders, Amy Vines and the authors in Christine Rose and Elizabeth Robertson's edited volume, *Representing Rape in Medieval*

[37] Carissa M. Harris, 'Rape Narratives, Courtly Critique, and the Pedagogy of Sexual Negotiation in the Middle English Pastourelle', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol. 46, no. 2, (2016), 263-287, p.266.
[38] For discussion on rape in Chaucer's life and writings, see Suzanne Edwards, 'The Rhetoric of Rape and Politics of Gender in the *Wife of Bath*'s *Tale* and the *1382 Statute of Rapes*', *Exemplaria*, vol. 23, no. 1, (2011), 3-26; Christopher Cannon, 'Chaucer and Rape: Uncertainty's Certainties', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, vol. 22, (2000), 67-92; John Bugbee, 'Chaucer's *Lucretia* and What Augustine Really Said About Rape: Two Reconsiderations', *Traditio*, vol. 74, (2019), 335-375; Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Timothy D. O'Brien, 'Seductive Violence and Three Chaucerian Women', *College Literature*, vol. 28, no. 2, (2001), 178-196; Christine Rose, 'Reading Chaucer Reading Rape', *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, eds., Elizabeth Robertson and Christine Rose, (United States: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 21-60. Caroline Dunn also offers an extensive bibliography on this subject in *Stolen Women*, p.4, n.10.
[39] Euan Roger and Sebastian Sobecki, 'Geoffrey Chaucer, Cecily Chaumpaigne and the Statute of Laborers: New Records and Old Evidence Reconsidered', *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 57, (2022) 407-37. See also Andrew Prescott's 'Who was Cecily Chaumpaigne?', in *The Chaucer Review*, 'Special Issue: The Case of Geoffrey Chaucer and Cecily Chaumpaigne: New Evidence', ed. Susanna Fein and David Raybin, vol. 57, no. 4 (2022), 452-462.

[40] Gwen Seabourne, '"'Escapades" and Labour: Chaucer, Chaumpaigne and Legal History', *University of Bristol Centre for Law and History Research*, (2023), https://lawandhistory.blogs.bristol.ac.uk/2023/05/09/escapades-and-labour-chaucer-chaumpaigne-and-legal-history/ [accessed 17th April 2025].

and Early Modern Literature, have also used literary source material to understand where and how rape and sexual violence sat within the medieval cultural imagination to great effect.[41]

At this point it feels pertinent to point out the relative chasm between historians of violence and historians of dress whose research focus has seldom, if ever, crossed. Yet if they were to do so, and as this thesis does, it becomes clear how valuable the two fields could be to one another. By examining violence through the presence and treatment of dress in the Middle Ages, we are able to gain a far deeper insight into the subjective and material experiences of gender violence. By examining dress and the ways it interacts with episodes of violence, we are able to piece together a more well-rounded picture of how medieval women constructed themselves, or were deconstructed, sartorially in reaction to gendered violence.

Writing about the dress of the somewhat ~~fairly~~ distant past with limited direct source material is a difficult project and one which requires a multi-disciplinary approach. Thus, in the last two decades, historians of dress and material culture have incorporated literary sources, sociological and economical methodologies and legal records alongside the art and visual cultural approaches, into their research on largely ephemeral dress and the experience of wearing clothing in the past. What little surviving clothing there is from the medieval period has been analysed by Gale Owen-Crocker, whose research tends towards the early medieval or Anglo-Saxon period, and Elizabeth Coatsworth, in their *Clothing the Past: Surviving Garments from Early Medieval to Early Modern Western Europe* which uses archaeological finds to reconstruct dress in the period.[42] The authors have stated their strongly held belief that relying on visual sources alone means that hidden details of dress, especially

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[41] ~~Corinne~~ Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment ~~in the Literature of Medieval England,~~* ~~(Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001)~~; Amy N. Vines, ~~'~~'Invisible Woman: Rape as a Chivalric Necessity in Medieval Romance~~'~~', in *Sexual Culture in the Literature of Medieval Britain*, ed. Amanda Hopkins, Robert Allen Rouse and Cory James Rushton, ~~((~~Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2014), 161-180; ~~Elizabeth Ann Robertson and Christine M Rose, eds.,~~ *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Robertson and Christine Rose, ~~((~~New York: Palgrave, 2001).

[42] Gale Owen-Crocker and Elizabeth Coatsworth, ~~*Clothing the Past: Surviving Garments from early medieval to early modern Western Europe*, (~~*Clothing the Past: Surviving Garments from Early Medieval to Early Modern Western Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

shoes, gloves and underwear are missed.[43] Stella Mary Newton's *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince*, first printed in 1980, was one of the first books on medieval dress which combined manuscript images, tomb effigies, and literary analysis, as well as one or two surviving garments such as the decorative armour worn by the prince.[44] These texts have long called for a thoroughly interdisciplinary approach to dress histories.

Initiated by these dress historians, Janet Arnold has authored a number of books which display the accurate patterns and techniques for reconstructing historical dress from the 1540s to the early 1900s, based on meticulously measured surviving garments from the period.[45] Jane Malcolm Davies and Ninya Mikhaila's 2006 pattern book, *The Tudor Tailor: Reconstructing 16th-Century Dress*, had similar aims of using extant garments as templates for reconstructing authentic early modern dress.[46] For the medieval period, Sarah Thursfield produced a book which attempted to do the same, although was limited in that it had less source material from which to draw which meant that her patterns were more generic than those of Arnold.[47] Even so, the book makes an important contribution to knowledge of the fashions and construction of medieval clothing that would otherwise be hard to come by.

Using literary analysis of medieval texts as an avenue into dress history has been a well-developed method for some time, not least as medieval literature is replete with descriptions of characters' dress. E. Jane Burns has produced an impressive body of work which, although looking for the most part at French literature, demonstrates the ways that this approach can be applied to English sources.[48] Similarly, Nicole Smith has drawn sartorial

[43] Ibid, p.2.
[44] Stella Mary Newton, *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince*, (Suffolk: Boydell, 1980).
[45] Janet Arnold, *Patterns of Fashion 4: The Cut and Construction of Linen Shirts, Smocks, Neckwear, Headwear and Accessories for Men and Women c. 1540 – 1660*, (London: Macmillan, 2008) and *Patterns of Fashion 3: The Cut and Construction of Clothes for Men and Women, c. 1560-1620*, (London: Macmillan, 1985).
[46] Ninya Mikhaila and Jane Malcolm-Davies, *The Tudor Tailor: Reconstructing 16th-Century Dress*, (London: Batsford, 2006).
[47] Sarah Thursfield, *The Medieval Tailor's Assistant: Common Garments 1100-1480*, (Wiltshire: The Crowood Press Ltd, 2001, 2015).
[48] E. Jane Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed: Reading Through Clothes in Medieval French Culture*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

analysis from French romances and *lai* to great effect.[49] Laura Hodges'' recent monograph, *Chaucer and Array: Patterns of Costume and Fabric Rhetoric in The Canterbury Tales, Troilus and Criseyde and Other Works*, is an important work in that it has taken a close look at descriptions of clothing in Chaucer's work, drawing out insightful wider analysis and contextualisation and situating Chaucer's characters within the society in which they were written.[50] Perhaps these books'' most important contribution to the field is that while accounting for dress in the literature, they clearly articulate the place of dress in the wider cultural imaginary of later medieval northern Europe. Studies such as these provide the framework from which I am able to analyse the dress of victim/survivors in ways that reveal how they saw themselves and how they utilised the culturally contingent visual and sartorial language.

Drawing from legal history and records has proved to be an immensely useful avenue of historical research when combined with dress history. Ulinka Rublack and Giorgio Riello, while both lean towards the early modern period, have produced a useful book on global sumptuary legislation with Maria Hayward's contribution examining medieval English and Scottish clothing ordinances effectively.[51] Diane Owen Hughes has written specifically on the legal and spiritual regulation of women's fashions during this period through prohibitions as well as guilt and shame, analysing the misogynist attitudes widely held against medieval women and states powerfully that, '[if] fashion is a woman, it is because women have been left only their clothing as a means of tailoring a social persona'.[52]

[49] See Nicole Smith's *Sartorial Strategies: Outfitting Aristocrats and Fashioning Conduct in Late Medieval Literature*, ((Indiana, U.S.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012) and ''*Estreitement Bendé*: Marie de France''s *Guigemar* and the Erotics of Tight Dress'', *Medium Ævum*, vol. 77, no. 1, ((2008), 96-117.

[50] Laura F. Hodges, *Chaucer and Array: Patterns of Costume and Fabric Rhetoric in The Canterbury Tales, Troilus and Criseyde and Other Works*, ((Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2014).

[51] Maria Hayward, 'Outlandish Superfluities: Luxury and Clothing in Scottish and English Sumptuary Law from the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Century'', in *The Right to Dress: Sumptuary Laws from a Global Perspective, 1200-1800*, ed. Ulinka Rublack and Giorgio Riello , eds., Ulinka Rublack and Giorgio Riello, ((Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 96-120.

[52] Diane Owen Hughes, ''Regulating Women''s Fashion'', in *A History of Women in the West: Silences of the Middle Ages*, ed. George Duby, Christine Klapisch-Zuber and Natalie Zemon Davis, , eds. George Duby, Christine Klapisch-Zuber and Natalie Zemon Davis, ((Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992).

Many historians have taken a social history approach to dress, contextualising it within the system of craft networks, guilds and apprenticeships necessary to produce textiles and the embroidery that early medieval England was famous for. Kay Staniland's work on embroidery craftspeople, in conjunction with Elisabeth Crowfoot and Frances Pritchard, is an invaluable resource for understanding the techniques and technicalities of the production of medieval dress and textiles based on archaeological finds.[53] Carole Rawcliffe's work on laundresses and their (perceived or real) connection with sex work aligns in many ways with Ruth Mazo Karras'~~–~~' work on prostitution and situates the work of the laundress within medieval society and the cultural imagination.[54] Margaret Rosenthal's article on the culture of clothing takes a broader look at dress and how it sits within social networks as an object of creation within a specific set of economic, political, social and technological conditions and how textiles circulate within society.[55] Catherine Richardson and Gareth Shaw's recent edited volume, *Clothing Culture, 1350-1650,* presents research on the complex roles clothing and dress played in late medieval and early modern society, with authors using a wide field of approaches.[56] From this volume, Andrea Denny-Brown's contribution, 'Rips and Slits: The Torn Garment and the Medieval Self', addresses the tailoring revolution of the High Middle Ages and how this ushered in 'sartorial self-presentation'~~–~~' which allowed for a flowering of self-expression.[57] In a similar vein, Susan Crane's work on 'self-fashioning'~~–~~' through dress, to borrow from Stephen Greenblatt's work on early modern authors, has shown how medieval

[53] *Textiles and Clothing, 1150-1450*, ed. Elisabeth Crowfoot, Frances Pritchard and Kay Staniland~~, eds. Elisabeth Crowfoot, Frances Pritchard and Kay Staniland, ((~~Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1992, 2001, 2006). Staniland has suggested that using medieval depictions of dress is ineffective as a source material in that it simplifies complex or hidden details of actual medieval dress.

[54] See Carole Rawcliffe, '~~'~~A Marginal Occupation? The Medieval Laundress and H~~h~~er Work'~~'~~, *Gender & History*, vol. 21, no. 1~~, ((~~2009), 147-169 and Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England*~~, ((~~Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[55] Margaret F. Rosenthal, '~~'~~Cultures of Clothing in Later Medieval and Early Modern Europe'~~'~~, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol. 39, no. 3~~, ((~~2009), 459-481.

[56] See *Clothing Culture, 1350-1650*, ed. Catherine Richardson and Gareth Shaw~~, eds. Catherine Richardson and Gareth Shaw, ((~~Oxford: Routledge, 2016).

[57] Andrea Denny-Brown, '~~'~~Rips and Slits: The Torn Garment and the Medieval Self'~~,'~~ in~~,~~ *Clothing Culture, 1350-1650*~~, Catherine Richardson and Gareth Shaw, eds., ((~~ed. Catherine Richardson and Gareth Shaw (Oxford: Routledge, 2016), 223-237.

people might configure their identity sartorially within the context of the cultural imagination.[58]

Yet, the analysis of the dress or undress of the victim/survivor is often entirely left out of histories of gendered violence. In the 1321 case of Joan le Sadler, a 12-year-old who was kidnapped and raped in London, Joan testified that she was wearing a 'blue' kirtle and 'a light shift' at the time.[59] This detail is omitted from both Corinne Saunders' and Barbara Hanawalt's in-depth discussions of the source.[60] Clearly, both authors felt that Joan's description of what she had been wearing was of little consequence, but the fact that Joan mentions it demonstrates that it was of importance both to her, and potentially to those investigating the case. In neglecting this detail, scholars ignore a key detail about the victim/survivor's perception and public presentation of herself through dress. This thesis aims to place women's self-fashioning as demonstrated through dress, or in some cases lack of, at the forefront. This lack of communication between these historiographies leaves a multiplicity of questions about the gendered, subjective and material experience of violence unanswered. Joan and others like her in the legal records deliberately discuss the clothing they were wearing, detailing colours and layers and whether the clothing pulled or ripped in the attack, because their dress mattered to them as objects connected with their identities and to which they had emotional connections. But these are also textiles which had witnessed the violation of their bodies and which the women mention at their trial because the textiles engage with a sartorial language that would have been understood by the jurors. By resting our academic attention on such details mentioned by victim/survivors of abuse, we are able to return to the women their agency.

[58] Susan Crane, *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[59] *Year Books of Edward II: The Eyre of London, 14 Edward II, A.D. 1321*, vol. 1, ed. Helen M. Cam, (London: Selden Society, 1968), p.88. This case is covered in more detail in Chapter Two.

[60] Corinne Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment, in the Literature of Medieval England*, (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), p.64 and Barbara Hanawalt, *Of Good and Ill Repute: Gender and Social Control in Medieval England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.132.

Dress History as a Respectable Discipline

The works discussed above form part of a surge of interest in the study of historical clothing, despite a slow, stuttering start in comparison with its sibling discipline of art history. Many, more recent scholars have pointed to fashion's association with femininity as the cause for this delay, which was founded on centuries'–' old misogynist assumptions. Even Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* from 1792, called for women to focus on topics other than fashion and needlework and for them to be properly educated alongside their brothers, writing that it was the 'frippery of dress'–' that 'weakens the mind'–' of her female contemporaries.[61]

In sixteenth-century Italy, there was a flurry of illustrated books documenting the historical and contemporary clothing of European men and women, as well as those in North Africa and the Middle East of which Cesare Vecellio's *De gli habiti antichi et moderni di diversi parti del mondo* (1590) was the most popular. Yet these books failed to inspire an academic interest in the history of clothing and it was not until the early 1800s when antiquarian societies began producing books of historical clothing, most likely in response to the taste for Classical culture that had been inspired in the men who went on the Grand Tour. The poor opinion of dress history was recorded in 1821 when Samuel Rush Meyrick and Charles Hamilton-Smith attempted to redress the situation with their book, *The Costume of the Original Inhabitants of the British Islands from the Earliest Period to the Sixth Century* in which they wrote that the discipline was burdened with 'the intemperate and hasty charge of carrying with it the inferiority of not being worthy of consideration of a man of letters'.[62]

[61] Mary Wollstonecroft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*,-((London: Penguin Books, 2004), p.79.
[62] Samuel Ruch Meyrick and Charles Hamilton Smith, *The Costume of the Original Inhabitants of the British Islands from the Earliest Period to the Sixth Century*,-((England: Thomas McLean, 1821), p.1 and quoted in Taylor, *The Study of Dress History*, p.2.

Despite their efforts, dress history continued to trundle along behind art history and other fields more befitting learned men.

In 1874, Eugène Viollet-le-Duc published his *Dictionnaire Raisonné du Mobilier Français* which was to be one of the first occasions 'period-appropriate terminology' was used to back up visual sources for the clothing of the Middle Ages.[63] Being an architect, however, Viollet-le-Duc lacked any knowledge of costume construction which led him to make a number of factual errors in print which were then repeated by later authors of dress history including in Jules Quicherat's *Histoire du costume en France* (1876). Viollet-le-Duc's focus on the costumes depicted on the statues of Chartres Cathedral, misunderstanding their construction and mislabelling the garments *bliauts* 'inflated [their] importance…to the detriment of other dress vocabulary found in the literature' of the period.[64] In so doing, Viollet-le-Duc inadvertently tainted later dress historians' understanding of elite clothing before the twelfth century and flattened an otherwise complex history of early medieval dress into a single garment. Yet, Roland Barthes has argued that 'truly scientific research on dress history began in about 1860' with Quicherat's aforementioned work and Germain Demay's *Le costume au Moyen âge* (1880) although 'scientific' is questionable as these scholars knew little about garment construction.[65] Despite the increase in publications, the field continued to be regarded with derision until at least the next century.

The founding of the Courtauld Institute of Art in 1932 went some way to advancing the study of dress but only in as far as it aided art history, mainly as a method for dating works of art rather than for understanding the historical and cultural significance of the clothes themselves. However, at the Courtauld in 1965, Stella Mary Newton founded the first MA in dress history, thereby inviting the discipline into academic discourse and giving it an

[63] Monica L. Wright, '"The *Bliaut*: An Examination of the Evidence in French Literary Sources"', *Medieval Clothing and Textiles*, vol. 14, ((2018), 61-80, p.65.
[64] ~~Wright, 'The *Bliaut*',~~ Ibid, p.78.
[65] Roland Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*, trans. Andy Stafford, ((London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.3.

institutional home.[66] There were different motivations for the founding of this nascent field; one was a desire for accurate reconstruction of garments, another was to study dress history in order to more accurately date art, yet a third was to interrogate the social history of clothing. That is, to place it within its cultural and social contexts. It is this branch that aligns with the approach to dress history in this thesis.

In 1941, C. Willett Cunnington, a medical doctor and writer on the history of English clothing, published *Why Women Wear Clothes* which asked the question, 'why do women wear clothes at all?'–' and suggested that 'the primary function of Woman's clothing may have been to serve as protection against weather – and Man'.[67] Whether it be referring to women in dehumanising phrases as 'enigmatical creatures'–' and 'elusive beings'–' to Cunnington's predatory assertion that 'life would be simpler if [men and women] were different species – like sheep and wolves…', it is evident that dress history was imbued with a deeply misogynist attitude. This approach was shared by James Laver in his *A Concise History of Costume* (1969) which offered what Jonathon Faiers has regarded as a 'patriarchal attitude'–' to women.[68] By the 1970s, feminist historians and scholars'–' use of burgeoning methodological approaches such as the new art history had advanced the study of the field by incorporating 'politics, feminism, psychoanalysis and theory'–' while reframing academic enquiry from 'objects to "social concepts"'.[69] This nascent approach had not been universally adopted however, with N.B. Hart, an economic historian, lamenting in 1976 that:

> 'the bulk of published work on costume history seems to have been compiled for the guidance of the theatrical costumier or the art historian seeking to date pictures. It is primarily concerned with the genealogy of cut and the evolution of successive styles… the history of fashion has been conceived either in an exclusively "internalized" way or

[66] Lou Taylor, *The Study of Dress History*,((Manchester University Press, Manchester: 2002), p.116.

[67] C. Willett Cunnington, *Why Women Wear Clothes*,((London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1941), pp.9, 13, 8, 7.
[68] Jonathon Faiers, 'Dress Thinking: Disciplines and Indisciplinarity', in *Dress History*, ed. Charlotte Nicklas and Annebella Pollen, eds. Charlotte Nicklas and Annebella Pollen, ((London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p.19.
[69] Eric Fernie, *Art History and Its Methods: A Critical Anthology*,((London: Phaidon Press, 1995), p.19.

> has derived its flavouring of economic and social significance only from the easy pickings of literary quotation or from an added dash of amateur psychology'.[70]

It is certainly true that art historians, wishing to more accurately date paintings, relied on the work of dress historians. Anne Hollander's *Seeing Through Clothes* (1988, reprinted 1992) studied Western historical dress through visual sources, albeit in an unapologetically Eurocentric fashion, stating that the field has 'no real substance other than in *images* of clothes, in which their visual reality truly lives, naturalized, as it were, by the persuasive eye of art'.[71] Hollander was incorrect to conclude that the study of extant clothing or textual sources with regards to dress was impossible or fruitless as later scholars have shown (and I intend to demonstrate). Hollander's assumptions, as Aileen Ribeiro has commented, fail to take into account 'economic pressures, social customs' ' and 'psychological perceptions' ' and also ignores the difficulties of studying the dress of cultures with comparatively limited visual sources on dress, such as the Middle Ages.[72] Equally, in a medieval society with a fairly inflexible social hierarchy and the bulk of the population without excess capital to create images, to rely solely on visual sources to understand dress leads to an exclusive study of the elite and aristocratic, ignoring the sartorial choices of the many. It should also be acknowledged that for the most part, artistic works and particularly manuscript illuminations do not do justice to the complexity of garments and thus while they are invaluable, they should not be seen as the only authoritative source for how clothing looked during the earlier part of this period.[73] By the early 1400s, visual sources become a lot more reliable as sources

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[70] N.B. Harte, ''State Control of Dress and Social Change in Pre-Industrial England', in', in *Trade, Government and Economy in Pre-Industrial England*, ed. D.C. Coleman and A.H. John, eds. D.C. Coleman and A.H. John, ((London: Morrison & Gibb Ltd, 1976), p.140.

[71] Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes*, ((University of California Press, London: 1993), p.454. Hollander's Western Eurocentric attitude to dress history makes her approach to dress history limited: 'many garments from the eastern hemisphere' ' 'tend to look better…when laid out flat', p.xiv.

[72] Aileen Ribeiro, ''Re-Fashioning Art: Some Visual Approaches to the Study of the History of Dress'', *Fashion Theory*, vol. 2, no. 4, 315-325, p.,321.

[73] See Kay Staniland, 'Court Style, Painters and the Great Wardrobe', in', in *England in the Fourteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1985 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. W. M. Ormrod, ed. W. M. Ormrod, ((Suffolk: Boydell, 1986), 236-246.

of clothing details. Panel paintings particularly by Dutch painters such as Roger van der Weyden (c.1399-1464), Jan van Eyck (1390-1441) and Hans Memling (1430-1494) frequently depicted clothing details such as seams (useful to understanding construction and fit), skirt pleating, and even the head of the pin used to attach separate sleeves to a kirtle (Figure 1).

Within the field of history, dress history had long been considered a topic of little interest to academics who assumed that fashion's changeability, visibility and decorativeness make the topic superficial, shallow and 'trivial'.[74] It has only really been since the 1970s that dress history has been examined with any real academic rigour, and been viewed as a practical pathway to the past. Indeed, the study of dress can offer the historian, of any discipline, more than an insight into economic shifts, technological advancements, trade routes or legislative changes. The study of the dress of the past is by no means trivial. It is the study of past people's self-fashioning and therefore, their understanding of their place within their world.

More than anything, studying clothing through as many varied sources as are available, whether that be images, sculpture, wills, court records, literature or extant garments, is the study of who the wearers were, how they saw themselves and their place in their society, and shaped how their contemporaries saw them.

[74] ~~Lou~~ Taylor, *The Study of Dress History*, ~~(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002),~~ p.59.



Figure 1 Detail of Mary Magdalen weeping in Roger van der Weyden's The Descent from the Cross *(c.1435). Note the detail of the seams, the pleats and the head of the pin holding the saint's sleeve to the shoulder of her gown. Wikipedia Commons.*

Questions

In order to more fully understand the convergence of late medieval English women's experiences of gender violence and their own clothing, this thesis seeks to answer a number of questions. Firstly, to what extent did women's clothing function as a marker and maker of

identity? To what extent did both violence and dress contribute to the enforcement of gender norms? How far did Christian ideology influence, or try to, the clothing of men and women in this period? Did clothing play an active role in the legal proceedings of gender, physical or sexual violence? What role did women's nudity play in violence? Did the clothing of victim/survivors contribute to their blame? Could gendered clothing be used by women to free themselves from, or overturn, patriarchal oppression? Are there any examples of women adopting masculine dress and if so, to what ends? As will be discussed below, a range of source and methodological approaches have been used to untangle these questions.

Methodological Approaches

This research depends upon the study of two topics which are largely unquantifiable and which have left few tangible remnants. The first, secular dress from the late Middle Ages, has not survived in any great quantities owing to the clothing of the majority of people being in almost constant use until it was no longer able to be worn. That it was made of organic materials such as linen (from flax plants), wool, silk, or leather has meant much of the clothing worn on the bodies of medieval people has rotted away with the bodies who wore them. The second, gender violence, is difficult to study concretely because the acts of violence themselves were fleeting - someone does something to someone and then stops doing it. It is so much harder to recover the ongoing trauma felt by victim/survivors, and yet the witnesses, the wounds, material damage and testimony of the victim/survivor herself, written into legal records, show the centuries that the act happened. The after-effects of the action, the physical and psychological wounds, would have been far longer lasting than the act itself. For the perpetrator, his violence may have seemed forgettable, inconsequential, even justified. For the victim-survivor, his actions would have reverberated through her life, causing immense grief, pain and shame which might not find justice. We must turn to

eyewitness accounts of violence in the legal records as the only evidence that the aggression occurred but these are replete with inaccuracies, vendettas, trauma, biases, misrememberings, confusion and also, lies. Another complication in the process is that victim-survivor's narratives were moulded to fit the overarching legal framework, which further obfuscated their voice and experience of their trauma, a topic which historians of gender violence have explored at length.[75] Thus, such impermanent themes and obscured narratives necessitate the adoption of interdisciplinary methods borrowed from related fields in order to fully contextualise the complex experience of clothing and how that intersects with being on the receiving end of gender violence within a deeply patriarchal social structure.

It must be acknowledged, however, that owing to the sources available, this methodology faces some limitations. Firstly, with the dearth of medieval extant garments to draw from, it is difficult to reconstruct medieval dress truly authentically without having to draw on informed speculation or make a general model of how an item of dress probably looked, as in Sarah Thursfield's pattern book.[76] By contrast, extant clothing from the early modern period onwards has been studied extensively by the likes of Janet Arnold who made patterns from existing early modern garments. Ninya Mikhala and Jane Malcolm-Davies, among others, drew on the extensive corpus of Tudor, Elizabethan and Jacobean portraiture as well as existing garments to produce detailed, informed pattern books of authentic period garments. [77] This allows for accurate reconstructions to be sewn and worn in order to understand more fully the physical and somatic sensations of wearing historic clothing as

[75] See for example, Barabara Hanawalt, *Of Good and Ill Repute: Gender and Social Control in Medieval England*, ((Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Chapter Eight and Christopher Cannon, ''The Rights of Medieval English Women: Crime and the Issue of Representation', in *Medieval Crime and Social Control*, ed. Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace, eds., Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace, ((Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 156-185, especially pp.165-7.

[76] Sarah Thursfield, *The Medieval Tailor's Assistant: Common Garments 1100-1480*, ((Wiltshire: The Crowood Press Ltd, 2001, 2015).

[77] For pattern books of early modern clothing and beyond, see Ninya Mikhaila and Jane Malcolm-Davies, *The Tudor Tailor: Reconstructing 16th-Century Dress*, ((London: Batsford, 2006); Elizabeth Friendship, *Creating Historical Clothes: Pattern Cutting from Tudor to Victorian Times*, ((London: Batsford, 2013) and Jenny Tiramani, Luca Costigliolo, Armelle Lucas and Claire Thornton with Susan North, *Seventeenth-Century Women's Dress Patterns*, ((London: V&A, 2011).

well as how one's movements might be constricted or one's posture might change in line with the clothing. It is a great loss to academics of the medieval material world that such detailed reconstructions on the same scale are almost entirely impossible.

A second stumbling block is that while women wrote extensively during the later Middle Ages, they tended to be of a higher social status than most others, from families with the income to spend on educating their daughters. Of the women who wrote for public eyes, most were religious or connected with elite households, such as Julian of Norwich or Christine de Pizan. Both women occupied very specific regions of the social spectrum which moulded and shaped their thoughts on secular and religious society. Of the existing letters between lay medieval women, which includes the Paston and Lisle women, their writing is formulaic and formal and likely transferred to parchment through a scribe. The conventional script these women follow in their letter writing again obscures any profound insight into their emotional states, or at least demands that historians analyse them to decipher the writer's inner world.

To navigate the difficulties of studying sexual violence created by the elapse of time and accidental or deliberate silences, Saidiya Hartman's article from 2008, 'Venus in Two Acts', provides a novel methodological approach when examining sexual violence against enslaved women as part of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in later centuries. It makes a profound statement about the relationship between the historian and the historical subject which might itself be a form of 'violence'.[78] Her creation of the method of 'critical fabulation'' acknowledges the absences within the archive, and thus the incomplete picture historians are presented with and how informed speculation can piece together the life and experience of someone about whom almost nothing can be known and whose voice has been expunged from the historical records. Owing to the chronological distance at which we interact with

[78] Saidiya Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', *Small Acts: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, vol. 12, no. 2, (2008), 1-14.

medieval sources, and the distinct lack of women's voices in those archival records, Hartman's methodology provides a valuable academic roadmap for approaching the reconstruction of disparate medieval women's voices and the ways that gender violence can rupture those narratives.

Thus, the nature of this thesis demands the use of approaches employed in the fields of dress history, literary theory, art history, archaeology and the study of material culture to understand how clothing was worn, torn, removed, how it was 'read' and the ways it could be manipulated by or used to manipulate women. My approach throughout this thesis has been to pay close attention to references to clothing in the legal records, particularly to note the clothing of the victim/survivor of gender violence and place that within a wider cultural context by drawing on contemporary romances, poetry, religious narratives, bawdy tales, sermons or learned writings and imagery and using textual and comparative analysis to draw out the semiotics of the clothing of medieval women who faced gender violence.

Scope and Sources

This research focuses on England in the economically, politically and socially tumultuous years between 1250 and 1500. Within this time frame, England and Europe were blighted by the Black Death beginning in 1348 as well as recurrent bouts of plague thereafter.[79] England also had to endure frequent wars with its neighbours, namely with France in the Hundred Years War (1337-1453) and continuous warring on England's border with Scotland, and with itself in the Wars of the Roses (1455-87).[80] Environmental afflictions also impacted the people living on the British Isles, from the Great Famine of 1315-1322, and the general cooling of the regions in the north Atlantic during this period, known as the Little Ice Age

[79] See Mark Bailey, *After the Black Death: Economy, Society and Law in Fourteenth-Century England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021) and Rosemary Horrox's *The Black Death*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013) for primary sources.
[80] See Christine Carpenter, *The Wars of the Roses: Politics and the Constitution in England, c.1437-1509* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

which lasted from around 1300 to the 1800s.[81] Yet the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries were a time of enormous creativity within the visual arts, literature and material culture. England's was a burgeoning society with flourishing trade links with Europe, Asia and Africa, and a country with a fluctuating yet ultimately growing population whose increasing capital meant an increasing desire for new ways to express themselves visually, with consumption of goods and particularly dress being the main routes to self-presentation.[82]

Although the focus of this research is on medieval England, visual and textual sources on dress, violence and gender from northern Europe, particularly France and the Netherlands, have also been consulted and used to draw informed speculation with which to stop up gaps in sources – namely the dearth of extant garments and stylised or simplified imagery. This is because the intercultural mixing of English and northern European cultures, through trade, travel and royal spouses who brought new trends which eventually trickled down through society, meant that England's cultural imagination and wider society spoke to and interacted with the same on the other side of the English Channel. This idea of cultural mobility, laid out in detail in Stephen Greenblatt's recent edited volume, *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, has been taken up in this research.[83] A famous sartorial example of this, while later than our period, is provided by Catherine of Aragon who was credited with having brought farthingales to English shores on her arrival in 1501 to marry Henry VIII's ill-fated brother, Arthur. Farthingales, a bastardisation of the Spanish '*verdugado*', where skirts made up of hoops were worn under decorative outer skirts, which gave the Tudors and later the Elizabethans their distinctive dress shape, and would evolved to become the crinoline of the

[81] See Bruce Campbell, *The Great Transition: Climate, Disease and Society in the Late Medieval World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
[82] Maryanne Kowaleski, 'A Ceonsumer Eeconomy', in eds. *A Social History of England, 1200-1500*, ed. Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod, *A Social History of England, 1200-1500*, eds. Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod, ((Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 238-259.
[83] Stephen Greenblatt, 'Cultural Mmobility: Aan Iintroduction' in', in *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Ines Županov, Reinhard Meyer-Kalkus, Heike Paul, Pál Nyíri, Frederike Pannewick, eds., Stephen Greenblatt, Ines Županov, Reinhard Meyer-Kalkus, Heike Paul, Pál Nyíri, Frederike Pannewick, ((Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1-23, p.6.

Victorian period.[84] Turning to European examples when studying dress history is especially pertinent when so few examples of medieval secular English dress have survived to today and so a plethora of other contemporary sources need to be utilised in order to flesh out a clearer picture of the experience of dressing in a society in which gender violence was frequent, an accusation that is legitimately levied at both England and the countries of northern Europe.[85]

The written sources for this thesis have been drawn from a range of genres in order to explore the widest possible evidence of recorded experiences. They include legal records from secular and ecclesiastical courts: eyre, King's Bench, indictment rolls, and assize rolls. Mentions of clothing and dress in the legal records are a crucial element of this research and, while rare, court transcripts like that of the trial of Joan of Arc are invaluable when accessing first-hand accounts of attitudes to dress. For example, as discussed in Chapter Three, Joan explicitly stated that her adoption of masculine clothing whilst in prison was a deliberate attempt to protect herself from her male prison guards, suggesting how masculine clothing could be a tool for the protection of the body against sexual violence.

The legal cases used in this thesis were found through a variety of means including days spent in archives combing through digitised eyre records or printed King's Bench documents as well as sifting through photographed records from the National Archives on the Anglo-American Legal Tradition website.[86] For others, I examined the sources having first read about them in the secondary literature. Where cases have been looked at by previous scholars, the scholar's work has been cited. I have then applied my own methodology to reveal new insights on the sources. The case of Matilda Burgin and Margaret Usshar, which is the main

[84] In its earliest days, even farthingales were viewed as demonstrating the wearer's sexual activity, likely due to the accusation against Juana of Portugal that she first wore one to hide an illegitimate pregnancy in the 1460s, Sarah A. Bendall, "'Take Measure of Your Wide and Flaunting Garments'': The Farthingale, Gender and the Consumption of Space in Elizabethan and Jacobean England,'' *Renaissance Sstudies*, vol. 33, no. 5 (2019), 712–737, pp.712-713.

[85] For a detailed catalogue of surviving medieval garments, see Gale Owen-Crocker and Elizabeth Coatsworth, ~~*Clothing the Past: Surviving Garments from early medieval to early modern Western Europe*, (~~*Clothing the Past: Surviving Garments from Early Medieval to Early Modern Western Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

[86] *Anglo-American Legal Tradition*, <http://aalt.law.uh.edu/IndexPri.html>, [accessed 25th July 2025].

focus of Chapter Three, and has not, as far as I am aware, been covered by any other scholar, I first found included in a non-academic collection of sources on cross-dressing through time compiled by Norena Shopland.[87] The opaque mention of Matilda and Margaret's case was given in the form of a newspaper article from 1897 in the York Herald under the title, 'The "New Woman" in 1417'.[88] I then traced the case back to the eighteenth century when it appeared in its Latin form in the work of the historian Henry Bourne which allowed me to pinpoint the archive in Durham that the original source was housed in.[89]

This thesis~~It~~ will use chronicles by contemporary writers, such as Henry Knighton, Matthew Paris and Orderic Vitalis as the moral judgments cast on their peers and the fashion they condemned reveal much about the reality of what people were actually wearing, even if it means reading between the lines of the outrage. It takes into account sermons, acknowledging them as a form of mass media which was able, or at least intended to, to convey and impart moralising lessons and ideal behaviours in parishioners, including "correct" methods of dress. In so doing, sermons intended to inculcate a hatred of certain forms of dress which were seen, by religious men, to be outward signs of vanity and pride.

Alongside legal sources, this thesis looks at episodes of violence against women in the secular literature of medieval England, as well as that which was circulating in northern Europe due to cultural mobility. Literature is an invaluable source of the analysis of historical cultures because it provided medieval people with a social script as well as a sexual script from which they could learn appropriate, socially approved behaviours and communication. The authors of the popular romances, daring quests or comedic narratives did not create these scripts themselves, but rather created literature which responded to or aligned with the culture

[87] Norena Shopland, *A History of Women in Men's Clothes: From Cross-Dressing to Empowerment* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books Ltd, 2021)
[88] Anonymous, 'The "New Woman" in 1417', *York Herald*, 7th November 1896, p.12.
[89] Henry Bourne, *The History of Newcastle upon Tyne: or, the ancient and present state of that town* (Newcastle upon Tyne: John White, 1736), p.208.

they inhabited, the 'horizon of expectations' of late medieval England.[90] This could be altered and amended by different demographics in society to suit their needs, as can be seen in the pastourelle genre of poetry in which sexual violence forms a recurring motif but in which we also see the female characters narrating their anger and pain in the face of such brutal treatment. This alternative 'script' voiced by a woman and aimed at other women demonstrates that there was an audience willing to engage with the type of material that provided solidarity, perhaps even comfort, as well as a language from which real, rather than fictitious, women could borrow to voice their fears and fury if they faced a similar situation. In popular literature, I examine the role gender violence plays in the narratives, as well as the symbolism behind the dress of female characters, such as Chaucer's description of the dressing, undressing and redressing of Griselda as symbolising both her husband's abuse and her rising and falling social status, discussed in Chapter Four.

This thesis does not engage in detailed analysis of extant medieval garments to any great extent purely because so few secular examples from this period exist. Of those that do, the work of Gale Owen-Crocker and Elizabeth Coatsworth, among others, provide valuable technical insight into contemporary dress. Archaeological sites such as Herjolfsnes and the clothes of the Bocksten Man, while being examples of Scandinavian dress, have been used to sketch out how common dress in medieval England would likely have looked.[91] Thus, this research necessarily looks to other sources such as imagery and literature for details of what for the most part no longer exists.

Dress is a very visual medium and although descriptions of characters' clothing abound in medieval literature, it is difficult for twenty-first-century historians to accurately picture how this might have looked. Thus, the paintings and sculptures of medieval England and

[90] Hans Robert Jauss's theory of a 'horizon of expectations' refers to the judgements, interpretations and reactions by a community in response to a literary text; *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, trans. Michael Shaw, ((Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p.15.
[91] See Else Ostergard, *Medieval Garments Reconstructed: Norse Clothing Patterns*, ((Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 2011).

northern Europe are a useful resource although, as previously mentioned, they were created for the religious and secular elites in society therefore expected to reflect an often-idealised image of the world. Visual sources from the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, while still useful in providing a general idea of dress and silhouette usually had a less realistic artistic style that did not intend to capture reality or could not achieve the level of detail that oil painting and manuscript illuminations from the fifteenth century onwards could. If one compares the images from the Luttrell Psalter (c.1345) and the Bedford Hours (c.1410-1430) it is possible see a vast different in depictions of dress.[92] The manuscript titled *The Pageants of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick*, which was commissioned between 1483 and 1492, provides detailed, if monochromatic, depictions of elite English dress in the later fifteenth century and also includes the dress of servants and midwives within Warwick's household making it an invaluable source for images of non-elite and working people.[93] European books of hours including the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (c.1412-1416) and that of *The Romance of the Rose* in MS Harley 4425 (c.1500), originating in Belgium are equally useful, despite depicting continental dress. The mixing of cultural influences in northern Europe, already discussed, means it is not so great a stretch to accept that English, French and Belgian dress had much (though not everything) in common in this period.[94] In the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, the frolicking nobles are depicted with anonymising and idealised generality with the exception of the books~~' '~~ patron, John, Duke of Berry who appears on various pages throughout and is made distinct through his dress. The peasants are depicted in clean, bright clothes in simple colours with various styles of veils which was likely intended to give more generalised feel for peasant dress without giving specific details. Paul Freedman has posited that while peasant life was sometimes idealised, as in this case, they were also frequently depicted as 'unpleasant and boorish~~' in~~', in contrast to the idealised faces, bodies

[92] BL Add MS 42130 and BL Add MS 18850.
[93] BL Cotton MS Julius E IV/3 and BL MS Harley 4425.
[94] MS 65, Museé Condé, Chantilly, France and BL MS Add Harley 4425.

and fashions of the elites.[95] This visual distinction between the strata, which was made evident through face and dress, was a useful way for the medieval elite as patrons of art to reinforce the strict hierarchical boundaries of society and demonstrate that any study of visual sources needs to be approached with nuance. Towards the end of the period this thesis considers a more realistic style of portraiture began to develop in line with the flourishing artistic practices developed during Italy's Renaissance which favoured good draftsmanship, perspective and a knowledge of human anatomy.[96] Specially commissioned portraits such as Jan van Eyck's *The Arnolfini Portrait* (1434) allowed for patrons to showcase their wealth and the virtues they hoped to embody not only through the medium of painting but also through the clothing they were depicted wearing. For the accuracy and effort put into painting the dress of the elites, one need only compare two portraits of the Italian noble woman, Maria Portinari (b.1456) who married the Belgium-based Tommaso Portinari in 1470. The first, *Portrait of Maria Portinari*, is part of a triptych commemorating her marriage by the artist Hans Memling (c.1430-1494). In the later image, the *Portinari Altarpiece* by Hugo van der Goes (c.1430-1484), she is depicted in a far grander clothing perhaps due to van der Goes' eye for detail and symbolism throughout the whole piece.[97] Despite the five years which had passed between the two images, she is depicted in the same stylish and sumptuous outfit that befitted the young bride and then the wife of an employee of the Medici family, with an elegant, ornate necklace, black Burgundian gown with trumpet sleeves and a wide, white belt. The neckline of her dress in the later depiction is higher, perhaps created by wearing a black partlet, with covers her chest which might signify her changing state from virginal girl to matron and with it her need to adopt more modest attire.

[95] Paul Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p.2.
[96] For further discussion of more realistic styles in later medieval European art, see Susie Nash, *Northern Renaissance Art*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[97] *Portrait of Maria Portinari*, (c.1470), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York and the *Portinari Altarpiece*, (c.1475), ***Galleria degli Uffizi***, Florence. For a discussion of the symbolism contained in the latter piece, see M. B. McNamee, "Further Symbolism in the Portinari Altarpiece", *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 45, no. 2, (1963), 142-143, p. 143.

Anne Hollander has argued that medieval art intended to capture 'how [clothing] and the bodies in them were supposed and believed to look'_rather than how the garments were made or how they looked in reality.[98] As discussed above, the visual art of this period included some element of idealisation, but it would be a mistake to suggest that medieval artists did not attempt to depict contemporary dress with accuracy. One need only examine the seams in the dress of Roger van der Weyden's Mary Magdalen in *Descent from the Cross* (Figure 1, above) to understand that Hollander's statement does not take into account the full breadth of artworks in this period which aspire to realistic depictions of medieval dress.

The rise of naturalistic detail in Renaissance painting from the fifteenth century onwards means that it is worthwhile briefly looking beyond our period for realistic portrayals of peasant dress, which, after all, changed less rapidly than aristocratic dress. The albeit sometimes fantastical and usually riotous work of Pieter Breughel the Elder (c.1525-1569) is an invaluable source for examining the style and construction of the dress of those lower down the social hierarchy in northern Europe. In Breughel's *Netherlandish Proverbs* (1559), *The Wedding Dance* (1566) and *The Peasant Wedding* (1567), the artist has depicted the clothing of the peasants in minute detail, so much so that the seams in the gowns of the figures are visible, and thus shows the ways the fabric restricted or allowed for movement of the body. Being paintings of the peasants whom Breughel likely saw around him in daily life, the faces and clothing of his subjects are without the idealised veneer that donor paintings or commissioned portraits would have had. The comparatively lowly social status of the subjects also indicates that their clothing would not have gone through an enormous revolution since the tail end of the period this research looks at and so it can be viewed as a fairly reliable source for the style, construction and colour of clothing by the turn of the century.

[98] Anna Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes*, (London: University of California Press, 1978), p.xii.

However, much care does need to be taken when using medieval images as a source from which to draw historical fact, such as it is. While some, often continental, medieval artists such as Hans Memling, Jan van Eyck and Roger van der Weyden responded to patrons' requests for realistically styled portraits that were replete with symbolism, other artists worked with the assumption that the contemporary audience understood that the images were generalised or symbolic. Images may have been simplified as many painters, especially in the early period, struggled to fully translate the colours and drapery of fabrics visually. Yet depictions of medieval people in their clothing, however distant from the reality, is a key visual source that provides almost unparalleled insight into how medieval artists saw their contemporaries, how patrons wished to be seen and the lengths they went to with their dress and presentation to meet those ends. Through existing imagery, it is possible to see how medieval people saw themselves and the society they lived in, with even the most generalised image able to inform historians on medieval colour combinations, silhouettes and modes of dress.

Thesis Structure

The chapters are arranged in such a way as to move from exclusively violent and even fatal scenarios to more nuanced situations, the danger of which is dependent on context and interpretation with the aim of analysing how these formed part of the cultural imagination. The chapters cover themes ranging from physical violence, sexual assault and spiritual danger to the legal protection that nudity counterintuitively might bring in domestic violence cases. The final chapter looks broadly at ways in which situations where clothing was used as a tool for the manipulation of women or ran alongside the exploitation of women could in fact have been subverted by women who, rather than being manipulated, were able to

manipulate and in so doing, wrestle back some semblance of power, autonomy, self-determination.

In Chapter One, I discuss the development of 'fashion' and lay out a history of women's, and to a lesser extent men's, dress from 1200 to 1500, drawing on a variety of literary and visual sources in order to contextualise the development of dress throughout the period. I show the shift from the T-shaped garments popular in the early Middle Ages to the complex, multi-layered garments which exaggerated the sexual dimorphisms of the bodies beneath such as women's small waists and larger hips emphasised by stays (early modern corsets) and farthingales of the early Tudor period. I highlight the role clothing played in identity formation and its connection to emotion. By looking at wills, I argue that clothing given as gifts to loved ones, or to statues of saints, could act as a reminder of the deceased loved one, creating a material link between the dead and the living. In this chapter, I also demonstrate the ways that men's and women's fashionable clothing could be linked with sin and the vices of pride and lechery, capable of damning wearers of it to hell. However, it was women's fashionable clothing that had the unique power of being able to damn both the wearer and aroused male onlookers, making adherence to fashion a dangerous pursuit.

Chapter Two focuses on decidedly darker, more troubling topics relating to violence against women in the English Middle Ages. I begin by exploring the particular ideological frameworks that contributed to deeply misogynist thinking during this period which meant that wider society broadly tolerated and sometimes even permitted certain types or degrees of violence towards women. Through the examination of the presence and prevalence of sexual violence in popular literature from Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* to medieval romance and poetry, it is clear that medieval audiences received and interpreted sexual violence in an array of ways. By examining the role clothing played in legal cases relating to the rape of medieval women, this chapter investigates the semiotics of dress in the lived

experiences of medieval women and how they talked about their clothing and infused it with symbolism to aid them in their legal battles. The analysis of the clothing of murder victims who were killed by jealous husbands or suitors in this chapter opens up discussion of the value of clothing when compared to women's bodies and compares motifs in popular literature with real events to place clothing firmly within the broader medieval cultural imagination.

Chapter Three focuses on a case study of two women, Matilda Burgin and Margaret Usshar who were caught wearing masculine clothing in Durham Cathedral attempting to enter the shrine of St Cuthbert from which women were entirely excluded. Their punishment, during which they had to wear ~~of wearing~~ the same transgressive clothing on market days in the parishes, was unusually harsh when compared with other women and people of uncertain gender in medieval London who were arrested in masculine clothing. Some of these people were assumed to be engaging in sex work. I suggest that the popularity of cross-dressing saints in well-known *vitæ* and religious texts including St Marina/Marinos, St Theodora/Theodorus and St Pelagia/Pelagius, alongside the motif of cross-dressing characters in literature from Chaucer to the *Romance of Silence* may have inspired Matilda and Margaret to undertake their own acts of religious, social and sartorial transgression by being seen to be subverting the gender hierarchy of medieval social order. I also draw on the 1431 trial of Joan of Arc in which she justified her adoption of masculine dress by asserting that it protected her from sexual assault and rape whilst imprisoned with male guards in the Earl of Warwick's castle. In doing so in such a way, I argue that through masculine clothing, women including Matilda, Margaret and Joan of Arc demonstrated that they understood the social freedoms, religious privileges and physical safety conferred by perceived maleness due to dress, but they also show that the act of temporary cross-dressing, for women, incurred severe reputational harms.

In Chapter Four, I examine the ways in which being in a state of undress, in a smock or entirely nude can be both socially damaging, by implying sexual voracity, and a spiritual, empowering position for women. When the stripped female body figures in medieval literature, it is often for the purpose of humiliation, accentuated by the removal of agency, as in the case of the character of the Patient Griselda or female virgin saints whose saintliness is heightened by their exposed bodies. My analysis of the semiotics of the smock demonstrates how an intimate and quotidian garment can cast a woman, fictional or real, as penitential and pious or sexually available according to different contexts. I go on to argue that within an abusive relationship, being seen to be naked when fleeing one's violent partner can be beneficial to one's court case. I suggest that some of the women whose cases I have examined were aware of the legal benefits and social detriment that running into the street naked and being observed to be naked or partially naked would cause. Through this act of sartorial casting off, these women allowed themselves to be viewed in a way that turned them into a spectacle but which strengthened their petitions for divorce by encouraging community support through eye-witness testimonies of the severity of the threat against her life which forced her into the streets naked.

Chapter Five explores the extent to which clothing acted as deeply emotionally charged material objects. The discussion begins by examining the role items of clothing performed as gifts given in exchange for sexual favours or as part of sincere courtship practices and how women's material knowledge of the construction of textile items imbued their gifts with emotional value, while men's bought gifts held greater monetary value. I highlight the fear that was evident in popular culture that women could be taken advantage of through gifts including textiles and I show how women used this common practice as a way to not only gain material items but also how they attempted to manipulate or were

manipulated into going through with the marriage contracts. I also look at how communities of women might share clothes between themselves to strengthen social bonds.

Combined, these chapters demonstrate the complex relationships late medieval women had with their clothing and how clothing could be used as a powerful tool to construct identities, manipulate behaviours or exploit women's bodies. However, in the face of violence, clothing, or a lack of it, could become an invaluable tool for women to use to bolster their claim that harm was done to them and attempt to reassert authority over their own lives. Through this research, I show that for medieval women, their clothing could expose them to violence but could also shield them from such danger and prove an invaluable material tool for navigating a deeply patriarchal society.

Chapter One: ‘Thei hadde of clothing noone experience’: The Lived Experience of Wearing Clothing in Late Medieval England[0]

The medieval mystic, Margery Kempe (1371-1438) explained in her biography that before she adopted a more spiritual life she wore colourful fabrics and dagged[0] clothes so ‘þat it schuld be þe mor staryng to mennys syght’.[0] She wrote that despite feeling herself to be a servant of God, she:

> wold not leevyn hir pride ne hir pompows aray that sche had usyd befortym, neithyr for hyr husbond ne for noon other mannys cownsel. And yet sche wyst ful wel that men seyden hir ful mech velany, for sche weryd gold pypys on hir hevyd and hir hodys wyth the typettys were daggyd. Hir clokys also wer daggyd and leyd wyth dyvers colowrs betwen the daggys… Sche had ful greet envye at hir neybowrs that thei schuld ben arayd so wel as sche.[0]

Margery cited feelings of pride and superiority as the cause for her desire to wear fashionable garments that heightened her attractiveness and demonstrated her higher birth, as she reminded her husband ‘schrewydly and schortly~~’~~_’_ that her father had been mayor of Norwich and alderman of the Guild of the Holy Trinity in King’s Lynn.[0] This, she felt, entitled her to wear clothing befitting her status within the community, regardless of her husband’s objections.

Margery’s words also demonstrate that a person might have multiple nuanced ideas about how they saw themselves, and their clothing could further complicate that image, and even act in direct contrast to their projected self-fashioning. Margery’s account shows that

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[0] John Lydgate, *Lydgate’s Fall of Princes*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healy, 1992), l~~.~~~~ine~~ 623. Lydgate’s text is a translation of Laurent de Premierfait’s French translation, titled *Des Cas des nobles hommes et femmes*, of Boccaccio’s original text, *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*, which dated from the late 1350s.

[0] Dagging is when the cuffs or hem of a garment are cut in a decorative feather pattern. It makes the garment less easy to alter later on, thus infuriating critics of these new, more wasteful fashions.

[0] Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Lynn Staley~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), book 1, chap. 2, l~~.~~~~ine~~ 195.

[0] Ibid, ll~~.~~~~ines~~ 191-195, 201.

[0] Ibid, l~~.~~~~ine~~ 197.

one's sartorial presentation, too, was not fixed and could evolve depending on a variety of external and internal factors such as piety, wealth, and age. Her biography reveals that medieval people were well aware that their clothing was part of a complex cultural and moral visual language and understood the various interpretations and receptions their clothing had. Furthermore, it demonstrates that medieval people not only had complex, even conflicting feelings about their own clothing but that clothing allowed them to navigate the lines consciously or unconsciously between respectability and provocation or sexuality and saintliness.

The experience of and emotional response to wearing clothing, both in a tangible and in an emotional sense such as to how a gown's skirt might sway while walking, or how one's arm movements might be restricted in heavy sleeves, or whether the clothes made the wearer feel confident or comfortable, is crucial to our understanding, yet these are often overlooked questions in the field of dress history. This chapter will look at medieval experiences of wearing clothing, as far as it is possible to do so, as well as the emotional relationships medieval people had to their clothing and also the morality assigned to specific clothing. It will also provide a chronology of, largely women's, dress history in the British Isles from 1250 to around 1500 in order to provide context for later discussions on aspects of women's dress and the ways identities could be constructed through it.

As discussed in the Introduction, only in the last few decades have dress historians argued for academic attention to be given to the field of dress history and strived to understand the social lives of clothes and their wearers. Indeed, Alieen Ribeiro has stressed the importance of looking not just 'at clothes as rhetoric and metaphor' but also '[regarding] them in an intimate relationship with their wearer'.[0] While every attempt has been made to employ this approach here, such a view of historical dress is made challenging by the dearth

[0] Aileen Ribeiro, 'Re-Fashioning Art: Some Visual Approaches to the Study of the History of Dress', *Fashion Theory*, vol. 2, no. 4 (1998), 315-325, p.323.

of secular garments to have survived from the late medieval period in the British Isles, but those that still exist coupled with visual, literary and archival sources are invaluable in creating a fuller picture of medieval women's sartorial experiences. Despite this, as Gale Owen-Crocker and Elizabeth Coatsworth have written, the few garments which have survived provide a 'precious link'' to a long-gone medieval society.[0] Similarly, there exist few examples of personal accounts of the emotional or physical feeling of wearing medieval clothing, making it almost (but not entirely) impossible to gain a first-hand account of how it felt to wear medieval garments. In the last century, the work of the dress historian, Janet Arnold, who made detailed drawing and dress patterns from extant garments has been invaluable for historical dressmakers, although her work, due to the scarcity of earlier garments, has focused on dress from 1540 to the Victorian Age.[0]

The late medieval period in Europe was a time of enormous change in dress. These sartorial changes were connected to wider social developments, the growth of commercial networks and trade links and ever-more clearly delineated views of gender. While people in previous centuries had also cared about how they presented themselves to the world through dress, it is this period, historians largely agree, that we see the flourishing of the consumption of dress which marks a key component of fashion, although Sarah Grace Heller has noted that there is evidence of a desire for novelty in dress in the writing of the centuries before.[0]

In 1250, northern European masculine and feminine secular dress generally consisted of a unisex garment that cloaked the body in swathes of fabric and which would have been largely the same, at least in cut though not in quality of materials, for different strata of

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[0] Gale Owen-Crocker and Elizabeth Coatsworth, ed. *Clothing the Past: Surviving Garments from early medieval to early modern Western Europe*, eds. Gale Owen-Crocker and Elizabeth Coatsworth, (*Clothing the Past: Surviving Garments from Early Medieval to Early Modern Western Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), p.1.

[0] **See Janet Arnold, *Patterns of Fashion 4: The Cut and Construction of Linen Shirts, Smocks, Neckwear, Headwear and Accessories for Men and Women c. 1540 – 1660*, ((London: Macmillan, 2008) and *Patterns of Fashion 3: The Cut and Construction of Clothes for Men and Women, c 1560-1620*, ((London: Macmillan, 1985).**

[0] Sarah-Grace Sarah-Grace Heller, *Fashion in Medieval France*, (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), p.50.

society. By 1500, there was far greater variety in not only colour choices but also fabric options and new styles of garment due to a number of factors including the introduction of tailoring and cutting garments to fit the body. Earlier peoples had relied on cinching and lacing loose, generic T-shaped garments with ribbons, braided belts and laces. In addition, an increase in the availability of dyestuffs such as kermes from the Middle East through Spanish and Portuguese trade routes as well as lichens to make purples from Norway arrived on English shores.[0] To accompany the already standard wools and linens, a range of textiles also began to be imported into the British Isles, such as silks from Muslim Spain and Italy, particularly Lucca, as well as the Middle East. Even fragments of silk damask from China dating from the mid-fourteenth century have been found at an archaeological site in London.[0] By the fourteenth century, satins in 'white, black, blue, red, *blodei* and green'~~-~~' were commonplace while velvet had ceased to be an elite item used for household furnishings and, while still expensive, became more accessible and began to be used for purses and garments.[0]

Dressmakers, building on new weaving techniques, developed tailoring methods in which dress patterns would be cut to fit the body creating a more form fitting, structured look which contrasted with the rectangular, straight-off-the-loom textiles used in the centuries before. This change, it has been argued, 'marked a social change more significant than any mutation that could take place in the aesthetic composition of dress'~~-~~' as the newer styles accentuated and revealed the body beneath through tighter, more tailored fashions.[0] Moreover, the cutting of textiles, as in the rounded top of sleeve heads and armscyes (the armhole inside the body of the garment) wasted valuable fabric and prevented the garment

[0] *Textiles and Clothing, 1150-1450*, eds. Elisabeth Crowfoot, Frances Pritchard and Kay Stanisland~~, ((~~Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1992, 2001, 2006), p.20.

[0] Stella Mary ~~Stella Mary~~ Newton, *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince*~~,~~ (Suffolk: Boydell, 1980),~~(Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1980),~~ pp.2~~-~~, 89, 88.

[0] Ibid, p.122. '*Blodei*~~-~~' or '*blodii*~~-~~' can be understood to mean 'of blue'~~-~~' and relates to the blueish colour of veins under pale skin hence the link with 'blood', according to Louisa Sylvester, Gale Owen-Crocker and Martin Chambers, ed. *Medieval Dress and Textiles in Britain: A Multilingual Sourcebook* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014)~~*Medieval Dress and Textiles*, *in Britain: A Multilingual Sourcebook*, eds. Louisa Sylvester, Gale Owen-Crocker and Martin Chambers, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014),~~ p.361.

[0] Newton, *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince*, p.3.

from being easily refashioned to accommodate the bodies of new wearers or to keep in step with changing styles. These new styles often required a second person to assist with dressing due to the opening of the garment being at the back or sides with complex lacing or multiple buttons to close the garment. Sleeves, too, made to be skin-tight, needed to have the opening slit from wrist to elbow laced or buttoned closed which would have been a difficult task to achieve on one's own. The complexity of not only the construction but also the wearing of these new garments and the inability for fashion-conscious wearers to dress or undress themselves without helping hands led moralists to decry these new styles as excessive, wasteful and lavish, unbefitting of those hoping to signal their Christian modesty.

Wider economic changes from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries contributed to the seismic shift in societal layout, namely a move away from feudalism, serfdom and subsistence farming to a consumer economy and increased social mobility.[0] Contrary to previous studies in historical economics which placed the advent of consumerism in the eighteenth century, Christopher Dyer has argued persuasively for the late Middle Ages to be acknowledged as a period of consumption, citing an increase in the spending power of middling and lower status people due to rising wages in the decades and centuries after the Black Death.[0] Aspirations for upward social mobility have also been identified as a driver of not only restrictive laws but also as a contributing factor to the emergence of fashion in a form that would be recognised today. The speed at which fashions changed during this period was another aspect which garnered condemnation from outspoken clerics and unease from the elites whose fashions were being imitated by a burgeoning mercantile class. This then prompted the introduction of sumptuary legislation which attempted to control the fashions of all members of society categorising the populace by wealth, gender and profession and

[0] For further discussion of medieval English feudalism, see Rodney Hilton, '"Feudalism and the Origins of Capitalism',," *History Workshop*, vol. 1, no. 1 ((1976), 9–25 and ; Mark Bailey, *The Decline of Serfdom in Late Medieval England: From Bondage to Freedom*, ((Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2014).
[0] Christopher Dyer, *An Age of Transition?: Economy and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages*, ((Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009), pp.128, 131.

allotting a set of colours, fabrics, furs and ornamentation fitting their social or economic position.[0] The legislations were 'largely ineffective'–' and 'almost always destined to fail'–' and there is no evidence to show that they were properly enforced amongst the people.[0] While the sumptuary legislation of France and Italy focused on the regulation of women's fashion, English sumptuary legislation also levied restrictions at male dress. Kim Phillips has argued, in fact, that these laws were aimed for the most part at 'men at the upper-middle level of the social spectrum'.[0] While Phillips is correct in that legislation directed many of its prohibitions at men, it would be incorrect to not take into account that many men, especially those at the upper-middle level of society, were married and headed households and so to control and restrict their clothing would likely lead to a restriction of the clothing of their wives, daughters and sons:

> 'Also, that craftsmen and people called yeomen shall not take or wear cloth for their clothing or shoes of a higher price than 40s. for the whole cloth, by way of purchase or otherwise; nor precious stones, cloth of silk, nor of silver, no belt, knife, brooch, ring, garter, or clasps, ribbons, chains, bracelets [or similar; *ends*], seals or other things of gold or silver, or any manner of apparel embroidered, enamelled or of silk, in any way. And *that their wives, daughters and children shall be of the same condition in their clothing and apparel*; and that they shall not wear any veil of silk, but only of yarn made within the realm, nor any manner of fur or budge except only that of lamb, rabbit, cat and fox.'[0]

Rather then, as demonstrated in this excerpt, women's dress is far from being an afterthought. Instead this direction seems to assume that wives and children are simply subsumed under the husband and that any legislation against the former means the same for the latter. Women's

[0] Christopher Breward, *The Culture of Fashion*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.8.
[0] Maryanne Kowaleski, 'A Ceonsumer Eeconomy', in, in eds. *A Social History of England, 1200-1500*, ed. Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod, *A Social History of England, 1200-1500*, eds. Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod, ((Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 238-259, p.248; W. M. Ormrod, *Edward III*, ((New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005, 2011), p.476.
[0] Kim Phillips, '"Masculinities and the Medieval English Sumptuary Laws',," *Gender & History*, vol. 19, no.1 (2007), 22–42, p.24.
[0] Louisa Sylvester *et al*, Gale Owen-Crocker and Martin Chambers, eds., *Medieval Dress and Textiles in Britain*: A Multilingual Sourcebook, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014),, p.205. Italics mine.

dress, as well as that of servants and children, could be controlled through the dress of their male relatives.

The move towards urban centres by many of the rural population in search of work further complicated the economic, and thereby, sartorial landscape of the English Middle Ages.[0] This congregation of peoples in a comparatively small location meant that individuals were exposed to new accents, mannerisms, and of course, fashions. What Catherine Richardson calls the 'hypervisibility of urban space' meant changes in dress spread quickly as onlookers sought to emulate trends and styles they were exposed to and keep up with their neighbours while also defining their own national or regional, gender and status identities through dress in a densely populated space.[0] Indeed, under Henry IV, the Statute of Seventh Year accused rural inhabitants of moving to town not only for work but for 'the Pride of clothing'.[0] This statement might reflect a top-down recognition of the power a desire for clothing had in incentivising moving for work, or it could symbolise a symptom of the desire for a better quality of life and the higher wages it allowed forfor it which could be found in the cities.

For the authorities to state that the wearing of fine clothing brought on the sin of pride is important as it signifies both the link between dress and virtue which will be discussed later in this chapter. Crucially, it also denotes that clothing can make the wearer feel confident enough that they might tip over into pridefulness. Since, as stated, there exist few first handwritten accounts of the experience of wearing clothing, insights like this are invaluable. Aside from positive feelings surrounding clothing, it was possible also to feel dowdy, restricted or burdened by clothing. A pregnant Margaret Paston complained to her husband

[0] Richard Britnell has suggested that the 'urban population of medieval England attained a peak somewhere around 1300' in', in his chapter, 'Town Llife' in', in *A Social History of England, 1200-1500*, eds. Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod, (, ed. Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 134-178, p.143.

[0] Catherine Richardson, 'Introduction' in', in Catherine Richardson and Gareth Shaw, ed. *Clothing Culture, 1350-1650*, eds. Catherine Richardson and Gareth Shaw, ((Oxford: Routledge, 2016), p.13.

[0] *The Statutes of the Realm*, vol. II of XI, eds. T. E. Tomlins and W. E. Taunton, ((London: Selden Society, 1816), p.157.

that she had nothing to wear during the winter except for her ‘blake’ and her ‘grene a lyer’ gowns but that they were too ‘comerus [cumbersome]’ and she felt ‘wery to wer yt’.[0] Perhaps already feeling herself to be weighed down by her growing pregnancy, the added weight of heavy clothing on her body may have felt too exhausting and unwieldy to wear.

Somewhat later, though still a fascinating insight into the wearing of clothing in the late medieval and early modern period, an account records the discomfort and instability the ceremonial clothing of Queen Mary caused her on her entry into London in 1553. She was reported to have worn ‘a call [caul] of cloth of tynsell beset with perle and ston’ underneath ‘a rond circlet of gold’ which together were ‘so massy [heavy] and ponderous that she was fayr to beare up hir hedd with her handes’.[0] While limited, these two excerpts reveal that medieval people expressed their discomfort or dissatisfaction with their own clothing and complained about the way it felt on their bodies.

[0] Margery Paston to John Paston, 14th December 1441, from Norman Davis, *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, Part 1, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), [online] https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/Paston/1:8.2?rgn=div2;view=fulltext, (accessed 31st July 2023); *MED,* ‘Comborus’, *MED,* [online], < https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED8505/track?counter=1&search_id=26822742>, (accessed 31st July 2023). ‘A lyer’ refers to a cloth of gold ‘of Lierre’ in’, in Belgium, Sylvester *et al*, **Medieval** *Dress and Textiles in Britain*, p.358.

[0] Ian Archer, ‘City and Court Connected: The Material Dimensions of Royal Ceremonial, ca. 1480-1625’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 71, no. 1, (2008), 157-179, p.167 and cited in Normingtonin Katie Normington, 'Player Transformation: The Role of Clothing and Disguise’, in Philip Butterworth and Katie Normington, ed. *Medieval Theatre Performance: Actors, Dancers, Automata and their Audiences* (Boydell & Brewer, 2017), 76-92,, p.82. A ‘call’ or ‘caul’ was a decorated, netted bag which sat on the back or sides of the head and held the long, plaited hair of the wearer, *Medieval Dress and Textiles in Britain*, p.364. That Queen Mary’s caul was ‘of tynsell’, meaning of a fabric shot through with gold threads, indicates it was an elite item befitting a queen, *MED,* ‘tinsel’, *MED,* [online], < https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED45935/track?counter=1&search_id=1247071>, (accessed 25th October 2024).



Figure 2 Detail of effigy of Katherine, Countess of Warwick, Warwick Collegiate Church of St Mary, Warwick, c.1369-1380, Wikipedia Commons. Note both the lacing at the centre front of the gown and the numerous buttons from her wrist to her elbow.

A 'Social Skin': Clothing, Identity and Emotions[0]

Medieval people experienced their clothing in many different ways and through different senses. Fundamentally this involved the physicality and tangibility of clothing worn on the body, soft or coarse textures against the skin or tightness of fit which might constrain daily

[0] I have borrowed Terence Turner's description of clothing as a 'social skin' from his article 'The Social Skin', *Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, vol. 2, no. 2, (2012), 486-504.

movements for the wearer. Clothing could also be understood objectively - as a material item that had been woven, dyed, constructed, laundered and repaired - and subjectively as a series of overlapping symbols forming a 'silent language', tied to memory and containing emotional value.[0] This visual language was able to convey a plethora of attributes from gender, social or marital status, wealth, cultural capital, piety, political allegiance and even place in the life cycle to others within the wearer's community. Susan Crane has talked of clothing as a 'visual manifesto' specifically in relation to courtiers, yet this idea can easily be extended to the clothing of ordinary medieval people which could certainly be said to act as a visual declaration of identity.[0] Clothes could become synonymous with a person to the extent that they could function as proof of identity within communities. The long life of textiles meant that they had a lengthy and intimate relationship with their various owners. This is especially evident in women's wills where it is possible to see textiles gendered with strong emotional connections, such as birthing linens and wedding dresses, gifted to female friends and family members. Gifts of clothing were also given to churches to be turned into altar cloths and ecclesiastical garments.[0] Indeed, Bronach Kane has extensively researched the formation of late medieval gender and memory in the courts and has observed that people's pasts were 'recalled through clothing, its worn use, its proximity to the skin, transforming textiles and mundane objects into repositories for active and emotional histories'.[0] How one dressed was a way of presenting one's personhood through self-expression according to the social expectations of the period, while also imbuing the fibres with memories and identity as an object worn close to the body. Indeed, what one wore could be a clearer marker of identity,

[0] Stella Mary Newton, *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince*, (Suffolk: Boydell, 1980)p.5.
[0] Susan Susan Crane, *The Performance of Self Ritual: Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War (*Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), *: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), p.8.
[0] Nicola A. Lowe, 'Women's Devotional Bequests of Textiles in the Late Medieval English Parish Church, c. 1350–1550 '*Gender & History*, vol.22, no.2, ((2010), 407–429 and Katherine French, *Good Women of the Parish*, p.44.
[0] Bronach Kane, *Popular Memory and Gender in Medieval England: Men, Women and Testimony in the Church Courts, c.1200-1500*, ((Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2019), p.83.

better even than one's face, as was the case of a woman whose dead body was found in the town of Pilton, near Barnstaple, Devon, ~~Somerset~~ in 1238. She was unrecognised by the Pilton townspeople but it was known that she had travelled from Plympton, near Plymouth and that she had been murdered. The jurors from the port town proclaimed that the unnamed woman was Eva, wife of Ralph de Chows on the reasoning that the woman was 'found in the same clothes that Eva used to wear~~'~~' and that she, along with her son, had left Ralph de Chows in the company of Henry le Ambleur, a man she was known to have been sleeping with.[0] The jurors suspected no one but Henry le Ambleur for her murder. Eva, if we are willing to accept that the jurors were correct in their identification, likely owned only one or two sets of clothes which made her more easily identifiable to her community through her dress. Eva's clothes were more closely associated with her identity than any part of her face or body and her clothes were able to speak for her after death, returning her identity to her whilst also identifying her murderer.

Wills are a useful resource for examining how clothes came to play such an integral part in the formation of personal identity as they can~~.~~ ~~Emotional connections and relationships between people could be demonstrated through what they gave to others after their death, and clothes were often the emotive object in question. Of course, someone might wish to pass on items of gendered clothing for a variety of non-sentimental reasons. From a practical standpoint, textiles and clothing were expensive items which would be repurposed until they were just rags. Similarly, bequeathing a woman's kirtle to another woman meant that fewer alterations might need to be made in order for the garment to be used and worn. This would then mean it could be worn soon after the death of the original owner and perhaps be a comforting reminder in the months and years after the death. It could also be that an unaltered garment would act as a clearer memento of the original owner, encouraging the~~

[0] *Crown Pleas of the Devon Eyre of 1238*, ed. H. R. T Summerson~~, ((~~Torquay: Devon & Cornwall Record Society, 1985), case 371.

recipient to keep the deceased in their thoughts and perhaps feeling a sense of physical closeness as they wear the garment their loved one wore in life so that the textiles become 'repositories of deeply valued personal memories'.[θ] In 1431, Isabel Gregory left Idany Hale, a woman from the 'spetill [hospital]' – but more likely an almshouse – a number of household items such as coal and cushions, as well as 'a cloke and a gounne of russet, furrid'.[θ] This assemblage of household items and clothing given to a woman so poor she lived on charity demonstrates Isabel's desire to posthumously provide both domestically and physically for Idany. These bequests had the added spiritual benefit of demonstrating Isabel's Christian virtue of charity, an act which would have reflected well on her in the afterlife. Although russet in this context likely referred to an 'inexpensive, woollen cloth' rather than to the reddish colour understood today, the detail that it was lined with fur demonstrates that it was created with practicality and comfort in mind, both of which would then be conferred on Idany with the cloak adding at extra layer of warmth against the harsh winters in an almshouse.[θ] To her daughter, Isabel left 'a blew goune and a green kyrtyll, and a schete'.[θ] Both of the gowns and the bedsheet would have been understood as deeply personal items, as her daughter would have seen her mother wearing the gowns which, along with the bedsheet, may have retained her scent, creating a sensory, as well as physical, reminder of her mother. These textiles connected Isabel's body with that of her daughter's through the sharing of her clothes and her bed sheet, perhaps acting to reinforce and remind her daughter of their maternal link. These bequests give a sense of a woman wanting to provide for women in her family and women in need within her community, perhaps hoping that the presence of her clothing in their lives would cause her memory to be brought to mind more frequently, likely encouraging both Idany and her daughter to offer prayers for her soul's safety. In this way, the

[0] Taylor, p.4.
[0] *Medieval Dress and Textiles*, p.49.
[0] *Medieval Dress and Textiles*, pp.389, 374.
[0] *Medieval Dress and Textiles*, p.49.

~~clothes functioned as a comfort in grief, an *aide-mémoire*, and in an exchange of material good for spiritual services.~~

~~The contents of wills~~ show how people reinforced relationships with each other after death through ~~s~~ the~~at~~ gifting of clothing to surviving relatives. This act in itself ~~was extremely common practice and~~ served ~~multiple functions from~~to demonstrate the giver's ~~demonstrating~~ Christian virtues by~~to~~ materially providing for loved ones or those in need. Perhaps most significantly, the clothing might also comfort those in the depths of their grief by serving as a tangible, sensorial link with the deceased. Some wills also demonstrate that this connection through clothing could extend to the altars and even statues of saints held in medieval churches which were dressed in clothing bequeathed to the church for that expressed reason by deceased parishioners. The givers may have hoped that the saints in the form of their statutes, in gratitude and appreciation for the textile gifts, would have interceded on their soul's behalf and eased their way into heaven. Nicola Lowe has identified a number of wills in which women designate certain domestic textiles such as bedlinens to be made into altar cloths or priests~~'~~' vestments, which created a fascinating interplay between female, lay textiles on male, religious bodies.[0] By examining the will of the high-status noble woman, Isabel Despenser, Countess of Warwick (1400-1439), we can see how she used gifts of clothing to churches with the explicit direction that they be used to clothe saints as a way of marking her grief, her identity and familial connections. In the will dating from the last year of Isabel's life, she bequeathed a 'gowne of grene Alyr cloth of gold with wyde sleves~~'~~' to the statue of Our Lady of Walsingham.[0] Here, 'Alyr~~'~~' refers to the Belgian town of Lierre, or

[0] See Nicola ~~Nicola A.~~ Lowe, 'Women's Devotional Bequests of Textiles in the Late Medieval English Parish Church, c. 1350–1550 ~~'~~*Gender & History*, vol. 22, no. 2~~, ((~~2010), 407–429; in 1518, Elizabeth Tymperly gave her wedding gown to be made into a vestment, p.409; in 1486, Alice Chester gave many textile gifts to the church of All Saints in Bristol with the request that they be made into altar cloths, p.409-410 and in 1375, Edelena atte Legh bequeathed her 'best tablecloth and towel to the high altar of the church of St Michael in Crooked Lane', p.411.

[0] Sylvester *et al.*, *Medieval Dress and Textiles*, p.52. ~~St Winifred was said to have been beheaded by a rejected suitor at a church door after she fled under the pretence that she need to change her clothes first, T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Gwenfrewi, [St Gwenfrewi, Winefrith, Winifred]', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, [online], https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-~~

Lier, known for its textile trade.[0] 'Cloth of gold'-' used gold thread woven with, usually, silk threads to create an extremely prized, elite textile which would have likely glittered in candlelight and so would be fitting for the Mother of God.[0] To her natal family's church and burial place, Tewkesbury Abbey, Isabel gave her 'weddynggown And all [her] clothis of gold, and clothis of silke, with-oute ffurrereur, everychon [each one]'-' presumably to be recycled as the abbey saw fit, with the exception of her 'Russet vellewet'-' which was to be given to 'Seynt Wynfryde'.[0] In contrast with Isabel Gregory's 'russet'-' gown which likely referred to a type of textile, here, 'Russet'-' describes the 'reddish-brown'-'colour of the velvet, a highly elite textile.[0] St Winifred's shrine was situated in Shrewsbury Abbey and being the patron saint of beheadings, it seems probable that Isabel felt the luxurious and expensive velvet dress donation fitting to honour her father, Thomas le Despenser, 1st Earl of Gloucester (1373-1400) who had himself been beheaded six months before Isabel's birth due to his role in the Epiphany Rising against Henry IV. This simple detail of clothing bequeathed in Isabel's will, when situated contextually within her life, hints at her enduring grief at the loss of a father she never knew and is evidence of the emotive power clothing held as indicators of familial relationships, sorrow, piety and identity.

Clothing could also act as a demarcator and reminder of life's joys, as Margaret Paston showed in her letter to her husband, John, from 14th December 1441, mentioned above. Alongside lamenting a lack of comfortable clothing to wear, Margaret requested her spouse purchase 'a goune cloth of mustyrdderyllers' in', in order to have a new winter gown made as

9780198614128-e-29729, (accessed 30th July 2023), para. 3.

[0] Medieval Dress and Textiles,Ibid, p.358.

[0] Ibid, p.366.

[0] St Winifred was said to have been beheaded by a rejected suitor at a church door after she fled under the pretence that she need to change her clothes first, T.M. Charles Edwards, 'Gwenfrewi, [St Gwenfrewi, Winefrith, Winifred]', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, [online], https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-29729, [accessed 30th July 2023], para. 3.

[0] Sylvester *et al*, *Medieval Dress and Textiles*, p.389.

she was outgrowing her other gowns in the final months of her first pregnancy.[0] Margaret also asked John to bring her a girdle from London as she 'hadde never more nede there of'' having outgrown the others. Girdles were a ubiquitous and necessary dress accessory for men and women at all strata of society and existed as simple linen bands, embossed leather belts or elite bejewelled silk versions depending on the wealth and status of the wearer.[0] Frequently decorative, they were also used to hang purses, keys and rosaries from, making it another avenue through which the wearer could signal certain attributes such as their piety, or their trade.

Despite being a unisex accessory, girdles were also highly gendered and were associated with female sexuality, maternity, womanhood and pregnancy. The Virgin Mary was believed to have presented her own girdle to St Thomas at her ascension into heaven, an important non-Biblical event which was recorded both in the *Legenda aurea* – a thirteenth-century text which is discussed at length in Chapter Three - and in the York Mystery Cycle among other widely accessible mediums.[0] Gifts of girdles were presented to women on their wedding, and girdles made of deer skin or decorated and inscribed parchment were loaned out to labouring mothers to aid them in giving birth. Indeed, a parchment girdle, dating from at least 1500, if not earlier, is in the collection of the Wellcome Library, London. Inscribed with prayers to St Quiricus and St Julita, drawings of the Holy Nails of Jesus'' crucifixion as well as his bleeding side wound, recent studies conducted by Cambridge University have shown the

[0] BL, Add MS 43490, f.43r. All following quotations come from this MS. 'Mustyrdderyllers'' refers to a 'grey-coloured textile…originally from Montivilliers in Normandy', *Medieval Dress and Textiles in Britain*, p. 383.
[0] David Humphrey, 'Girdles: post-1100', in' *Encyclopedia of Medieval Dress and Textiles*, ed. Gale Owen-Crocker and Maria Hayward, eds. Gale Owen-Crocker and Maria Hayward, https://doi-org.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/10.1163/2213-2139_emdt_COM_000773, ((accessed 25th October 2024).
[0] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, ((Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.468; Peter Happé, *Cyclic Form and the English Mystery Plays*, ((Leiden: The Netherlands: Brill, 2004), p.238. It should be noted that the highly gendered and even sexual connotations offo the girdle were employed within the Middle English romance, *Bevis of Hamptoun*, in which the Middle Eastern heroine, Josian, strangles the husband she has been forced to marry on their wedding night with her own girdle, thereby wholly and murderously inverting the gender expectations of the period: *Four Romances of England: King Horn, Havelock the Dane, Bevis of Hampton, Athelston*, eds., ed. Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake and Eve Salisbury, ((Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), ll.3220-3221.

presence of vaginal fluid, which points to the girdle having been worn during at least one woman's labour.[0] Crucially, the parchment 'girdle'' contains drawings of girdles, making it a fascinating example of a depiction of an item of clothing on a one-dimensional surface being used as if it were the belt itself, while also being imbued with religious-magical-medicinal properties. The Middle English conduct poem, 'The Good Wyfe Wold a Pilgremage', which is framed as a mother advising her daughter, recommends that she 'Honge thy gyrdyll nott to low, but take þe knot away'' [Hang your girdle not too low, and take the knot away]. [0] This advice confirms sartorial symbolism that having a low-slung girdle around one's hips would have accentuated a young woman's waist, stomach and hips while the knot could act as a suggestive symbol of the vulva behind it.[0] Thus, girdles were intimately linked with motherhood and giving birth, making it even clearer that in asking her husband for a new girdle, Margaret Paston was emphasising her pregnant body and how it necessitated new clothes to accommodate it which John in his role as her husband could and should provide.

Margaret Paston's letter shows her excitement and pride at her pregnancy, reporting the congratulations and joy of her family and those in their community at the news; a local man, Jon of Damm, she said, 'be hys trouth that he was not gladder of no thing that he harde thys towlmonyth than he was ther of'.[0] Margaret ended her letter with a plea to John to 'were the reyng with the emage of Seynt Margaret', the patron saint of childbirth, that she sent him 'for a rememraunse'.[0] Margaret's letter and her requests for new clothing convey a sense of joy and pride, with clothing marking this exciting new beginning and acting as markers for this

[0] 'Medieval "birthing girdle" parchment was worn during labour, study suggests', University of Cambridge [online], https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/medieval-birthing-girdle-parchment-was-worn-during-labour-study-suggests (accessed 25th October 2024). For more information on the girdle, see the Wellcome Collection's database record: https://wellcomecollection.org/works/mwzwv2m7 and Sarah Fiddyment, Natalie Goodson, Elma Brenner, Stefania Signorello, Kierri Price and Matthew Collins, 'Girding the loins? Direct evidence of the use of a medieval English parchment birthing girdle from biomolecular analysis', *Royal Society of Open Science*, vol. 8, no. 3, (2021), 1-14.

[0] National Library of Wales, Brogyntyn MS ii.1 and translated in *Medieval Dress and Textiles*, pp.178-180.

[0] Kane, *Popular Memory and Gender in Medieval England*, p.117., p.117.

[0] British Library, Add MS 43490, f.43r. This letter from Margery Paston to John Paston from December 1441 has been transcribed online, < https://www.thisispaston.co.uk/index.php>, (accessed 31st December 2024).

[0] Ibid.

momentous life stage. Her writing shows that medieval clothing brought happiness to wearers, as well as annoyance when clothing didn't fit or was constricting and unwieldy.

The sources record medieval annoyance at ill-fitting or impractical clothing and also reveal the desire to feel confident in beautiful clothing as well as the excitement at new clothing heralding the birth of a child. Letters and literature from the Middle Ages make clear that clothing could make a medieval person feel attractive and proud of their appearance and it could make them feel comfortable and, of course, deeply uncomfortable. Much of the emotional experience of clothing in medieval England, as it is for many in the twenty-first century, was largely unexceptional in that dressing in familiar, well-worn clothes was a daily occurrence. The normality of clothing and the spectrum of ordinary responses to one's clothing in medieval England meant that it often went uncommented upon in contemporary sources making it difficult for modern historians to access. However, the everyday emotional register is present if only historians are prepared to sit with what might seem like offhand remarks about the daily experience of dress. It is in these glimpses that we can access the 'experience', or knowledge, of clothing that John Lydgate referred to.

Clothing, Sin and Shame

Christian doctrine was soaked into the fabric of daily medieval life, and in order to get compliance from the people and adherence to Christian virtues and laws, shame and fear were powerful tools in the Church's arsenal. Fear of hellfire and the spiritual damnation that accompanied those who were sent there would have been believed to be a very real possibility in the minds of those living the Middle Ages. Clothing was a particularly worrisome topic for clerics as not only did it have the power to corrupt the soul of wearer and onlooker by inducing sexual thoughts, it had the power to disrupt and distort the distinct order of society when people wore clothing that was above their social station. Shame was a useful,

internalised deterrent against sin, and clerical writers were keen to impress upon lay audiences that revealing clothing would incur sinful thoughts in both the wearer and the onlooker. They took pains to warn against the adoption of fashionable clothing lest it tempt those in the wearer's vicinity in the sins of lust, lechery or adultery. While both men and women were criticised for their adherence to new, revealing fashions, as will be discussed it was women particularly who bore the brunt with the spiritual welfare of the men around them and even the nation on their bared shoulders. The literature points to this frequent repetition of highly gendered sartorial condemnation beginning in the Middle Ages and continuing throughout the centuries. This is telling, however, as it denotes the frequency with which those fashionably inclined openly disobeyed the Church's advice and rulings. Handed down through sermons, parables, and conduct poems mimicking parental criticism in the case of 'The Good Wyfe Wold a Pilgrimage', the inhabitants of medieval England would have been keenly aware that society's and God's anger could be incurred through improper clothing and yet the fashion conscious were willing to risk eternal damnation to look attractive in life.[0]

From at least the twelfth century, men's evolving fashions, particularly with tighter clothing was used to emphasise the body, incurred the wrath of clerical writers such as Orderic Vitalis (1075-*c*.1142) who decried the 'over-tight shirts and tunics'' and 'long and luxurious locks'' which made men look 'like harlots'' and which signified 'effeminacy'' and which thus carried with it the insinuation of sodomy.[0] A few centuries later, revealing masculine clothing was still outraging clerics such as Thomas Gascoigne (1404-1458) who was more detailed in exactly which part of masculine dress was so abhorrent: men '[showed] off the shape of their thighs and their genitals through the slit in their gown, and do not use breeches, but stockings, in which the shape and size of their member is displayed in shameful fashion'' as '[such] finery firstly leads to many sins and distracts minds, when they should be

[0] Sylvester *et al, Medieval Dress and Textiles in Britain*, pp.178-181.
[0] '*strictis camisiis…tunicisque*' from Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History*, quoted in Sylvester *et al, Medieval Dress and Textiles*, pp.130-131.

thinking about the Lord, to the worst desires and to evil acts'.[0] Despite the sartorial shift towards more voluminous doublets and gowns for men in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there was still a trend for most fashionable men to wear tight-fitting hose and short bodices which caused Peter Idley (d.1473) to advise his son against those whose clothes are 'cut on the buttocks even above the rump'–' for 'if they should bend, kneel, or crouch, the gown will not reach to the middle of the back: would God that they were not taken without hose or breeches'.[0] The Act of Apparel in 1463 decreed that 'no knight under the estate of a lord, esquire, gentleman, nor none other person'–' was allowed to wear a jacket 'unless it be of such length that the same may cover his privy members and buttocks'.[0] Historians agree that English sumptuary law was more focused on maintaining social order through static sartorial levels. While clerics were also concerned with the maintenance of social order, as ordained by God, their preoccupation with the newly figure-hugging fashions are evident. Both concerns demonstrate clerical anxieties about the structure and spiritual safety of society and the ways dress can act to undermine it, either through disguising one's social position or through the population's descent into sexual sin.

Not only were these new fashions too tight and overtly sexual, moralists and clerical writers contended, but certain clothes were also an invitation to the devil. Fashion, they argued, encouraged the sin of pride in people who took care of their appearance, as well as allowing lecherous thoughts to occur in viewers who saw a man's exposed backside, or a woman's revealed breasts, which would ultimately lead to societal breakdown and spiritual decay. Robert Mannyng (*c.*1275-1338) was particularly effusive on the topic, having written in *Handlyng Synne* (1303) that 'Noþeles of þe newe gyse, / Þe deuyl haþ made hym chef

[0] '*Homines enim femorum formam ostendunt et genitalium per aperturam togæ, et braccis jam non utuntur, sed caligis, in quibus forma magnitudinis membrorum turpiter ostenditur. Talis ornatus primo movet ad magna peccata, et retrahit mentes, quando de Deo cogitarent, ad pessimal desideria et ad actus malos*'–' from Thomas Gascoigne's *Loci e Libro Veritatum* quoted in Sylvester *et al*, *Medieval Dress and Textiles*, p.153.
[0] Peter Idley, 'Instructions to His Son'–' quoted in Sylvester *et al*, *Medieval Dress and Textiles*, p.187.
[0] N.B. Harte, '-State Control of Dress and Social Change in Pre-Industrial England-, in-', in *Trade, Government and Economy in Pre-Industrial England*, eds. D.C. Coleman and A.H. John-, ((London: Morrison & Gibb Ltd, 1976), p.141.

iustyse [The devil has made himself chief justice of new fashions]'.[0] Tirades against developing fashions were often combined with threats that the wearer would be damned or that 'she would live in hell with the devils'–' because of her ornate hairstyle or that the long trains of her dress 'gives the devil power'–' which demonstrates a belief that fashionable feminine clothing could act as a conduit for devilish creatures.[0] Moreover, some clerics felt that fashion caused harm not just to individuals but to the nation as a whole, as Robert Mannyng warned, in his aforementioned text from the early fourteenth century, that 'All the while they have fashion in hand, God's grace will never be present in the land'. [0] This idea that God might withdraw his favour from an entire country was no doubt meant to change the minds of fashion-focused citizens but clearly had little impact.

While both men and women were subject to sartorial criticism, it was women who were charged with endangering not only their country and their own souls but the souls of onlookers, particularly lustful men through their attractive clothing. For Robert Mannyng, women's desire to beautify themselves through dress or simply to adhere to the fashionable trends within their social circle was worthy of damnation as it enticed once innocent men to sin:

> 'Lecherye ys also gret ȝernyng / To be desired þrugh feyr cloþthyng. What wymmen hem tyffe wyþ own wyl, / To foly loue ouþre men to tyll. ȝyf men, þrugh here feyr atyre / Wyþ hem to do foly haue desire, / Þey shul answere for here synne, / For þey are rote & first begynne'.[0]

[0] Robert Mannyng of Brunne, *Handlyng Synne* in Sylvester *et al.*, *Medieval Dress and Textiles*, p.151.
[0] 'With develes she shule duelle / For the clogges that cleveth by here chelle'–' in the anonymously authored text, 'Against the Pride of Ladies', and William of Wadington's *Le Manuel des Pechiez* in Sylvester *et al.*, *Medieval Dress and Textiles*, p.162, and 141 respectively.
[0] Robert Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne* in Sylvester *et al*, *Medieval Dress and Textiles*~~*Multilingual Sourcebook*~~, p.143.
[0] 'Lechery is also a great longing to be desired because of beautiful clothing. Those women who ornament themselves to their own pleasure love to lure other men to foolish desire. If men, because of their beautiful attire desire to make love to them, they should answer for their sin, for they are the root cause and first beginning', ~~Robert Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*,~~ ibid, ll.~~ines~~ 7613-7620.

Mannyng seems here to have been deliberately drawing comparisons between fashionably dressed women and Eve, the first person to bring sin into the world, and because of whom humans adopted clothing at all.

Other medieval writers condemned women who, in their view, were deliberately using fashionable, revealing or attractive clothing to entice men to sin, by using dress to highlight or eroticise elements of their bodies which would draw the attention or admiration of men. This desire for revealing fashions due to perceived innate sinfulness prompted John Bromyard (died *c*.1352) to pose the question, 'Where, again, shall be found those who lay bare their breast and compress their feet in the tightest shoes and thus diligently adorn their body for the love of God, as do the proud, to destroy their own souls and those of others?'[0] Bromyard clearly saw women's bodies and clothing as posing a very real threat to the spiritual safety of others, condemning women who were, in his view, 'wantonly adorned to capture souls'–' and listing an array of sartorially-related weapons: 'the garland upon her head is as a single coal or firebrand of Hell to kindle men with that fire; so too the horns of another, so the bare neck, so the brooch upon the breast, so with all the curious finery of the whole of their body'.[0] The specificity with which Bromyard describes the items of dress covering women's bodies suggests his real interest might lie in the body beneath, so again we see that it is women's bodies through the clothing that covered them that were deemed to pose a threat to men's spiritual safety.

Thomas Gascoigne was more specific in his analysis of women's attire and the effect it could have on unsuspecting men when he noted specifically that the revealing low-cut or

[0] John Bromyard, *Summa Predicantium*, '*Ubi terum inueniuntur, qui ita pectus nudarent, & pedes in strictissimis caleis [calceis] arctarent, & corpus, ita diligenter ornarent pro amore Dei, sicut faciunt superbi ut, suas & aliorum perdat animas*'–' quoted in Sylvester *et al*, *Medieval Dress and Textiles,* ~~*Medieval Dress and Textiles,*~~ p.155.

[0] Ibid, '–'*in muliere namque impudice ornata ad capiendas animas sertum in capite est: quasi unus carbo vel titio inferni pro igne illo accedendo sic cornua alterius, sic collum nudatum sic firmaculum in pectore, sic de omnibus curiositatibus totius corporis*'–'.

open fronted bodices of women were what was drawing the male eye and delivering their souls to the devil:

> However, the baring of a woman's bosoms, which had already become fashionable in the youth of Henry VI, king of England, around the year 1429, serves not the needs of nature, nor of one's office, nor of one's status, but is a great enticement to sin for those who look at them, and has introduced poison, although by the grace of God no-one drinks from it, and for this reason, inasmuch as there is poison in this very act of baring the bosoms, it destroys the souls of those who look at them.[0]

As Sheila Delany has noted, bared breasts started to become a regular sight during courtly festivities in the fifteenth century, such as when a 'bevy of unclad dancers'' entered Henry VI's Christmas ball and from which he fled in shock.[0] Concurrently at the French court, Agnès Sorel, the favourite mistress of Charles VII from 1444 until her death at 28 in 1450, wore daringly revealing clothing with no royal condemnation to the shock of more conservative contemporaries.[0] The chronicler, George Chastellian, described Sorel as the 'producer and inventor [*produiseresse et inventeresse*]'of the more shocking dress at court.[0] Sorel's desire for the sartorially shocking is no doubt what prompted the archbishop of Rheims, Jean Jouvenal des Ursins, to recommend his brother, the French chancellor, speak to the king regarding specifically the 'front openings through which one sees the teats, nipples, and breasts of women'.[0] This type of source material, private correspondence between two high-level political figures, is illuminating as it suggests that the archbishop, on hearing about

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[0] Thomas Gascoigne, *Loci et Libro Veritatum*, '*Nudatio autem pectorum mulieris, quæ jam inolevit Henrici Sexti, regis Angliæ, circa annum Domini 1429, non est propter necessitatem naturæ, nec officii, nec gradus, sed magnum allectamentum est peccati videntibus, et venenum obtulit, quamvis ex gratia Dei nemo ex illo biberet, et ideo in quantum in ipsa est animas videncium interficit*', quoted in Sylvester *et al, Medieval Dress and Textiles,* p ~~*Medieval Dress and Textiles,*~~ p.154-55.

[0] Sheila Delany, *Impolitic Bodies: Poetry, Saints, and Society in Fifteenth-Century England: The Work of Osbern of Bokenham*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.108.

[0] Sorel is perhaps now best remembered as the bare-breasted model on whom Jean Fouquet based his image of the breast-feeding Madonna, painted two years after Sorel's death. The painting, formally known as *The Melun Diptyc*h (c.1452) now resides in the Royal Museum of Fine Art, Antwerp.

[0] Delany, *Impolitic Bodies,* p.108.

[0] ~~Delany,~~Ibid, p.109.

the dressing or undressing of the king's mistress, felt genuine concern for the moral and spiritual degeneracy of the court. Of concern to the archbishop, this behaviour which was tolerated by some and seen as scandalous by others within elite circles threatened to trickle down to those on lower rungs of the social hierarchy. The dress of the French king's mistress would have been of great concern to the French people, but the sartorial acts of Sorel and those who copied her would have undoubtedly reached the ears of the English court. As Delany has pointed out, not only was England always attentive to the news of its enemy in the midst of war, with English ambassadors and diplomats sending reports back, but also because the English queen, Margaret of Anjou, was aunt to the insulted French queen, Marie of Anjou, whose marriage Agnès was undermining. Thus, the English populace would have heard criticism of Sorel's revealing clothing in the form of anti-French propaganda through various channels. That the French archbishop addressed Agnès'–' dress in his letter points not only to the veracity of the reports but also that her dress was of very real concern to patriotic, God-fearing French men.

When assessing the corpus of late medieval moralistic writings on women, it seems clear that what the clerics and secular writers really abhorred was women's bodies, with their potential for sexual attraction, and which betrays the writers'–' fear of revealed, uninhibited female bodies. The recommendation for this was for women's bodies to be hidden behind concealing, sombre-coloured clothing which did not invite attention. *The Thewis of Gud Women* (1487), a conduct poem in Scots dialect which survives in a number of manuscripts, advised its female audience to wear clothing that is 'Nocht our-costlik, na ȝeit sumptuous,/ To mak folk at hir invyous [Not overly costly, nor greatly sumptuous to make people envious of her]'.[0] Here it is other people's envy of the wealth and status indicated by luxurious or attractive clothing that the wearer must avoid. The reader is recommended to consciously

[0] Tauno F. Mustanoja, *The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter, The Good Wyfe Wold A Pylgremage, The Thewis of Gud Women*, ((Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran, 1948), p.179. Translation mine.

alter her dress to avoid unnecessary attention. The 'conservative' attitude of conduct literature as noted by Glenn Burger is fully apparent here in this control of women's dress to "protect" women's honour and bodies.[0]

As historians, we are used to analysing historical sources. We read carefully for any trace of bias, agenda or motive within textual sources. The same approach must be applied to textual sources describing eyewitness accounts of contemporary dress – we must be careful not to assume that because particular styles are commented upon by religious or political writers that it describes the dress of the majority. Wealth and status necessarily played an unavoidable role in the clothing that people had access to and that many examples of condemnation of medieval dress relates to the elites whose financial resources and status within society meant they had the monetary power to follow fashions and the social power to be less impacted by criticism.

To many today, their only interaction with historical clothing is through the glass of a museum case, either on a mannequin or laid flat. From this point of observation, the garments are removed from any vibrant notion of a past life, unless they are garments from named graves as is the case with the garments from the grave of Enrique I (c.1217) or the burial gown of Eleanor of Toledo (c.1562). With any connection they may have had to their former owners lost, it can be difficult to imagine that these clothes were once warmed by the bodies of their wearer. Lou Taylor has stated that 'one of the great voids of dress history has been its failure to establish emotional responses to clothing and appearance'.[0] This thesis seeks to do just that.

[0] Glenn Burger, *Conduct Becoming: Good Wives and Husbands in the Later Middle Ages*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), p.5.
[0] Lou Taylor, *The Study of Dress History*, p.6.

A Chronology of Clothing, 1250-1500

To fully understand the nuance, or indeed to attempt to 'read' the clothing described in the legal and literary sources of this period, it is crucial to provide a chronology of the clothing worn between 1250 and 1500 that leans on contemporary visual sources. Indeed, Sarah Grace Heller has argued that in order to understand the 'mechanics of fashion' one must look to depictions of it.[0] Focusing on the appearance of and changes in dress at this point will allow readers to more fully understand specific details of medieval dress as they appear in numerous textual and visual sources under discussion in later chapters. With this contextualising knowledge, an awareness of the fluidity and the path of fashion in these centuries or the specific vocabulary, we can attempt to more authentically 'read' medieval clothing.

Thanks to the Pre-Raphaelites of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when one thinks of the clothing of the medieval period, images come to mind of figure-hugging dresses with voluminous pleated skirts and long fluted sleeves with cuffs that graze the floor in richly coloured velvets and silks with low-slung, bejewelled girdles. Works including Edmund Blair Leighton's *The Accolade* (1901), Frederic William Burton's *The Meeting on the Turret Stair* (1864) or John Everett Millais' *Mariana* (1851) are perfect examples of that uniquely Victorian idealised and ~~romanticised~~romanticised image of the medieval period which has come to dominate popular imaginings. Yet this style of dress, the *bliaut*, that might be thought to characterise the entire late medieval period was largely out of fashion by the start of the thirteenth century. The centuries between 1250 and 1500 were periods of astonishing sartorial change which saw silhouettes for both men and women expand, contract, lengthen or shrink from one decade to the next. The speed at which styles dropped in or out of fashion, and the extremes to which clothing was taken shocked and outraged moralists and

[0] ~~Sarah-Grace~~ Heller, *Fashion in Medieval France*, ~~(Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2007),~~ p.50.

chroniclers who felt the sartorial shifts such as men's poulaines and women's tighter clothing brought God's wrath and invited plagues.

In reality, it was due to urbanisation, increasing global trade and most crucially, textile technological advancements in weaving and tailoring. At its peak around the year 1300, the urban population of England amounted to between 10 and 20%, and the country was spotted with small- to medium sized towns which were supported by the market demand of their goods and services.[0] Imports of goods from continental Europe and beyond would also be transported around the country to be bartered for and bought by urban inhabitants and rural visitors. Although 80-90% of the population did not live in towns, they would have visited them regularly to sell and buy products. This meant that towns acted as a melting pot from which imported textiles could be bought and, crucially, new fashions could be seen and taken back to villages and homesteads although new styles in peasant dress could be some years behind those of the middling or upper echelons. After the Black Death in 1348 which halved the population, those who survived found they could earn higher wages which meant an increased purchasing power. This further fuelled the speed with which fashions changed as the peasant and middling consumers sought novelty and improved quality, from the food they consumed to the clothes they wore.[0]

To speak of a development of fashion around the fourteenth century is complex and fraught with linguistic distinctions. Sarah Grace Heller has argued in relation to medieval France that it is futile to attempt to pinpoint 'a single authoritative moment of incarnation' ' and that the focus should rather be on 'when the cultural value placed on novelty' ' and

[0] Richard Britnell, 'Town Llife' in', in *A Social History of England, 1200-1500*, eds., Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod, (, ed. Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 134-178, p. 143.

[0] Maryanne Kowaleski, ''A Ceonsumer Eeconomy' ', in *A Social History of England, 1200-1500* in *A Social History of England, 1200-1500*, eds. Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod, (, ed. Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 238-259, p.243. Kowaleski identifies the 'dramatic changes' in' in dress as starting as late as the 1340s, adjacent corresponding to the Black Death, p. 247.

sartorial innovation became more prominent.[0] We should instead consider that fashion 'existed in developing stages in thirteenth-century France', influenced by events such as the decline of the Carolingian Empire, an economy battered by war and famine, the Invasion of England by the Normans and the Third Crusade in the Middle East and the Invasion of England by the Normans.[0] Margaret Rosenthal makes a clear distinction between 'fashion'' and 'dress'' with the former as a performative 'public and private system, a social and an individual phenomenon'' while the latter works to 'affirm the persistence of social patterns and to consolidate cultural ways of life, despite the ways clothing can be transferred from subject to subject'.[0]

This thesis follows a similar model in that it uses 'fashion'' to indicate broader changes in dress according to shifting tastes while 'dress'' is used in a micro sense and refers to individual items of clothing or an outfit and is most closely related to the personal experience of the act of *dressing*.

Dress history has been accused of being a 'wholly descriptive catalogue tradition'' with scholars of the last century accused particularly of attempting to document the chronological change in dress in a reductive way that observes merely the 'rising and falling of hemlines'.[0] This usually involved highlighting a fluid, seamless evolution from one period with its definable clothing styles to the next – the neckline of the medieval linen undershirt crept upwards to become the ruffled embroidered collar of the Tudor period which became the increasingly oversized ruffs of the Elizabethan period which gave way to the wire lace collars of the Jacobean period which became the soft drop-down collar of the seventeenth century – and so on. Indeed, different styles existed concurrently with different generations

[0] Sarah Grace Heller, *Fashion in Medieval France*, (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), p.46.
[0] Heller, *Fashion in Medieval France*,Ibid, pp. 59, 57, 55.
[0] Margaret F. Rosenthal, ''Cultures of Clothing in Later Medieval and Early Modern Europe'', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol. 39, no. 3, ((2009), 459-481, pp. 463, 471.
[0] Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold, *The World of Consumption*, (London: Routledge, 1993), p.?? quoted in Lou Taylor, *The Study of Dress History*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p.64 citing Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold, ed. *The World of Consumption* (London: Routledge, 1993);. Margaret Scott, *Medieval Dress & Fashion*, ((London: The British Library, 2007, 2009), p.9.

wearing styles beyond when it was considered fashionable. As Roland Barthes has pointed out it would be entirely inaccurate to attempt to date the start or cessation of a particular fashion development, stating 'it is a distortion to confuse the invention of a fashion with its adoption and even more so to assign a rigorous end-date to any garment'.[0] One example of this is the sideless surcoat, the popularity of which fluctuated between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. It began as a sleeveless tunic - without the open sides it became known for- under which a long-sleeved, full-length gown would be worn, examples of which can be seen in manuscript images such as the Codex Manesse in the late thirteenth century (Figure 3).[0] Over the following years, the arm openings grew further down the body as can be seen in Figure 4 from the Taymouth Hours which shows a woman hunting while wearing a red undergown and green surcote with gaping, though not extreme, sides. Becoming an accepted piece of court dress in the fourteenth century, wearing it highlighted one's noble lineage. This made it a popular item of dress for women to be depicted wearing in effigies such as ~~it was used by later artists to highlight the noble lineage of early Christian saints and medieval monarchs, such as in Hugo van der Goes' *Seated Saint, c.*1475-1480, thought to depict Catherine of Siena, and in~~ the 1531 tomb effigy of the former queen of France, Anne of Brittany (1477-1514), long after it had fallen out of style on the streets of Paris (Figure 5~~4~~).[0] For Anne to have been dressed in an outmoded outfit may have had a number of reasons. It could relate directly to formal court dress and so cement her link to the royal house of Brittany and her royal lineage. It could also represent Anne at her 'perfect~~'~~' age by medieval standards, that being her state of virginal maidenhood and recalls her outfit on the day of her marriage as she transitioned from maiden to wife.[0] The final depiction of Anne of Brittany in

[0] Roland Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*, trans. Andy Stafford~~, (~~ (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.5.
[0] University of Heidelberg, MS Cod. Pal. germ. 848, f.194r, for example.
[0] Hugo van der Goes, *Seated Female Saint*, 1475-1482, pen and ink, The Courtauld, London and tomb of Louis XII and Anne of Brittany~~, (~~ (unveiled 1531), Saint-Denis Basilica, Paris, France.
[0] ~~Kim Phillips, *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England, 1270-1450*, (Manchester: Manchester University, 2003), p.~~Kim Phillips, 'Maidenhood as the Perfect Age of Woman's Life', in *Young Medieval Women*, ed. Katherine Lewis, Noël Mengue and Kim Phillips (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 1-24, p.1 and elaborated on in Roberta Gilchrist's *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life Course*~~, (~~ (Suffolk: Boydell &

highly formal dress on her tomb contrasts with the portrait of her in her own prayer book in which she wears the fashionable dress of the early sixteenth century (Figure 6) ~~(Figure 5)~~.



Figure 3: University Library of Heidelberg, Codex Mannesse, Col. Pal. germ. 848, fol. 249v, c.1300-40, Wikipedia Commons.

Brewer, 2012), p.206.



Figure 4 Detail showing a woman with long, red undergown and green surcote with less extreme side openings, which is probably indicative of the style most non-noble women would have adopted; British Library, Yates Thompson MS 13, also known as the Taymouth Hours, c.1325-35, f.78.



Figure 5: Anne of Brittany's tomb effigy in Saint-Denis Basilica, Paris, France. The highly decorated edges of her sideless surcote help it to stand out from the undertunic when carved in marble. In the public domain, photographed by A. Beaudroit.



Figure 6: Anne of Brittany being presented by St Anne, St Ursula and St Elena in the Grand Heures of Anne of Brittany *by Jean Bourdichon, c.1503-08. France, BnF, MS lat. 9474, fol. 3. BnF Gallica.*

One's status within society, coupled with one's access to money~~, ((~~or one's family's access to money in the case of most women at the time) dictated to a great extent what one could wear. The first English sumptuary law which attempted to control the dress of secular people dated from 1337 with the final law relating to appearance from 1553, although sumptuary laws relating to clerical clothing were produced as early as 1127.[0] Fuelled by 'protectionist motives', N. B. Harte has suggested that earlier sumptuary laws, especially that

[0] Hilary Doda, ''"'"Saide Monstrous Hose"': Compliance, Transgression and English Sumptuary Law to 1533', *Textile History*, ~~(2014),~~ vol. 45, no. 2~~,~~ (2014), 171-191, p.172.

of 1337, aimed to bolster the English economy by limiting imports from abroad and in so doing, forcing people to buy domestic products and also as a way of delineating, and perhaps attempting to crystalise, social hierarchy, although they were not entirely successful.[0] Later sumptuary laws such as the legislation from 1363, were more explicitly about controlling identity which, Hilary Doda has argued, turns clothing into 'an agent of power, capable of generating identity around a body'.[0] I suggest that even without this legislative layer, clothing was a key tool in identity making.

As suggested by Eva's murder in Pilton, Somerset, mentioned above, most people on the British Isles during particularly the early part of this period would probably have owned only one or two changes of clothes although as the centuries progressed, the burgeoning mercantile groups and wealthier circles would have had many.[0] For the majority of those at the bottom end of the social scale, these two outfits would have been a set of daily clothes and a set of finer garments for religious holidays which would have had to suffice. Archaeological evidence suggests that these 'Sunday best'' clothes became the funeral clothing of most ordinary medieval people.[0] For most, then, 'hand-me-downs'' and clothing patched together from outgrown or unused clothing were the norm, as even elite clothing could be compiled from repurposed textiles.[0]

Domestically produced wools were available to all depending on quality; worsteds for the lower ranks, russets for the middling and cloth of gold for the very wealthiest. Wool had the advantage of being both warm and fairly water resistantrproof, due to lanolin, and so was suited to colder and wetter northern European climates and was the most common textile for

[0] N.B. Harte, ''State Control of Dress and Social Change in Pre-Industrial England', in *Trade, Government and Economy in Pre-Industrial England: Essays Presented to F. J. Fisher*, eds. Donald Cuthbert Coleman and A.H. John, (London: Morrison & Gibb Ltd, 1976), 132-165, ', p.137.
[0] Doda, "Saide Monstrous Hose", p.174.
[0] Gale Owen-Crocker, 'Smelly Sheep, Shimmering Silk: The Sensual and Emotional Experience of Textiles', in', in *Sense and Feeling in Daily Living in the Early Medieval English World*, ed. Maren Clegg Hyer and Gale Owen-Crocker, eds. Maren Clegg Hyer and Gale Owen-Crocker, ((Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 197-218, p.212.
[0] Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, p.71.
[0] Owen-Crocker, 'Smelly Sheep, Shimmering Silk', p.212.

outer garments for men and women. Flax was grown domestically to be turned into linen which was used for underwear, shifts and headwear, because lying close to the body, it was important the garments could withstand intensive laundering. Linen could also be bleached by simple exposure to the sun, making it easier to appear cleaner. Gale Owen-Crocker has described how a 'person whose linen was frequently laundered would feel, smell and appear cleaner than someone who did not have this advantage'[0] which is evidenced through the many laundry manuals which have survived from the latter half of this period.[0] Velvets had been imported to England as early as 1200, and silks were imported from Europe in luminous colours, although these could only be obtained by the wealthy. For many, simple '[soft] woollen clothes and clean linen garments'[0] would have had to suffice but even so would have 'made people look and feel their best'.[0]

At the start of the 1200s, fashions evolved slowly, restricted by textile technological limits such as smaller loom widths and lack of material elasticity. Masculine and feminine clothing were created from a 'simple T-shaped shift with cylindrical sleeves', these simple rectangular shapes being more economical than later cut-to-shape clothing patterns.[0] Clothing intended for male bodies was shorter, usually around knee-height, than the floor- or ankle-grazing feminine garments, but both styles draped the body in swags and swathes of fabric.[0] Men might wear leg wrappings or hose beneath their tunics, examples of which can be seen in the ~~Bayeaux~~Bayeux Tapestry - or more accurately, Embroidery - and everyone would have worn cloaks or mantles, in varying woollen weights and colours according to what they could afford.

By the 1250s, daily dress consisted of a gown or *goun*, also called a *cotte* or tunic, which was usually knee-length for men and floor-length for women and was gathered in at

[0] ~~Gale~~ Owen-Crocker, '~~'~~Smelly Sheep, Shimmering Silk'~~'~~, p.205.
[0] ~~Owen-Crocker, 'Smelly Sheep, Shimmering Silk'~~Ibid, p.218.
[0] ~~Christopher~~ Breward, *The Culture of Fashion*, ~~(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995),~~ p.13
[0] ~~Susan~~ Crane, *The Performance of Self*~~, : Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War,~~ ~~(Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002),~~ p.13.

the waist with a leather or woven belt or girdle (Figure 6). In contrast to the voluminous drapery of the body of these garments, owing to the rectangular garment shapes, the sleeves became tighter towards the wrist and wearers sometimes required a second person to lace their sleeves up in order to taper them towards the wrist, which was again seen by moralists as a sign of wanton excess. This was worn over a linen or in winter, a woollen shift. Over this, a short sleeved or sleeveless *surcote* was worn, most commonly in an opposing colour to contrast with the colour of the gown underneath, the hem of which could be pulled up and tucked into a woman's belt to both display her undergown and to be less cumbersome while walking, a practice which continued into the sixteenth century.[0]



Figure 7: A man wears a parti coloured tunic in red and green which is tied around his waist with a belt. His hood is tucked it into his belt. Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Bodl. 764, f.71v.

[0] Breward, *The Culture of Fashion,* p.13. Certainly this practice of lifting the front of the skirt because its sheer weight could make walking cumbersome was in use until the at least the early modern period, as evidenced by Hans Holbein's drawing, *A Lady Walking*, c.1530-40, which depicts a woman wearing a tasselled sash and a belt which is tied around her waist and clipped to the hem of her skirt and pulled upwards while she lifts the rest of the bulk of, likely heavy woollen fabric, as she walks. The image is housed in Oxford's Ashmolean Museum, (accession number WA1863.423).

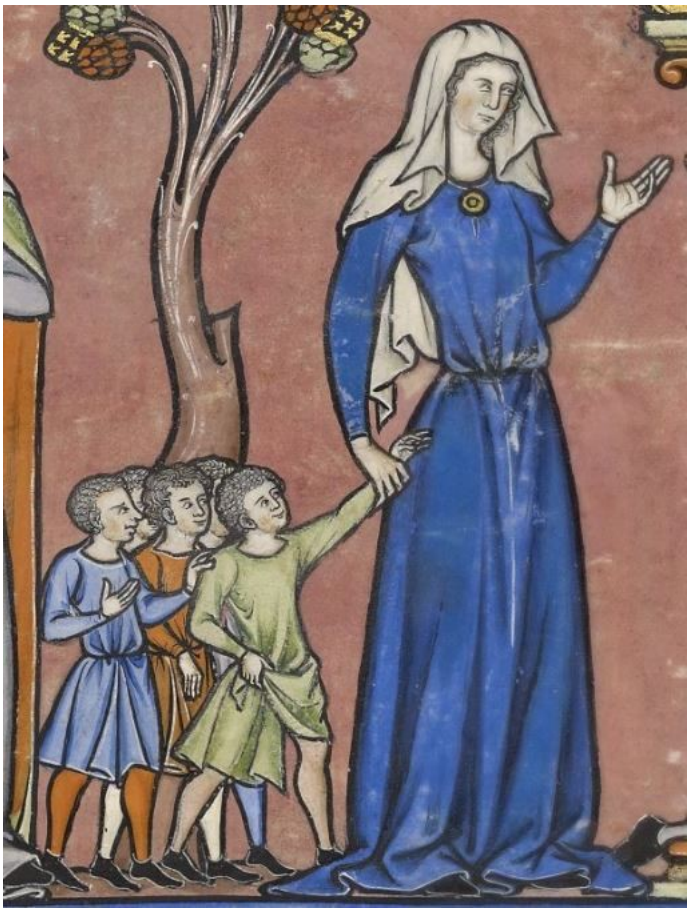


Figure 8: New York, Morgan Library & Museum, MS M. 638, f.195, c.1244-54.



Figure 9: A woman milks a cow whilst wearing a barbette *and* fillet, *Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Bodl. 764, f.41v*

For the majority of women, a simple circular or semi-circular piece of white linen, or silk for elite women, was draped over the head which allowed the curve to fall in attractive waves around the wearer's face (Figure 87). This could be pinned over a fitted coif that would be tied under the chin or at the nape of the neck for security. The *barbette* and *filet* was a more complex, multi-part construction worn by mature, respectable, wealthier, women, religious women or women in mourning (Figure 98).[0] The *barbette* - from the French for 'little beard'– was a linen strip of fabric which passed under the chin and over the top of the head to secure a veil or the *fillet*, a wider, stiffened strip of linen or silk which could be plain or decorated with linen ruffles or other surface decoration worn around the circumference of the head. Separate hoods which descended down over the shoulders as a mini cape were exclusively masculine garments at this stage, and it wouldn't be until the next century that the garment began being worn by women as well.

In the first half of the fourteenth century, clothing for many women consisted of a woollen gown with sleeves tapered towards the wrists with a veil and wimple, and a mantle for warmth as can be seen in the depiction of peasant women harvesting grain in the Luttrell Psalter (c.1325-1335).[0] The text contained depictions of agricultural labourers, cooks and servants, as well as a portrait of the patron, Sir Geoffrey Luttrell alongside his wife and daughter-in-law in formal, heraldic attire and was produced as a testament to Luttrell's successes making it an important resource for the dress of people up and down the social scale.[0] A more elite woman sitting beside a squirrel wears a green long-sleeved gown with a pink over-gown with ¾ length sleeves with fluted, hanging cuffs as well as a wimple under her chin, her hair plaited under a net caul and a matching pink hood on her head (Figure 109). ~~However, in the psalter, noble women are depicted in the gowns and sideless surcoats of earlier centuries, to highlight their lineage as the garment '[retained] its symbolic meaning in~~

[0] Sylvester *et al*, *Medieval Dress and Textiles*, p.360.
[0] London, British Library, Add MS 42130, f.172.
[0] Ibid, fols.171, 207-208, and 202v.

~~representations of queenly figures'.~~[0] ~~Two~~ A second magnificent manuscript~~s~~ from the first half of the fourteenth century ~~show various types of clothing worn by women and men of various social strata at the time.~~, t~~T~~he Taymouth Hours, corroborates the Psalter's depictions of late medieval clothing, by devoting a number of pages to the clothing of noble women and their servants In a variety of similar styles of dress.~~.~~



Figure 10: A woman beside a squirrel with a bell attached to its collar. The woman wears a green, long-sleeved tunic with a pink over-gown and matching hood to cover her linen headdress. British Library, Add MS 42130, known as the 'Luttrell Psalter~~Taymouth Hours~~', f.33r.

[0] ~~Ibid, f.33r and Valija Evalds, 'Sacred or Profane? The Horned Headdresses of St Frideswide's Priory', *Medieval Clothing and Textiles*, vol. 10, (2014), 129-150, p.144.~~



Figure 11 Detail of a man dressed in a hood with a liripipe and wrapped in a cloak from Piers Plowman in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 104, f.51r.



~~Figure 12: Detail of Hans Memling,~~ Virgin and Child with Saints Catherine of Alexandria and Barbara~~, c.1480. Housed at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York and in the public domain. Note the way the cuffs could be folded back to reveal the fur lining.~~

By the 1340s, the armholes of the unisex sleeveless *surcotes*, a garment which had originated as the tunic over a knight's armour, lengthened to become sideless *surcotes* sometimes reaching as low as the mid-thigh. These open sides exposed not only the colour of the more fitted gown beneath but also the form of the wearer's body. This style seems to have first appeared in Spain in the 1200s, and a few examples are extant, including that of Enrique I of Castille (1204 – 1217) and Eleanor of Castille (1200-1244).[θ] The sideless surcote's popularity spread across Europe and eventually became the court dress of England well into the next century, and was used by European artists to depict female characters of noble lineage such as Hans Memling's *Virgin and Child with Saints Catherine of Alexandria and Barbara*, from the early 1480s (Figure 10, above) and illuminations of Christine de Pizan's character, Reason, in *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405) as well as being used in funeral effigies of queens in the fifteenth century. As it has been documented that Christine de Pizan personally oversaw the illuminations for her work in her publishing house, it is clear that this was a deliberate design decision on her part, or one that she entirely approved of, for conveying the regal lineage of her characters.

By the middle of the fourteenth century, a long tail began to develop from the crown of men's hoods, known today as a liripipe but was contemporarily called a tippet in reference to the tippets that hung from people's sleeves. The only complete surviving secular outfit from the medieval period which is estimated to have been made and worn between 1350 and 1370 in Sweden includes a hood with liripipe.[0] Worn by someone now known only as the Bocksten Man, the hood's liripipe helped to date his body to the third quarter of the

[θ] Eleanor of Castille's sideless surcoat is housed at the Patrimonio Nacional in Madrid and can be viewed online at <https://www.patrimonionacional.es/colecciones-reales/indumentaria/traje-de-leonor-de-castilla>, [accessed 16th March 2025]. She should not be confused with Eleanor of Castille, Queen of England (1241-90) who married Edward I.

[0] The Bocksten Man's remains and outfit are housed in Sweden's Hallands Kulturhistorkia Museum and can be viewed online, https://museumhalland.se/en/the-bocksten-man/the-bocksten-mans-outfit/, [accessed 17th July 2024]. For further information and images of the Bocksten Man's complete outfit, see Louise Sénby Posse, 'The Man in the Bog' on *Scandinavian Archaeology*, 28th September 2020, https://www.scandinavianarchaeology.com/the-man-in-the-bog-the-man-who-was-found-by-coincidence/, [accessed 16th July 2025].

fourteenth century. This was then confirmed by radiocarbon dating of the man's bones and the wooden stakes which had pierced his body and are thought to have been used to prevent his body from floating in the bog.[0] His hood with liripipe was made from heavily fulled twill woollen fabric and was thus warm and rain resistant. Similar hoods with liripipes have been found in graves in Greenland, while illuminations from the British Isles and ~~northwestern~~north western Europe show the hood with liripipe was a popular and far-reaching article of clothing worn by men and women (Figure 11 and 12). Gale Owen-Crocker and Elizabeth Coatsworth have noted a number of styles in which the hood and liripipe could be worn including wrapping it around the neck for warmth, although this seems doubtful as the liripipe of extant garments are usually quite thin and so could probably not offer much coverage.[0] Chaucer describes one of his characters as wearing 'his typet wound aboute his heed'~~–~~' but this seems to refer to a style of headwear called a *chaperon* which developed when the hood with liripipe was put on upside down and then balanced on the head in a fantastical swathe of fabric, with the liripipe often hanging down the back or draped over the shoulder. While hoods with various liripipe lengths~~,~~ remained popular for the middling and lower strata of medieval English society, and were~~as~~ worn over linen caps to separate the difficult-to-launder wool from the easily dirtied scalp, the *chaperon* became an elite masculine garment into the late fifteenth century. ~~Numerous paintings from the period suggest there were at least five distinct styles of almost plumage-like *chaperons* perched on their heads while some men are depicted with the headdress slung over their shoulder and down their back demonstrating the desire men also had for novel and conspicuous fashions (Figure 12 and13).~~ Alongside ~~*chaperons*~~ these, men also wore fur hats as can be seen in the Arnolfini Portrait (1434) and brimless, tall, possibly felted, hats. Clearly then, there were numerous styles of headdress alone that circulated alongside each other.

[0] Owen-Crocker and Coatsworth, ed. *Clothing the Past*~~*: Surviving Garments from early medieval to early modern Western Europe*, eds. Gale Owen-Crocker and Elizabeth Coatsworth, (Leiden: Brill, 2018),~~ p.37.
[0] Ibid~~*Clothing the Past*~~, p.~~.~~38.



Figure 12~~13~~ A front and back view of hoods, one with a floor length liripipe. BnF, MS Latin 7907A, f.81v, c.1400-1407



Figure 14 Jan van Eyck, Man Holding a Ring, *c.1430 and housed in the Brukenthal National Museum, Belgium. In the public domain.*



Figure 15 Weeper E at the tomb of Isabella of Bourbon, c.1475-6 and housed in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. In the public domain.

Perhaps the most monumental changes to occur in European dress history also occurred in the 1340s: that of a tailoring revolution in which garments were cut-to-fit which relied on more flexible weaving patterns which allowed for stretch. This gave textiles a more elasticated quality, meaning it could stretch around the curves and bones of the body, allowing for more close-fitting garments. Additionally, the method of 'setting the sleeves ~~-~~ into small rounded armholes at the point where the arm springs from the shoulder~~'~~' rather than attaching a tube of clothing to the shoulder meant sleeves were more fitted and the garment as a whole was more fitted and flattered the body.[0] This new seam at the armhole would, however, have been more constrictive and more likely to burst open by some violent motion. Both of these technological and tailoring advances altered the way dress in northern Europe was constructed, the way it sat on the body and the way it constricted the body's movements.

Around the middle of the thirteenth century, roughly concurrently with the sideless *surcote*, another trend developed for strips of fabric, usually white in colour, to hang from just above the elbows to the waist or even the ground. It is unclear whether these streamers, also known as is 'tippets~~'~~' or 'tappets', were stitched or buttoned on to a gown. It seems that sometimes they were an integral part of the garment, while they could also be attached to armbands which could be slid on or tied around the arm to be worn with any outfit, and while there is evidence that both men and women wore them to begin with, it seems they became an exclusively female item towards the turn of the century, before falling out of fashion. ~~(Figure 14). As can be seen in Figure 14, which shows Joan, daughter of Edward III (1312-1377) as a weeper on the side of his tomb at Westminster Abbey, especially long and therefore impractical tippets were an elite item of clothing which would have dragged on the floor or got in the way of manual work.~~[0] For elite women, tippets might reach to the ground but for

[0] Crane, *The Performance of Self*, p.13; Newton, *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince*, p.3.
[0] ~~Joan died at the age of 14 of the Black Death in 1348, almost 30 years before this image of her was made. While this is highly unlikely to be an accurate representation of Joan, the weeper of Joan is likely meant to~~

the women lower down the social scale, tippets which reached to the length of a normal sleeve proved popular as it demonstrated that the wearer's family could afford to spend money on fabric that had no practical function and was purely decorative, but it would not have impeded the wearer's arm movements while working.



Figure 16 Joan of England, the weeper at the tomb of Edward III in Westminster Abbey. The tomb was constructed around 10 years after Edward III's death. Photo owned by Westminster Abbey.

The chronicler, John of Reading, seemed to have been particularly outraged by the swiftly changing fashions he witnessed, having written in 1344:

> Sometimes their clothes are long and wide, at others they are short, tight, dagged, and cut about and [slit] all around. The sleeves of their surcoats like their hoods have tapets, long and wide which hang down too far. They look, to tell the truth, more like tormentors and devils in their clothing than like normal men. And the women surpass the men in their clothing, which is so tight that they hang fox tails under their dresses at the back to hide their arses, a kind of behaviour which may well have provoked many of the evils and misfortunes that have beset the kingdom of England.[0]

depict her in her most idealised form including most fashionable dress.

[0] John of Reading, *Chronica Johannis de Reading et Anonymi Cantuariensis 1346-1367*, ed. James Tait, ((Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1914), p.89 and is cited in Andrea Denny-Brown, *Fashioning Change: The Trope of Clothing in High- and Late-Medieval England (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012)*, p.12 and Rosemary Horrox, *The Black Death*, ((Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p.131.

Andrea Denny-Brown has argued that the language used by disapproving clerics in relation to the fashionable cutting and slicing of garments threatening the safety of the nation turns '[t]he fashionable body' in', into 'an active weapon of destruction'.[0] However it is evident that while men's fashions also horrified John of Reading, it was women's sartorial decisions and the visibility of their bodies within their clothes that were deemed to have the ability to cause harm to the entire nation. This misogynist sentiment was reiterated in the final book of Henry Knighton's *Chronicle* in which he claimed that women who put on masculine clothing during tournaments in the 1340s caused God to inflict 'cloudbursts, and thunder and flashing lightning, and tempests of astonishing violence upon them'.[0] It is unclear whether the 'them'-' is referring to the women brought this ill-favour on themselves or whether the misfortune was brought on wider society. Still more chroniclers and moralists wrote against the introduction of different fashions, even going so far as to blame the European wives of English kings.[0] The mother of Joan, Philippa of Hainault (1313-1369) who married Edward III in 1328, was frequently accused of having brought 'French inspired'-' and continental styles to English shores via her own dress and that of her entourage.[0] This view was no doubt fuelled by francophobia on the part of the patriotic English chroniclers who were used to the frequent wars and ill-feeling between the two nations, as well as a dose of misogyny as painting women's dress as bringers of evil and national harm was a recurring rhetoric, a topic of discussion later in this chapter.

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[0] Andrea Denny-Brown, 'Rips and Slits: The Torn Garment and the Medieval Self', in', in Catherine Richardson and Gareth Shaw, ed. *Clothing Culture, 1350-1650*, ((Oxford: Routledge, 2016), p.227.
[0] Henry Knighton, *Knighton's Chronicle, 1337-1396*, ((Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p.96.
[0] Diane Owen Hughes, '[']Regulating Women's Fashion', in', in *A History of Women in the West: Silences of the Middle Ages*, eds. George Duby, Christine Klapisch-Zuber and Natalie Zemon Davis, (, ed. George Duby, Christine Klapisch-Zuber and Natalie Zemon Davis (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), 136-157, p.138.
[0] *Chronica Johannis*, p.88. For further discussion, see Breward, *The Culture of Fashion*, p.8 and Crane, *The Performance of Self*, p.18.

An image of a couple playing chess while others watch on from MS G.24 in the Morgan Library, New York, dates from 1345-1350 and provides an excellent example of concurrent fashion styles that John of Reading thought so abhorrent. Two of the women wear sideless surcotes, while the third woman wears a surcote with attached three-quarter-length sleeves and short, white tippets. The men wear green hoods with dagged hems, front opening *cotehardies* in purple, blue and pink with buttons from neck to hem. By the mid-fourteenth century, dagging had reached widespread popularity having appeared in a declaration of dress prohibitions for crusaders in 1188 which was intended to prevent the adoption of wasteful fashions. Dagging was the 'snipping of pointed, rectangular, or otherwise shaped tags on an outer garment, usually on the edges of bombard or poke sleeves, *chaperons*, tippets or other sleeve ornaments, and gown hems'.[0] Seen also to be excessive in their use of fabric, bombard sleeves were funnel shaped sleeves which could reach to the feet. ~~Isabeau of Bavaria is shown in a highly fashionable houppelande gown with bombard sleeves in *The Book of the Queen* by Christine de Pizan.[0]~~ Similarly, poke sleeves were very full sleeves which gathered at the wrist creating a bag-like shape. The enormous amounts of fabric needed to create these extravagant sleeves signalled the wealth of wearers and aroused the ire of moralists and commentators. Moralists felt it to be a vain and wasteful part of fashionable dress which indicated spiritual negligence and, indeed, a sumptuary law of 1383 attempted to curtail it as the pattern of cutting in oscillating shapes caused fabric to be wasted.[0] It was a style that was perhaps inspired by the slashed garments of soldiers returning from wars but which only became possible due to new textile manufacturing, such as fulling, which prevented textiles

[0] John Block Friedman, ''The Iconography of Dagged Clothing and Its Reception by Moralist Writers'', *Medieval Clothing and Textiles*, vol. 9, (2013), 121-138, p.123.
[0] ~~BL Harley MS 4431, f. 3r.~~
[0] 'A Statue Concerning Diet and Apparel', 37 ***Edwardi*** III, 1383, *Statues of the Realm*, (London: Dawsons, 1963), pp.380-381.

from fraying.[0] The first mention of dagging in Middle English comes from a 1346 edition of *Brut*:

> 'In thys tyme, Englisshmen so much haunted & clyvd to the wodnes and foley of the strangers...that...they changed ham every yere...cloþyng, of long, large & wyde cloþis, destitu & desert from al old honeste & good usage...schorte cloþis & stret-wasted, dagged & ket...that if y soþ schal say, they were...liche to turmentours & devels'.[0]

While the author mentions many characteristics of the new fashions, the dagging and cutting of clothing is pointed out expressly for criticism and association with spiritual degradation. Authors of popular texts also wrote of the new style with disapproval; writing around 1378, William Langland clearly disliked the style too, ~~having described a character who~~having the character of Conscience decry Covetousness who 'lowgh lyf and leet dagge his clothes'.[0] To Langland, dagged clothing indicated a character too concerned with worldly affairs, and thus not devoting time to spiritual betterment.[0] Geoffrey Chaucer ~~also~~ gave voice to the disapproving opinions~~ed~~ of the new style, writing '…if so be it that [the wealthy] wolde yeven swich pownsoned and dagged clothing to the povre folk, it is nat convenient to were for hire estaat'.[0] In contrast with Langland, Chaucer seems to have been less concerned with the religious implication and more worried about how the style could filter down through the social strata as recycled clothing and which would thus blur hierarchical distinction.[0] However, Chaucer felt that dagging was indicative of obedience to worldly fashions ~~was evidently also condemnatory of dagging and its insalubrious effects on~~and inappropriate for a

[0] Andrea Denny-Brown, 'Rips and Slits', ~~: The Torn Garment and the Medieval Self' in Catherine Richardson and Gareth Shaw, *Clothing Culture, 1350-1650*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2016),~~ p.233.
[0] *The Brut or the Chronicles of England*, vol. 2, ~~ed.,~~ ed. Friedrich W.D. Brie, ***Early English Text Society***, ~~(~~ (New York: Kraus, 1971), chap. 227, p.297.
[0] William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman (*London and New York: J.M. Dent and E.O. Dutton, 1978), passus 20, ll.141-144 and digitised by the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse* at the University of Michigan.
[0] Friedman, ~~'~~'The Iconography of Dagged Clothing', p.125, citing William Langland, *Piers Plowman*: *The C-Text*, ed. Derek Pearsall, ~~(~~ (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), passus 20~~2~~, line ~~s 142-~~143. Friedman cites passus 22 but this seems to be in error as the poem has only 20 passus.~~.~~
[0] *The Riverside Chaucer*, 300, lines 414-23.
[0] ~~*The Riverside Chaucer*, 300, lines 414-23.~~

man of piety. Aas Friedman has pointed out, Chaucer clothes the friars ~~that in his descriptions of the friars~~ in his version of *Romance de la Rose*, ~~they are wearing dagging on their clothes~~in dagged garments to highlight their vanity.[0] Clearly then, to wear dagging indicated a preoccupation with the world, its fashions and where one sat in its social hierarchy rather than on the safety of one's immortal soul.

From the second half of the fourteenth century, the shape of fashionable footwear also altered and so became a target of sartorial criticism. Called *poulaines* or *crakows*, the toes of these shoes stretched to great lengths in front of the wearer, making it difficult to walk or kneel to pray without bending the tips, so that an anonymous author of an untitled poem complained that 'for the sake of their long toes they pray while standing even on holy days'.[0] The Boston Museum of Fine Arts holds a pair of exquisite purple silk *poulaines* with leather soles and white cotton lining which are believed to be of French origin (Figure 135). Three eyelets on each side of the ankle openings show the shoes were slipped on and then tightened with laces which have since been lost.[0] In inclement weather, pattens -~~,~~ leather and wood over-shoes -~~,~~ might be worn to protect the delicate fabrics and pierced leather from damage which can be seen in the right-hand panel of Roger van der Weyden's *The Seven Sacraments* altar piece from 1445-50, where a bridegroom wears both poulaines and pattens (Figure 146).[0] A single, leather *poulaine* with a lattice work decorated upper is n housed at the Museum of London having been discovered on the site of Baynards Castle (Figure 157). Women and men who were less able to afford such delicate~~exclusive~~ footwear wore more modest, and more practical, versions of leather shoes and ankle boots with more natural points to their toes, of which many examples survive in museum collections.

[0] Friedman, '~~'~~The Iconography of Dagged Clothing', p.125, ~~footnote~~ n.15.
[0] 'A satire on manners and costume', Sylvester *et al*, *Medieval Dress and Textiles*, p.167.
[0] Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, accession no. 44.572a-b, fifteenth century.
[0] London, Victoria and Albert Museum, accession nos. T.610-1913 and 1490B-1901. In the same painting, the bridegroom figure, possibly the donor, also appears in the left-hand panel taking a step in his multi-part footwear which usefully illustrates how one might have walked in them.

Just as dagging was inspired by military clothing, so too was the fashionable doublet for men in the 1360s, interchangeably called a *jupon* or *pourpoint*, which emulated the protective jackets and breastplates of soldiers with its padded torso, an example of which survives having belonged to Charles de Blois (Figure 168). While the middling and peasant men of medieval society continued to wear long-sleeved, knee-length tunics which were belted at the waist, wealthier or more elite men began to wear a formerly military garment, the *jupon* or *pourpoint* as civilian dress. The padding of this formerly protective garment, which had been worn between the body and armour as cushioning against blows, became more exaggerated until the chest was stuffed with wool which made the waist seem smaller and gave men an 'hour-glass'-' figure which became a popular silhouette emulated by those lower down the social hierarchy, as can be seen in a sculpture in ivory of three soldiers mourning the death of Christ, held in the Rijksmuseum, which also shows the copious use of buttons. (Figure 179). The shoulder seams for the *pourpoint* followed the line of the shoulder blade which would have allowed ease of movement such as when swinging a sword. The centre-front opening allowed the wearer to take the garment on or off themselves, while also providing a stage for the copious number of buttons.[0] Feminine fashions also adopted this front-opening style with numerous buttons from neckline to groin as we saw on Joan's dress in Figure 14.

[0] Margaret Scott, *Fashion in the Middle Ages*, (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011, 2018), p.23.



Figure 13~~17~~ Purple silk poulaines with a leather sole and a stacked leather heel, fifteenth century. Housed at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, accession number 44.5721-6



Figure ~~14~~18 Detail of Roger van der Weyden's The Seven Sacraments, *1445-1450. In the public domain. The man wears purple hose, black leather* poulaines *and wooden pattens.*



Figure ~~15~~19 A poulaine *housed at the London, Museum of London, accession no. BC72[79]<2496>, c.1350-1440.*



Figure ~~20~~ 16 The purpoint of Charles de Blois, pre-1364 and housed at the Musee des Tissus et des Arts decoratifs de Lyon. Image can be found online at < https://www.burlington.org.uk/archive/exhibition-review/textiles-in-medieval-florence-florence> [accessed 21st March 2025]



Figure ~~21~~ 17 Three soldier crying at the death of Christ, 1360, ivory, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Figure 22 Detail of 'June~~' in~~', in Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry, Musée Conde, MS 65, f.6v.

Throughout the fifteenth century, middling and lower status women continued to wear simple woollen, form-fitting gowns ~~-~~, although the term 'kirtle~~' in~~', increased in popularity ~~-~~, with attached or separate sleeves, over linen shifts, perhaps adding an over~~-~~gown when weather or finances permitted. The illuminator for the month of June from the *Très Riches Heure du Duc de Berry* (c.1412-1416) depicted two female labourers making hay in variations on peasant clothing; their gowns have short sleeves under which the long linen sleeves of their chemises show, perhaps to protect them from the sun although for this style of gown, longer sleeves could no doubt be pinned on if desired (Figure 18~~20~~).

Beginning in the late 1390s, a novel style of dress developed for elite women and men alongside the standard short tunics, hose and hoods for men, and long gowns, surcotes, veils, and hoods for women. This style soon reached the people of middling social status, with the very poorest adopting it later when they received it as second-hand clothing. The

houppelande was a ‘a voluminous, flowing, usually belted garment with full, wide sleeves, worn by both men and women’ ’ from the late fourteenth to the mid-fifteenth century at least (Figure 1921).[0] The standard houppelande for women had a high neckline often with a pointed collar that folded down over the collarbones, hanging – so called ‘bombard’ ’- sleeves which might even have grazed the ground, an aspect which Thomas Hoccleve suggested made brooms redundant.[0] For women, a houppelande required a belt to be worn under the breasts to create a high waistline and a long silhouette, while for men, a belt was worn low, around the hips. If a man’s houppelande finished at his knees, it was called *haincelin*. A single houppelande has survived from the period, having belonged to the Bohemian prince, John of Görlitz (1370-1396) which demonstrates the garment’s extensive use of material and its elite qualities as it was thought fit to serve as the prince’s funeral garments (Figure 22).



Figure 23 Detail of a miniature of Christine de Pizan presenting her manuscript to Queen Isabeau of Bavaria, c. 1410 – c. 1414, BL Harley MS 4431, f. 3r

[0] Sylvester *et al*, *Medieval Dress and Textiles in Britain*, *: A Multilingual Sourcebook*, eds. Louisa Sylvester, Gale Owen-Crocker and Martin Chambers, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), p.168.

[0] Thomas Hoccleve, *The Regiment of Princes*, ed. Charles R. Blyth, ((Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999), p.55, ll.533-536.



Figure ~~24~~19 The funeral garment of John of Görlitz from Milena Bravermanová and Helena Březinová, 'The Fate of the Remains and Funerary Equipment of Czech Rulers and Their Family Members', Folia Archaologica*, vol. 35~~,~~ ((2020), 107-121, p.116.*



Figure ~~25~~ 20 Claus Sluter, Crying No. 34 at the tomb of Philip the Bold, 1404-1406. Housed in the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon, Accession number: CA 1416 No. 34.



Figure 21 Detail of a miniature of Christine de Pizan presenting her manuscript to Queen Isabeau of Bavaria, c. 1410 – c. 1414, BL Harley MS 4431, f. 3r.

Thomas Hoccleve clearly felt that this new style of men's dress made them vulnerable to assault because their 'sleeves encombrous so syde traille [cumbersome sleeves hang low]'–'making it impractical for them to raise their arms in defence or wield a weapon. Unable to raise his arms to defend himself or his lord, Hoccleve felt 'he nis but a woman; He may nat stande him in stide of a man'–'but instead should follow the Roman god of war, Mars, who 'loveth noon array / That hurtith manhode'.[0] It is evident then, that the sheer amount of fabric needed to construct a houppelande made the garment weighty, unwieldy, constricting and highly impractical. Unable to draw a weapon, men became vulnerable and incapable of defending themselves or the lord they had pledged their loyalty to. As Hoccleve saw it, this vulnerability caused by impractical dress reduced men to the state of women whose movements were restricted by tight sleeves and bodices. Women were also not expected to retaliate to violence themselves and this lack of knowledge might have further intensified

[0] Thomas Hoccleve, *The Regiment of Princes*, ed. Charles R. Blyth, (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999), p.51-53, ll. 440, 466-469, 482-483.

their vulnerability in the face of violence. Men's houppelandes were also constructed in such a way that the skirt of the garment fell to their feet, imitating the floor-length dress of women, of which the statues of male funeral mourners on the tomb of Phillip the Bold, dating from *c*.1404-1406, are a prime example (Figure 203). Louise Sylvester has suggested that the gown mentioned in Hoccleve's *The Regiment of Princes*, ((*c*.1411-13) and which aroused such distaste in the author is a houppelande:

> But this me thynkith an abusioun,
> To see oon walke in gownes of scarlet
> Twelve yerdes wyde, with pendaunt sleeves doun
> On the ground.[0]

In both quotes, Hoccleve's revulsion for the style because of how it limited men physically is clear but the sheer expense such an amount of fabric incurred in order to construct the garment could impoverish the wearer, having noted that the wearer's 'cofre and eek his purs been penylees [coffer and even his purse being penniless]'.[0] Alongside this, it was felt that the new fashions were 'usurpe[d]' ' by lords' ' men, which inverted the social hierarchy and made it difficult to discern which strata of society one belonged to. The expense and elitism of these garments can be seen in an illumination dating from 1410 in which Christine de Pizan is shown presenting her book to Isabella of Bavaria. The queen and her ladies-in-waiting each wear various brightly coloured and patterned houppelande while the author herself wears a simple gown with in-built tippets in the blue that Christine is so often depicted in over a red, long-sleeved gown, ((Figure 2121). Christine also wears a more modest, though still fashionable, butterfly hennin, matching two of the women in the background, while the queen and her more senior women wear bejewelled heart-shaped

[0] 'But this, I think, is an abuse, to see one walk in gowns of scarlet, twelve yards wide, with pendant sleeves down on the ground,' ' Thomas Hoccleve, *The Regiment of Princes*, ed. Charles R. Blyth, (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999), p.51, ll.421-424.
[0] Thomas Hoccleve, *The Regiment of Princes*, ed. Charles R. Blyth, (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999), p.51Ibid, l.ine 429.

escoffions which comprised of rolls of woollen or silk fabrics padded out and shaped. ~~This type of highly fashionable headwear can be seen on the figures of elite members of society mourning the death of Isabel de Bourbon (Figure 24). The hair would then be pulled up underneath the headdress and hidden or left to fall down the wearer's back.~~

Another style of headdress to develop during the first half of the fifteenth century, was the hennin which included the truncated, butterfly and steeple styles (Figure 2~~2~~5). It is from this last style, the steeple hennin that another sartorial stereotype from the Middle Ages is drawn - of a princess in a tower with a conical headdress ~~(Figure 26)~~. As we have seen, dress in the Middle Ages was frequently felt to display outwardly the sins that were present inwardly, and a tall, fashionable, eye-catching hennin was believed to indicate pride, while a truncated hennin indicated humility, modesty and virtue (Figure 2~~3~~7). For this reason, the bifurcated or butterfly hennins, which were tall structures divided in the middle and placed on either side of the head over which linens would be draped, while being extremely popular in fashionable ~~, aristocratic~~ circles were derided and ridiculed by male moralists and clerics stretching back even as far as the late thirteenth century; the author of a fourteenth century sermon, 'A Dispotion bitwene a God man and þe Devil', complains of '…þis wymmen: Þat muchel haunted pride, Wiþ hornes on heore hed: Pinned on uch syde, Maad of an old hat'.[0] This was necessarily an elite item as a horned headdress sitting precariously atop one's head would have struggled to stay on whilst the wearer performed hard manual labour. Thus, while the critics derided women for vanity and pride, the impracticality of the garment underscored the diatribes. It is possible that the critics were also trying to deter women lower down the social hierarchy from~~of~~ adopting the fashion and trying to appear as though they belonged to a strata of women who did not need to work. However, we can see from the portrait of

[0] 'These women that are much haunted by pride, with horns on their heads, pinned on each side and made of an old hat', Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS e Museo 180, f.69v-75. See also Valija Evalds, 'Sacred or Profane?: The Horned Headdresses of St Frideswide's Priory', *Medieval Clothing and Textiles*, vol. 10 (2014), 129-150.

Margareta van Eyck by her husband, below (Figure 24) that middling women who were the wives of artisans also aspired to elite fashions and wore more modest versions of these horned headdresses.



~~*Figure 26 A weeper with an escoffion at the tomb of Isabel de Bourbon, c.1475. Housed at the Rijksmuseum, accession number BK-AM-33-H.*~~



Figure ~~27~~ 22 A weeper with a butterfly hennin at the tomb of Isabel de Bourbon, c.1475. Housed at the Rijksmuseum, accession number BK-AM-33-H



Figure 28 Anne de Beauchamp, Countess of Warwick (1426-1492), from the Rous Roll, *BL Add MS 48976, c.1483-85.*



Figure ~~29~~ 24 Jan van Eyck, 'Margareta van Eyck', c.1439, housed in the Groeningenmuseum, Bruges. In the public domain. Margareta wears the fashionable horned headdress of her day with a layered linen wimple across the horns.

Many authors drew on the style's similarity to animal horns and claimed it turned women into beasts: 'women in þere degree with theire gay heddes sett up on heyȝte and ornyd [horned], as it were an unreasonabyll beeste…hou foule þei are: In soule and in bodi'.[0] The word 'foule~~'~~ ' here had connotations of both uncleanliness and sinfulness, and so it is evident that this anonymous writer felt the way the woman decorated her hair with elaborate fabric constrictions tainted her both spiritually and physically.[0] The cleric and poet, John Lydgate (1370-1451) was particularly vociferous in his contempt for the fashion, writing in 'A Dyte on Womenhis Horns~~' in~~', in 1449:

[0] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS e Museo 180, f.69v – 75 and translated in Sylvester *et al*, *Medieval Dress and Textiles*, pp.156-7.

[0] 'foule', *MED*, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED17437/track?counter=1&search_id=861985, [accessed 24th March 2025].

Clerkys recorde, by gret auctoryte,
Hornes wer yove to bestys ffor dyffence -
A thyng contrarye to ffemynyte,
To be maad sturdy of resystence.
But arche wives, egre in ther vyolence,
Fers as tygres for to make affray,
They have despite, and ageyn concyence,
Lyst nat of pryde, then hornes cast away.[0]

This analogy between women's headdresses and animal horns with the purpose of defence demonstrates clearly the ideal of female passivity; fashionable women are horned animals or bloodthirsty tigers who upset the natural order of women's obedience and meekness. The horned headdress transforms into a defensive weapon, thereby making women 'eager for violence~~–~~' and allowing them to defend themselves. Lydgate is not explicit about whom medieval women might want to defend themselves from, however the insinuation is clear, particularly in his mention of arche wives, or dominating women, being eager for violence – women might want to defend themselves or turn the tables on men.

By the 1440s, the houppelande had morphed into a style of feminine garment that was known as the Burgundian gown which would remain as an item of elite, highly fashionable dress until the start of the next century. Instead of the high, winged collars or round necklines of the houppelande gowns, a Burgundian dress had a deep V-shaped neckline which ended below the chest but was filled in for modesty's sake by the gown beneath or an inserted triangular partlet. This style of gown accentuated the waist which was made smaller by a wide belt, often in a striking contrasting colour as in Jan van Eyck's portrait of his wife (Figure 2~~4~~6). ~~The weeper from the tomb of Isabel de Bourbon also wears a Burgundian gown~~

[0] 'Clerks record with great authority, horns were given to beasts for defence – a thing contrary to femininity, to be made of sturdy resistance, but dominating wives, eager for violence, fierce as tigers to attack, they have disdain, and go against conscience. If you want nothing of pride, then cast your horns away,~~–~~' John Lydgate, 'A Dyte on Womenhis Horns~~', in~~', in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 683, f.53r-54v and in Sylvester *et al*, ~~the~~ *Medieval Sourcebook*, pp.176-179. Translation mine.

~~(Figure 25). These two~~This example~~s~~ demonstrate~~s~~ that fashionable clothing was within~~g~~ reach of non-elite women with large and even middling means, as Margareta van Eyck who was the wife of a craftsman, albeit a popular painter, was able to afford such a gown. ~~Equally, Isabel de Bourbon's weepers, while they likely do not represent real people, do depict general high fashion styles for the period.~~ For ~~the very poorest~~less wealthy women, linen chemises and woollen kirtles continued to be the norm with smaller details such as surface decoration and accessories allowing the wearer to adhere to fashion changes without a total refashioning of their clothes. Roger van der Weyden's depiction of Mary Magdalen in *The Seven Sacraments* (Figure 25~~7~~) demonstrates the practice of separate sleeves which could be swapped out depending on taste, weather or occasion but they could also left off entirely for ease of movement and keeping them clean, as seen in the image of peasant women at work in the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* above. Behind the weeping woman with separate sleeves, another female mourner wears a fur-lined, purple Burgundian gown over a green kirtle. Of course, both of these women are imaginative depictions of Biblical women but~~and~~ van der Weyden chose to depict this holy scene with figures in contemporary dress in line with medieval inclinations towards affective piety. These medieval garments in a Biblical scene allowed the artist's contemporaries to imagine themselves in the place of the holy figures or at least in their company, intensifying the devout's grief and strengthening their religious fervour. This then means that we can accept the clothes of the mourners to be accurate representations of dress in the 1470s, which further shows the ways different styles from Burgundian gowns to simple kirtles with detached sleeves could be worn concurrently within society.



Figure ~~30~~ 25 Detail of Roger van der Weyden's The Seven Sacraments, *1445-1450. In the public domain.*

Undergarments became more elaborate in the fifteenth century as recent archaeological finds from Lenberg Castle, Austria demonstrates. Nearly 3000 scraps of textiles were found under the floorboards on the second floor of the building which included children's clothes, a pair of men's 'underpants~~–~~' or rather, braies.[0] It has been suggested that the fragments were deposited between 1480 and 1485, and while the purpose is not known,

[0]'Medieval lingerie from Lengberg Castle, East Tyrol', *Universität Innsbruck Projects and Sciences*, https://www.uibk.ac.at/archaeologien/forschung/projekte/nutz/textilien-lengberg/mittelalterliche-unterwaesche/index.html.en, [accessed 8th June 2023]

the deliberate depositing of these textiles aligns with other evidence found throughout Europe from the Roman period to the nineteenth century and points toward a belief in the protective, even supernatural, qualities of the fabrics.[0] It is possible that the textiles were discarded in the negative space between the walls as a form of medieval insulation if they were beyond repair, but this seems unlikely as the deposit was very localised and there was no indication that this was a practice copied all over the castle.

At first, it was assumed that the find was that of a medieval 'bra~~'~~' or more sensationally 'lingerie~~'~~' (Figure 2~~6~~8). However, on closer examination, it appears the fragment actually forms the bodice part of a side-laced linen shift, but the fabric that made up the skirt was removed prior to placement, likely due to its potential to be repurposed. The bodice, on the other hand, was of little further value materially as it had been tailored in such a way that it could not be recut. The linen bodice has a line of delicately stitched eyelets from underneath the right armhole to the bottom of the bodice which likely would have continued into the skirt, allowing the wearer to close the side opening with a thin lucet braid, as can be seen in contemporary images such as Figure 29. The separate cups in the bodice confirm the veracity of visual and literary sources which describe 'zwen tuttenseck [two bags for the breasts]'.[0] Despite the extensive research and the conclusion that this was not a precursor to modern bras, this misunderstanding is still in wide circulation in scholarly works.

[0] Rachel Case, Marion McNealy and Beatrix Nutz, '~~'~~The Lengberg Finds: Remnants of a lost fifteenth ~~15th~~ century tailoring revolution~~', in~~', in Johanna Banck-Burgess and Carla Nübold, ed. *North European Symposium for Archaeological Textiles* XI~~, eds. Johanna Banck-Burgess and Carla Nübold, ((~~2013), pp.221-225.

[0] Vienna, Austrian National Library, MS Cod. 2880, fols.130v-141r.



Figure ~~31~~ 26 The Lengberg 'bra', image copyright owned by the Institute of Archaeology, University of Innsbruck



Figure ~~32~~ 27 An artisan stitches fur lined chemises: Germany, Würtemburgische Landesbibliothek, MS Cod.poet.et.phil.fol.2, f.203r. Note the squirrel pelt on the table.

With the Lengberg ‘bra’ confirmed to be a bra, there exists no material evidence and little visual evidence of medieval women wearing something similar to modern underwear. However, a few sources suggest that the motif of women wearing knickers was used to highlight their perceived masculine traits, similar to the proverbial phrase ‘to wear the trousers’ to signify a woman dominating a man.[0] A German woodcut from a 1474 edition of Boccaccio’s *De Claris Mulieribus* shows the legendary Assyrian queen, Semiramis, who acted as regent for her son and commanded military operations, naked except for a pair of underpants in the company of two women in matching underwear and floor length, open gowns. In the background and meant to indicate a later scene, Semiramis is shown having intercourse with her son, Ninus, in bed (Figure 28). A second print by Israhel von Meckenem ((fl.1465-1503) shows a man winding spun thread while looking fearfully at the woman next to him who appears to be in the act of hitting him with her distaff while pulling her underwear down (Figure 29). Both images suggest that, at least in parts of northern Europe, underwear was a male garment which could be associated with traits of lust and violence if worn by women in artistic sources.

[0] On the other hand, the Luttrell Psalter gives a number of examples of men’s undergarments with illuminations of two peasant men threshing in their shirts and braies and a marginalia of a man using his feet to pull the string on a bow and exposing his braies, hose and knee garters, f.74v and 54r. Equally, in the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, peasant men are shown with exposed braies, f.6v and 9v.



Figure 2833 Hand-coloured woodcut illustration of Semiramis and her attendants and in bed with Ninus, printed by Johannes Zainer, c.1474 and reprinted in W.L. Schreiber, Handbuch der Holz- und Metallschnitte des XV. Jahrhunderts (Nendeln: Kraus Reprints, 1969), no. 3506.



Figure 2934 Israhel van Meckenem, 'Mundus inversus', British Museum, accession number 1873,0809.651. Note the pattens she wears over her shoes, the garters holding up her stockings and her kirtle with detachable sleeves.

As the horned headdresses were replaced with the increasingly fashionable steeple and truncated hennins with flowing veils, the loose sleeves that Hoccleve had so hated fell out of

fashion and were replaced with tight, arm-hugging sleeves which ended in fluted cuffs which covered the knuckles to create a lengthening and thinning effect to the arms (Figure 3~~2~~0 ~~and 33~~). S~~S~~ombre colours of blacks, dark reds and greens ~~had come~~came to replace the more vibrant colours of earlier centuries as it was felt that bright colours showed vanity and a desire to be seen, while darker colours highlighted a person's modesty and piety, and with the Black Death so fresh in the national memory, this might be unsurprising.[0] ~~-~~This V-shaped bodice and A shaped skirt with a small waist help to create created a defined hourglass silhouette and so emphasised the stomach and hips of the wearer, and thus hinted at her potential fertility. Gradually, front lacing, as seen in Figure 32, began to be adopted by many and it was used as a way to add attractive decoration to the bodice. By the early sixteenth century, the distinct Tudor fashions had been born with the gable and French hoods, codpieces and farthingales so linked with Henry VIII's court and the nascent early modern period.

It is fundamental to the ensuing argument that the layers of visual symbolism and emotional value imbued in the making, wearing and seeing of medieval dress is brought to the fore. Medieval people could implicitly and immediately 'read~~'~~' a contemporary's outfit for social, personal and economic qualities which would allow them to situate each other within the strict social hierarchy. This desire to read and be read within the sartorial-social system meant that there was an ever-increasing desire for novelty and a desire to mark oneself out from others. Anxieties around accentuated sexuality or disguised social climbers make evident the increasingly complex and at times ambiguous symbolism of dress, complicating its readability. This was a period of enormous sartorial shift which began to allow for even greater self-design as the centuries wore on. Clothing was intimately linked

[0] Certainly by the early modern period, black particularly had come to be associated with funerals; Dolly MacKinnon, 'Charitable Bodies: Clothing as Charity in Early-Modern Rural England', in *Practices of Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols Publisher, 2008), 235-259, p.249.

with both the body and the spirit, making it an important stage on which the person's self-fashioning could take place.



Figure ~~35~~ 30 Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy (1446-1503) by an anonymous painter, housed at the Louvre, Paris and in the public domain. She wears a steeple hennin with a fine linen veil hanging from it. The V-shaped opening of the

Burgundian gown and the partlet beneath it have widened immensely which allowed for the lacing to become a key decorative element with a small flower acting to anchor the lace to her garment and is the forerunner of the distinctively Tudor square neckline. Her lengthy sleeves have been folded back to reveal the ermine fur which lines it and which recalls her royal heritage.



Figure 36 Anne de Beauchamp, Countess of Warwick (1426-1492), from the Rous Roll, *BL Add MS 48976, c.1483-85.*

Conclusions

So often, historical research focuses on the look and style of a garment or the methods and techniques used to create it. Here, we have examined the materiality of and the emotional responses to wearing medieval clothing. We have seen how clothing might be uncomfortable and restrictive or soft and comfortable and how the physical sensations of medieval clothing impacted psychological welfare and emotions about one's body and one's dress, as some pieces could be confidence boosting and others could harm it. However, a medieval person was aware of the need to be cautious that their confidence in their clothing and the pride of looking one's best did not spill over into pridefulness which could endanger one's soul.

Medieval people were bombarded by ideologies, criticisms and wider dogma on the negative impact adhering to fashion could have on one's soul. Yet the persistence of these criticisms over the centuries reflects their ineffectiveness as the personal benefits of adopting fashions overcame the threats of spiritual degradation.

This chapter has used a variety of sources to explore the ways clothing, as a potent carrier of cultural symbols and social signifiers, participated in the visual language of medieval England and was used to construct and perform identities. I have shown how clothing was frequently imbued with the emotions and memories of the wearer, heightening the meaning and value of one's dress. As markers of identity, clothing was 'read' and interpreted in various ways by contemporaries and its potential meanings were heavily influenced by the cultural imagination of medieval England. Because of its value as a method of identity formation, clothing was criticised and condemned by religious and civic authorities on the grounds that it could be used to hide or misrepresent the wearer's station in life or be used to accentuate gendered and sexualised aspects of the wearer's body which, it was felt, would encourage sinning and lead to societal decay. Thus, the responsibility of maintaining a moral, hierarchical society lay quite literally on the shoulders of medieval men and women. The intense emotional value that one's clothing held indicates that we should

analyse it all the more thoroughly when it is mentioned in legal cases, as it had profound meaning for its wearers and their peers.

This chapter has laid out the evolution of dress over 300 years which saw momentous shifts in technologies, sartorial influences and the ways ~~individualism~~ identity and personality could be expressed through dress. In the ensuing chapters, the knowledge that clothes could be read for social and moral meaning forms the methodological basis for interpreting the relationship between dress, safety and danger in a variety of situations.

Chapter Two: Dangerous Dressing

On 7th February 1430, John Carpenter, a husbandman and husband of a mere 15 days, commanded his 16-year-old bride, Isabel,[0] to ready herself to travel with him on pilgrimage later that day. Importantly, he 'made to arraye hir in hir best arraie'.[0] Together, they then travelled north from their home in the village of Birdham on the West Sussex coast to the outskirts of the village of Stoughton. The distance was around 10 miles and would have taken the newly-weds around three and a half to four hours on foot. There, in the ancient yew forest near Stoughton and far from home, John beat Isabel so hard on the head 'that the brayne [brain] wende out'. He then proceeded to stab his new bride with his knife and 'yaf [gave] hir many other dedly woundes'.[0] Carpenter's next actions point towards his motive as he 'streped hir naked oute of hir clothes'' and cut her stomach open 'from the brest doune, toke hir bowels oute of hir body and loked if she wer with child'. It seems, therefore, that Carpenter was suspicious of his young wife's fidelity and felt justified in killing her and opening up her body in search of his answer.[0] While the petition presented to parliament three years later in 1433 does not mention who first found her body, or who apprehended Carpenter after he committed the deed, we know that he was outlawed and later arrested for the act. As

[0] Where possible, the women will be referred to by their first names and their assailants, rapists and murderers will be subsequently referred to simply by their surname. This is to ensure the foregrounding of the women in this research, as too often, the men's names have been recorded while women's names have been omitted, ignored or hidden behind their father's or husband's name. For example, in more recent scholarship, John Bellamy referred to the murderer John Carpenter by name but his wife and victim, Isabel, was referred to simply as 'his wife'. It seems inappropriate to record the names of the perpetrator but leave the victims or victim/survivors anonymous; *The Law of Treason in England in the Later Middle Ages*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p.125.

[0] TNA SC 8/26/1281. All subsequent quotes from this case come from this document. Isabel's case is printed in *An Anthology of Chancery English*, eds., ed. John H. Fisher, Malcolm Richardson and Jane L. Fisher, (Knoxville, TS: The University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 244-245, and *Rotuli Paliamentorum: ut et petiones, et placita in Parliamento temporo Edwari R. I [ad finem Henrici VII]* (London: n.d., 1767-77), 4:447.

[0] The verb used here, 'to give', is particularly unpleasant especially in the context of the murderer and victim's recent nuptials and any marital or courtship gifts that might have been exchanged.

[0] For further discourse on the perceived secrets of the female body and the association of women with deceit and concealment of pregnancies, see Monica Green, 'From "Diseases of Women" to "Secrets of Women": The Transformation of Gynecological Literature in the Later Middle Ages', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol.30, no.1 (2000), 5-40, especially pp.14-17 and Joan Cadden, *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Christopher Cannon has stated, 'the nature and ambit of the female lives court rolls describe begin in a woman's hurt'.[0] This chapter examines a number of cases ~~the ways~~ in which medieval English women were confronted by real, perceived or threatened violence and explores how women's dress functioned within the legal system's and wider society's attitude to gender violence.[0] Through analysis of the dress of female murder victims, the way victim/survivors of sexual assault talked about their own clothes in their legal trials~~,~~ and the ways in which literary gender violence and female characters~~'~~' clothing were perceived and understood, this chapter will ~~within the broader cultural imagination of the period particularly in the genre of pastourelles and other popular literature. Building on examination of dress within the cultural imagination, this chapter wil~~interrogate the lived and embodied experiences of medieval women. It will also demonstrate that women used dress as a way of asserting their own agency in the courtroom. Furthermore, it will~~ also~~ explore the treatment of the dress of murdered women and why women who were raped were also frequently robbed of items of clothing. Ultimately, this chapter foregrounds medieval women's experiences of violence and the connections between this violence and what they were wearing.

For late medieval England, misogynist attitudes were quite ingrained in mainstream society. It was simply understood ~~as fact~~ that women were inferior to men biologically, physically, and intellectually, and furthermore, that women's submission to men 'paralleled the submission of all mankind to God', meaning that the specific brand of late medieval

[0] Christopher Cannon, '~~"~~The Rights of Medieval English Women: Crime and the Issue of Representation~~' in~~', in *Medieval Crime and Social Control*~~, eds., Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace, (~~, ed. Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p.156.

[0] This chapter focuses on six legal cases with two in each category due to the amount of information in each record which allows for ample analysis. Many other cases exist in the legal records with differing levels of details. For example, eyre records are frustratingly brief and formulaic in style and so, despite there being numerous cases of rape, assault and theft, very little can be gleaned from them. Likely many instances of gender violence would have happened in secret or the privacy of the home or would have been dealt with within the family or community, meaning many cases would never have made it to court.

misogyny was underpinned and reinforced by religious dogma.[0] This thesis will use the twentieth century feminist and poet, Adrienne Rich's definition of the patriarchy as being a 'familial-social, ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education and the division of labour -, determine which part women shall or shall not play and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male'.[0] It should be noted that men are not the only enforcers and beneficiaries of patriarchy. Medieval women, too, profited from and worked within the patriarchy to the detriment of other women, as will be discussed later in Chapter Five. Despite this caveat, it is the phrase 'by force' in', in Rich's definition, which is of particular interest here.

The phrase, sexual 'script', was coined in 1973 by John Gagnon and William Simon in *Sexual Conduct: The Social Sources of Human Sexuality* to describe a socially accepted set of actions, speech and codes which are generally understood to relate to sexual intercourse.[0] Applying this framework to our period enables us to study medieval sexual behaviour through a sociological lens and in doing so, provide a plethora of quantitative and extremely useful terminologies. It is my conviction that this theory can be sensitively applied to the Middle English media encountered by medieval men and women from the thirteenth- to sixteenth-centuries. In a society in which violence, whether physical or sexual, was a reality of everyday life, it also made its way into secular and religious literature of the period, from rape by deceit in Chaucer's 'The Reeve's Tale' ' to sexual assaults in the pastourelles.[0] In this

[0] Judith Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras, ''Women, Gender, and Medieval Historians' in', in *The Oxford Handbook of Women & Gender in Medieval Europe*, eds. Bennett and Karras, (, ed. Judith Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.5.
[0] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*, ((New York: Norton, 1976), p.57 and cited by Judith Bennett in *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism*, ((Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p.55.
[0] John Gagnon and William Simon, *Sexual Conduct: The Social Sources of Human Sexuality*, ((London: Hutchinson & Co., 1973), p.23.
[0] Rachel Moss, 'Chaucer's Funny Rape: Addressing a Taboo in Medieval Studies', https://rachelemoss.com/2014/09/11/chaucers-funny-rape-addressing-a-taboo-in-medieval-studies/ [accessed 7th May 2024].

way, it may be a useful tool in understanding the 'relationship between representations of violence and realities' in', in late medieval England.[0] The term has been used in recent research into the frequency of sexual violence in pornography and its effect on women and men in twentieth- and twenty-first-century society, with Fiona Vera-Gray *et al*'s recent work highlighting the prevalence of sexually violent pornographic videos on popular pornographic sites.[0] Their research demonstrates how repeated exposure to sexual violence through this medium normalises it by creating a 'sexual script'-' from which viewers can learn and enact it in their own interactions with consensual partners or non-consensual victim-survivors. Equally, sexual scripts based on heterosexual interactions might inculcate in women the behaviour to act submissively and to tolerate painful experiences or exploitation. Within medieval literature, the motif of rape had numerous functions, which Marjorie Curry Woods succinctly argues have far more ancient origins and which amount to a more nuanced, multifaceted array of potential sexual scripts.[0]

This chapter will analyse various forms of gender violence and the roles clothing played within them in legal cases relating to murder, assault and kidnap as well as the theft of clothing from the victims/survivors of rape. It will examine broadly the presence and purpose of sexual and gender violence in the contemporary popular literature, including where, in the poetry genre of *pastourelles*, clothing is used as a lure to entice or trap women into a scenario for sexual assault to occur.

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[0] Fiona Vera-Gray-, Clare McGlynn, Ibad Kureshi and Kate Butterby, 'Sexual Violence as a Sexual Script in Mainstream Online Pornography', *The British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 61, no. 5 (2021), 1243-1260, *et al.,* p.1245. See also Carissa Harris'-' *Obscene Pedagogies: Transgressive Talk and Sexual Education in Late Medieval Britain*,-((Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021) and Marjorie Curry Woods'-' *Weeping for Dido: The Classics in the Medieval Classroom*,-((Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019) as both analyse the ways that sex, gender and violence were taught to girls and boys in the Middle Ages.

[0] Fiona Vera-Gray *et al*, -, Clare McGlynn, Ibad Kureshi and Kate Butterby, -'Sexual Vviolence as a Ssexual Sscript', t in mainstream online pornography', *The British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 61, no. 5, (2021), 1243-1260, p.1245.

[0] See Marjorie Curry Woods, 'Rape and the Ppedagogic Rrhetoric of Ssexual Vviolence' in', in *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages*, ed. Rite Copeland,-((Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 56-86.

Late Medieval Patriarchy and Gender Violence

The model of patriarchy specific to medieval England was able to check off each of Rich's criteria: within the nuclear family, the father/husband had ultimate control over the wife and children, servants, domestic finances and inheritance, while if the wife brought any properties, land or goods of her own to the marriage, they were incorporated into the husband's ownership, with few exceptions. Under medieval and early modern law, women suffered what Tim Stretton has termed 'legal disabilities'.[0] Due to the law of *coverture*, a wife's 'legal entity~~'~~' was expunged and she was precluded from signing contracts and was unable to defend herself in court.[0] Women were also disallowed from acting as jury members, judges or legal clerks, leaving them to navigate a legal system inhabited and dominated by men who might be more likely to think charitably on a male defendant's actions and more likely to believe a woman was lying. A medieval woman was prevented from suing others under her own name with the exception of suing her rapist or her husband's murderer.[0] Due to *primogeniture*, sons benefited from grander financial or property inheritance while daughters might receive a few choice belongings from the parents as a keepsake under the expectation that a daughter's husband wouldho provide for her and so she did not require independent wealth. Indeed, everything from the home she lived in, to the cooking utensils she used to the clothes on her back were the property of her husband, as was her body beneath them. This attitude might explain why in numerous cases of a wife's abduction, divorce or desertion, the

[0] Tim Stretton, *Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.24. Stretton has borrowed from William Blackstone's phrase, '…the disabilities which the wife lies under, are for the most part intended for her benefit and protection…~~'~~' which can be found in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (London, 1765), vol. 1, p.433.

[0] Ibid, p.22. For further discourse on the law of coverture, see Sarah M. Butler, 'Discourse on the Nature of Coverture in the Later Medieval Courtroom', in Tim Stretton and Krista J. Kesselring, ed. *Married Women and the Law: Coverture in England and the Common Law World (*Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 24-244 and Teresa Phipps, 'Coverture and the Marital Partnership in Late Medieval Nottingham: Women's Litigation at the Borough Court, ca.1380-ca.1500', *Journal of British Studies*, vol, 58, no. 4 (2019), 768-786.

[0] For further examination of a medieval woman's legal rights, see Christopher Cannon, ~~'~~'The Rights of Medieval English Women: Crime and the Issue of Representation~~' in~~', in *Medieval Crime and Social Control*~~, eds.,~~ ~~Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace, (~~, ed. Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 156-185.

husband sued for theft of the clothes the wife was wearing at the time of her kidnap or escape. One such case is that of John Wyatt and Alice, whose marriage was dissolved due to his impotence in 1388. While waiting for the divorce to be finalised, Alice lived with her uncle, Henry. Wyatt then sued Henry for the theft of the clothing ~~in~~ which Alice had worn to her family member's house, which included 'the aforesaid linen and woollen cloth and kerchiefs [that] were the clothes of the body of the aforesaid Alice which~~en~~ she then had on her, and the ring of which the same John complains was then on the finger of the aforesaid Alice'.[0] One might wonder if Wyatt's feelings of emasculation at the ending of his marriage due to his own physical issues might have spurred him to sue his former in-laws and attempt to have Alice's clothes legally removed from her. It is unclear whether Wyatt was successful in suing his former in-laws. This case demonstrates a pervasive attitude that a woman's body, and the clothes on it, belonged, ultimately, to her husband, and that she owned nothing of her own. Under English common and canon law, a widow could expect to be entitled to paraphernalia which included clothing and dress accessories associated with her, and which a husband would have mentioned in his will. However, this was ultimately up to the discretion of the husband who could deny a wife the clothes, jewellery or shoes she had worn during the marriage, as well as household items.[0] Thus, in legally demanding the return of Alice's clothes, Wyatt may have been attempting to legally and socially withdraw her status as wife from her.

~~Medieval English patriarchy~~Misogynist attitudes towards women and their appropriate place in society were~~as~~ maintained and upheld by both men and women enacting and reenforcing gender inequalities through numerous practices, traditions and language which taught subsequent generations that women's status was beneath that of men. Rituals

[0] TNA, KB 27/509, m.26 and transcribed in *Select Cases of Trespass from the King's Courts, 1307-1399*, ed. Morris Arnold, vol. 1~~, ((~~London: Selden Society, 1985), p.87.

[0] Anna Boeles Rowland's unpublished PhD thesis usefully covers the topic of paraphernalia that appears in the London Consistory courts, 'Material Mnemonics and Social Relationships in the Diocese of London, 1467-1524' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2019), pp.201-203.

such as the churching of women 40 days after childbirth which demonstrated the belief in women's bodily uncleanliness post-delivery – indeed, the event was called the day of purification. It conveyed the attitude that women's bodies were inherently fallible, unclean and inferior, having borrowed pseudo-medical understandings from Classical and Ancient Greek scholars, namely Hippocrates, Galen and Aristotle. Medieval scholars drew from these texts and amalgamated them with Christian~~ine~~ doctrine to suit their needs. Thomas Aquinas (c.1225-1274) agreed with Aristotle in identifying women as ~~'~~ 'defective and misbegotten'.[0] From the cradle, men and women were treated very differently, firstly with the education of girls and boys, both in the way that girls were excluded from higher academic education (as opposed to practical or vocational education such as apprenticeships which were permissible) and in the way that very different gendered expectations were taught informally to children through conduct poems such as *How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter* and the *Book of the Knight of the Tower*. Popular texts such as these impressed on young women the behaviours and traits expected of them, such as being 'both meek and myld~~'~~' ~~i~~In the face of a husband's anger as the Good Wife advises her daughter, and the reputational, spiritual and social repercussions on women should ~~their~~ they fail to live up to them was clear.[0] Indeed, this advice that women face fury with passivity could have been intended as a way to de-escalate the wrath of an angry or violent husband and in so doing, protect the wife from harm. As discussed in Chapter One, conduct texts frequently advised against immodest or showy dress for both girls and boys but it is especially girls~~'~~' behaviour and appearance which was most under scrutiny as it was they who bore the brunt of carrying the familial reputation through their sexual continence, with adherence to rules on modest dress being a key signifier.

[0] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part 1, Questions 92, Article 1. For an extensive discussion on bodily difference, see Monica H. Green, '~~:~~Bodily Essences: Bodies as Categories of Difference~~' in~~', in ~~*A Cultural History of the Human Body, Vol. 2: In the Medieval Age*~~, ed., Linda Kalof, ~~(~~, ed. Linda Kalof (New York City: Bloomsbury, 2010), 141-162.

[0] 'How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter', *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular English Verse*, ed. George Shuffleton~~, ((~~Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008), line 20. See Felicity Riddy, 'Mother Knows Best: Reading Social Change in a Courtesy Text', *Speculum*, vol. 7, no. 1~~, ((~~1996), 66-86.

Women's bodies had~~ve~~ long been a platform on which patriarchal ideas of expected female traits, such as modesty, passivity and chastity, have been played out, and clothes were the method through which such traits were immediately displayed. Many people in medieval England, from clerics and fathers to husbands and women themselves were deeply concerned with the visibility of women's bodies and attempted to control women's bodies by encouraging or condemning styles of dress. Through this attempt of sartorial~~ly~~ control, there was greater oversight of women's sexuality and their reproductive autonomy as 'control over wives'~~–~~' and daughters'~~–~~' sexuality ~~[~~was~~became]~~ an integral aspect of masculine identity and male honour'~~'~~.[0] This was due to the way material and economic wealth, as well as material goods and property, were passed down through the male line, as a girl would grow up to marry into another family, contributing to and partaking of their familial wealth rather than her natal family's and producing heirs who would inherit her husband's property. Medieval men wanted to ensure that their property and wealth could be passed on to children who were biologically related to them, emphasising the importance of family bloodlines through restriction on the behaviour and clothing of female bodies.

Control of female physicality was achieved through encouraging or enforcing a modest style of dress for women in order to conform to the medieval idea of the ideal woman, upheld by the Christian model of the Virgin Mary and promulgated by social attitudes to women's dress, as covered in greater detail in Chapter One. To be thought of as respectable and "good", a medieval woman's body was to be covered under long kirtles, arms to be hidden beneath wrist-length sleeves and hair, a symbol of female beauty and sexuality, was to be contained under veils and hoods once a woman had married. A medieval woman's well-covered body symbolised not only her piety but also her controlled sexuality, her obedience

[0] Kim Phillips, *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England, 1270-1450*~~, (~~ (Manchester: Manchester University, 2003), p.146. See also Kim Phillips'~~–~~' more recent work on sexual reputation: 'The Breasts of Virgins: Sexual Reputation and Young Women's Bodies in Medieval Culture and Society', *Cultural and Social History*, vol. 15, no.1~~, (~~ (2018), 1–19.

to her husband or father whose reputations depended on her sexual continence, and therefore security that any offspring were undoubtedly the husband's.

Although it was implicitly expected that women would unquestionably conform to the medieval patriarchal requirements of them, it was also understood that should a woman deviate from the strict social script or disobey a male relative, the punishments were severe and could take the form of private or public violence. In this way, the ever-present threat of violence underpinned the patriarchal society of medieval England. If the subjugation of women, as R. Howard Bloch as argued, is the 'ultimate aim~~'~~' of misogyny, then violence, whether real, perceived or threatened has been its most potent tool, a last resort to counter rebellious, deviant or non-compliant behaviour in women.[0] Women might face the reality of physical violence at the hands of their fathers and then later physical and sexual violence by their husbands, with few repercussions for the perpetrators. Violence might also come at the hands of strangers as will be shown shortly, although perpetrators of physical or sexual violence against women could expect to receive harsher punishments than husbands, who society viewed had a right to rape or chastise a woman. Indeed, Kathryn Gradval in her analysis of sexual violence in medieval France, has argued that rape was part of a medieval woman's 'daily reality'.[0] While it is clear from even the eyre court records that rape was common, I would not suggest that it was a daily reality though certainly the threat of it, hinted at in literature, plays and conduct books, was. Many medieval women faced the threat of physical and sexual violence from within the home as much as outside.[0]

[0] R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval ~~M~~misogyny and the ~~I~~invention of Western ~~R~~romantic ~~L~~love*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p.6.

[0] Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), p.18.

[0] With regard to murder across genders, Barbara Hanawalt has shown that fatal violence occurred in public and private, rural and urban spaces with varying intensity. See Hanawalt, '~~"~~Violent Death in Fourteenth- and Early Fifteenth-Century England'~~,"~~ *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 18, no. 3~~,~~ ~~(~~ (1976), 297–320, especially pp.318-320 for statistics on motives, weapons, locations and times of murders in Northampton, London and Oxford.

A foundational tool of patriarchal societies is the use and threat of sexual violence by men to intimidate women into submission. To protect one's female relatives from the abuses of other men, fathers and husbands attempted to control the behaviour and, crucially, dress of wives, sisters and mothers. This guise of protection by men from *other* men has been articulated further by Judith Bennet, who has written eloquently that it is various complex 'patriarchal ideologies and realities that have assured women that there is safety in protected subordination and danger in vulnerable freedom'.[0] This threat of sexual violence was, and continues to be, a very effective tool in encouraging acquiescence to the *status quo* as sexual violence not only threatens a woman's physical safety and ignores her bodily autonomy but it also completely dehumanises her.

An important side effect of rape which cannot be ignored is the risk of conceiving a child with the perpetrator. Not only did an unintended pregnancy incur social stigma and damage marital prospects for unmarried women, but it forced medieval women to carry their rapist's child who will unintentionally have acted as a reminder of an exceptionally traumatic experience. Unfortunately, when a victim/survivor of rape conceived a child, the courts, and likely wider society, would have taken the view that the rape had been consensual as medieval scientific thought held that both men and women needed to orgasm in order to ejaculate seed for the conception of a child, and thus, if a woman conceived then her body at least had consented.[0] Furthermore, medieval women who found themselves pregnant after consensual or non-consensual sex had few recourses to terminate their pregnancy should they have wished to.[0]

[0] Judith Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism*, ((Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p.59.
[0] See Elise Bennett Histed, '"Medieval Rape: A Conceivable Defence?'" *Cambridge Law Journal*, vol. 63, no.3 (2004), 743–769, pp.750-751, n.25.
[0] See Sara Butler, 'Abortion Medieval Style? Assaults on Pregnant Women in Later Medieval England', *Women's Studies*, (2011), vol. 40, no. 6, (2011), 778-799.

The gendered sexual expectations for medieval men were vastly different from those of women as the view was widespread that women were to be physically and sexually conquered and their virginities were to be won with men's 'sexual domination of women [being] proof of their ability to rule', confirming their position in society as the more aggressive, conquering gender.[0] The widespread tolerance of sexual violence in its many forms against women during the period is further demonstrated in a number of legal records in which the rapists depend on or are assisted by male, and sometimes female, friends.[0] A particular case is especially heinous and demonstrates the length to which some men went to conceal a rape committed by their friend as Alicia was kidnapped on her way to pray in the local monastery in 1234. She was kidnapped by Robert le Poitevin and 'his force', taken to Poitevin's house and raped.[0] During her assault, a friend of her attacker's 'bound her hair with his hands'–' making escape impossible while other friends sang loudly so that 'her cry could not be heard because of their song'.[0] Not only had Alicia been kidnapped and raped, she had been raped within earshot of a group of men who chose not to stop it and who actively prevented her from raising the hue and cry by drowning her voice and hiding her rape, allowing it to go unstopped.

While naturally, there would have been many men horrified at the rapes and sexual assaults enacted against women, examples such as Alicia's demonstrates the tolerance and acceptability of sexual violence within communities of men. It is possible that members of Poitevin's entourage were disgusted by his behaviour but were too cowardly to do anything. However, they were also living in a society where sexual assaults in secular or religious

[0] Shannon McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London*, ((Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p.14.
[0] There are, of course, cases in which women are also complicit in and benefit from the rape of other women such as one from in 1385 when Margaret was locked in a room by a sex worker, Matilda Whetewell, in order to be raped by Adam Matte, TNA KB 9/167, m.8. This case is covered by Wendy Turner in 'The Leper and the Prostitute: Forensic Examination of Rape in Medieval England' in', in *Trauma in Medieval Society*, eds., Wendy J. Turner and Christina Lee, (, ed. Wendy Turner and Christina Lee (Boston: Brill, 2018), 122-147.
[0] *The 1235 Surrey Eyre*, vol. I, ed. C.A.F. Meekings, ((Guildford: Surrey Record Society, 1979), p.433.
[0] The 1235 Surrey EyreIbid, p.433.

popular culture could be intended to amuse, shock or titillate an audience and where alleged rapists brought before a court of law were more likely to be found not guilty. In any case, they chose not to stop Alicia from being raped.

Popular Culture and Sexual Violence

Sexual assaults and various forms of gender violence appear frequently in medieval England's popular literature, both secular and religious, with often close attention paid to the clothing of the victim/survivor. For medieval authors, who were with very few exceptions male, physical and sexual violence were useful motifs to amuse, titillate or shock an audience, with 'the act or threat of rape [being] the narrative hub around which knightly action rotates'.[0] Audiences of mixed genders were frequently encouraged to view the violent act from the rapist's point of view, such as Chaucer's fictional narrator, the Wife of Bath, who describes the rape of an unnamed woman by one of King Arthur's knights who 'maugree hir heed / By verray force, he rafte hire maydenhed'.[0] This event is viewed by many scholars as being 'little more than a plot device' and although the knight's punishment is set by King Arthur's queen, who orders him on a year-long quest to truly understand what women want, the focus of the tale is on his redemption rather than the impact it had on the life of the unnamed woman.[0] As Harris has noted, Chaucer encourages his audience to ignore the woman's 'fear or pain' by gliding over her response and instead the rape is the catalyst from which the subsequent 'rehabilitation of the rapist' stems.[0] Despite this lack of focus on the emotions of the characters who are assaulted, there were no doubt members of Chaucer's

[0] Amy Vines, 'Invisible Woman: Rape as a Chivalric Necessity in Medieval Romance' in', in *Sexual Culture in the Literature of Medieval Britain*, ((Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2014), p.161.
[0] 'Against her will, by force, took her virginity', Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson, ((Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), ll.887-888, p.118. There is an interesting linguistic link here between 'heed' meaning 'will' and 'maydenhed' meaning 'virginity'.
[0] William H. Smith, 'Rape, Identity, and Redemption: Teaching "Sir Gowther" in the Community College Classroom', in *Teaching Rape in the Medieval Literature Classroom: Approaches to Difficult Texts*, ed. Alison Gulley (Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), p.205.
[0] Carissa Harris, 'Rape Narratives, Courtly Critique, and the Pedagogy of Sexual Negotiation in the Middle English Pastourelle', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol. 46, no. 2, ((2016), 263-287, p.263.

audience who empathised acutely with the characters'' treatment. Sexual assaults feature elsewhere in Chaucer's work, as in *The Reeve's Tale* in which a young woman, Malyne, and her mother are raped in a farcical bed-hopping scene.[0] The two rapist lodgers are indifferent to the emotions of their victims and the insinuation is clear that Malyne enjoyed the rape as firstly, she didn't cry out and secondly, she offered bread to her assailant after the attack. This narrative reinforces medieval ideas around women's ready sexual appetites and minimises the trauma a real woman might feel after such an incident. Christine Rose has argued that the numerous rapes and episodes of gender violence in Chaucer's work 'figure for agendas other than sexual' in', including 'homosocial interactions'.[0] This framework suggests female bodies are, once again, relegated to props through which male relationships are enacted. Applying this to *The Reeve's Tale*, it could be argued that Chaucer used the, albeit fictional, assault on the bodies of Malyne and her mother as avenues through which their male relative's reputation can be assaulted in revenge by other men.

This was also a society in which certain women, namely peasant women or those lower down the social scale, were thought to be the ideal target of sexual exploitation, as laid out in Andreas Capellanus's treatise, *De amore* (c.1189) which advised that 'if you should, by some chance, happen to fall in love with some of their [peasant] women, be careful to puff them up with lots of praise and then, when you find a convenient place, do not hesitate to take what you seek and embrace them by force'.[0] Here we have an example of an author, perhaps even a cleric, condoning the rape of women of little means or social power. This text was aimed at elite men and it would be impossible to gauge how many of Capellanus'' readers put the advice into practice.

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[0] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson, ((Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. ??
[0] Christine Rose, ''Reading Chaucer Reading Rape'', *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, eds., ed. Elizabeth Robertson and Christine Rose, ((United States: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p.35.
[0] Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans., John Jay Parry, ((New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p.150.

Medieval women, on the other hand, were expected to behave antithetically to men in sexual scenarios. Rather than being the sexual victors, women were taught and expected to be passive participants even if the sex itself was consensual and desired. This meant that when women did reject sexual advances, men could misinterpret - wilfully or otherwise - the woman's response, and rape her under the impression that she was refusing only to keep up the impression of conforming to medieval ideals of a meek, passive woman to whom sex had to be done. This is in spite of the medieval belief in a woman's 'stronger sexual appetite'.[0] This view stemmed from Ancient Greek beliefs about female libidos which meant that a woman's rejection became a 'cultural requirement~~' in~~', in medieval England.[0]

Similarly, in *Sir Gowther*, a romance from the mid-fifteenth century, the titular character is himself a product of rape-by-deceit when his mother is approached by a demon in the guise of her husband who initiates sex with her. Sir Gowther goes on to live a violent, murderous early life in which he rapes a prioress and her nuns before burning them alive in their nunnery.[0] However this sacrilegious act of violence leads to him beginning a quest for redemption and salvation which ultimately sees him become a pious man and benevolent king.

While it is clear from these texts that medieval audiences understood rape to be a morally deplorable act which prompted the knight to redeem himself, the audience's interpretation and reaction would be conflicting and complex. In the tale of *Sir Gowther*, the rapist is also the hero and the woman must be raped in order for the man to better himself morally and spiritually and fulfil his destiny. This is in no way to say that real rapists felt that they were compelled to rape in order for them to go on a penitential quest to better

[0] Judith Bennett, 'Ventriloquisms: When Maidens Speak in English Songs, c.1300-1500~~'~~' in *Medieval Women's Song: Cross-Cultural Approaches*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), p.192.
[0] Carissa Harris, *Obscene Pedagogies: Transgressive Talk and Sexual Education in Late Medieval Britain*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), p.118.
[0] *The Middle English Breton Lays*, ~~eds.,~~ ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), ll.181-192.

themselves, but it does suggest an atmosphere in which a rapist's s' actions might be more readily excused while the voice and experience of the victim/survivor was more easily overlooked.

While many texts paid little attention to the emotional response of the narrative's victim/survivor, John Gower's popular text from 1390, *Confessio Amantis*, describes in detail the emotional turmoil of Lucretia after the rape by Tarquin, a widely known Roman tale which had been rewritten most famously by Livy.[0] Gower describes Lucretia as 'the wofulleste upon this molde, / Which wepte as sche to water scholde…Their sihe hire clothes al disguised, / An hou sche hath hirself despised…'[0] Although the author has described the emotions he imagines a (fictional) woman might feel at being raped, the anguish and pain seems due to the offense it will cause her husband and father rather than the pain and disrespect it would cause her. In fact, Gower has Lucretia dress in black and neglect her once well-combed hair to emphasise her grief before Lucretia arranges her clothes to preserve her chastity in death: 'hire clothes with hire hand sche rihte, / That no man dounward fro the kne / Scholde eny thing of hir se'.[0] Lucretia's modesty in life is demonstrated through her self-styled presentation of her clothes in death. The extent to which Lucretia's distress is described allows audience members to interpret her anguish in a way that might be relevant to them, even providing a sense of comfort or solidarity with Lucretia's situation.

One subgenre of popular medieval literature in which the conflicting gendered attitudes to consensual and non-consensual sex meet is the pastourelle, a lyrical dialogue between a well-off man, usually a knight or a clerk, and a peasant girl or shepherdess in a

[0] Titus Livy, *The History of Rome*, Book 1, ed. Benjamin Oliver Foster, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989) chapter 57-60.
[0] John Gower, *Confession Amantis*, vol.3, ed., ed. Russell A. Peck, trans., Andrew Galloway, ((Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), 7:5017-5018, 5021-5022.
[0] John Gower, *Confession Amantis*, 7.5071-73 and in Jennifer Garrison's 'Transforming Community: Women's Rape Narratives and Gower's *Confession Amantis*', *Medieval Feminist Forum: Journal of Gender and Sexuality*, vol. 57, no. 1, ((2021), 121-141, p.134.

rural, pastoral or woodland setting.[0] Originating with ~~in~~ troubadours of the south of France in the eleventh century, pastourelles ~~before gaining~~became popular in the courts of ~~popularity in courtly settings in~~ northern France. The poems crossed the English Channel ~~and being transported in medieval minds across~~ to the British Isles in the late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century, where they evolved to suit English tastes. ~~English pastourelles had mutated.~~ Formerly concerned with male sexual aggression, the young woman's beauty and descriptions of the pastoral setting, in Middle English the texts became focused on a more equally matched dialogue between the two with the maid verbally resisting the sinister attentions of the knight, despite the difference in social status. The maid is sometimes able to successfully rebuff and even mock the male character's attempts at seducing her, and on other occasions, the sorrowful, pedagogic warnings of the raped woman are lamented directly to the audience.[0]

Recent scholarship has focused on a more nuanced, polysemous interpretation of these poems, seeing them as educational aids intended for female audiences using fictional characters and scenarios to informally teach women how to avoid sexual assault and protect themselves from unwanted male advances.[0] Despite this genre having been referred to as 'lovers'' dialogues', Carissa Harris' more recent labelling of them as an example of 'survivor speech' seems not only more accurate but also more understanding of the layers of complexity that a medieval audience may have implicitly understood and appreciated.[0] The

[0] While forests and woodland feature in popular literature in a variety of ways, from a romantic location in which lovers might meet and wander, to magical spaces for otherworldly encounters, forests are also what Corinne Saunders has called the 'archetypal locus of violence' as they represent a liminal, isolated space in which violence can take place unobserved, outside of the familiarity of a town; *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England*, (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), p.205.

[0] Carissa Harris' extensive body of work on the pastourelles are resistance literature is highly informative: 'Pastourelle Fictionalities', *New Literary History*, vol. 51, no. 1, (2020), 239-242 and 'Rape Narratives, Courtly Critique, and the Pedagogy of Sexual Negotiation in the Middle English Pastourelle', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol.46, no.2, (2016), 263-287. See also Helen Cooper, *Pastoral: Medieval into Renaissance*, (United Kingdom: Redwood Burn Ltd, 1977).

[0] The first work to argue for this was Katherine Gravdal's essay on French pastourelles, 'Camouflaging Rape: The Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in the Medieval Pastourelle', *Romantic Review*, vol. 76, no. 4, (1985), 361-373.

[0] *Middle English Debate Poetry: A Critical Anthology*, eds. John W. Conlee, (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 1991), p.x. Conlee describes this genre as 'lovers' dialogues' with no mention at all of the non-consensual sex

pastourelles form a highly intriguing and nuanced genre which at once draws from the cultural imagination by the mimicking of legal precedents ~~in *Through a forest,*~~ and also~~s well as~~ reinforces it by forming a collection of popular folk poems which speak to and against sexual violence in a medium that was not exclusive to the learned or elite.

I~~The~~n the Middle English pastourelle, *Throughe a forest as I can ryde*, which dates from around 1425,~~poems'~~ the focus on the warring dialogue between the two opposing characters could even be said to present a possible 'sexual script~~'~~' from which real medieval women might draw when faced with a sexually aggressive man attempting to persuade them into a sexual encounter through empty promises and hollow gifts.[0] The final lines of the pastourelle, *Throughe a forest as I can ryde*, take the form of d~~D~~irect ~~, didactic~~ speech ~~to an audience is found in the Middle English pastourelle, *Throughe a forest as I can ryde*, dating from around 1425, in which~~ the fictional maid~~,~~ ~~who~~ has herself just been raped~~,~~ to the audience. She ~~,~~ advises that 'all medons be ware, be rewe, / And lett no man downe ye throwe / For and yow doo ye wyll ytt rewe / For then the pye wyll pecke yowe'.[0] The wording supposes many in the audience were women and even points towards a key purpose of the poem being to educate as 'peer pedagogy' and advise women as they navigated a world in which sexual violence was a common threat.[0] In this way, this pastourelle could be seen to be engaging in a form of resistance to sexual violence by acknowledging what was done to her, and allowing the audience to find solidarity in that.

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often described in them, preferring instead to focus on the female characters who send the men away rejected, who accept marriage offers before 'agreeing to submit~~'~~' to male character, and the occasions where the peasant woman 'capitulates, agreeing to fulfil his desires there and then', p.xxxiv. See also Ca~~r~~riss~~a~~ Harris, 'Rape Narratives', p.267.

[0] 'Sexual script~~'~~' theory and gift giving within courtship are discussed at length in Chapter Five. ~~'~~Throughe a forest as I can ryde', *The Welles Anthology: MS. Rawlinson C.813: A Critical Edition*, eds. Sharon L. Jansen and Kathleen H. Jordan (Binghampton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1991), pp.216-9, ll. 57-58. This pastourelle is also contained in British Library, MS Harley 2253, f.66v-67r.

[0] ~~'Throughe a forest as I can ryde', *The Welles Anthology: MS. Rawlinson C.813: A Critical Edition*, eds. Sharon L. Jansen and Kathleen H. Jordan, (Binghampton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1991), pp.216-9, (line 57-58). This pastourelle is also contained in British Library, MS Harley 2253, f.66v-67r.~~Ibid, ll.57-60.

[0] Harris, *Obscene Pedagogies*, p.125.

A concurrent intention for these female-augmented texts might have been to encourage solidarity and provide comfort amongst the survivors of sexual assaults, and allowing women to process the traumas they experienced through the safety of a fictional text. The female characters in the pastourelles talk back, argue with and verbally defend themselves from their potential assaulter, and in doing so '[performed] recovery and survival~~'~~ ' for audience members affected by it and who might have wished they had behaved similarly.[0] The final verse of *Through a forest* has the raped female character say: 'Though a knave hath by me leyne, / Yet I am noder dede nor sleyne / I trust to recover my harte ageyn…'[0] In these words, she acknowledges that while she has been raped, she is not dead and her life with continue and she will have the opportunity to be happy and find love, reminding audiences members both of the horrors of sexual violence but also that there is hope after it. The fictional, anonymously authored characters, then, were able to speak publicly about emotional responses to rape, their fear, shame, pain and anger, in a way that real medieval women may have found difficult to do in a society which placed so much importance on sexual purity.

In these poems, clothing often plays an important, symbolic role in the pseudo-courtship rituals which prefigure the violent sexual assaults and demonstrate the place of clothing as gift or bribe for illicit or non-consensual sex which sit in the cultural imagination of the period. Gift-giving formed a crucial part of chivalric behaviour, with royal and aristocratic relationships maintained by reciprocal, symbolic statements of largesse, which often took the form of feasts and the distribution of meat, manuscripts and clothing but was intended to '[establish] a system of domination~~'~~ ' as it emphasises the higher financial and material standing of the giver and expects gratitude and loyalty in return.[0] This power

[0] Harris, 'Rape Narratives', p.267.
[0] 'Through a forest', *The Welles Anthology*, pp.216-9, l~~ines~~ 65-67.
[0] Lars Kjær, *The Medieval Gift and the Classical Tradition: Ideals and the Performance of Generosity in Medieval England, 1100-1300*~~, ((~~Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p.122.

dynamic is echoed in the pastourelles which is further reinforced by both the status- and gender- power dynamics of the two characters making for an entirely unequal exchange except for the female character's wit with which she is able to humiliate the male character. Gifts of clothing and accessories such as jewellery, gloves and purses were particularly common love tokens or engagement gifts from medieval grooms to their new brides and signified him accepting the responsibility to care for all his wife's needs as her legal guardian. Despite these love-imbued gifts, Mary Douglas has noted that, with the exception of anonymous blood donations, there are 'no free gifts'–' that do not expect some form of emotional, physical or material compensation.[0] Perhaps cynically, one could argue that even heartfelt gifts from a husband to a wife can be seen in such a compensatory or transactional light, with a husband's gift of flowers or jewellery being a sign of appreciation but also acting as compensation for unpaid domestic labour, childcare or with the expectation that sex will follow in gratitude. Indeed, the gifts, or perhaps more accurately, bribes, in Middle English pastourelles only further this sociological idea, as the male characters use material goods to entice or trap women into returning these 'gifts'–' with sexual favours.

While gifts of clothing and jewellery do not appear in every Middle English pastourelle, a large portion of the assailants do attempt to bribe, encourage or entice the maid to accept his requests – which quickly become violent demands – of sexual intercourse. This contrasts with Bennett, Karras and Werner's findings in their recent article which suggested that 'medieval people expected that any man might give any woman material benefits in return for the pleasures of her company and, possibly, the pleasures of sexual relations with her, too'.[0] When compared with tThe reaction of some of the female characters, pastourellesa more fragmented picture of material negation in courting practices is revealed

[0] Mary Douglas, 'Foreword', from Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, ((London: Routledge, 1990, 2002) from the 1954 English translation, p.xii.

[0] Judith M. Bennett, Ruth Mazo Karras and Janelle Werner, 'No Romance without Finance: Courtship in Late Medieval England', *Speculum*, vol. 99, no. 1, ((2024), 74-101, p.74.

as these pastourelles demonstrate instead that medieval women's company or sexual favours were not necessarily easily bought even when items are offered. From 'a good golde ryng…a purse of velweytt that was soo fyne' in', in *Throughe a forest…*, ((lines 17-18) to offers of 'comeliche' ' clothing from another pastourelle, *In a fryht as Y con fare fremde*, ((line 12), rich clothing and sumptuous accessories are dangled in front of these peasant characters to secure their affections or make them feel obligated to demonstrate their gratitude through sexual favours.[0] Bennett, Karras and Werner's work shows that there was a wide spectrum of responses from women being offered gifts for sexual relations.

Material bribes of expensive jewellery and textiles could have been seen to be effective lures for women of lower social standing for whom gold or velvet would be unobtainable. This theme also plays on the medieval idea of women being particularly covetous and greedy when it comes to fashionable clothing, as it allows them to show off in front of other women by displaying their possessions which were highly prized by others in the social group. The Middle English pastourelle, *Throughe a forest as I can ryde*, is told from the point of view of a man riding through a forest who chances upon an isolated, peasant woman and he begins attempts to woo her by speaking 'to hur of love, I trowe'.[0] She voices her lack of interest 'yn scornyng' ' and refers to the man in the derogatory, belittling term, 'Jenken'.[0] The narrative then switches to the female's point of view who narrates that:

> He toke then owt a good golde ryng,
> A purse of velweytt that was soo fine;
> "Have ye thys, my dere swetyng;
> With that ye wylbe lemman myn…"[0]

[0] 'In a fryght as Y con fare, fremde', *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, vol.2, ed. Susan Greer Fein, trans. David Raybin and Jan Ziolkowlski (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2014), pp.147-152.
[0] *The Welles Anthology*, pp.216-9, line 6.
[0] 'Jenken', also spelt 'Jankin' ' comes from the masculine name, John with the diminutive suffix '-kin' ' to form a patronising, catch-all name for a young man. 'Jankin', *MED*, < https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED23780/track?counter=1&search_id=56805442>, [accessed 16th January 2024].
[0] *The Welles Anthology*, pp.216-9, ll.ines 17-20.

To a more cynical, chauvinistically-minded audience and certain scholars, the assailant's words, quoted here by the female character, could be interpreted as a pseudo-romantic propositioning of a prostitute although the Middle English Dictionary does offer a number of translations for 'lemman', which would suggest otherwise.[0] These include 'a paramour, lover; a concubine; a betrothed lover; a wife', none of which align closely enough with a casual, opportunistic, 'freelance prostitute', as William Paden has suggested.[0] Rather this word seems to be an attempt by the man to woo and earn the trust of the woman by using a term of endearment, although this would likely have had sarcastic and insincere, mocking or humorous connotations for a medieval audience who were well aware of the genre's intentions. It is possible that a visual or symbolic link between a velvet purse and female genitalia would have been understood by a medieval audience, with the man exchanging a material vulva for the woman's actual.[0]

Later in the poem, having been thrown to the ground and raped 'twys or thrys' (line 35), the woman turns to her assailant and asks 'But sythe [since] ye have i-leyn me bye, / Ye wyll wedde me now as I trowe' (lines 37-38). The fictional rapist rejects the idea of marriage, echoing one of the first real-world solutions that were offered to compensate a rape victim. He refuses, claiming he has no interest in her now 'the pye [magpie] hathe peckyd yow' (line 40). In response, the woman asks that the items he offered her before he raped her be given to her as compensation for the wrongs done to her:

> But sythe ye have i-leyn me by,
> And brought my body unto shame,
> Some of your good ye wyll part with me,
> Or ells, be Cryst, ye be to blame.[0]

[0] 'Lemman', in *Middle English Dictionary* [online], <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED25097/track?counter=1&search_id=5110774>, [accessed 5 January 2021].
[0] William D. Paden, 'Rape in the Pastourelle', *Romantic Review*, vol. 80, no.3, (1989), 331-348, p.336.
[0] The significance of purses in medieval courtship is discussed in detail in Chapter Five.
[0] *The Welles Anthology*, pp.216-9, ll.41-44.

Her invocation of Christ in the final line hints at her anger at what has ~~'s~~ been done to her and demonstrates her desire to be taken seriously in this situation while her request to be given the goods she was offered, far from defining her as a prostitute, may well have been interpreted by a medieval audience as an imitation of a legally sanctioned 'financial settlement [between the rapist and] the victim or her family, which was to be applied to the victim's marriage as a dowry'.[0] A medieval audience might then have interpreted this plea for material recompense as at least in some way making up for the physical wrongs done to her, and which would have been worth a considerable amount to a peasant woman and her family. Unfortunately for her, the man refuses but her curses follow him through the last two verses: 'Crystes curse goo wythe yow'.

Although many of the women in these pastourelles attempt or wish to resist their attacker, the real resistance comes in the form of the telling of the pastourelles themselves. This voicing of fictional traumatic experiences would have created space for male and female audience members to discuss or think on their own experiences or feel less isolated in a society which stigmatised sex outside of marriage, whether it was consensual or not.

'In hir best arraie': Murder and Dress

Medieval England had been thought to have been a bloodthirsty society in which murders, assaults and rapes were not only rife but also an accepted aspect of life and that the state, such as it was, had little power to prevent such acts of violence with Barbara Hanawalt's quantitative work having shown that 'medieval England had a very high homicide rate'.[0]. J.B. Given noted that there was a high chance that 'every person in England in the

[0] ~~Shannon~~ McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture*, ~~*in Late Medieval London*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006),~~ p.68.
[0] Hanawalt, 'Violent Death', p.302.

thirteenth century, if *he* did not personally witness a murder, knew or knew of someone who had been killed. There was an even greater chance that an English*man* would have encountered someone who had killed a man'.[0] Recent research by scholars of medieval violence such as ~~Sarah Butler and~~ Larissa Tracy and Sara Butler has ~~revealed~~ shown that while erates of violence, and especially murder, were higher than they currently are, medieval society was still deeply shocked by it ~~picture to be far more complex~~.[0] ~~Barbara Hanawalt's quantative work having shown that 'medieval England had a very high homicide rate'.[0]~~ Further work by Manuel Eisner and his team on murder in three medieval urban centres – London, Oxford and York – ~~corroborate this entirely and~~ has culminated in a highly informative, interactive digital map which plots incidents of fatal violence in each of the towns based on reports in Coroners'' Rolls.[0] While this project has noted murders which took place over many years, it is easy to be surprised by the number of violent deaths within a comparatively small geographical space.

~~J.B. Given noted that the view of an extremely violence society was formed by 'impressionistic evidence' but that there was a high chance that 'every person in England in the thirteenth century, if *he* did not personally witness a murder, knew or knew of someone who had been killed. There was an even greater chance that an English*man* would have~~

[0] Given, *Society and Homicide in Thirteenth-Century England*, p.40. Given's use of exclusively masculine nouns and pronouns here is telling as it was presumably intended to connote the general population of men *and women* but in doing so, he effectively omits women from the discussion and redirects attention towards male experiences of homicidal violence, negating medieval women's relationships to homicidal violence. Italicisation are mine.

[0] Larissa Tracy, 'Murder Most Foul', in Larissa Tracy, ed. *Medieval and Early Modern Murder* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2018), 1-16, p.3; see also Sara Butler, *Forensic Medicine and Death Investigation in Medieval England*, ~~((~~London: Routledge, 2016); ~~Larissa Tracy, 'Murder Most Foul' in *Medieval and Early Modern Murder*, ed., Larissa Tracy, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2018), 1-16; ed. Richard W. Kaeuper,~~ *Violence in Medieval Society*~~, ed. Richard W. Kaeuper,~~ , ed. Richard W. Kaeuper ~~((~~Boydell & Brewer, Woodbridge: 2000), especially James Brundage, 'Domestic Violence in Classical Canon Law'', 184-195 and Barbara Hanawalt, ''Violence in the Domestic Milieu of Late Medieval England'', 197-214.

[0] ~~Barbara Hanawalt, 'Violent Death in Fourteenth- and Early Fifteenth- Century England', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 8, no. 3, (1976), 297-330, p.302.~~

[0] Manuel Eisner, *Interactive London Medieval Murder Map*, University of Cambridge: Institute of Criminology~~, ((~~2018), https://medievalmurdermap.co.uk/, [accessed 24th September 2024].

encountered someone who had killed a man'.[0] Putting aside the exclusive use of masculine pronouns here, Given has collated evidence that demonstrates women's closeness to violence: medieval women made up 19.5% of murder victims while only 8.6% of murders were committed by women.[0] These statistics make sense with context; violence in women was not a trait promoted or tolerated by medieval society at large, with such women being pejoratively labelled arch wives, as Lydgate did when commenting on women's horned headdresses. Additionally, medieval women would have had no combat training although their brothers were expected to engage in physical sports and violent activities such as archery and arms training. Medieval women would also have spent much of their time within the home, occupied with domestic chores, childcare or working from home likely in the textile or brewing industries. Moreover, women would have been encouraged to keep company with other women as socialising in public with men outside of their immediate family was heavily frowned upon. For these reasons, alongside being generally smaller and less strong than their male counterparts, it is clear to see why female murderers in the Middle Ages were more likely to kill other women or children rather than men. Conversely, women may have been less likely to face prosecution for violent crimes precisely because authorities and jurors made assumptions about their physical or emotional inability to do so. If men were victims of women's violence, they were less likely to seek justice as to do so would have been to highlight the pair's inverted roles and bring shame and possible humiliation on the man, silencing him from the historical record. Research conducted by Miriam Müller, which has examined cases of violence in two towns and has reinforced this idea, showingdiscovered that violence enacted by women made up 14% of the total number of violent incidences.[0]

[0] J. B. Given, *Society and Homicide in Thirteenth-Century England*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977), p.35, 40. Given's use of exclusively masculine nouns and pronouns here is telling as it was presumably intended to connote the general population of men *and women* but in doing so, he effectively omits women from the discussion and redirects attention towards male experiences of homicidal violence, negating medieval women's relationships to homicidal violence. Italicisation are mine.

[0] Ibid, Given, p.48.

[0] Miriam Müller, 'Social Ceontrol and the Hhue and Cery in Ttwo Ffourteenth-Ceentury Vvillages', *Journal of Medieval History*, vol. 31, ((2005), 29-53, p.42. Hanawalt has suggested that women's violence made up 10%

Recent studies have shown that men were more likely to kill other men, as they socialised and worked in largely male environments outside of the home and so had more opportunity.[0] Combined with the traditionally masculine traits such as physical strength and combat skills which were reasons for pride, weapons easily to hand as most men carried daggers as a useful tool for eating, carrying out daily tasks and perhaps in some way as a phallic symbol ~~–~~ daggers being the primary weapon in most murder cases – which signified and emphasised their manhood and the importance placed on one's reputation, fatal violence could erupt.[0]

The practicalities of prosecuting a murderer were protracted. Hanawalt has noted the necessary steps that were to be taken upon the discovery of a body: the first finder must raise the hue and cry which would alert the local community to the crime. Local authority figures such as the sheriff and bailiff would then call for the coroner who would inspect the body for wounds and cause of death, note details such as location and date, make inquiries about potential suspects who would then be arrested and sent to the local jail before being presented to the king's justices for further action.[0] Once the accused murderer was brought before the court, which consisted of the county officials as well as the twelve male jurors, ~~and~~ the defendant was asked how he would like to plead. ~~Once a jury had been assembled, T~~the case was put ~~forward~~ before the court and the juries acted as witnesses and would decide whether the defendant was guilty, innocent or should be pardoned. After this, the justices heard the verdict and decided on the sentence.[0] While uxoricide, the murder of wives by husbands, was treated as a straightforward murder, the killing of husbands by wives was treated as petty treason, just below attempting to kill the king himself. The murder of a woman by a social

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of the overall number, *Crime and Conflict*, p.115.

[0] In her very localised study, Müller has shown that men murdering other men made up 65% of the overall murder rate, ibid, p.41.

[0] Hanawalt, 'Violent Death', p.305.

[0] ~~Hanawalt, 'Violent Death'~~Ibid, pp.299-300.

[0] Hanawalt succinctly breaks down the process from finding a body to prosecuting the accused in 'Violent Death', pp.299-300. On the legal process surrounding rape cases, see Seabourne, 'Rape and Law in Medieval Western Europe', p.353. Hanawalt's detailed breakdown of a rape trial can be found in 'Whose Story Was This? Rape Narratives in ~~Meideval~~Medieval English Courts~~' in~~', in *Of Good and Ill Repute: Gender and Social Control in Medieval England*~~, (~~ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 124-141.

inferior also counted as petty treason, suggesting that the law on petty treason played an important role in maintaining social hierarchy.[0] The case of Isabel Carpenter which began this chapter, is rather unique in that it was viewed by her contemporaries as a particularly violent murder, so much so that they asked the authorities to treat the killer as a traitor, meaning that if Carpenter had been found guilty, he would have faced the most severe penalty possible – that of being hanged, drawn and quartered.[0]

Carpenter's brutal and bizarrely ritualistic evisceration of the young bride so early into their marriage, the location being so far from their families and communities and in the forests of Sussex, compounded by the humiliating removal of her clothing, appalled their contemporaries and pushed them to have Carpenter tried for the most serious crime of treason. Larissa Tracy has argued that '[m]edieval records of murder cases suggest that even justifiable (or simply understandable) killings were not ignored by a society supposedly numbed by hardship', stressing that 'medieval societies were no less horrified by homicide than modern ones'.[0] This is certainly confirmed by the contemporary reactions to Isabel's murder, mentioned at the start of this chapter. The last mention of Carpenter in the document records him awaiting trial in the 'prisoune called the Kynges Bench'. But the feelings of the commissioners of the peace, Sir John Bohun, Sir Henry Husee and William Sydney, alongside the horror of the people of Stoughton, can be felt in the request that 'the horrible murdure' Carpenter 'be judged as a traitor' with the expectation that he 'be drawe and hanged' rather than the usual punishment of hanging for murder.[0] Certainly, this was seen to

[0] ***Crime, Law and Society in the Later Middle Ages***, ed. and trans. Anthony Musson and Edward Powell, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p.95.

[0] Another case in which the woman's dress was torn down to the navel before being raped is that of Joan Hadestock who accused James Montibus of rape in the London Eyre of 1276, although here, the reason to tear the dress open seems to be about the exposure of the woman's breasts rather than a fear of infidelity, *The London Eyre of 1276*, Martin Weinbaum, ed. (London: London Record Society, 1976), plea 519.

[0] Tracy, 'Murder Most Foul', p.3.

[0] Barbara Hanawalt, 'Violent Death in Fourteenth- and Early Fifteenth- Century England', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 8, no. 3, (1976), 297-330, p.298. J.B. Given has noted that 18.3% of male murderers met their end at the gallows in *Society and Homicide in Thirteenth-Century England*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977), p.137.

be no ordinary murder of a wife by her husband and Isabel's horrific last day shocked her medieval contemporaries as much as it might horrify us now.

This was an unusual request in that most cases of uxoricide were viewed simply as homicide while the murder of a husband by a wife was classed as petty treason, a more serious crime as it threatened established gender hierarchies within medieval society.[0] Mariticide perhaps also challenged cultural and religious expectations about women being gentler, meeker and less violent while a harsher punishment would act as a deterrent to unhappy, mistreated or vengeful wives. In the case of Carpenter, his crime was understood to be so violent and callous that only the harshest punishment would do and it was hoped that he would be tried as if he had betrayed the king himself. Unfortunately, John Bellamy has noted that the people of Stoughton's petition that Carpenter be treated as a traitor was refused by the king on account of Carpenter stating that he and Isabel had been on pilgrimage when he murdered her and was therefore outside of the remit of secular courts.[0] It is unclear whether this was true and that he and Isabel had been going on pilgrimage, whether he told Isabel that is where they were going as a ruse to take her away from her community or whether Carpenter, fully aware of the punishment he was in danger of receiving, created the lie at some point after being apprehended in order to save his own skin.

The detail of Isabel being 'in hir best arraie~~'~~' at the time of her murder is curious and ~~both~~ reveals much about her life while also leaving many questions unanswered. That she had a set of best clothes suggests that she had at least one other set of clothing for everyday or perhaps workwear. If this is the case, it shows that she and Carpenter were not impoverished peasantry. Instead, this detail paints a picture of an outfit worn for important days with vibrant colours and surface decoration such as braids or small embroideries.~~; and by~~

[0] Sara Butler, ''Spousal Abuse in Fourteenth-Century Yorkshire: What can we learn from the Coroners~~'~~' Rolls?'', *Florilegium*, vol. 18, no. 2~~, (~~ (2001), 61-78, p.71.
[0] John Bellamy, *The Law of Treason in England in the Later Middle Ages*~~, (~~ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p.125.

~~extension her husband/murderer, was not on the lowest rung of the economic ladder and seem rather to have been middling peasant although it is unlikely that these were particularly expensive garments in imported colours or with any more surface decoration than applied domestically-woven braids or homemade embroideries.~~ It is certainly possible that the best clothes she wore as she was murdered were also the clothes she had worn at her wedding a fortnight before as it was commonplace for women to marry in their best clothing, with purposely made wedding dresses only becominge popular in recent centuries.[0] Her best clothing would probably also have acted as a funeral clothing, as mentioned in Chapter One. To those at her funeral, this may have been a particularly grim image having so recently witnessed her marriage. In Middle English as in modern English, 'best~~'~~' meant 'finest', 'most excellent~~'~~' or 'highest quality'.[0] Although Isabel had certainly not been wealthy, she had owned and worn a set of clothes that her husband, and possibly she too, considered her finest clothing. These 'best~~'~~' clothes probably made Isabel feel beautiful. There is no further detail of what her best clothes entailed: likely a linen smock underneath a woollen kirtle with a veil or hood, a girdle, stockings and boots.

Two key elements of Isabel's murder – being forced to dress in her best clothing and then being taken on a journey fraught with danger - are strikingly similar to the plot of a popular Arthurian romance composed in around 1170 by Chrétien de Troyes entitled *Erec and Enide* in which the newly married knight, Erec, is so infatuated by his new bride, Enide, that he puts off his knightly duties to spend all his time with her. Enide becomes ashamed that her husband's reputation for chivalrous deeds and masculine prowess is declining because of

[0] For examples of dresses in which someone gets married including white, blue and violet dresses, see McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex and Civic Culture*, pp.40-41. Queen Victoria popularised the white wedding gown when marrying Albert in 1840, but the colour made the dress impractical for work or daywear, meaning it was a purpose-made garment. Women who could not spare the money on an outfit worn only for one day might wear their Sunday best or make an outfit for themselves which they could re-wear as their finest outfit for years to come; Martina Licata, 'Scottish Influences on British Women's Fashion: The Role Played by Queen Victoria, 1837-1852', *Journal of Dress History*, vol.4, no.1 (2020), 6-29 ,p.19.

[0] 'best', *MED*, < https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED4235/track?counter=2&search_id=589332>, [accessed 5th April 2025].

his love for her so Erec decides to go on a quest to win back his reputation, demanding that Enide accompany him to lure thieves and vagabonds to attack the pair. He commands her to 'Put on the very loveliest / gown [she owns]…', saddle her best horse and remain silent on their journey.[0] Enide repeatedly disobeys this order which had been given to her and speaks up to warn Erec of approaching dangers. Within the text, this enforced silence intends to remove~~s~~ Enide's ability to express herself, forcing her to override her own thoughts and needs in favour of Erec's and foregrounds his personhood. Yet Enide does speak up, saying to herself that she does not want to 'show such cowardice~~' '~~ as to let the robbers she has seen attack.[0] To a medieval audience this could be interpreted in a plethora of ways; on the one hand Enide's behaviour confirms that women are naturally disobedient and talkative, but it could also show that women should be listened to and that their voices could be beneficial and sensible. Ultimately the character, Enide, lives out her days as queen of Nantes alongside Erec. By contrast, Isabel was permanently silenced. There is, of course, no way to know for certain whether Carpenter had been aware of *Erec and Enide* in its original form, yet it is very likely that the author's romance had been circulating in England since the 'twelfth or thirteenth centuries'.[0] There is, however, concrete evidence that *Erec and Enide* had been known in England since at least the late fourteenth or early fifteenth centuries owing to the inclusion of the names of the knights at the couples' wedding in British Library, MS Harley 4971. ~~it is entirely possible that its themes and motifs of a woman going on a journey alongside her husband while in her best clothing had circulated in late medieval English culture through translated or bastardised retellings which trickled down through society and became part of the broader cultural imagination of the period.~~ Perhaps Carpenter had heard the tale and wanted to re-enact it, casting himself as the hero before his violence overcame

[0] Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec and Enide*, ed. Dorothy Gilbert~~, ((~~Berkley: University of California Press, 1992), ll. 2578-2579.

[0] Ibid, ~~*Erec and Enide,*~~ l. 2837.

[0] Keith Busby, '*Erec, le Fiz Lac* (British Library, Harley 4971)', in *People and Texts: Relationships in Medieval Literature*, ed. Thea Summerfield and Keith Busby (Leiden: Brill: 2007), 43-50, p.44.

him. Perhaps he instructed Isabel to dress in her finest clothes because he had always intended to murder her and had hoped to sell the clothes once he had escaped the scene, but in his frenzy he forgot to take them. In this instance, Carpenter plays the role of the thieves that Erec hopes to fight on his quest. Even if we disregard the view that the romance would have reached Carpenter's ears, it would still be safe to assume that the Justices of the Peace, Sir John Bohun, Sir Henry Husee and William Sydney, would have, given their level of education and literacy. In their eyes, this inversion of the romance may have seemed acutely horrifying.

The clothing that Isabel had been stripped out of, having been left naked in the countryside, was clearly seen as deeply significant to the community who found her and to the clerks, the coroner and the jurors, as the detail was recorded in the highest criminal court in the country. It must have been a detail supplied by the murderer, that she was in 'hir best array'–' but why he thought it relevant to mention is puzzling. It is difficult to trust the set of events presented to us in the record because of the questionable source: the murderer. We learn of the events through a court clerk who was present in the court as the findings of the coroner and the testimony of Carpenter were presented. Carpenter was the sole witness to his violence and so it is from him that we are told that Isabel was stripped only after her death, and that she was beaten on the head before being stabbed and disembowelled. So why then, did the stripping happen at all? Carpenter showed such little regard for Isabel in brutally murdering her and yet rather than cut through the fabric of her clothing to get at her insides, he stripped her body before cutting her open as if the clothing had more value to him than his wife did. Perhaps he mentioned her 'best arraie'–' by way of explaining his later action of stripping her of it; that he was conscious of the worth of her clothing and anxious to be seen as not wasteful or that he wanted to signal his financial worth by making it clear that she had more than one set of clothes. Indeed, it is possible that the detail that she was in her finest

clothing was intended to corroborate his alibi that the couple was travelling on pilgrimage and she wanted to look her best when being in the presence of God and the saints.

Throughout this court record, what has lasted is the murderer's voice, the voices of Bohun, Husee and Sydney and the outrage of the community in which the murder happened. The voice which does not reach us through the record is that of Isabel herself. So often in the study of women's history, scholars are confronted by silences, as here, and so Hartman's use of 'critical fabulation' might be of use when examining a woman who ~~. Isabel~~ was silenced in life and in death. ~~and when writing about her, I am confronted by this silence forced on her.~~ A month before her death she was a 16-year-old girl perhaps excited for her upcoming marriage and even preparing 'hir best arraie' for the big day. ~~She was a girl about to marry a man who would be the death of her.~~ On the day of the "pilgrimage", was she already aware of the violent temper of her groom? Perhaps her heart sank and her stomach curdled with fear at the order to ready herself in her finest clothing and travel away from home with this man. Or perhaps on the hours-long journey, his previously jovial mood turned sour and murderous and he grew suspicious of her fidelity and took advantage of her physical vulnerability and isolation to enact violence on her body while being careful to leave her clothing undamaged. In Isabel's case, there are incalculable unknowns. We cannot be certain that what the records tells us, on account of the information in it being given by the culprit, is in itself certain. All we can know is that Isabel was murdered and her body was found. Between these two events, her story turns murky. Hence, Hartman's use of critical fabulation is a useful way of filling in the gap and reconstructing a sequence of events that led to the discovery of a 16-year-old's naked body and her discarded dress.

Another document from at least a decade later records a woman, also named Isabell, who faced a brutal death which included the humiliation of being partially stripped. Here, the removal of her clothing by her attacker was intended to allow him greater access to her body

in order to rape her. The document, a bill presented to parliament in 1444 to prevent pardons being granted to those convicted of murdering women they had attempted to rape, demonstrates a wider horror at her fate and an attempt to prevent men who murdered because they could not rape from being socially and religiously absolved of their two-fold crime. It lays out Isabell's final hours: John Bolton attempted to rape Isabell, wife of Roger Bakeler, and 'as sche wold not assent un to him he vilanisly tok of here all the Atire of her hede And al so her clothes of her body otake [except] her smokke'.[0] The document goes on to note that after murdering her, Bolton went on to steal the clothes he removed from her body including 'a gowne, a kirtell, a hode, two kerchieffs'–' as well as 'two keyes'–' which was felt to signify his lack of 'repentyng'–' of his 'horrible ded'. These clothes and keys were the goods and chattels of her husband, Roger, and so amounted to a double wrong against him in the murdering of his wife and the stealing of his property in the form of her clothing. Perhaps the smock was left on her body as she had fought especially hard to prevent it being taken from her, as it acted as the last barrier between her body and his will.

After removing her outer clothing, Bolton 'felonesly sleeth and murdred her and kutte her throte twyes and twyes stikked her thrugh her pappes [breasts] and sides with a dagger wher upon sche died'.[0] To slit someone's throat twice is to kill someone with intention, as cutting a throat once is usually enough for someone to bleed out. That he went on to repeatedly stab her torso with particular attention to her breasts reinforces the sexualised element of her murder in line with medieval view of exposed breasts being highly sexual and also deeply sinful. It is abundantly clear that Bolton was intent on ensuring Isabell's death. Here it is Bolton's dagger which ultimately penetrates Isabell's body with fatal consequences.

[0] TNA C 49/26/5, printed in *An Anthology of Chancery English*, ~~eds.,~~ ed. John H. Fisher, Malcolm Richardson and Jane L. Fisher~~, (~~ (Knoxville, TS: The University of Tennessee Press, 1984), p.260-262.

[0]'Slen', *Middle English Dictionary*, [online], https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED40820/track?counter=1&search_id=48860302 [accessed 12th December 2023]. A similar case is that of Emma le Mason who accused John Harn in 1366 of beating her, stealing a dress worth 2s 6d and injuring her on her chest and breasts, although Emma survived; *Chester County Court Indictment Roll 1345-1377: Dealing with Serious Crime in later Fourteenth-Century Cheshire*, ed. Phyllis Hill and Paul Booth (Manchester: The Chetham Society, 2019), case no.90.6.

Following the murder and absconding with her clothes which would, to medieval eyes, have been in the possession of her husband, Bolton was by his 'sotell ymaginacion'' granted a pardon. The bill which records the details of Isabel's murder was intended to rescind his pardon, stating that 'yf any man desire here after to Ravisshe Any woman and for cause that sche wolle noght assente unto hym sle and murder her that any charter to be made to any suche person for any suche murder be voide and noght availlable in law for the love of Ihesu and yn way of charitie'. While it is unknown whether this petition was granted, the responses to both Isabel's and Isabell's cases certainly demonstrate a level of intolerance to senseless murder against women in medieval English society. Furthermore, the clothing of both Isabel and Isabell were highly significant in revealing how the two women's bodies were treated shortly before and after death. The stripping of both women demonstrates the sexualisation and objectification of their bodies painfully clearly, and certainly made the cases all the more shocking and heinous to the people who found them. The inclusion of the details of the two women's clothing in the court cases demonstrates that clearly and certainly strengthened the cases against the murderers by emphasising the discarded, sexualised and brutalised bodies of the women.

'Her torn garments': Clothing in Rape Cases

> Mi kerchef and mi clothes anon
> Y schal torende down ichon
> And say with michel wrong
> With strengthe thou hast me todrawe[0]

The heroine of this romance, Belisaunt, threatens the hero, Amis, that she will frame him for her rape and manufacture the evidence of it herself if he refuses to declare his love and sleep with her. This narrative comes from the romance *Amis and Amiloun*, which exists in four

[0] [My kerchief and my clothes also I shall tear down and say with much hurt that with strength you have violated me], Edward E. Foster, ed., *Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Amadace*, ed. Edward E. Foster((Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), ll.631-634. Translation mine.

manuscripts dating from the 1330s to around 1500, demonstrating the text's popularity.[0] In Amy Vines'–' analysis of false rape accusations and sexually aggressive women in medieval romance, she has noted that Belisaunt's speech highlights her awareness of the 'proper legal methods'–' for prosecuting rape as laid out the key legal texts of the day.[0] Not only does Belisaunt's threat play on apparently timeless male fears around being falsely accused of rape, it also demonstrates that damaged or torn clothing, as well as bleeding or bruising, was crucial evidence to show there had been a struggle and that the sex had been non-consensual. This snippet from a popular literary text demonstrates a widespread awareness of the sartorial and physical harm that was required to prove that sexual assault had occurred.[0] Indeed, damage done to one's clothing evinces the damage done to the body beneath. Moreover, it also points to the belief that these signs of violation could be 'easily manufactured'.[0] This belief that material indicators of rape could be falsely created may have contributed to the doubtful responses by male jurors and lawyers about the veracity of a rape claim. False rape accusations in the English Middle Ages are not the focus of this research, but this passage makes clear that it was acknowledged within wider medieval society that torn clothing was legitimate evidence of violation.

Dress appears not only in medieval literary rape narratives but also frequently in a number of legal cases relating to a woman's rape. In both sets of sources, dress functioned in varied ways fulfilling both legal requirements and personal objectives. When women mentioned what they were wearing at the time of the assault, it should be understood that the

[0] As laid out in Foster, Edinburgh, Advocate Library, Advocate 19.2.1, commonly known as the Auchinleck MS, British Library's MS Egerton 2862 and MS Harley 2386 as well as Bodleian Library, MS Douce 326.

[0] Amy Vines, 'The Many Wives of Potiphar: Rape Culture in Medieval Romance', in', in *Rape Culture and Female Resistance in Late Medieval Literature*, ed. Sarah Baechle, Carissa M. Harris and Elizaveta Strakhov,– eds., ((Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2022), 142-164, p.150.

[0] Gwen Seabourne, ''Rape and Law in Medieval Western Europe' in', in *A Companion to Crime and Deviance in the Middle Ages*, ed. Hannah Skoda, ((Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2023), 342-357, p.346. For further discussion of rape and law, albeit in the early modern period, see Garthine Walker, ''Rape, Aacquittal and Ceulpability in Ppopular Cerime Rreports in England, c.1670-1750'', *Past and Present*, vol. 220, no. 1, ((2013), 115-142.

[0] IbidVines, 'The Many Wives of Potiphar', p.-149. Gwen Seabourne has suggested that although false rape accusations are a popular literary motif, they are very rare in actual legal cases, 'Rape and Law in Medieval Western Europe', p.356.

victim/survivor was elaborating on a pivotal, traumatic event in her own life which could harm not only her psyche but also her future prospects. Likely while recounting the event to a room of male strangers, she could see it unfolding in her mind's eye, and could recall details of her own clothing such as its colour, texture, detailing, which may have since been stained with both her own blood and her distressing memories. She may have also added the detail in her account to give her story veracity, knowing full well how slim her chances were of securing a conviction for her attacker. Thus, adding small details may have seemed an effective way to make her story more believable to the jury, while also making herself seem to be a reliable witness to her own trauma. Moreover, the self-reported sartorial details in the records should be read as the woman self-fashioning in the midst of a traumatic event, asserting her presence in the situation herself through material culture, and reclaiming the agency and bodily autonomy stolen from her during the sexual assault.

Before presenting her narrative in the courts, women who were subject to acts of violence had to follow a strict, formulaic path in order to seek justice. Between the 1240s and 1250s, Henry Bracton composed or,; some scholars argue, elaborated on; a detailed and comprehensive text on late medieval English law which would not be attempted again until the eighteenth century.[0] Entitled *De legibus et consuetidinibus Angliæ* but commonly called simply *Bracton* after its author, it laid out numerous crimes, acceptable reasons for convictions or acquittals, how to record appeals as well as appropriate punishments according to the thirteenth-century English judicial system and which upheld the legal processes for the next few centuries.[0]

The text goes as far as to categorise female victim/survivors by their marital status which then corresponded to punishments meted out to the rapists and sexual assaulters. The

[0] William Blackstone, *Commentaries on English Law*, vols. 1-4, ((Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1765-1769).
[0] Henry Bracton, *De legibus et consuetudinibus Angliæ*, trans. Samuel E. Thorne, vols. 1 – 4, (online), <https://amesfoundation.law.harvard.edu/>, [accessed 23rd March 2023]. 'De Legibus Et Consuetudinibus Angliæ', *Harvard Law School Library Online*, https://amesfoundation.law.harvard.edu/Bracton/index.html, [accessed 23rd March 2023].

taking of a woman's virginity, whether a nun or an unmarried woman, through rape was seen to be a particularly heinous crime as their virginity was 'dedicated to God'' so the taking of this state not only 'hurt…mankind'' but worse, offended God.[0] While virgins could expect, at least in theory, that their attackers would receive the most extreme and serious punishment of castration of the 'members', both penis and testicles, this occurred very rarely for a number of reasons including a hesitancy by the exclusively male judges and jurors to inflict such an emasculating punishment on another man.[0] The thinking for this was that 'when a virgin is defiled she loses her member'' and so it was important that 'her defiler be punished in the parts in which he offended'.[0] This is an approach very much in keeping with Biblical justice: 'what manner wem [wound] he gave, he shall be compelled to suffer such a wem'.[0] Additionally, the castration was deemed necessary in order to remove the organ which had excited the perpetrator's 'hot lust'' and the blinding was to remove the organs which 'gave him sight of the maiden's beauty for which he coveted her'.[0] This phrasing does convey a medieval understanding of rape being purely about lust and greed and does not acknowledge the varied reasons for rape, such as the desire to overpower, dominate and control another, rather than purely from lust.[0]

Married, formerly married or non-virgin women could not hope that their attack would meet with similarly disfiguring punishments as Bracton stated that as a 'married [woman] or a widow living a respectable life, or … a matron, a recognised concubine or a prostitute plying her trade'' was no longer a virgin, having had it 'taken'' lawfully by husbands or illicitly by patrons, their rapes were in some ways less serious. Instead, they

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[0] ***Bracton***, p.415.
[0] ***Bracton***, p.414.
[0] ~~Bracton, p.414.~~Ibid.
[0] Leviticus 24:20, Wycliffe Bible. The *Medieval English Dictionary* defines 'wem'' as both a 'bodily injury or harm'' but also a 'sexual defilement, loss of virginity', < https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED52187/track?counter=1&search_id=48860302> (accessed 3rd January 2024).
[0] ***Bracton***, p.414
[0] See Shani D'Cruze, ''Approaching the History of Rape and Sexual Violence: Notes Towards Research'', *Women's History Review*, vol. 1, no. 3, (1993), 377-397.

could expect the ambiguity of 'some other severe punishment'' meted out to their attacker but not the castration and blinding given for the rape of virgins.[0]

Once a rape had been committed, the woman had then to fulfil a series of objectives which would have been potentially shaming and retraumatising and which situated clothing centrally within the experience in order for the case to be taken seriously in a court. As laid out in *Bracton*, the woman 'must go at once and while the deed is newly done, with the hue and cry to the neighbouring townships and there show the injury done her to men of good repute, the blood and her clothing stained with blood and her torn garments'.[0] This was borrowed from Ranulf de Glanvill's legal text from the 1180s, *Tractatus de legibus et consuetudinibus regni Anglie*, which advised that a woman should show 'to trustworthy men the injury done to her and any effusion of blood there may be, and any tearing of the clothes'.[0] The importance of this material evidence is clear here and repeated elsewhere in the *Bracton*: a woman should show 'if her garments are torn, or if not torn, stained with blood'.[0] Without the benefit of technologies such as CCTV cameras and rape kits then, damage done to a woman's clothing stood in as evidence of that she had fought back or struggled with the attacker who had forcibly ripped open her clothing. Torn clothing was evidence then, of a non-consensual act where her damaged clothing indicated the damage done to her body beneath.[0]

This rigid set of requirements for victim/survivors of physical and sexual assault demonstrates a lack of awareness of the effect on them. From telling everyone in the vicinity that the rape had occurred to then explaining it to 'good'' men who were likely unknown personally to the victim, and the potential shame and humiliation of showing them any

[0] ***Bracton***, p.415.
[0] ***Bracton***, p.415.
[0] Ranulf de Glanvill, *A Treatise of the Laws and Customs of the Kingdom of England*, ed. and trans. G. D. G. Hall, ((Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p.175.
[0] ***Bracton***, p.345.
[0] Gwen Seabourne, ''Rape and Law in Medieval Western Europe'', *in A Companion to Crime and Deviance in the Middle Ages*, ed. Hannah Skoda, (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2023), 342-357, p.346.

wounds or blood, possibly on private areas of the body, it is clear that there was a lack in the medieval understanding about experiencing trauma, at least at a judicial level if not at a personal one. Evidently there is little consideration for the mental or physical welfare of the victim/survivor on the pathway from violence to justice.

In the court record concerning her case, Rose le Savage mentions the clothing she was wearing on the day she was kidnapped and raped in 1279 before being held captive for two years .[0] She described being grabbed and taken outside her family home near Irchester in Northamptonshire by John de Clifford and a group of his friends at sunrise as she walked towards the parish church. Clifford put her on a palfrey and carried her over 40 miles southwest to the village of Middleton Stoney near Bicester, Oxfordshire. Rose then went on to provide extensive details on the geographical positioning of Clifford's house – it was 'north and south'~~–'~~ facing but the door opened 'westwards'.[0] She recalled the way he carried her from the horse into the house before 'violently stripping her'~~–'~~ out of 'a certain robe of green'~~–'~~ so that she was 'entirely naked', how he held her down by clasping both her hands in his left hand before he 'raped her of her virginity'~~–'~~ on the righthand side of the bed which left her 'bloody'.[0] Because Rose then tried to escape her captor, Clifford took her to an upstairs room in his house and 'shut her up securely imprisoned'~~–'~~ from Sunday 7~~13~~th ~~November~~ January 12807~~9~~, 'the Sunday after the Feast of St Hilary in the eighth year'~~–'~~ of the reign of Edward I until Martinmas (11th November 1282~~1~~) in the tenth year of the king's reign when she was able to escape through an upstairs 'stone'~~–'~~ window at sunrise.[0] Rose immediately

[0] 'roba de qua erat vestita de viridi', TNA KB 27/70, m.1d. This case has been transcribed and translated into *Select Cases in the Court of the King's Bench under Edward I*, vol. I, ed. G. O. Sayles~~, ((~~London: Selden Society, 1936).

[0] *Select Cases in the Court of the King's Bench under Edward I*, p.101.

[0] Here the translation is mine as G. O. Sayles translated the green robe as being a robe of 'miniver'~~–'~~ which was a type of expensive fur from a squirrel (p.101). Upon examining the original document, I noticed the error. This mistranslation has broader implications as miniver fur, as Barbara Hanawalt has noted, was a marker of nobility and would have meant that Rose was of a high social standing; *Crime and Conflict*, p.140. Had Rose been wearing miniver fur, it would have shown her case to be even more nuanced by suggesting her kidnap and rape was related to a property crime or used to force her to marry her captor and rapist so that he could claim her inheritance, or as an attack against her male family members by a warring family. That she's wearing a green dress then, allows us to focus in somewhat on her social context.

[0] *Select Cases in the Court of the King's Bench under Edward I*, p.102.

raised the hue and cry, as was expected of her, and sued Clifford at the court of the King's Bench within a few weeks.

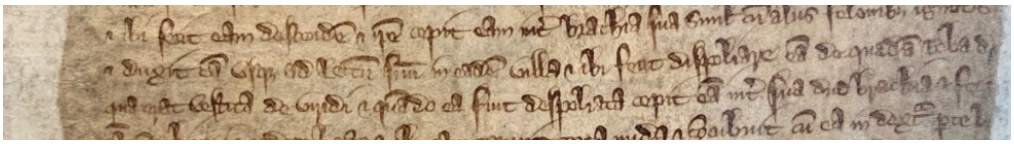


Figure 37 Detail of document containing Rose le Savage's case, The National Archives, KB 27/70, m.1d. The description of her dress can be seen running from top right. Own photo.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Clifford denied any wrong-doing and was able to argue that as Rose was unable to give a specific day or year or place when the rape occurred, she must have been lying. The justices were convinced of this and Rose was committed to 'gaol for her false appeal'.[0] Thus, once again, Rose found herself imprisoned. Sometime later, in the spring of 1283, a man from Northampton named Bartholomew came and sued Clifford on behalf of the king, but Clifford did not appear before the justices who overturned the previous judgement. While it is unclear how Bartholomew of Northampton and Rose were connected, he asserted that with the help of his unidentified friends Clifford *had* abducted Rose, raped her and taken her virginity, and held her hostage, for which Clifford would suffer the comparatively negligible punishment of paying £10 to the king. No further mention appears of Rose, her release from jail, nor any mention of compensation she might have received for the initial trauma of the kidnapping and rape. Neither was there mention of the probable countless rapes she suffered while kept in Clifford's house for the two and a half years of her life which were stolen from her. Caroline Dunn has suggested that Rose's and Clifford's contrasting social statuses effected their respective treatments in court and the outcome of the trial as Clifford could afford to pay to 'hire a good lawyer…who knew the proper legal forms for appeals' and who knew that Rose's vagueness about the dates and locations of her ordeal was enough to persuade the justices that she was lying.[0]

[0] Select Cases in the Court of the King's Bench under Edward I, p.102Ibid.

[0] Caroline Dunn, *Stolen Women in Medieval England: Rape, Abduction, and Adultery, 1100-1500*, ((Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.62.

There are a number of reasons as to why Rose may have been unable to specify when and where these events took place. While it is well understood today that some of the side effects of trauma, especially after rape, can include memory loss, this was not the case in the thirteenth century and Rose's lack of knowledge or specificity was taken to signify her guilt.[0] Another likelihood is that due to Rose's lower social status, she was simply less learned and less well-travelled and so could notot pinpoint the exact hour of her capture of the exact day of her escape or the route to a town 40 miles away. This may have meant that she relied on comparatively smaller details such as the directions the door she was taken through was facing, the stone window she jumped from or the colour of the dress she was wearing on that fateful day.

Rose was clear about one thing - that she was wearing a 'robe of green'.[0] This dress was the last material connection Rose would have to her family for two years, a textile imbued with memory, familiarity and comfort. She may have felt so closely tied to the object that it felt necessary for her to mention it in her appeal, and if it may had been the only dress she wore during her abduction - unless Clifford had thought to provide her with some while incarcerating her – then her identity and her emotional response to the green dress would be even more intertwined. In medieval England, the colour green - *viridis* in Latin and cognate with the English 'verdant'- had a plethora of wider symbolic connotations, with its primary link being to nature and with that, freshness, youth, springtime and hope.[0] So in mentioning the colour of her dress at the time of her kidnap and rape, Rose could have used the detail to reinforce the veracity of her story to the court and she could have also, consciously or not, been linking herself with the themes and virtues the colour symbolised within the late

[0] Kristin W. Samuelson, 'Post-traumatic stress disorder and declarative memory functioning: a review', *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience*, (2011), vol. 13, no.3, (2011), 346-351.
[0] '*roba de qua erat vestita de viridi*', TNA KB 27/70, m.1d.
[0] Michel PastouereauPastoureau, *Green*, *: The History of a Color*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), pp.62, 72, 76.

medieval cultural imagination. This would then highlight Rose's youth and thus underscore her virginity which had been taken by force by Clifford leaving Rose wounded and bloody.

Just as Rose had felt it pertinent to include the detail of her clothing at the time she endured sexual violence, so too did a young victim/survivor of rape some 40 years later. In 1320, the 12-year-old Joan le Sadler appealed Reymond de Limoges of rape in London, and the court documents record a lengthy and convoluted legal battle between Joan and her family and Limoges in which the latter used various tricks and excuses to avoid punishment while never denying the rape happened.[0]

Many of the specifics of Joan's case bear similarities with Rose's; Joan was close to her father's house at dusk when Limoges either led her away by the hand or grabbed her and carried her away to his own house nearby to assault her. There are a number of differing accounts about Joan's traumatic event as she was made to testify on two occasions. She initially stated she was held in Limoges'~~–~~' house overnight during which time she was raped. She then said she was raped and immediately released the same night. Of the actual rape, she was clear when she testified that Limoges:

> laid her on the ground with her belly upwards and her back on the ground, and with his right hand raised the clothes of the same Joan the daughter of Eustace up to her navel, she being clothed in a blue coat and a shift of light cloth, and feloniously as the felon of our lord the King who ~~[he]~~ now is, with both his hands he separated the legs and thighs of the same Joan, and with his right hand took his male organ of such a length and size and put it in the secret parts of this same Joan, and bruised her watershed and laid her open so that she was bleeding and ravished her maidenhead…[0]

[0] *Year Books of Edward II: The Eyre of London, 14 Edward II, A.D. 1321*, vol. 1, ed. Helen M. Cam~~,~~ ~~(~~ (London: Selden Society, 1968), pp.87-93. In Barbara Hanawalt's covering of Joan's case, her surname is given as 'le Seler', *Of Good and Ill Repute: Gender and Social Control in Medieval England*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.124.

[0] *Year Books of Edward II: The Eyre of London, 1321*, p.88.

Limoges's assault on the child was so violent that 'her life was despaired of~~'~~' and she 'lost all hope of recovering her health'.[0]

Joan's self-reported description of what Helen Cam translated as a 'blue coat', but which might be more accurately labelled a blue kirtle instead, is revealing. As demonstrated above, this clothing detail would have assisted in painting a more vibrant narrative to the court audience, and was perhaps intended to lend authenticity to her words. Colours have long been highly symbolic and culturally contingent with shades and names of colours shifting greatly. Joan was not specific about the hue of the blue kirtle, yet blue became an increasingly popular and fashionable colour during the Middle Ages and it would have been a colour that was economically attainable with cheaper woad-dyed fabrics being accessible for many.[0] Yet, despite having comparatively little to go on other than the word 'blue', much research has been given over to colour hierarchy and colour theory as it stood in the Middle Ages from which further analysis of the colour in the medieval cultural imagination can be drawn. Michel ~~Pastoureau~~Pastoureau has noted that since the twelfth century, blue had become the colour of choice to depict the clothing of the Virgin Mary.[0] While it also came to symbolise 'joy, love, loyalty, peace, and comfort~~'~~' during this period, it seems not inconceivable that in describing herself, or being advised by family to describe herself, wearing a blue kirtle on the day of her rape, Joan was sartorially emphasising her own virginity and the purity which had been taken from her.[0] Thus it could be evidence that Joan was consciously self-fashioning after the event in order

[0] ~~Hanawalt, *Of Good and Ill Repute*, p.129.~~Ibid, p.90.

[0] It should also be noted that while the authors of wills and household letters frequently mention the type of fabric as well as the colour, Joan did not mention this, which may have been because, as a 12-year-old, she simply did not know about the specific types of textile and instead identifying colours was more obvious.

[0] Michel ~~Pastoureau~~Pastoureau, *Blue: The History of a Color*~~, (~~(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), p.50.

[0] Ibid, p.80.

to manufacture a certain image of herself for the jury in line with the legal format that constrained her and the judicial bias she faced.

Limoges proved to be a conniving and wily defendant who first claimed to be a member of the clergy which, if true, would have meant he needed to be tried in an ecclesiastical court rather than a secular one and which would have resulted in a penitential sentence over capital punishment meted out from secular courts had it been true. His claim delayed the trial by some months and by the time he conceded to a trial by jury, Joan had been either intimidated into not attending, or had been paid off. Her non-appearance at court meant, in the eyes of the judicial system, that she was guilty of having made a false appeal and so would have been arrested herself had she not been so young. According to legal practice, Limoges was then tried at the king's suit where he claimed he was the real victim, having suffered damages worth £40 and that Joan had been placed there to lure him into committing the rape so that her father could sue him.[0] This meant that a year after the traumatic event, in 1321, Joan was again forced to testify a second time when a date discrepancy in her story was found. However, Barbara Hanawalt has posited that this inconsistency may have been due to an 'inattentive (or bribed?) clerk'–' who was translating verbatim from English into French and Latin.[0]

Hanawalt has suggested that although in many cases of sexual violence, the perpetrator escaped, for 'the victim, telling the tale itself was some compensation'.[0] Not only might she clear her name in the eyes of her community but, I suggest, by using the format of the court case to retrospectively dress herself, she engaged in self-fashioning, and by so doing, emphasised her body in the traumatic episode, reclaiming it through the clothing she wore at the time of horrific violence.

[0] *Year Books of Edward II: The Eyre of London, 1321,* p.92.
[0] Hanawalt, *Of Good and Ill Repute*, p.133.
[0] Ibid, p.134.

Sexual Violence and Theft of Clothing

> …here by this way haunts a knight that distresses all ladies and gentlewomen, and at the least he robbeth them or lieth by them.[0]

So claimed a damsel to Sir Lancelot in Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'arthur*. Sexual violence twinned with the theft of the victim/survivor's clothing and accessories appear not infrequently in the legal records, and indeed, Hanawalt has observed that rape and robbery were often linked.[0] The records show that jewellery, as much as clothing, were targets of theft after rape and, following Roberta Gilchrist's example, I will include in this category of clothing accessories such as 'jewellery, badges, purses and pouches'–' used to adorn the body in specific ways similar to dress.[0] These were items which were worn on and kept close to the body, which also acted as signifiers within the silent, visual language of the period and held important symbolism within the cultural imagination.

In London, 1276, Alice le Normande appealed the Roman merchants, Frederico and Gentilio, who were presumably in the city on business, of rape. Not only had they committed this act of dehumanising sexual violence against her but, Alice contended, they had also stolen 'a brooch…and a hood'.[0] If we accept the theft of someone's autonomy and personhood through rape as just that, why might someone also steal the personal belongings of the person they had assaulted? Was this a simple case of opportunism on the part of the two Italians who, upon overpowering and raping Alice saw her brooch and her hood and took them to sell on? This interpretation seems unlikely as there were strict rules against dealing in

[0] Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, ((Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.107.
[0] Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict*, p.105.
[0] Roberta Gilchrist, *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life Course*, (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), p.68.
[0] British Museum Add. Charter 5153, m.4d and translated in *The London Eyre of 1276*, ed. Martin Weinbaum, ((London: London Record Society, 1976), p.21.

stolen goods which would have had greater repercussions for the foreign men far from home. Did they each take an item from Alice as a souvenir of their triumph over her body? Given that she included it in her appeal, did Alice view the theft of her clothing and accessories to be as offensive as the assault on her body? Would the court have taken her case less seriously if she had not had her clothing stolen and so, by adding the detail in, was Alice materially confronting her attackers and strengthening her case, thereby taking back her autonomy? There are so many possible complexities to this case but as will be shown it seems clear that it benefited the victim/survivor to include both the physical and material offences in the same case.

Frederico and Gentilio were clearly not career-thieves, being described as merchants in the records, but rather arrogant chancers with an inclination towards violence. However, J. B. Given has suggested that robbers may have 'deliberately sought out women as targets'.[0] This might have been due to the simple reason that women are, generally, less physically strong than male counterparts and so would have been a more easily overpowered and less dangerous target. This relative defencelessness may have been intensified by the fact that medieval women were less likely to carry weapons on their person with which they could retaliate in part due to their social upbringing which did not encourage violence or a knowledge of weaponry. Medieval men, on the other hand, would have been expected to be acquainted with archery and possess some melee combat skills, to carry a knife on their person and be prepared to take up arms should they be called to. To put it simply, medieval women were much less socialised towards engaging in violence, even in self-defence, making them prey for would-be rapist-thieves.

[0] ~~J. B.~~ Given, *Society and Homicide in Thirteenth-Century England*~~, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977)~~, p. 117.

If we are to take the view that most of the cases in this section which came to court were brought against thieves who raped, rather than rapists who stole, then rape was perhaps a tool of violence intended to subjugate the woman into handing over her possessions – a threat which was then carried through. Equally, the rape of a woman after the theft of her belongings could have occurred as a way to emphasise the thief's power over her. Arthur Chancellor, when writing about investigating modern sexually violent crimes, has identified a subgroup of attackers called 'opportunistic offenders'_who might include 'a burglar who conducts residential burglaries and after breaking into a house discovers a vulnerable female and decides to rape her'.[0] Clothing, then, might be the most easily transportable and stealable item within reach.

Clothing was expensive when new and even the most outmoded or outworn item had its uses or could have been sold second hand, which made clothing worth stealing. In this period, laws were enacted making it a criminal offence to knowingly sell or deal in stolen goods, pointing to a healthy trade in stolen items, including clothing.[0] As Kate Kelsey Staples has shown, fripperers, a medieval profession which dealt exclusively in the buying and selling of second-hand clothing, were made to swear an oath that they would 'not to buy or sell things that were immorally or shadily purchased, stolen, damp and bloodied…or which came from lepers or from a church'.[0] It has been suggested by Elizabeth Coatsworth that the fear of being caught with stolen clothing was exactly the reason that a hat, dating from around the 1350s, was deposited within the walls of the Church of St Mary the Virgin in Little

[0] Arthur S. Chancellor, *Investigating Sexual Assault Cases*, (Florida: CRC Press, 2022), p.210.
[0] Kate Kelsey Staples, 'Con-artists or Entrepreneurs? Fripperers and Market Space in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century Paris', *Journal of Medieval History*, vol. 43, no. 2, (2017), 228-254, p.228.
[0] Ibid, p.234.

Sampford, Essex (Figure 326).[0] Coatsworth has posited that it was perhaps a jewel or brooch which had been attached to the hat had caught the eye of the thief.[0] To avoid being found in possession of the unadorned hat, and perhaps to mitigate the spiritual consequences of stealing, Coatsworth suggests, the thief felt the safest location would be inside the walls of a parish church, possibly his or her own.[0] In this way, perhaps the thief felt the location of the deposit may have mitigated their crime.

In the case of Edith de Wytewell of Warminster, Wiltshire, theft was likely the motivation behind the attack because her rapist was assisted by a woman.[0] Edith sued William le Escot of rape and also sued Alice, 'the daughter of Thomas the reeve of Cufaud[-]' for 'abetting, namely that she aided the said William where he lay with [Edith] by force and in robbery took from her a brooch worth eightpence'.[0] Although Alice was acquitted, William was outlawed for the theft and not for the rape, perhaps because it was acknowledged that William and Edith had had a sexual relationship previously which damaged her claim that on this occasion, the sex was non-consensual. Unfortunately for Edith, medieval legal thought held that if a man and a woman had already had sex consensually, her claim that he had afterwards raped her was void. This was because there was the expectation that she accused him purely

[0] Elizabeth Coatsworth, 'Survival, Recovery, Restoration, Re-creation: The Long Life of Medieval Garments[-in]', in Gale R. Owen-Crocker and Maren Clegg Hyer, ed. *Refashioning Medieval and Early Modern Dress: A Tribute to Robin Netherton*[, Gale R. Owen-Crocker and Maren Clegg Hyer, eds., (](Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2019), 59-73, p.[-]65.

[0] Ibid.

[0] The possibility should be noted that the hat functioned as an apotropaic object which had been deposited within the walls of the church to ward off evil and safeguard the building, or even that the hat had been worn by the statue of a saint in the church and had been lost or discarded. For further discussion on these theories and the material context for the hat, see Gale Owen-Crocker and Elizabeth Coatsworth, [eds.,] ed. [*Clothing the Past: Surviving Garments from early medieval to early modern Western Europe, (*]*Clothing the Past: Surviving Garments from Early Medieval to Early Modern Western Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 51-52. The hat is also listed on the Deliberately Concealed Garments Project database, https://concealedgarments.org/cache/28593/ [accessed 22nd June 2023].

[0] TNA JUST 1/1996 and written up in *Crown Pleas of the Wiltshire Eyre, 1249*, ed. C.A.F. Meekings (Wiltshire: Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, 1961), pp.210-211.[*Civil Pleas of the Wiltshire Eyre, 1249*, ed., M. T. Clanchy, (Devizes: Wiltshire Record Society, 1971), pp.210-11.]

[0] *Wiltshire Eyre, 1249*, p.211.

out of jealousy if he had married another woman or out of desperation and to protect her own reputation if her family had discovered that she was not a virgin.[0]

The other option is that the perpetrator set about with the intention of raping a woman, the 'dominant crime'–' that Chancellor stresses it is important to determine in modern rape cases, and for whom a trophy was taken from the body of the



Figure 32 The Little Sampford Hat, c.1350. Catalogued in the Deliberately Concealed Garments Project under the number CG9.

woman.[0] Chancellor categorises this type of offender as a 'sexual sadist', who is more likely to take 'a souvenir or trophy'–' from the victim/survivor.[0] Within modern psychological discourse of sexual crimes, it is understood that 'souvenirs'–' function as a 'symbol of triumph or victory'–' over the victim/survivor or even as an *aide memoire* of the attack.[0] Small items, due to pragmatism, are the most common trophies, especially jewellery and 'intimate'–' clothing such as bras and underwear.[0] As discussed in Chapter One, medieval European women did not wear underwear in the way modern women do. It seems likely then that a hood was the easiest garment

[0] Bracton, Henry, 'De Legibus Et Consuetudinibus Angliæ', *Harvard Law School Library Online*, https://amesfoundation.law.harvard.edu/Bracton/index.html, p.416.
[0] Chancellor, *Investigating Sexual Assault Cases*, p.210
[0] Ibid.
[0] Ibid, p.108.
[0] Ibid. Other modern trophies include driving licenses and video recordings of the attack.

to steal, alongside the brooch, as it was worn externally and could be slipped over the head quickly, making it an easily stolen, yet personal item of clothing. This reading certainly seems more in keeping with the actions of Frederico and Gentilio, who would have had little need, and perhaps few contacts in London willing to buy, items of stolen female clothing.

Dress is, as also discussed in Chapter One and seen in cases like the aforementioned Eva who was found murdered in Somerset and identified through her clothing, intimately linked to personhood and so the theft of one's personal belongings, particularly those worn on the body, could be seen to function as a proxy attack. Indeed, the anthropologist Ada Engebrigtsen, whose work primarily focuses on Roma and traveller communities, has argued that '[t]he amalgamation of objects and persons is everywhere present in social relations, and theft thus serves, among other things, as a forceful demonstration of this assimilation'.[0] This, she says, explains 'the feeling of having been personally violated or abused that people often refer to when they have experienced theft[']which demonstrates that '[identity] and personhood may thus be attacked through objects['].[0] Applying this to medieval women, the rape and subsequent theft may have felt like a multifaceted attack. Not only was violent abuse carried out against their bodies, but in having their clothing stolen, the articles of clothing with which they formulated and projected their identities was also taken.

Numerous rape cases are peppered throughout medieval England's legal records but with a conviction rate that was so low, it is clear to see why so many women might have incorporated the additional crime of theft to the suit. It could have been legally pragmatic in that she felt that a two-pronged suit of rape and theft

[0] Ada I. Engebrigtsen, '"Your Heart is not Warm Unless You Steal!": Social Constructions of Theft and Stealing', *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*, vol. 17, no. 1, (2008), 119-135, p.120.
[0] Ibid.

would strengthen her case and increase her chances of a conviction, or that having suffered the trauma of sexual violation, the theft stood in as a symbol of something precious having been taken from her. A theft of a material object would also reinforce the lack of consent in the violation of her body. Alternately, by describing what she had been wearing during the attack and which had then been taken from her, it is possible this element contributed to the victim/survivor's self-fashioning as it allowed her to show the jurors the items and objects she had worn before the attack, and in so doing, recreate the woman she had been before the incident.

Hanawalt has calculated that between 1202 and 1276, there were 142 cases of rape brought before the eyre courts, which contrasts starkly with the 3,492 murders in the same period.[0] It should absolutely not be assumed that this means there were only 142 rapes, but rather that only 142 women went ahead with their appeal despite the stigma, financial barriers or the reality of almost certain failure to convict and which often resulted in the woman facing prison time and a monetary punishment.

By contrast, for Joan de Haldeby, her abduction and the theft of her clothing were not evidence enough that a crime had been committed. According to the Surrey Eyre of 1241, John Goldcloppe, enraged at Joan's refusal to betroth herself to him, attempted to force her hand by abducting her. Along with a few of his friends, he kept her in his hometown for a day until she was rescued by authorities in the area. After her release, Joan sued John for 'abduction, wrongful imprisonment and the robbery of some articles of dress, including a couple of brooches worth 2s'.[0] However, because her appeal was not based on rape or the death of her husband, the two charges a woman could bring against someone, her case was nullified. It seems that Joan, perhaps realising that her case of abduction was quitefairly flimsy,

[0] Barbara Hanawalt, *Of Good and Ill Repute*, *: Gender and Social Control in Medieval England,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.131.
[0] *The 1235 Surrey Eyre,* vol. I, ed. C.A.F. Meekings, ((Guildford: Surrey Record Society, 1979), p.123.

included the details about the theft of her clothes and accessories, highlighting their financial worth, in an effort to bolster her claim of a wrong done to her.

Conclusions

Whether real, threatened or perceived, violence was a tool to intimidate and enforce the compliance and oppression of women. Yet, the dress of a woman subjected to violence played an important role in the legal proceedings. Her clothing could act as evidence that a non-consensual attack had occurred, or highlighted the way her body had been discarded after death. Ultimately, descriptions of the victim/survivor's clothing foregrounded her body in the legal records.

In most cases of violence against women, her clothing is the final barrier between her body and her attacker, and so any violence to her clothing acted as foretelling the violence that was intended for her body beneath. In these cases of rapes, kidnaps and murders as well as the thefts of clothing after a rape, we see a disregard for both the woman and her clothing, material items intimately linked with her identity, life and physicality. For those silenced by male violence, such as Isabel and Isabell, we are able to gain a clearer insight into their lives by analysing the ways their clothing was treated before, during and after their deaths. For the survivors, clothing could be used by women to reinforce their testimonies and, crucially, to allow them to self-fashion in the andro-centric world of the court room. By imbuing themselves with the traits and virtues associated with the colour of their clothing and by perhaps relying on the colour's meaning within the broader cultural imagination, these women may have felt empowered to confront the men accused of violating their bodies. In this way, these women used their clothing as a way to reclaim their agency in the court room.

The brevity with which the cases of gender violence were so often recorded proved a limiting factor. The more shocking crimes like those committed against Isabel Carpenter were

recorded in detail. However this contrasts with the sheer number of rape cases in other record types for which a mere line or two was thought sufficient to document the women's traumas. Eyre records are particularly scant, with stock phrases such as '[Woman] appeals [man] of rape' or 'of rape and robbery' hiding the true horror and denying full attention to the woman's pain. An absence of extraneous details such as the victim/survivor's clothing in many court records should not be viewed as indicative of a lack of significance placed on the clothing of the victim/survivor. Clearly, this is not the case as when clothing is mentioned it is recorded with attention and detail. Jurists, too, placed importance on the dress of victim/survivors, with damaged dress acting as key evidence that assault had happened. So, any lack of detail in the court records concerning dress is likely to be far more indicative of the formulaic structure of wording and the strained workload that clerks of courts were forced to contend with, unable to waste time or ink on the details of a case.

In the next chapter, I will examine the ways masculine clothing on feminine bodies was viewed within secular and religious society and how transgressive sartorial practices could temporarily free women from the restrictions placed on them, as well as wider, more passive violence enacted against women in medieval England.



Figure 38 The Little Sampford Hat, c.1350. Catalogued in the Deliberately Concealed Garments Project under the number CG9.

Chapter Three: Deviance or Devotion: Women Dressed as Men in Late Medieval England[0]

On the 18th September 1417, a mandate was written by the official of the Bishop of Durham, Thomas Langley, to the parish priests of the churches of St Nicholas and All Saints in Newcastle-upon-Tyne which was then copied into the Priory Register.[0] It concerned the crimes and consequent punishment of two women, Matilda Burgin and Margaret Usshar, who had been brought before the bishop's court.[0] They had been caught in Durham Cathedral attempting to approach the shrine of St Cuthbert. For women to approach the shrine was expressly forbidden, and in order to circumvent this ruling, the women had disguised themselves in masculine clothing making the act all the more egregious. What prompted these women to take such serious, controversial and potentially damaging steps? Could they have been motivated by their own personal devotion to St Cuthbert to put on masculine clothing to see his shrine? Were they motivated by disdain for the gendered segregation upheld by the Bishop of Durham and did they intend to disobey the command of St Cuthbert? Or were these women driven by desperation, looking for something they needed or perhaps thinking that being in the presence of St Cuthbert's relics would have protected them from something they feared?

[0] Parts of this chapter have been published as an article ~~with the journal, *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, (2024) but has yet to be assigned to a volume.~~: Eleanor Birch, 'Deviance or Devotion: Women Dressed as Men in Late Medieval England', *Fashion Theory*, vol. 29, no. 5 (2025), 619-639.

[0] Durham Cathedral Archive, Priory Register III, f.7r. The mandate was printed in Latin in William Hutchinson, *The History and Antiquities of the County Palatine of Durham*, vol. II, ~~((~~Newcastle: S. Hodgson & Robinsons, 1823), p.297 and was summarised in English in M. A. Richardson, *The Borderer's Table Book; or Gatherings of the Local History and Romance of the English and Scottish Border*, ~~((~~England: Henry G. Bohn, York Street, Covent Garden, London 1846), p.149.

[0] I intend to refer to Matilda and Margaret by their first names from here on, following the argument of Emily McLemore in her blog post, 'Thinking Sex, Teaching Violence and the Book of Margery Kempe~~'~~', for the University of Notre Dame's *Medieval Studies Research Blog*, ~~((~~2021), https://sites.nd.edu/manuscript-studies/2021/03/03/thinking-sex-teaching-violence-and-the-book-of-margery-kempe/, [accessed 26th February 2023], n.1. McLemore has argued that to refer to medieval women solely by their surname is to conflate their identity with that of their husband or father, and so by using their first names, their personhood is brought to the foreground.

Masculine clothing could bring practical benefits, and this may well have motivated these women: it brought opportunities, and it brought both physical and spiritual protection in late medieval England; but it was also a subversive act which could produce reputational damage, as well as spiritual and legal repercussions. For many of the cases in this chapter, I will be largely using female pronouns. This is because there is no clear evidence that the women I focus on were using clothing as a means to express and represent a gender identity that was other to what they were assumed to be at birth; rather, these women were using masculine clothing as a temporary tool to gain social freedoms. There are many examples of people living throughout the medieval period who did perform their gender identity through dress and personal adornment, mannerisms and labour, if it did not align with binary understandings of biological sex: people such as John/Eleanor Rykener, who dressed in men's and women's clothing at different points in their life, used clothing in a way which performed a complex gender identity.[0] For people like John/Eleanor Rykener, the work of sociologist, Judith Butler, who has written extensively on the ways gender could be said to be continually 'constructed~~'~~' and performed - the 'doing~~'~~' of gender - is a useful framework. Applying Butler's approach, we can see how clothing acted as a practical tool which allowed women to evade or undermine the constraints and dangers of a male-oriented society. While clerics had vitriolic reactions to women dressing in men's clothes, such as Henry Knighton's disgust mentioned in Chapter One, in this chapter, I will show how temporarily adopting male

[0] Tess Wingard's paper on 'passing~~' in~~', in late medieval England was extremely useful when thinking about medieval (in)tolerance to and flexibility of gendered identities, 'How to Pass in Fourteenth-Century England: Cisgender and Transgender Bodies in Medieval Thought', Leeds International Medieval Congress 2024. For more discussion of non-binary or trans experiences in the medieval period, see Leah DeVun, *The Shape of Sex: Nonbinary Gender from Genesis to the Renaissance*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021) and *Trans Historical: Gender Plurality before the Modern*, ed~~s~~. Greta ~~LeFleur~~LaFleur, Masha Raskolnikov and Anna Klosowska~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021). More dedicated analyses of Rykener's life can be found firstly in Ruth Mazo Karras and David Lorenzo Boyd, ~~'~~'The Interrogation of a Male Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth Century London~~'~~', *GLQ*, vol. 1, no. 4~~,~~ ~~(~~ (1995), 459-465; Ruth Mazo Karras and Tom Linkinen, ~~'~~'John/Eleanor Rykener Revisited~~' in~~', in *Founding Feminisms in Medieval Studies*, ed~~s~~. Laine E. Doggett and Daniel O'Sullivan~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 111-121; Kadin Henningson, ~~'~~"Calling [herself] Eleanor": Gender Labor and Becoming a Woman in the Rykener Case~~'~~', *Medieval Feminist Forum*, vol. 55, no. 1~~,~~ ~~(~~ (2019), 249-266.

clothing could allow the medieval wearer greater social benefits and freedom of movement, as well as allowing more intense access to the divine.[0]

This chapter will first examine the circumstances surrounding the case of Matilda and Margaret, their arrest in Durham Cathedral and the social, spiritual and sartorial consequences of their very public punishment. It will then go on to compare their experience with that of other medieval women, and in some cases perhaps gender non-conforming people, who were arrested having adopted masculine dress. Finally, this chapterarticle will examine the possible influence the popular religious literature of cross-dressing female saints may have had on Matilda and Margaret perhaps inspiring their later behaviour.

Sacred Space and Female Exclusion

The cathedral of Durham had been consecrated to St Cuthbert (c.634-687) in 1104, housing the body of the saint in an elaborate shrine behind the high altar at the eastern end of the cathedral which became an immensely popular site of pilgrimage for the remainder of the medieval period. Indeed, the anonymous author of *The Rites of Durham* (c.1593) included a possible eyewitness account which described the shrine as 'estimated to be one of the most sumptuous in all England, so great were the offerings and jewels bestowed upon it, and endless the miracles that were wrought at it' ' before Thomas Cromwell had the shrine the Reformation stripped the shrine of its riches in 1537.[0] Even then, the cult of St Cuthbert maintained a strong following, particularly in the north of England, where he was the patron saint of the county of Northumberland, and in Scotland.

[0] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, ((London: Routledge, 2004), p.1. See also Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, ((New York: Routledge, 2017).

[0] *The Rites of Durham*, eds. Margaret Harvey and Lynda Rollason, ((Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2020), p.106. Harvey and Rollason have suggested that the anecdote came from a former member of the monastic community whom the author interviewed, p.23.

The Rites of Durham was compiled in 1593 by an anonymous author whom Margaret Harvey and Lynda Rollason argue convincingly was the antiquarian~~,~~ William Claxton, owing to his 'access to manuscript and printed sources', past members of the religious house, as well as the cathedral itself. Claxton's suspected Catholic sympathies and friendships with known Recusant families only strengthens Harvey's and Rollason's case.[0]

Various reasons for women's absence from the shrine and the cathedral are given in versions of St Cuthbert's *v~~V~~ita*. *The Rites of Durham* put forward the anecdote that the saint had grown to abhor the presence of women after he had been wrongfully accused of impregnating a local Pictish chieftain's daughter in his youth. The young woman declared in the presence of her father and his peers that the celibate hermit had fathered her child, prompting the saint to pray to God for proof of the lie. At that moment, the 'earth there, makeing a hissing noyse, presently opened, and swallowed her upe in the presence of the beholders'.[0] On the intercession and begging of the girl's father, St Cuthbert again prayed to God for the girl to be returned to her family on the condition that access to any church consecrated to him be forbidden to women and that 'noe woman after that should resorte unto him'.[0] Thus, over the centuries the shrine of St Cuthbert developed a reputation for what recent scholars have identified as 'misogyny~~'~~' with women being continually excluded from entering the cathedral as well as seeing or benefiting from closeness to the shrine for centuries.[0] In assessing an array of contemporary accounts, it becomes clear that there was a mixed response to this ordinance long before Margaret and Matilda's act ~~and perhaps even~~from outright disobedience alongside total acceptance to~~o~~r frustrated submission. *The Rites of Durham* mentions a number of processions in which the relics of St Bede, St

[0] Ibid, p.~~-~~23.
[0] Ibid, p.180.
[0] Ibid, p.181.
[0] A.E. Redgate, 'St Cuthbert', in *The Oxford Companion to British History*, ~~eds.,~~ ed. Robert Crowfoot and John Cannon~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199677832.001.0001/acref-9780199677832-e-1221 [accessed 1st March 2023]~~,~~ ~~(~~ (para. 1 of 3).

Cuthbert and St Margaret were paraded around the cathedral, accompanied by a crowd of ‘men, wemmen and children [who] with great reverence and devotion’ observed the processions which went through into the cloisters and into the cathedral with ‘a number of men following it (but no women was suffered to goe further than the abbey yeitts)’.[0] The verb used, ‘suffered’, could have been intended in the sense of ‘allowed’ but certainly has stronger implications of a painful endurance of something or someone, pointing towards the attitude that women’s presence near in the cathedral was perhaps a spiritual pain for the male religious inhabitants or St Cuthbert himself.[0] St Margaret’s relics were included in the procession but her sainthood put her in the same spiritual sphere as St Cuthbert, perhaps excluding her from being rejected from the space. While modern vocabulary used to identify, discuss or challenge misogynist attitudes do not correlate to medieval ideas about gender inequalities, it is clear from the writings of Symeon of Durham (fl. 1086-1129) who highlighted the fatal and spiritually damning consequences for women who had attempted to enter the sacred cathedral space, that scare tactics were a necessary tool to prevent contemporary women from doing the same. Symeon recorded the tribulations of one woman who was driven by ‘womanly eagerness’ to see the ‘varied beauty’ of the cathedral, but while on ‘the path through the cemetery…went out of her mind and bit out her own tongue’ before slitting her own throat. Another woman, this time named as Sungeova, was punished by ‘losing her senses’ and ultimately dying after crossing the cemetery as a shortcut for getting home at the command of her husband.[0] Thus, neither the feminine body being outside the cathedral of St Cuthbert, nor obeying one’s husband but disobeying St Cuthbert grants exemption from the saint’s, and thereby, God’s wrath. While these anecdotes have no

[0] *The Rites of Durham*, pp.358, 359.

[0] ‘sufferen’, *MED*, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED43653/track?counter=1&search_id=73592620, [accessed 23rd September 2023].

[0] Symeon of Durham, *Libellus de exordio atque procursu istius, hoc est Dunhelmensis, ecclesie: tract on the origins and progress of this the Church of Durham*, ed. David Rollason, ((Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp.-109, 108. These cases are repeated in the anonymously authored Middle English text, *The Life of St Cuthbert in English Verse, c. AD 1450*, ((England: Surtees Society, 1891) which dates from c.1450 but which is believed to rely on texts translated from Latin and French before 1200, ((p.1).

verifiable truth to them, it seems highly likely that these narratives would have circulated within the general populace of Durham, not least because the country was known for being the lands of St Cuthbert, and further afield as a way of instilling a female obedience to the will of St Cuthbert by fear. The presence of these scaremongering tales demonstrate that Symeon and his contemporaries felt a need to dissuade and deter women who might try to enter the cathedral. These literary deterrents, then, could indicate that there had been previous attempts by women to enter the cathedral and that generating and circulating tales detailing the madness and suicide of women who tried, would discourage them.

Although Katherine French has demonstrated that women could be benefactors and even keyholders of churches and that women's devotion was highly regarded on the parochial level, this approach was not shared by Durham Cathedral.[0] Instead, women were expressly forbidden from approaching the shrine, a rule not applied to male members of the laity. It would have been clear to the local women and female pilgrims that their sex precluded them from access not only to the patron saint of their county but also the space in which he was housed, which as Christian Liddy has noted, was seen as a 'source of power'.[0] This meant they were also excluded from access to any intercession or healing that praying at the popular saint's shrine might have provided. Being denied physical access to the shrine of the most eminent saint in the region excluded women from a crucial religious experience that their male relatives had access to, and forbade women from participating fully in the religious culture of Northumberland. As Daphne Spain has argued, having a space reserved exclusively for them 'allows men to produce and reproduce power and privilege'.[0] William Melczer has put forward that in relation to the site of Santiago di Compostela, 'the sacred consecrates its immediate environment: hence the need to share that environment, the need for an

[0] Katherine French, *The Good Women of the Parish: Gender and Religion after the Black Death*, ((Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp.85, 89.
[0] Christian Liddy, *The Bishopric of Durham in the Late Middle Ages*, ((Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2012), p.234.
[0] Daphne Spain, *Gendered* Spaces, ((Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p.3.

unmediated contact with the sacred'.[0] Similarly, Susan Morrison has noted how the segregation of gender at some of the pilgrimage sites in Rome 'precludes [women] from the "bonus points" available…in terms of indulgences' and the same can be said of Durham in that the spiritual relief as well as awe, reassurance and comfort of being close to a venerated body was utterly denied to female pilgrims.[0] Thus, this gendered segregation of pilgrimage sites in both England and mainland Europe reinforced the gender hierarchy already inherent into Christianity, and perhaps undid any attempt by medieval Christian writers to see each other as spiritually equal in the eyes of God regardless of sex and in accordance with St Paul's letter to the Galatians in which he wrote that 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus'; (Galatians 3:28). Clearly, the lived experience of medieval Christian women was far removed from this egalitarian phrase which put forward a sentiment that the women in Northumberland would not have recognised in their own religious practice.

The Case of Matilda Burgin and Margaret Usshar

It was to this sacred, segregated-by-sex space that Matilda and Margaret attempted to gain access in mid-September 1417. A document from the priory register records that the women came from the town of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, some 15 miles north of Durham. They were domestic servants to Peter Baxter and his pregnant, unnamed, wife with whom they would likely have lived.[0] Assuming that Matilda and Margaret were, apart from this one known example of aberrant behaviour, largely typical of their demographic, it can be speculated that they would have been aged between their mid-teens and early twenties as the majority of servant women at the time, were unmarried and possibly had migrated from the

[0] William Melczer, *The Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago di Compostela*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1993), p.2.
[0] Susan Morrison, *Women Pilgrims in Late Medieval England*, (London: Routledge, 2000), p.90.
[0] Priory Register III, f.7r. Here we see evidence of a woman's name being omitted from history while her biological worth as wife and mother is foregrounded.

countryside to Newcastle for employment.[0] At some point in the days leading up to the 18th of September, the women travelled to Durham, which would have taken around five hours on foot. It was not documented whether they were already dressed in masculine clothing or whether they had packed their masculine disguise with them and changed before entering the cathedral. Putting masculine clothing on in order to walk the distance to Durham may well have afforded them an extra level of protection from strangers who may have been willing to do harm to two young women walking in the countryside. Indeed, the very fact that Matilda and Margaret travelled together may have had multiple benefits beyond simply alleviating any boredom from walking for five hours. Travelling as a pair, even if they had been wearing feminine clothing, would have provided some level of physical protection, making them less vulnerable to opportunistic thieves or attackers on the rural road between the cities.[0]

This would be entirely in keeping with George Duby's assertion that travelling in pairs or groups would have dispelled any taint of 'insanity'' or deviancy that a lone walker may have elicited, and given that Matilda and Margaret were intending to commit a religious violation, it was perhaps all the more important that they appear sane.[0] Sexual assault was also a very real threat to female pilgrims. Both Margery Kempe and St Birgitta of Sweden's daughter, Katherine, mention the fear of sexual violence while travelling to or from a sacred site.[0] Indeed, Margery Kempe noted that on return to England from her pilgrimage to Aachen in 1434, 'sche was evyr aferd to a be ravischyd or defilyd'' and that she 'durst trustyn on no man'' believing that 'men wolde a defylyd hir'' while she only felt safe enough to sleep at night when 'sche had a woman er tweyn with hir'.[0] Although Joan of Arc lived across the

[0] Kim Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, : *Young Women and Gender in England, 1270-1450*, (Manchester: Manchester University, 2003), p.108.
[0] For female companionship as protection, see Anne E. Bailey, ''Women Pilgrims and Their Travelling Companions in Twelfth-Century England'', *Viator*, (2015), vol. 46, no. 1; (2015), 115-134.
[0] *A History of Private Life, Vol. II: Revelations of the Medieval World*, ed., ed. Georges Duby, trans., Arthur Goldhammer, ((London: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp.510-511.
[0] Morrison, *Women Pilgrims*, p.58.
[0] Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Book II, ed. Lynn Stanley, ((Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), lines 499, 502.

English Channel, she was a contemporary of Matilda and Margaret until her death in 1431 which had been prompted, in part, due to Joan's refusal to give up her masculine attire a mere fourteen years after the pair's own act of cross dressing. Joan's court testimonies reveal that her own anxieties about sexual violence while on the road or battle-field were recorded in her court trials from 1430: 'for lodging and sleeping at night, she usually had a woman stay with her [but when] she was fighting, she slept clothed and armed when she could not find a woman'.[0] Clearly then, travelling in the company of other women was thought to offer some level of protection against sexual assault, with the other woman perhaps able to raise the hue and cry in the event of an assault, as well as acting as an eye witness who could testify in court as well as companionship.

Neither of the two documents relating to their case note the specifics of what Matilda and Margaret had been wearing at the time of their apprehension which suggests that they were dressed in clothing that was considered entirely usual for northern English men of the early fifteenth century. However, the provenance of their appropriated clothing is a mystery; it seems most probable, as servants with access to their master's laundry, that they would have been able to siphon off items for their own use. Equally, they could have stolen - perhaps temporarily in their minds - clothes from their fathers or brothers and assembled their outfits piece-by-piece to avoid suspicion. While wearing their master's clothing would indicate a higher social status than that of their fathers, it can be assumed that their outfits were made up of at least the basic elements: a long-sleeved, woollen tunic which reached to their knees, woollen hose or stockings held up by knee garters, leather ankle boots and a woollen cap or hood on their heads which would have hidden their long hair. Visual examples of the types of contemporary clothing and outfits worn by those of a similar social status to

[0] *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, ed. Daniel Hobbins, ((Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p.148. Joan's use of dress is covered more fully later in this chapter with a couple of key sources being Susan Crane's 'Clothing and Gender Definition: Joan of Arc', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol. 26, no. 2, (1996), 297-320 and Valerie Hotchkiss, *Clothes Makes the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1996), especially Chapter 4.

Margaret and Matilda can be found in the manuscript illuminations of a book ~~owned by John, Duke of Berry~~ which was produced in around 1413 (F~~f~~igure 3~~4~~). Despite being a French source, this manuscript, created for the brother to the king of France,~~-~~ Duke Jean de Berry~~-Jean de Berry~~, the commissioner of the more famous *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* mentioned in Chapter One, it contains some very fine examples of early fifteenth century fashion for different members of society from the nobility to agricultural labourers. The French provenance should not be an impediment to including it in this study of late medieval dress owing to the cultural mixing that occurred between England and northern France during this period. As discussed in Chapter One, very few secular garments have survived from the period, but the clothes of the Bocksten Man, who is believed to have died in Sweden in the last half of the fourteenth century, provides unique examples of clothing which would still have been in circulation~~ting~~ in the early part of the next century, albeit very out of fashion.[0] In the image below, we can see a group of men in conversation. Two wear versions of *chaperons* in black and purple, while two others wear a red cap and a pink hood with a long liripipe. They wear knee-length tunics with belts and purses. Three of the men wear hose in black, pink and blue while the young man on the right wears stockings which appear to have been rolled down to the garter below the knee. All wear ankle high, black leather boots. It is this type of outfit, ~~:~~ hood, tunic, hose and boots, that we can assume Matilda and Margaret were wearing when they approached Durham Cathedral.

[0] For details on medieval extant garments, especially the Bocksten Man, see *Clothing the Past: Surviving Garments from early medieval to early modern Western Europe*, ed~~s~~. Gale Owen-Crocker and Elizabeth Coatsworth~~, (~~ (Leiden: Brill, 2018), particularly p.163.



Figure ~~39~~ 33 The Comedies of Terence, *Paris, Bibliotheque de l'Arsénal, MS 664, fol. 121r, c. 1413. Source: BnF Gallica.*

It is unclear how far into the cathedral Matilda and Margaret were able to walk, but the document does suggest that they were able to approach the shrine.[0] The court makes clear the outrage of the bishop's council that presided over Matilda and Margaret's case, noting that they were 'induced by diabolical influence~~'–'~~ ~~i~~in attempting to see the shrine of St Cuthbert 'in men's clothing [*vestibus virilibus*]~~'–'~~ 'knowing this to be prohibited to women in all ways under the penalty of major excommunication…'[0] For this 'grave crime', it was decided that the women were to 'march publicly in the procession for three feast days around the Church of St Nicholas and another three feast days around the Church of All Saints…in the same male clothing, the same form and fashion in which they had so recklessly entered the said Church Cathedral of Durham'.[0] Yet again, Matilda and Margaret's bodies were rejected from the vicinity of the saint, as they were made to perform their punishment in their town 15

[0] Priory Register III, f.7r, '*ut ad feretrum sanctis confessoris Cuthberti personaliter accederent'.* All translations mine.

[0] Ibid, '*ex instigatione diabolica inducte…vestibus virilibus inductae, eo animo et intentione, ut ad feretrum sanctis confessoris Cuthberti personaliter accederent scientes hoc esse prohibitum mulieribus quibus-cunque sub pena excommunicationis majoris et violationis ecclesiae libertatis.~~'–'~~*

[0] Ibid, '*incedat coram processione tribus diebus festivis circa ecclesiam Sanctis Nicholai et aliis tribus diebus festivis circa ecclesiam Omnium Sanctorum praedictas in eisdem vestibus virilibus eisdem modo et forma quibus ad dictam ecclesiam cathedralem Dunelmen tam temerarie accedebant'.*

miles north rather than around the cathedral. This decision may have been taken to amplify their shame by being observed in such a penitential state by their own community, but it also may have served to strengthen the bishop's and, by extension, St Cuthbert's total rejection of them, their bodies and their spirituality in the cathedral space. The severity of their punishment was clearly intended as a deterrent to other women against attempting to invert the medieval perception of a natural, God-ordained social order, and might also hint at the threat to his authority that Bishop Langley might have perceived it to be.

The specification that Matilda and Margaret were expected to wear the exact same masculine clothing in which they had committed the offence is intriguing. This suggests that the clothing was not confiscated from them and that they had to keep it with them in the interim, perhaps as a reminder of their guilt. They then had to materially recreate the offence by dressing again in those clothes and re-enacting the crime around two other sacred buildings, their parish churches, and so would have been in full view of their community. It is likely that for a late medieval person to have seen a woman wearing masculine clothing in broad daylight would have been a shocking and unsettling sight, as it implied the inversion of God's order in the world. Indeed, the mockery of the convicted by the public would have been a key aspect of the punishment, a phenomenon that Mitchell Merback has called 'judicial spectatorship'.[0]

This performance of their crime as punishment was intended by Bishop Langley and his council not only to instil guilt, shame, humiliation and contrition in the female offenders, but also as a clear deterrent to other women who may have been tempted to emulate them in order to get a glimpse of the shrine and cathedral from which they were excluded. The earliest manuscript of the *Rites of Durham* states that 'yf any woman chanced to come within

[0] Mitchell Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe*, ((London: Reaktion Books, 1999), p.128. For further discussion of medieval punishment, see Robert Mills, *Suspended Animation: Pain, Pleasure and Punishment in Medieval Culture*, ((London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2006) and Jody Enders, *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence*, ((Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018).

the abbei gaits, or within any presinckt of the house, yf she had beene seene but her length within any place of the said house, she was taken and sett fast and punished, to geve example to all others for doyng the like'.[0] The *Middle English Dictionary* suggested the possible meaning of 'her' in', in the previous quotation as 'hair' ' length which may well have been the medieval forerunner of the idiomatic phrase 'hair's breadth'.[0] In addition, their public penance would have demonstrated the far-reaching power of the bishop, and may even have suggested been intended to demonstrate the St Cuthbert's or the bishop's omniscience in that these women were caught in disguise in Durham and could be punished in a town some distance away but still within the realm of the bishop. Liddy has suggested that the bishops of Durham 'saw themselves as the personification of the founding saint of their church' ' which would make any slight against the bishop a slight against their esteemed saint.[0]

Punishments for Women Dressing as Men in Medieval England

In comparing the punishments of other women who were caught in the act of wearing masculine clothing, it seems clear that Margaret's and Matilda's punishments were unusually harsh and quite unique, having involved the pair re-dressing in the men's clothes they committed the crime in. The dress of others made to perform a public penance might include being shoeless and bare headed, one's usual clothes or a white sheet of fabric for the more egregious crimes.[0] Mary Mansfield's seminal text on the role of humiliation in public penance focuses on thirteenth-century France although she did include some examples from England and Flanders. Her work has highlighted that public penances were 'quite common'

[0] *Rites of Durham*, p.178.
[0] 'Her', *MED*, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED20433/track?counter=2&search_id=23520772>, [accessed 1st March 2023].
[0] Liddy, *Bishopric of Durham*, p.177.
[0] Rosalind Hill, ''Public Penance: Some Problems of a Thirteenth-Century Bishop'', *History*, vol. 36, no. 128, ((1951), 213-226, p.219 and Dolly MacKinnon, ''Charitable Bodies: Clothing as Charity in Early-Modern Rural England' in', in *Practices of Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds., ed. Megan Cassidy-Welch and Peter Sherlock, ((Turnhout: Brepols Publisher, 2008), 235-259, p.249.

~~in~~‘, in England, at least more so than France, and that the role of spiritual public penance was to ‘[reconcile] the sinner with God and the church’.[0] Mansfield has noted that it also served to embarrass, could settle feuds, humiliate and discipline members of society, and in so doing, maintain or reinforce social order for a variety of crimes from interpersonal violence, illicit sexual activity or fraudulent business dealings.[0] Penance is specifically a sacrament of the church which was undergone in a ‘semi-voluntary~~–~~’ fashion as they could not be physically enforced.[0] However, penance was endured under the threat of excommunication, arguably a greater punishment than secular ones, as it put the excommunicated in danger of eternal damnation if they were to die without receiving the last rites and prevented them from being buried in consecrated ground. Furthermore, excommunication had wide reaching social and legal implications which, as Felicity Hill has shown, led to the social exclusion of the excommunicated through fear of sinful contagion.[0] It left the excommunicated vulnerable to violence and ostracization from their communities, prevented business dealings, ‘provoked fear of hell…and removal of legal rights’.[0] Matilda and Margaret had been threatened with ‘major excommunication [*excommunicationis maioris*]’, which meant a ‘complete exclusion from Christian society~~–~~’ and which the contemporary theologian Thomas Chobham compared to being afflicted by ‘leprosy’.[0] This assertion of major excommunication as synonymous with one of the most feared diseases in the Middle Ages would have meant that Peter Baxter, his convalescing wife and new-born twins, as well as the wider communities of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, were in immense spiritual danger by being in close proximity to the two women.

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[0] Mary C. Mansfield, *The Humiliation of Sinners: Public Penance in Thirteenth-Century France*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), p.128.
[0] Ibid, p.114.
[0] Ibid, p.99.
[0] Felicity Hill, *Excommunication in Thirteenth-Century England: Communities, Politics, and Publicity*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp.104-107.
[0] Ibid, p.11.
[0] Priory Register III, f.7r. Thomas Chobham, *Summa: Thomas de Chobham Summa Confessorum*, ed. Revd. D. Broomfield~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Louvain: Éditions Nauwelaerts, 1968), p.248, cited ~~in~~ in Hill, *Excommunication in Thirteenth Century England*, p.105.

While Matilda and Margaret had been ordered by the authority of the bishop to do penance for their crime, religious punishments were not always the consequence of cross-dressing which itself speaks to the severity of their spiritual transgression in the most important Christian building in the north of England. Research into female 'cross-dressing~~'~~ ~~in~~', in London after 1450 by Judith Bennett and Shannon McSheffrey has demonstrated that a different punishment was the standard for women who were assumed to be sex workers and who used the wearing of masculine clothing in their trade.[0] They note that the punishment handed to Trude Garard on 5th May 1473 was 'conventional for London prostitutes~~'~~ ~~'~~' but also became 'the precedent for the punishment of cross-dressers~~'~~ ~~'~~' as Garard has been caught 'in a mans array and ~~lothing'~~clothing~~' in~~', in the streets of London. Garard admitted to being a 'strumpet~~'~~ ~~'~~' and as punishment was to be led from the prison to the pillory and then on to the outskirts of London 'wearing a striped hood on her head~~'~~ ~~'~~' but otherwise no mention of what she was expected to wear.[0] This lack of prescriptive clothing other than a striped hood suggests it was understood that she would wear feminine clothing for the procession, rather than the masculine clothing she had been caught wearing. These striped hoods are recorded in the punishments of other women accused of being sex workers as well as those found to be cross-dressing. This is due to the possible conflation, in medieval minds, of feminine bodies ~~wearing masculine clothing and~~ and their ~~an~~ uncontrolled libido with wearing masculine clothing, which could lead the woman, therefore, to seek out sex work. In the years after Matilda and Margaret's case, a number of other women and less easily gendered people were arrested for cross dressing in late medieval and early modern England. One such woman was Elizabeth Chekyn who was arrested in the street in 'a preeste array and clothing~~' in~~', in 1516

[0] Judith Bennett and Shannon McSheffrey, ~~'~~'Early, Erotic and Alien: Women Dressed as Men in Late Medieval London~~'~~', *History Workshop Journal*, 77~~, (~~ (2014), 1-25, p.21.
[0] London Metropolitan Archives, COL/CC/01/01/008, f.50 and referenced in Bennett and McSheffrey, 'Early, Erotic and Alien', p.22.

and was accused of being a 'harlott and Strumpett'.[0] In 1519, Margery Brett, Margery Smyth, ~~and~~ Margery Tyler and Elizabeth Thomson were convicted of being 'Strumpettes & common harlottes of their bodies' with evidence of this being that they wore ~~were arrested and~~ their ~~shorn~~ hair shorn 'like unto mennys hedes~~'~~' which was felt to demonstrate~~d~~ their intention to 'goo in mennes clothing at tymes' and were arrested.[0] Their actions directly contravened the Biblical teachings laid out by St Paul in his letter to the Corinthians in which he ordered that women should leave their hair long and that for a wife to cut her hair or shave her head is disgraceful (1 Corinthians 11:6). It also went against the Old Testament prohibition against women adopting male dress as it was an abomination against God (Deuteronomy 22:5). There were other interpretations of these Biblical laws and medieval people argued with and moulded spiritual laws as they saw fit. Yet Margery, Matilda, ~~Chekyn~~ Elizabeth and the three Margerys were not adopting masculine dress to take up arms. Crucially for them, the authorities took the view that they had crossed crucial, deeply rooted theological boundaries and transgressed sartorial gender dichotomies.

Despite the accusations of sex work by the court, the three Margerys never admitted to being sex workers but rather were labelled as such by the court. ~~Chekyn's~~ Elizabeth's punishment, despite what could have been construed as an assault on and making a mockery of the clergy, was to wear a striped hood and an image of a woman in a priest's clothing pinned to her shoulder. But she was not expected to wear the priest's clothing again for her punishment as Matilda and Margaret were commanded to do. The three Margerys and the short haired Elizabeth wore striped hoods around their shoulders with a men's bonnet on each of their heads. These punishments and the penance imposed on Margaret and Matilda

[0] Elizabeth Chekyn's case is in London Metropolitan Archives, COL/CA/01/01/003, f.103v and formally written up in LMA, COL/AD/01/013 (Book N).

[0] Margery Brett, Margery Smyth, ~~and~~ Margery Tyler and Elizabeth Thomson's case can be found in LMA, COL/CC/01/01/012, f.10r. ~~Chekyn's~~ Both cases~~case as well as Brett's, Smyth's and Tyler's cases~~ can be found in Bennett and McSheffrey, 'Early, Erotic and Alien', p.22. I am reluctant to include the three Margerys and Elizabeth T in this group of women using male attire as a tool because their more permanent, or at least longer lasting, decision to cut their hair short alongside their adoption of male clothing seems to signify a preferred gender identity, and perhaps they should be considered as examples of medieval trans or nonbinary people.

amounted to what Katie Normington has described as a 'speaking picture'[0] which broadcast their crimes to all in the vicinity.[0]

As with Elizabeth, the other clothing of the Margerys while they undertook their punishment is not mentioned, implying that there was no question they would wear anything other than their usual feminine clothing. Both of these sets of punishments used either images of women in masculine clothing pinned to the body or the placement of masculine clothing on female bodies with the intention of humiliating the women who endured it, while also inciting the mockery, condemnation or abhorrence of onlookers. Yet none of these women were commanded to dress fully in masculine clothing as Matilda and Margaret were, despite there being seemingly no suspicion that either were engaged in sex work themselves. While sex work was thought to detrimentally impact the wider community in which it occurred and so needed to be controlled, Matilda and Margaret's crime affronted the bishop, the saint and the Church and thus needed a harsher punishment than others.

Matilda and Margaret's unusually harsh and rather exceptional punishment is perhaps what prompted the parish priest of the Church of All Saints in Newcastle, Robert Croft, to send a note back to the office of the bishop of Durham confirming that half of the punishment had been fulfilled and asking for leniency in forgiving them the rest of the punishment. Croft affirmed 'they humbly obeyed, appeared and devoutly completed the said penance, they went around the Church of All Saints before the procession according to the manner and form enjoined on them'[0]

[0] Normington takes the view that Elizabeth and the three Margerys were in 'costume' and behaving as male impersonators rather than, as seems particularly clear in the former's case, people using masculine clothing in order to gain greater social freedoms or perhaps publicise their illicit trade. I have chosen to avoid the term 'costume' when discussing dress generally but especially when discussing the act of cross dressing as it suggests dramatic, artificial intent rather than a pragmatic decision, or in some cases, authentic gender presentation. Katie Normington, 'Player Transformation: The Role of Clothing and Disguise', in *Medieval Theatre Performance: Actors, Dancers, Automata and their Audiences*, ed. Philip Butterworth and Katie Normington (Sufflok: Boydell & Brewer, 2017), 76-92, p.89.

[0] '*…quae humiliter obtemperantes comparverunt et dictam poenitentiam devote impleverunt circum eundo Ecclesiam Omnium Sanctorum coram processionem secundum modum et formam eis junctam in ultima domincas*', Register III, f.10v. Translation mine from the original document but this certificate was also printed in the Latin in Henry Bourne, *The History of Newcastle-upon-Tyne: or, the ancient and present state of that town*

~~walked in the procession around All Saints the Sunday before Croft wrote the letter~~. Croft claimed ~~-~~the women were prepared to complete the penitential procession but asked 'if would be good if they could be ~~whether it might be better for them to be '~~graciously spared~~'~~' the rest ~~of the ordeal~~.[0] This request from a comparatively lowly parish priest to the highest ecclesiastical authority in the region asking that the punishment of two women who offended not only the highest ecclesiastical figure in the region but also St Cuthbert himself be commuted to a lesser sentence perhaps indicates that it was seen as excessive in reality. Equally possible, Croft could have been requesting an end to the punishment because it was ineffective with Margaret and Matilda or their communities enjoying the experience. While it is possible that Croft pitied the two women and perhaps felt the penance to have been spiritually, psychologically or reputationally damaging to the women, it is also likely that Croft was concerned for the effect the spectacle of their penitential performance would have on his parishioners. Perhaps it was felt that Matilda and Margaret's punishment was in danger of inciting civil unrest with onlookers taking pity on the two. Or worse, that the local community was titillated by the sight of two young women in masculine attire which, being a sexual taboo attested to in Bennett and McSheffrey's work, was a tactic utilised by some female sex workers who had been caught in masculine dress.[0] ~~Certainly, theirs was not the only penance for which the authorities received backlash: the processional penance of the bishop of Lincoln, Oliver Sutton, generated complaints because it was felt that the penalty 'threatened the dignity of the men whose position required the respect of their neighbours'.[0]~~ Although Matilda and Margaret, as servants, were relatively lowly in the medieval social hierarchy and so there may have been little concern that the respectability of servants was at

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(Newcastle-upon-Tyne: J. White, 1736), p.208.

[0] '*tamen bonum est ut illis gratiose parceature si vobis placuerit'*, Register III, f.10v. Translation mine. ~~This certificate was printed in Latin in Henry Bourne, *The History of Newcastle-upon-Tyne: or, the ancient and present state of that town*, (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: J. White, 1736), p.208~~.

[0] ~~Judith M.~~ Bennett and ~~Shannon~~ McSheffrey, 'Early, Erotic and Alien', ~~: Women Dressed as Men in Late Medieval London', *History Workshop Journal*, 77, (2014), 1-25, especially~~ pp. 8-14.

[0] ~~Mansfield, *The Humiliation of Sinners*, p. 127, n. 123.~~

stake, perhaps their punishment challenged the honour of their master, Peter Baxster. It is unknown whether Robert Croft's request was granted or denied.[0]

On reviewing these two documents from the Durham Priory Register, a whole host of intriguing questions present themselves. ~~We can~~One may speculate about the relationship of Matilda and Margaret. We can perhaps assume that they were close friends if they were willing to commit a crime together, but who first suggested it? How long did they plan it? Where did they get the masculine clothing and what happened to the garments after their punishment was complete or commuted? The most revealing questions are why did they do this and what or who inspired them to transgress the dictate of their revered saint? For this, an examination of the cultural frame of reference with regard to women in masculine clothing may be enlightening.

The Popularity of the Cross-Dressing Figure

It seems entirely plausible that Matilda and Margaret had heard of the practice of cross-dressing through a range of secular and religious popular culture. In literary sources, Larissa Tracy has argued that cross-dressing acted as a 'motif~~'~~ ' which enabled a female character to achieve a goal through the increased social freedoms that masculine clothing afforded her.[0] This motif can be seen across a broad range of texts and genres from romances, tales and hagiographies as well as appearing in biographical accounts from the period.

Disguise was an important~~,~~ and frequently employed tool of authors in the late Middle Ages.[0] It allowed characters to slip between status, age, profession or, as discussed here,

[0] Robert Croft also noted that the women's master, Peter Baxter, had been informed of his and his wife's upcoming appearance at the ecclesiastical court in Durham on the charge of abetting Matilda and Margaret which had been laid out in the bishop's mandate. Croft warned the bishop's office that Baxter's unnamed wife was too fatigued by the birth of twins to attend, '*fatigata cum duobus gemellis'*, Register III, f.10v.

[0] Larissa Tracy, 'Chaucer's Pardoner: The Medieval Culture of Cross-Dressing and Problems of Religious Authority', *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality*, vol. 54, no. 2 (2018), 64-108, p.66.

[0] For discussion of disguise in chivalric romance, see Susan Crane, 'Knights in Disguise: Identity and Incognito in Fourteenth-Century Chivalry~~' in~~', in *The Stranger in Medieval* Society, ed. F. R. P. Akehurst and Stephanie Cain Van D'Elden~~, ed. F. R. P. Akehurst and Stephanie Cain Van D'Elden, ((~~Minnestoa: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 63-79. For disguise in theatre performance, see Katie Normington, '~~'~~Player

gender. Disguise also allowed characters to deceive others within the text while allowing the audience to be vicarious and even voyeuristic. The wife, Zinerva, in Boccaccio's *Decameron* (c.1353), uses masculine clothing to escape assassins and support herself as an itinerant musician while some scholars have argued that Chaucer's Pardoner walks an ambiguous line between a female character cross-dressing and a feminine man, among other interpretations.[0] In *The Romance of Silence* by a mysterious Heldris of Cornwall, writing in a French dialect in the ~~13th~~ thirteenth century, the titular character switches between masculine and feminine gender identities and clothes her biologically female body in masculine clothing throughout much of the text before deciding to live the rest of her life as a woman.[0]

Historical female figures were also known to have temporarily adopted masculine clothing in order to achieve a goal. Christina of Markyate (c.1096-1155) was described in hagiography as having used masculine clothing to disguise herself and escape a forced marriage while Jacqueline of Bavaria escaped house arrest 'in mannys weeds~~' in~~', in 1425.[0]

The Augustinian canon and chronicler, Henry Knighton, decried the women who, it was rumoured, had attended tournaments dressing in men's clothing against the wrath of God in the years before 1348. He reported that the women:

> …dressed in men's clothes of striking richness and variety, to the number of forty or sometimes fifty such damsels, all very eye-catching and beautiful, though hardly of the kingdom's better sort. They were dressed in parti-coloured tunics, of one colour on one side and a different one on the other, with short hoods, and liripipes wound about their heads like strings, with belts of gold and silver clasped about them, and even with the kind of knives

Transformation: The Role of Clothing and Disguise~~' in~~', in *Medieval Theatre Performance: Actors, Dancers, Automata and their Audiences*, eds. Philip Butterworth and Katie Normington~~, ((~~Boydell & Brewer, 2017), 76-92.

[0] See ~~Larissa~~ Tracy, ''Chaucer''s Pardoner~~: The Medieval Culture of Cross-Dressing and Problems of Religious Authority', *MFF*, vol. 54, no. 2, (2018), 64-108~~' and Jeffrey Rayner Myers, ''Chaucer's Pardoner as Female Eunuch'', *Studia Neophilologica*, vol. 72, no. 1~~, ((~~2000), 54-62.

[0] See Heldris of Cornwall, *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance*, ed. Sarah Roche-Mahdi~~, ((~~Michigan: Michigan University Press, 1992).

[0] C. H. Talbot and Henry Summerson, 'Christina of Markyate', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), [online], <https://doi-org.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/37281>, [accessed 25th February 2023].

Charles L. Kingsford, *The Chronicles of London*~~, ((~~Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), p.129 from BL Cotton Cleopatra C IV, f.33v.

> commonly called daggers slung low across their bellies, in pouches. And thus they paraded themselves at tournaments on fine chargers and other well-arrayed horses, and consumed and spent their substance, and wantonly and with disgraceful lubricity displayed their bodies, as the rumour ran.[0]

Knighton reported the appearance and activities of these unnamed, unidentified women most likely as a means to criticise and damn the hedonistic behaviour of his predecessors in contrast with his eulogising of his contemporary political allies and patrons. While this anecdote makes clear that such behaviour was deeply frowned upon by religious figures, if it is to be accepted as truthful, it demonstrates a level of acceptance of such sartorial transgressions as a spectacle. It suggests the permissibility of women of lower social status - after all, Knighton refers to them as 'hardly the kingdom's better sort' – temporarily adopting men's clothing as a performance. Indeed, it seems that someone linked to the court paid for the outfits and horses, and perhaps even paid the women. Such sartorial acts may have harmed the reputations of aristocratic women. Regardless of the veracity of the claim, the idea of women dressing in masculine clothing was~~to be~~ highly entertaining and perhaps titillating. The description of 'daggers slung low across their bellies~~'~~' would have been suggestive of male genitalia.

Perhaps the largest corpus of texts relating to the act of cross-dressing is the group of biologically female saints who adopt masculine clothing for all or part of their lives in order to disguise themselves or gain access to religious institutions from which they would otherwise be barred. Indeed, the fact that there is a plethora of examples which come from popular religious and lay literature further suggests that a certain level of misogyny in wider medieval society was accepted and reinforces the notion that women were considered lesser, or subordinate in all strata of society. As Hotchkiss has argued, using difficult and outdated language, the very presence of 'the transvestite saint, by inverting signs of gender, illustrates

[0] Henry Knighton, *Knighton~~'~~s Chronicle, 1337-1396*~~((~~Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp.95-6.

problematic views on the inferiority of women as well as anxiety about female sexuality'.[0] This would suggest that female sexuality needed to be contained and restricted while the female body needed to be hidden or entirely transformed for holiness to be conferred, although this neglects the presence of the majority of female saints whose female identity was in no way hidden. For most of the virgin martyrs, the focus of their hagiographies *is* their female bodies which are stripped of clothing, harmed and exposed both to the fictional torturers and bystanders as well as the medieval reader. The heightened sexuality of the virgin martyrs becomes a focal point around which their piety and sainthood revolves.[0]

Saints in England formed a crucial element of late medieval Catholicism and, it has been argued by Sarah Salih, were viewed as the medieval equivalent of 'superheroes and celebrities' by their devotees.[0] Catherine Sanok has suggested that female saints' lives in particular should be seen as a 'central part of women's literary culture' and were not only available to higher status women who were literate or could afford books as they were accessible through audible, public means.[0] The stories of their lives and deeds were told not only through hagiographic texts but also through church paintings and sculptures, and re-enacted through plays, and, crucially, in sermons; the most popular text on the lives of the saints, Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea*, which includes a number of cross-dressing

[0] Valerie Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1996), p.13.

[0] For more on sexual violence in the saints' lives, see Karen Winstead, *The Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2018) and Catherine Innes-Parker, 'Sexual Violence and the Female Reader: Symbolic "Rape" in the Saints' Lives of the Katherine Group', *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 24, no. 3 (1995), 205-217 and Beth Crachiolo, 'Seeing the Gendering of Violence: Female and Male Martyrs in the *South English Legendary*', in *'A Great Effusion of Blood'?: Interpreting Medieval Violence*, ed. Mark D. Meyerson, Daniel Thiery and Oren Falk (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

[0] Sarah Salih, 'Introduction: Saints, Cults and *Lives* in Late Medieval England', in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, ed. Sarah Salih (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), p.1.

[0] Catherine Sanok, *Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints' Lives in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p.27. Sanok goes on to provide evidence of women owning, and therefore reading books of saints' lives and bequeathing them to friends and relatives, which demonstrates a wider access to hagiographic literature than might otherwise be assumed. See also Felicity Riddy, '"Women talking about the things of God": a Late Medieval Sub-Culture', in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, ed. Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

saints, was written with the express intention that it be a source for priests from which they could draw their sermons. Bronach Kane has noted the importance of sermons as a method through which ideas could be transmitted: the medieval mystic Julian of Norwich (c.1343-after 1416) reported that she herself first heard of the life of St Cecilia while in church.[0] While it seems unlikely that Matilda and Margaret would have had direct access to hagiographic texts themselves, it would be almost impossible to deny that they would very likely have come into contact with saints' lives through visual, audible or dramatic modes.

Within the hagiographies of the time, there are at least twenty female saints who cross-dress for part or all of their lives within the literature of medieval Christendom. Some are more popular than others, and have their *vitae* retold in various manuscript collections, while others gained popularity in certain locations but subsequently seem to have fallen from popularity, such as Papula of Gaul. The most popular hagiographic text was Jacobus de Voragine's aforementioned *Legenda aurea* which was produced between 1259 and 1266, but is believed to have reached British shores in the 1270s in its original Latin.[0] It contains the lives of seven cross dressing saints including St Eugenia, St Theodora, St Pelagia and St Thecla who had followed St Paul and preached in male clothing.[0] The life of St Eugenia had been circulating through the British Isles much earlier than the others, as Ælfric of Eynsham had written about her in the eleventh century. It was not until 1438 that the *Legenda aurea* was first translated into vernacular Middle English making it much more accessible, particularly to lay women and men, as well as a source of accessible sermon material for priests. Later, in 1483, the first printed Middle English version of the *Legenda aurea* was produced by William Caxton and titled the *Gilte Legende*, in which were included the

[0] Bronach Kane, 'Social Representations of Memory and Gender in Later Medieval England', *Integrative Psychological and Behavioural Science*, vol. 46, no. 4 (2012), 544-558, p.548 and Sanok, *Her Life Historical*, p.27.
[0] Anne B. Thompson, *Everyday Saints and the Art of Narrative in the South English Legendary* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p.190.
[0] See Julie Van Pelt, 'Thecla, the First Cross-Dresser? The Acts of Paul and Thecla and the Lives of Byzantine Transvestite Saints', *Thecla and Medieval Sainthood: The Acts of Paul and Thecla in Eastern and Western Hagiography*, ed. Ghazzal Dabiri and Flavia Ruani (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

narratives of St Marina/Marinus, St Theodora/Theodorus, St Pelagia and St Margaret of Pelagia.[0] This not only demonstrates the consistent appetite for saints' lives in the late medieval period as well as the continuing popularity of de Voragine's narratives but also that the printing of the *Gilte Legende* opened it up to a much wider readership, and coincided with an increase of lay literacy at the time, further promoting the theory that there was a persistent interest in the lives of cross-dressing saints. In 1405, Christine de Pizan authored *The Book of the City of Ladies* which, while not strictly hagiographic, recounted the lives of a host of women deemed worthy of admiration, and even included St Marina/Marinus, St Euphrosyna and St Nathalia.[0] Pizan also wrote a text in support of Joan of Arc in 1429, three years before the latter's death.[0] Other popular hagiographic texts include the vast corpus of saints' lives written in the midlands and south of England and collectively known as the South English Legendaries of which the Vernon manuscript in the Bodleian Library, dating from 1390-1400, is the most extensive and impressive.[0] The lives of St Theodora/Theodorus and St Pelagia are also included, but St Marina/Marinus is omitted in favour of another cross-dressing saint, St Euphrosyna/Smaragdus. St Cuthbert is also included.

The theme of the repentant prostitute or adulteress was very popular, perhaps because these narratives illustrated that even women who committed what was seen in the Church's eyes as one of the lowest, most abhorrent sins, could be reformed through Christ. This spiritual transformation is realised externally through the clothing of cross-dressing saints, but particularly in the case of the repentant prostitute/adulteress, with their male clothing

[0] *Women of the* Gilte Legende*: A Selection of Middle English Saints Lives*, ed. And trans., Larissa Tracy (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003).
[0] Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Rosalind Brown-Grant (London: Penguin Books, 1999), pp.225-7, 227-8, 232-3.
[0] See Christine de Pizan, *Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc*, ed. Angus J. Kennedy and Kenneth Varty (Oxford: Society for the Study of Mediaeval Languages and Literature, 1977).
[0] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Eng. Poet. A. 1. Known as the Vernon MS, St Theodora is on f.93r, St Euphrosyna/Smaragdus on f.103v-104r and St Pelagia on f.208v.

'symbolically [depicting] the power of Christianity to "transform" its adherents' both physically and spiritually.[0] St Theodora is one such sexual sinner.

St Theodora/Theodorus is mentioned in relation to the sin of wrath as an example of a virtuous response to false accusations without turning to anger.[0] Their life is also told in the *Legenda aurea*, the *Gilte Legende*, and the earlier Vernon MS, and details how they are tricked into committing adultery by a man who is enamoured of them. The lecherous man tells the saint that God can only see what one does in the day-time, and so by giving themselves to the man in the night-time, and easing his sexual frustrations, the saint is clean of sin. Suspicious, St Theodora/Theodorus goes to a local abbess to ask if this is true, and the saint is horrified by the revelation that God is omniscient. The *Legenda aurea* notes briefly that the saints 'clad [themselves] with the clothes of [their] husband'and went to a monastery.[0] One might wonder why Theodora/Theodorus did not admit themselves to the nunnery of the abbess who corrected them earlier in the tale, but for the saint to enter a female space would mean obliterating the power of their *vita* entirely. The Vernon manuscript delves into much more detail, noting that when confronted with the reality of her actions she was a 'ful sori womman' and:

> … þen of hir own witte / Al hire her awey heo kutte / And in monnes cloþing / Tok þe wey wiþ gret hiȝing / Touward a Munstre of Monkes blak / And þer heo preyed for godus sake / þat Amonges Othur men / A Monk of þe hous / heo mihte ben.[0]
>
> …then of her own knowledge / all her hair she cut away / and in men's clothing / took herself quickly / toward a monastery of black monks (Benedictines)/ and there she prayed for God's sake / that among other men / a monk of the house / she might be.

[0] Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man*, p.19.
[0] *A Repertorium of Middle English Prose Sermons*, vol, I-IV, ed. Veronica O'Mara and Suzanne Paul (Suffolk: Brepols, 2007), p.2302.
[0] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 365-370.
[0] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Eng. Poet. A. 1 (Vernon MS), f.93r.

This text delves into much more detail about St Theodora/Theodorus' emotional state and perhaps gives a suggestion of their gender identity by using the word 'othur'. This implies that St Theodora/Theodorus, through God's intervention, either hopes to be transformed into being also one of the monks of the house, a physical, bodily transformation that will expunge her sinfulness or that the monks would simply view their gender as male, while their body remains biologically female. This makes the change from female to male pronouns in many hagiographic texts seem like a logical continuation within the narrative. It should be noted that St Theodora/Theodorus' feast day is 11th September, the same month that Margaret and Matilda adopted masculine clothing to enter Durham Cathedral.

A saint who has received comparatively little attention and analysis in discussion of cross-dressing virgin saints, likely because she is anonymised and reduced to a sexualised body is The Virgin of Antioch. She appears in Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea* alongside a plethora of others and, despite being nameless, is outspoken and active in her own martyrdom.[0] As with many of the virgin martyrs, she is threatened with being sent to a brothel, and therefore, sexual assault and the destruction of her prized virginal state, until in the final moment, a knight steps through the crowd and offers to sacrifice himself in her stead. To achieve this, the knight tells her they must each exchange clothing in order to be mistaken for one other:

> Let us exchange our clothing. Mine will suit you and yours me, and both will suit Christ. Your garb will make me a true soldier and mine will keep you a virgin. You will be well-clothed and I will be better off unclothed, so that the executioner may recognize me. Take my clothing, which will hide the fact that you are a woman, and give me yours, which will consecrate me for martyrdom. Wrap this cloak around you to conceal your maidenly form and protect your chastity. Put on this bonnet, to cover your hair and hide your face: those who have been in a brothel usually hide their blushes…[0]

[0] Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p.250-4.
[0] Ibid, p.252.

After this exchange of clothing, the virgin escapes the brothel disguised as the knight which, the reader is assured, is made possible because the pagans saw her with their eyes and not with their heart. Her persecutors are confounded by the presence of the knight in the brothel: 'A girl came in here, but I see a man…A maiden is changed into a knight!'.[0] The knight is then led to the place of execution and is met by the virgin who is outraged at having been cheated of her own chance for martyrdom, declaring 'I have changed my clothing, I have not changed what I profess to be. If you snatch my death away from me, you will not have redeemed me: you will have cheated me!'.[0] The tale ends with the author quickly skipping over the description of their martyrdom, a scene he belabours in other virgin martyr *vitæ*, and eulogises over the pair's inestimable piety.

It is a particularly unusual scenario for a hagiography to suggest that a man can better himself spiritually by exchanging clothing with a woman. The one exception to this comes from the life of St Jerome where the saint is tricked by his fellow monks into mistaking a woman's gown for his habit when dressing in darkness to attend Matins, or night prayers.[0] A key difference between these two examples of religious male cross-dressing is that for St Jerome, the act is 'unintentional', in that it is a mistake curated by his peers.[0] The knight, on the other hand, is the one to conceive of the idea of exchanging his clothing, and initiate it. It is not explicitly stated that the knight is in armour or military garb but as his only identifying marker is that he is a 'knight', a certain mental image is suggested to the audience. Clearly, the knight has not fully committed to the disguise he suggests to the virgin as he is still

[0] Ibid, p.253.
[0] Ibid.
[0] Using outdated language that was more acceptable at the time, Vern Bullough has suggested that this absence of cross-dressing male saints is due to the perceived 'lost status' a male saint would undergo, 'Transvestites in the Middle Ages', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 79, no. 6 (1974), 1381-1394, p.1382. Similarly, Valerie Hotchkiss has noted that when male characters cross-dress in medieval European fiction, it is done for 'comic' or 'lewd' effect, with male characters being humiliated in female clothing or donning female clothing in order to enter feminine spaces for their own sexual desires, Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man*, p.10.
[0] Robert Mills, *Seeing Sodomy in the Middle Ages* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), p.8. Mills has pointed to one other example of a medieval man, Richard Rolle, wilfully dressing in feminine clothing contained in religious accounts ahead of his assumed canonisation as suggested it figured as a way to highlight his otherness, p.8.

identifiable to onlookers in the brothel. Perhaps the mental image of a knight in a young girl's clothing, or a virgin falling over her over-sized military disguise would have been too comic and unserious a motif to be used in sermons and so the tale never gained the same popularity as other cross-dressing saints.

There is no description of the virgin dressed in the knight's clothing provided except that she was given his 'mantle'.[0] So while the virgin is not explicitly described as being in militaristic clothing, she certainly is described in militaristic language, being ready to 'wage a war' for her virginity and beliefs.[0] This militaristic language is in keeping with the descriptions of saints, even female ones, as soldiers fighting a spiritual battle on behalf of Christ.

~~For St Eugenia/Eugene see Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, pp.551-3. In the *vita* of St Eugenia/Eugene, the religious man, Helenus 'would not allow a woman to come near him', yet when St Eugenia/Eugene approached in a 'man's clothing', he replied, 'Rightly do you call yourself a man, because you act like a man though you are a woman'.~~St Natalia is a saint whose own actions most closely align with those of Margaret and Matilda in that she adopts male dress for the sole purpose of entering into a male-segregated space temporarily. She is mentioned in a Middle English sermon as well as *The Book of the City of Ladies*, although in the *Legenda aurea* she appears only as a side character in her husband, St Adrian's, martyrdom.[0] She adopts male clothing very briefly and for a very specific task – to visit her dying husband in prison. After praying to God that her husband, a military commander under Emperor Maximianus named Adrian, converts to Christianity in the second century he is immediately imprisoned and St Natalia visits daily to pray, weep and kiss his chains. When

[0] 'The virgin offered her head to the executioner, the knight his mantle to the virgin!', Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p.252.
[0] Ibid, p.250.
[0] *A Repertorium of Middle English Prose Sermons*, vol, I-IV, ed. Veronica O'Mara and Suzanne Paul (Suffolk: Brepols, 2007), p.2401. Christine de Pisan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Rosalind Brown-Grant (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p.233; Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, pp.546-550.

women are banned from entering the prison, she 'dressed up like a man' to continue being at her husband's side, cleaning his wounds and kissing his blood as he died.[0] St Natalia's gender is never in question. In fact, her status as a devoted wife is reinforced by her brief adoption of masculine clothing which grants her access to a male space and allows her to fulfil her uxorial duties. St Natalia's temporary transgression of physical boundaries due to her clothing is echoed by Matilda and Margaret in their use of clothing to gain access to the shrine they were excluded from.

The life of St Marina/Marinus follows a similar format in that they adopt masculine religious garb in order to follow their father into a monastery. Yet unlike Matilda, Margaret and some of the other cross-dressing saints, they remain in masculine clothing until death, which suggests that long-term adoption of masculine clothing for the sake of God was forgivable, even something to be commended. St Marina/Marinus was one of the most popular cross-dressing saints from this period, appearing in several manuscripts which demonstrates further that their complex gender presentation was not grounds for condemnation or excommunication. The revelation of St Marina/Marinus' gender is depicted in a fifteenth-century French manuscript kept in the Morgan Library in New York (Figure 34).[0] In the image, the saint is being prepared for burial by three nuns, one of whom seems to have already begun to undress the saint whose outer habit has been pulled up to the knees. The presence of the three nuns seems deliberately reminiscent of the three women to whom Jesus appeared after his entombment. For St Marina/Marinus in particular, this revelation and exposure of her biological gender allows 'her body [to speak] for her when she dies, it becomes the voice and spectacle for her purity and her innocence, while providing a titillating

[0] Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Earl Jeffrey Richards (New York: Persea Books, 1982), III:16.1, p.249.
[0] Vanessa Wright has suggested this image actually depicts another gender non-conforming saint, Margaret/Pelagius in 'The Textual and Visual Uses of the Literary Motif of Cross-Dressing in Medieval French Literature, 1200-1500' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2019), p.309.

glimpse of the forbidden for all the monks who have crowded in to witness this miracle'.[0] Except in the Morgan Library's image, the observing monks are replaced by nuns. This is curious as it would hardly be appropriate for nuns to prepare a monk's body for burial, and yet neither could monks prepare a nun's body. It seems as though the illuminator or patron has deliberately chosen for nuns to ready St Marina/Marinus' body for burial because it is expected that the reader would be familiar with the story and the scene could have been interpreted to be indecent or sexually charged otherwise.



Figure 34 Detail showing three nuns discovering St Marina/Marinus~~os~~''~~s~~ sex after the saint's death. New York, Morgan Library and Museum, MS M.675, f.136v.

[0] Tracy, 'Chaucer's Pardoner', p.99.

In the *vita* of St Eugenia/Eugene, the saint adopts masculine clothing on their conversion to Christianity and, in attempting to enter a monastery, is stopped by the head of the institution, Helenus, a man who 'would not allow a woman to come near him', yet when St Eugenia/Eugene approached in a 'man's clothing', Helenus replied, 'Rightly do you call yourself a man, because you act like a man though you are a woman' and the saint was allowed to receive 'the monastic habit' from him.[0] This *vita* promotes the idea that in order to live a holy life, a saintly woman may deliberately hide her gender by wearing male clothing.

These ambiguously gendered saints, who slip between the gender binary that is sometimes assumed to have dominated medieval thinking, could also hint at a wider spectrum of medieval gender experiences than might otherwise be imagined, with their *vitae* perhaps fulfilling a spiritual, emotional or gendered need for otherwise overlooked Christians. Lynda Coon has argued that these saints – or perhaps the authors of their *vitae* - participate in a 'theology of the cosmetic'~~–'~~ which Rebecca Moore describes as an 'annihilation of women's clothing, hair and bodies, and a corresponding exaltation of men's clothing, hair and bodies'.[0] While this may have some basis, this approach also ignores the potential medieval readings of these saints as part of what Leah DeVun has called a 'nonbinary sex', which allowed authors to use clothing as a way of signalling and performing a chosen gender to the reader.[0]

For the medieval audience of saints'~~–'~~ lives, both lay and clerical, these cross-dressing saints were not rebelling against the decree in Deuteronomy, but were rather demonstrating~~,~~ the transformational power of Christianity. Western Church Fathers such as St Augustine (c.354-430), St Ambrose (c.333-397) and St Jerome (c.342-320), borrowing from Aristotelian thought, upheld and reinforced early Christian doctrine and the Old Testament's creation of

[0] Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, pp.551-553.
[0] Rebecca Moore, *Women in Christian Traditions*~~,~~ ~~(~~(New York: New York University Press, 2015), p.62. Moore quotes directly from Lynda Coon's work, *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women in Late Antiquity*~~,~~ ~~(~~(Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), p.40.
[0] Leah DeVun, *The Shape of Sex: Nonbinary Gender from Genesis to the Renaissance*~~,~~ ~~(~~(New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), p.5.

Eve, which viewed women as inferior men. The theological belief that women were lesser than men in all aspects of their lives, but particularly in their spirituality is evident in St Jerome's writing: '…when [a woman] wished to devote herself to Christ more than to the world, then she will cease to be a woman and she will be a man…'. Similarly, St Ambrose wrote that 'she who does not believe is a woman and should be called by the name of her corporeal sex; but she who believes comes closer to the perfect male'.[0] Although the Old Testament had less authority than the New Testament, its decree that men and women should not wear the clothing associated with the other gender to avoid being 'abominable before God'–' was still influential.[0] However, Biblical and Patristic writings should not be thought of as displaying the beliefs and attitudes of any group of medieval people, as that would be to completely disregard the complexities and nuances of popular beliefs and lived experiences. Indeed, the very presence of these gender non-conforming saints suggests an interest in or perhaps even acceptance of the religious experiences of people whose gender identity might not have been viewed as strictly conventional. Both saints Marina/Marinus and Theodora/Theodorus, along with the repentant prostitutes, St Pelagia and St Margaret of Pelagia, choose 'sex-neutral'–' male religious clothing, rather than a nun's habit.[0] While that is not to say that the clothing of medieval religious was exclusively viewed as being asexual – there are plenty of examples of priests engaging in illicit sex in the popular literature –– the author may have been attempting to demonstrate how a woman might desexualise herself and 'disfigure [their] female beauty'–' through religious male clothing while simultaneously '[shielding] the female body from sexual union with men' in', in order to protect their chastity, their spiritual union with Jesus.[0] However, for women like Elizabeth Chekyn, the

[0] Jerome, *Commentariorum In Epistolam Pauli ad Ephesios*, 3.5.28. Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam*, 14:392.

[0] Deuteronomy 22:5, *The Vulgate Bible: Douay-Reims Translation*, ed. Angela M. Kinney, ((London: Harvard University Press, 2010), p.991.

[0] Susan Crane, *The Performance of Self, : Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War*, (Philadelphia: University Pennsylvania Press, 2002), p.78.

[0] Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man*, pp.23, 22.

opposite might be true. The neutralising, monk's habit adopted by some of the cross-dressing saints was, for her, anything but de-sexualising. Indeed, as she stepped out in a priest's gown, she or her clients may have felt it heightened her sexual appeal, in part due to the perhaps scintillating taboo of crossing societal norms and even disregarding respect for the Church.

These saints were not considered abominations and nor were they excluded from but rather fit into the hagiographic corpus with justifications for their acts of cross-dressing. Rather than entirely subverting or undermining Biblical law, then, they have simply 'reinterpreted' it.[0] Matilda and Margaret may well have felt that they, too, were reinterpreting Christian rulings for themselves, and utilising it within a religiously sanctioned scope. If Anke Bernau is correct in her argument that 'women were urged by religious writers to achieve a more masculine identity through spirituality and chastity', and certainly there has been some evidence for this in the writings of St Jerome and St Ambrose, then the saints are demonstrating a pathway to spiritual fulfilment through irregular means.[0] Perhaps authors of these texts were filling a gap in medieval Christian theology by providing an alternative or accompanying figure for devotion alongside more popular, perhaps mainstream, saints such as St Catherine of Alexandria and St Margaret of Antioch, to whom a parish church and an altar in Durham cathedral were dedicated, which would suggest a less prejudiced, more wide reaching understanding of gender identities and gendered experiences during the Middle Ages.

We must be careful when reading these saints as 'real', however. It is difficult to discuss the saints as autonomous figures acting on their own, as each saint is a fictional character produced by a, likely male, author and interpreted differently by audiences.

[0] Stipe Odak, 'Heroines in Strange Costumes: Female Transvestism/Cross-dressing in Medieval Hagiographies', *Disputatio Philosophica*, vol. 3, no. 1, (2011), 33-42, p.42.
[0] Anke Bernau, 'Gender and Sexuality', in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, ed. Sarah Salih (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2006), p.104. Conversely, Caroline Walker-Bynum has pointed out that for real historical saints such as Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, Catherine of Siena and the mystic, Margery Kempe, their gender did not preclude them from receiving intense divine love and in fact allowed them to relate to Christ in complex and profound ways, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1988), p.291.

Caroline Walker-Bynum, in her *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, has written about the saints in a way that implies the texts are biographies, by suggesting that cross-dressing saints saw themselves 'in female images…not as warriors of Christ, but as brides, as pregnant virgins, as housewives, as mothers of God'.[0] It would be impossible as a historian, however, to claim to know what or how an actual person thought who lived 500 years ago, even if their words were recorded verbatim. Their speech could contradict or disguise their innermost thoughts, or be misinterpreted or misconstrued by others. Furthermore, Indeed, there is no real certainty that these early Christian saints from the third or fourth centuries even existed at all. Even if we accepted that they had existed, the lives and actions of these biologically female saints have since been translated, modified, and reinterpreted by mainly male authors to suit the needs of their patrons or their religious institutions, and in fact reflect the needs and attitudes of the immediate cultural, geographical and temporal period in which the hagiographies were written.[0] However, those authors employed cross-dressing as a way to protect the saints both physically and spiritually, who were then praised for that and indeed attained sainthood because of their actions. As Hotchkiss has noted, their 'recognition of holiness is earned primarily through the denial of womanhood'.[0] Yet the true power of the saints came not from whether they really existed but from how they were interpreted and what they did for the women who prayed to them.

Saints in England formed a crucial element of late medieval Catholicism and, it has been argued by Sarah Salih, were viewed as the medieval equivalent of 'superheroes and celebrities' by their devotees.[0] Catherine Sanok has suggested that female saints' lives in particular should be seen as a 'central part of women's literary culture' and were not only

[0] Caroline Walker-Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, (Berkely: University of California Press, 1988), p.291.

[0] It can be fairly safely assumed that many of the hagiographies discussed here were written by men, with the exception of Christine de Pizan's text. However, it is widely accepted and proven that de Pizan rewrote various lives of illustrious women to suit her own agenda of valorising those women.

[0] Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man*, p.13.

[0] Sarah Salih, 'Introduction: Saints, Cults and *Lives* in Late Medieval England' ' in *A Companion of Middle English Hagiography*, ed. Sarah Salih, (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), p.1.

available to higher status women who were literate or could afford books as they were accessible through audible, public means.[θ] The stories of their lives and deeds were told not only through hagiographic texts but also through church paintings and sculptures, re-enacted through plays, and, crucially, in sermons; the most popular text on the lives of the saints, Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea*, which includes a number of cross-dressing saints, was written with the express intention that it be a source for priests from which they could draw their sermons. Bronach Kane has noted the importance of sermons as a method through which ideas could be transmitted: the medieval mystic Julian of Norwich (c.1343-after 1416) reported that she herself first heard of the life of St Cecilia while in church.[θ] While it seems unlikely that Matilda and Margaret would have had direct access to hagiographic texts themselves, it would be almost impossible to deny that they would very likely have come into contact with saints' lives through visual, audible or dramatic modes.

Within the hagiographies of the time, there are at least 20 female saints who cross-dress for part or all of their lives within the literature of medieval Christendom. Some are more popular than others, and have their *vitae* retold in various manuscript collections, while others gained popularity in certain locations but subsequently seem to have fallen from popularity such as Papula of Gaul. The most popular hagiographic text was Jacobus de Voragine's aforementioned *Legenda aurea* which was produced between 1259 and 1266, but is believed to have reached British shores in the 1270s in its original Latin.[θ] It contains the lives of seven cross dressing saints including St Eugenia, St Theodora, St Pelagia and St

[0] Catherine Sanok, *Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints' 'Lives in Late Medieval England*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p.27. Sanok goes on to provide evidence of women owning, and therefore reading books of saints' ' lives and bequeathing them to friends and relatives, which demonstrates a wider access to hagiographic literature than might otherwise be assumed. See also Felicity Riddy, '"'"Women talking about the things of God": a late medieval sub-culture' 'in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, ed. Carol M. Meale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[0] Bronach Kane, 'Social Representations of Memory and Gender in Later Medieval England', *Integrative Psychological and Behavioural Science*, (2012), vol.46, no.4, (2012), 544-558, p.548 and Sanok, *Her Life Historical*, p.27.

[0] Anne B. Thompson, *Everyday Saints and the Art of Narrative in the South English Legendary*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p.190.

Thecla who had followed St Paul and preached in male clothing.[θ] The life of St Eugenia had been circulating through the British Isles much earlier than the others, as Ælfric of Eynsham had written about her in the 11th century. It was not until 1438 that the *Legenda aurea* was first translated into vernacular Middle English making it much more accessible, particularly to lay women and men, as well as a source of accessible sermon material for priests. Later, in 1483, the first printed Middle English version of the *Legenda aurea* was produced by William Caxton and titled the *Gilte Legende*, in which were included the narratives of St Marina/Marinus, St Theodora/Theodorus, St Pelagia and St Margaret of Pelagia.[θ] This not only demonstrates the consistent appetite for saints' lives in the late medieval period as well as the continuing popularity of de Voragine's narratives but also that the printing of the *Gilte Legende* opened it up to a much wider readership, and coincided with an increase of lay literacy at the time, further promoting the theory that there was a persistent interest in the lives of cross-dressing saints. In 1405, Christine de Pizan authored *The Book of the City of Ladies* which, while not strictly hagiographic, recounted the lives of a host of women deemed worthy of admiration, and even included St Marina/Marinus, St Euphrosyna and St Nathalia.[θ] Pizan also wrote a text in support of Joan of Arc in 1429, three years before the latter's death.[θ] Other popular hagiographic texts include the vast corpus of saints' lives written in the midlands and south of England and collectively known as the South English Legendaries of which the Vernon manuscript in the Bodleian Library, dating from 1390-1400, is the most extensive and impressive.[θ] The lives of St Theodora/Theodorus and St Pelagia are also

[θ] See Julie Van Pelt, 'Thecla, the First Cross-Dresser? The Acts of Paul and Thecla and the Lives of Byzantine Transvestite Saints', *Thecla and Medieval Sainthood: The Acts of Paul and Thecla in Eastern and Western Hagiography*, ed. Ghazzal Dabiri and Flavia Ruani, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).
[θ] *Women of the* Gilte Legende*: A Selection of Middle English Saints Lives*, ed., trans. Larissa Tracy, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003).
[θ] Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Rosalind Brown-Grant, (London: Penguin Books, 1999), pp.225-7, 227-8, 232-3.
[θ] See Christine de Pizan, *Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc*, eds., Angus J. Kennedy and Kenneth Varty, (Oxford: Society for the Study of Mediaeval Languages and Literature, 1977).
[θ] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Eng. poet. a. 1. Known as the Vernon MS, St Theodora is on f.93r, St Euphrosyna/Smaragdus on f.103v-104r and St Pelagia on f.208v.

included, but St Marina/Marinus is omitted in favour of another cross-dressing saint, St Euphrosyna/Smaragdus. St Cuthbert is also included.

The theme of the repentant prostitute or adulteress was very popular, perhaps because these narratives illustrated that even women who committed what was seen in the Church's metaphorical eyes, as one of the lowest, most abhorrent sins, could be reformed through Christ. This spiritual transformation is realised externally through the clothing of cross-dressing saints, but particularly in the case of the repentant prostitute/adulteress, with their male clothing 'symbolically [depicting] the power of Christianity to "transform" its adherents' both physically and spiritually.[θ] St Theodora is one such sexual sinner.

St Theodora/Theodorus is mentioned in relation to the sin of wrath as an example of a virtuous response to false accusations without turning to anger.[θ] Their life is also told in the *Legenda aurea*, the *Gilte Legende*, and the earlier Vernon MS, and details how they are tricked into committing adultery by a man who is enamoured of them. The lecherous man tells the saint that God can only see what one does in the day-time, and so by giving themselves to the man in the night-time, and easing his sexual frustrations, the saint is clean of sin. Suspicious, St Theodora/Theodorus goes to a local abbess to ask if this is true, and the saint is horrified by the revelation that God is omniscient. The *Legende aurea* notes briefly that the saint 'clad [themselves] with the clothes of [their] husband' and went to a monastery.[θ] One might wonder why Theodora/Theodorus did not admit themselves to the nunnery for the abbess who corrected them earlier in the tale, but that would mean obliterating the power of their *vita* entirely. The Vernon manuscript delves into much more detail, noting that when confronted with the reality of her actions she was a 'ful sori womman' and:

[0] Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man*, p.19.
[0] *A Repertorium of Middle English Prose Sermons*, vol, I-IV, eds., Veronica O'Mara and Suzanne Paul, (Suffolk: Brepols, 2007), p.2302.
[0] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 365-370.

… þen of hir own witte / Al hire her awey heo kutte / And in monnes cloþing / Tok þe wey wiþ gret hiȝing / Touward a Munstre of Monkes blak / And þer heo preyed for godus sake / þat Amonges Othur men / A Monk of þe hous / heo mihte ben.[θ]

…then of her own knowledge / all her hair she cut away / and in men's clothing / took herself quickly / toward a monastery of black monks (Benedictines)/ and there she prayed for God's sake / that among other men / a monk of the house / she might be.

This text delves into much more detail about St Theodora/Theodorus' emotional state and perhaps gives a suggestion of their gender identity by using the word 'othur'. This implies that St Theodora/Theodorus, through God's intervention, either hopes to be transformed into being also one of the monks of the house, a physical, bodily transformation that will expunge her sinfulness or that the monks would simply view their gender as male, while their body remains biologically female. This makes the change from female to male pronouns in many hagiographic texts seem like a logical continuation within the narrative. It should be noted that St Theodora/Theodorus' feast day is 11th September, the same month that Margaret and Matilda adopted masculine clothing to enter Durham Cathedral.

A saint who has received comparatively little attention and analysis in discussion of cross-dressing virgin saints, likely because she is anonymised and reduced to a sexualised body is The Virgin of Antioch. She appears in Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea* alongside a plethora of others and despite being nameless, is outspoken and active in her own martyrdom.[θ] As with many of the virgin martyrs, she is threatened with being sent to a brothel, and therefore, sexual assault and the destruction of her prized virginal state until in the final moment, a knight steps through the crowd and offers to sacrifice himself in her stead. To achieve this, the knight tells her they must each exchange clothing in order to be mistaken for one other:

Let us exchange our clothing. Mine will suit you and yours me, and both will suit Christ. Your garb will make me a true soldier and

[θ] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Eng. poet. a. 1, (Vernon MS), f.93r.
[θ] Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p.250-4.

> mine will keep you a virgin. You will be well-clothed and I will be better off unclothed, so that the executioner may recognize me. Take my clothing, which will hide the fact that you are a woman, and give me yours, which will consecrate me for martyrdom. Wrap this cloak around you to conceal your maidenly form and protect your chastity. Put on this bonnet, to cover your hair and hide your face: those who have been in a brothel usually hide their blushes…[θ]

After this exchange of clothing, the virgin escapes the brothel disguised as the knight which, the reader is assured, is made possible because the pagans saw her with their eyes and not with their heart. Her persecutors are confounded by the presence of the knight in the brothel: 'A girl came in here, but I see a man…A maiden is changed into a knight!'.[θ] The knight is then led to the place of execution and is met by the virgin who is outraged at having been cheated of her own chance for martyrdom, declaring 'I have changed my clothing, I have not changed what I profess to be. If you snatch my death away from me, you will not have redeemed me: you will have cheated me!'.[θ] The tale ends with the author quickly skipping over the description of their martyrdom, a scene he belabours in other virgin martyr *vitæ*, and eulogises over the pair's inestimable piety.

It is a particularly unusual scenario for a hagiography to suggest that a man can better himself spiritually by exchanging clothing with a woman. The one exception to this comes from the life of St Jerome where the saint is tricked by his fellow monks into mistaking a woman's gown for his habit when dressing in darkness to attend Matins, or night prayers.[θ] A key difference between these two examples of religious male cross-dressing is that for St Jerome, the act is 'unintentional' in that it is a mistake curated by his peers.[θ] The knight, on

[θ] Ibid, p.252.
[θ] Ibid, p.253.
[θ] Ibid.
[θ] Using outdated language that was more acceptable at the time, Vern Bullough has suggested that this absence of cross-dressing male saints is due to the perceived 'lost status' ' a male saint would undergo, 'Transvestites in the Middle Ages', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 79, no. 6, (1974), 1381-1394, p.1382. Similarly, Valerie Hotchkiss has noted that when male characters cross-dress in medieval European fiction, it is done for 'comic' ' or 'lewd' ' effect, with male characters being humiliated in female clothing or donning female clothing in order to enter feminine spaces for their own sexual desires, Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man*, p.10.
[θ] Robert Mills, *Seeing Sodomy in the Middle Ages*, (University of Chicago Press, 2015), p.8. Mills has pointed to one other example of a medieval man, Richard Rolle, wilfully dressing in feminine clothing contained in

the other hand, is the one to conceive of the idea of exchanging his clothing, and initiate it. It is not explicitly stated that the knight is in armour or military garb but as his only identifying marker is that he is a 'knight', a certain mental image is suggested to the audience. Clearly, the knight has not fully committed to the disguise he suggests to the virgin as he is still identifiable to onlookers in the brothel. Perhaps the mental image of a knight in a young girl's clothing, or a virgin falling over her over-sized military disguise would have been too comic and unserious a motif to be used in sermons and so the tale never gained the same popularity as other cross-dressing saints.

There is no description of the virgin dressed in the knight's clothing provided except that she was given his 'mantle'.[θ] So while the virgin is not explicitly described as being in militaristic clothing, she certainly is described in militaristic language, being ready to 'wage a war' for her virginity and beliefs.[θ] This militaristic language is in keeping with the descriptions of saints, even female ones, as soldiers fighting a spiritual battle on behalf of Christ.

St Natalia is a saint whose own actions most closely align with those of Margaret and Matilda in that she adopts male dress for the sole purpose of entering into a male-segregated space temporarily. She is mentioned in a Middle English sermon as well as *The Book of the City of Ladies*, although in the *Legenda aurea* she appears only as a side character in her husband, St Adrian's, martyrdom.[θ] She adopts male clothing very briefly and for a very specific task – to visit her dying husband in prison. After praying to God that her husband, a military commander under Emperor Maximanus named Adrian, converts to Christianity in the second century he is immediately imprisoned and St Natalia visits daily to pray, weep and

religious accounts ahead of his assumed canonisation as suggested it figured as a way to highlight his otherness (p.8).

[θ] 'The virgin offered her head to the executioner, the knight his mantle to the virgin!', Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p.252.

[θ] Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, Ibid, p.250.

[θ] *A Repertorium of Middle English Prose Sermons*, vol, I-IV, eds., Veronica O'Mara and Suzanne Paul, (Suffolk: Brepols, 2007), p.2401. Christine de Pisan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Rosalind Brown-Grant, (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p.233; Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, pp.546-50.

kiss his chains. When women are banned from entering the prison, she 'dressed up like a man' to continue being at her husband's side, cleaning his wounds and kissing his blood as he died.[0] St Natalia's gender is never in question. In fact, her status as a devoted wife is reinforced by her brief adoption of masculine clothing which grants her access to a male space and allows her to fulfil her uxorial duties. St Natalia's temporary transgression of physical boundaries due to her clothing is echoed by Matilda and Margaret in their use of clothing to gain access to the shrine they were excluded from.

The life of St Marina/Marinus follows a similar format in that they adopt masculine religious garb in order to follow their father into a monastery. Yet unlike Matilda, Margaret and some of the other cross-dressing saints, they remain in masculine clothing until death, which suggests that long-term adoption of masculine clothing for the sake of God was forgivable, even something to be commended for. St Marina/Marinus was one of the most popular cross-dressing saints from this period, appearing in several manuscripts which demonstrates further that their complex gender presentation was not grounds for condemnation or excommunication. The revelation of St Marina/Marinus' gender is depicted in a fifteenth-century French manuscript kept in the Morgan Library in New York (figure 35).[0] In the image, the saint is being prepared for burial by three nuns, one of whom seems to have already begun to undress the saint whose outer habit has been pulled up to the knees. The presence of the three nuns seems deliberately reminiscent of the three women to whom Jesus appeared after his entombment. For St Marina/Marinus in particular, this revelation and exposure of her biological gender allows 'her body [to speak] for her when she dies, it becomes the voice and spectacle for her purity and her innocence, while providing a titillating

[0] Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Earl Jeffrey Richards, (New York: Persea Books, 1982), III:16.1, p.249.

[0] Vanessa Wright has suggested this image actually depicts another gender non-conforming saint, Margaret/Pelagius in 'The Textual and Visual Uses of the Literary Motif of Cross-Dressing in Medieval French Literature, 1200-1500', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2019), p.309.

glimpse of the forbidden for all the monks who have crowded in to witness this miracle'.[0] Except in the Morgan Library's image, the observing monks are replaced by nuns. This is curious as it would hardly be appropriate for nuns to prepare a monk's body for burial, and yet neither could monks prepare a nun's body. It seems as though the illuminator or patron has deliberately chosen for nuns to ready St Marina/Marinus' body for burial because it is expected that the reader would be familiar with the story and the scene could have been interpreted to be indecent or sexually charged otherwise.

[0] Larissa Tracy, ''Chaucer's Pardoner', : The Medieval Culture of Cross-Dressing and Problems of Religious Authority', *MFF*, vol. 54, no. 2, (2018), 64-108, p.99.



Figure 40 Detail showing three nuns discovering St Marina/Marinos's sex after the saint's death. New York, Morgan Library and Museum, MS M.675, f.136v.

The continued popularity of the cross-dressing saints such as St Marina/Marinus or St Natalia, in hagiographic texts, sermons and religious images points to a need within the general populace for representation of not only gender-nonconforming figures but also for characters who temporarily or permanently reject religious discourse on crossing binary gender presentations through dress in order to achieve a spiritual goal. Whether this was consciously or unconsciously identified by theological writers is another matter but what we can see is their response to this need. These cross-dressing saints, through their varied narratives, provide exactly what any given audience member might be looking for whether that be comfort, solidarity, affirmation or reassurance.

Cross Dressing for Protection from Sexual Assault

While there is ~~are~~ a handful of examples of female figures cross dressing in late medieval English history, such as the aforementioned Christina of Markyate, the most famous example of female cross dressing in the Middle Ages is that of Joan of Arc. Her later life is extremely well documented through her court trials although this is a methodologically complex source. Joan had been captured by enemy Burgundian forces during a battle, handed over to the English, and was subjected to an ecclesiastical trial: the trial document presents Joan's own words at multiple removes, as her responses were to some extent dictated by the hostile questions asked, transcribed from notes by notaries at the end of each day in French, and later translated into Latin. Through recorded questioning, she provided a first-hand account of her motivation for cross-dressing and from that can be extrapolated her experience of dressing in masculine secular and military clothing in order to drive the English forces out of France. Joan's example does offer some insights into the experiences and rationale of other cross-dressing women in the later Middle Ages.

Joan began hearing voices at the age of 13, and by the age of 19, these voices encouraged her to leave her familial home and begin a military campaign to rid France of the English. Despite many successes such as the sieges of Orlèans and Paris, she was captured by the Burgundians in 1430 at Compiègne and sold to the English who used French theologians to try her in an ecclesiastical court in front of the Bishop of Beauvais and various scholars of theology and canon law from the pro-English University of Paris.[0] Throughout her heresy trial, which took place between late January and March 1431, two linked avenues of inquiry recur, which showed just how curious, baffled and confused her ecclesiastical questioners were. They needed to uncover the source and validity of her voices as well as her reasoning for her adoption of masculine military and secular clothing.[0]

At the start of the preparatory trial, Joan refused to name her voices but, perhaps realising the precarious situation she was in and the need to justify them within a Christian model, she admitted that the voices she heard were that of St Michael the Archangel, St Katherine and St Margaret, and came ultimately from God himself. It is usually assumed that the Katherine Joan referred to was St Katherine of Alexandria and the Margaret was St Margaret of Antioch, both hugely popular saints in the period and often paired together in depictions and literature. However, I am suggesting, following both Lilas Edwards and Karen Sullivan, that in fact, the St Margaret that Joan claimed to have heard was St Margaret/Pelagius.[0] Confusingly, there are two cross-dressing saints in the *Legenda aurea* with very similar names. To avoid losing her virginity in marriage, St Margaret cut her hair, 'put on man's clothes', adopted the name Pelagius and escaped to a monastery, rising to

[0] *Joan of Arc: La Pucelle*, ed. Craig Taylor, ((Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p.2.

[0] The records of her trial at Poitiers have been lost, although some of Joan's contemporaries make references to them in their own writings such as Pope Pius II and the author of the *Chronique de la Pucelle*, both mentioned in Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man*, pp.52, 53.

[0] Lilas G. Edwards, 'Joan of Arc: Gender and Authority in the Text of the *Trial of Condemnation* in', in Katherine J. Lewis, Noël James Menuge and Kim M. Phillips, eds., *Young Medieval Women*, Katherine J. Lewis, Noël James Menuge and Kim M. Phillips, eds., (, ed. Katherine J. Lewis, Noël James Menuge and Kim Phillips (Stroud, U.K.: Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1999), p.141 and Karen Sullivan, '"I do not name to you the voice of St Michael": The Identification of Joan of Arc's Voices in', in *Fresh Verdicts on Joan of Arc*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler, (, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (London: Routledge, 2021), p.108, n.39.

become abbot of a nunnery before being accused of impregnating one of the nuns.[0] Separately, St Pelagia was a courtesan living in Antioch who went by the name Margaret, from the Latin word for 'pearl', 'because of the preciousness of [her] attire'.[0] St Pelagia adopts the name Pelagius as well, and becomes a hermit in the mountains outside of Jerusalem. For both of these saints, their biological sex is revealed only after their death with masculine clothing being the vehicle through which they are able to achieve sainthood. These two saints, along with St Margaret of Antioch, a hugely popular saint of childbirth after being swallowed by a dragon, may well have blended together in Joan's mind to form a single saintly amalgamation.[0] During her trial, Joan claimed to hear voices which directed her to carry out God's mission of crowning Charles VII on the French throne and overthrowing the English troops.[0] Initially, Joan claimed she believed the voice came from God alone, then she believed it to be an angel, but over the course of the trial, when pushed on the matter she revealed that she heard the voices of St Michael the Archangel, St Katherine and St Margaret.[0] It was with St Katherine and Margaret that Joan mentioned having a particularly close relationship, as she described hugging and kissing their physical forms and promising them to remain a virgin.[0] This revelation by Joan, forced out of her by continued and directional questioning by the scholars was incriminating and damning.

That Joan felt she was hearing the voice of a saint who cross-dressed is perhaps too convenient a conclusion to draw. Joan may have known of cross-dressing saints as part of her informal religious education, including sermons, but, as Craig Taylor has pointed out, she did not 'attempt to cover up the fact that she was female and therefore was not following the licit

[0] Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p.619.
[0] Ibid, p.617.
[0] Even the Encyclopaedia Britannica has conflated the various St Margarets into a single saint who was swallowed by a dragon and also cross-dressed: 'St Margaret of Antioch', https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Margaret-of-Antioch, [accessed 3rd October 2023].
[0] *Joan of Arc: La Pucelle*, ed. Craig Taylor, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 144.
[0] Ibid, pp. 141, 142, 152.
[0] *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, ed. Daniel Hobbins, ((Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 91, 174.

example of St Margaret also called Pelagien'.[0] Hotchkiss has also pointed out that Joan never compared herself to the various cross-dressing saints in the trial records, and posits that this was due to Joan not seeing them as an example for her own sartorial decisions as the saints' ' cloistered lives had 'little in common with Joan's military career'.[0]

While Joan and her direct contemporaries never likened her to the saints, the judges at Joan's posthumous nullification trial a few decades later were very aware of the potential comparison between her and other cross-dressing saints. The records of the rehabilitation trial in 1456, which found that Joan had been wrongly executed 25 years earlier, stated that:

> It ought not to be judged heretical if she received the sacrament in this habit (male dress), since it has been taken up out of necessity for her duty and office, and it was worn for a good cause. Just as no one will fault blessed Marina, who was accused of a crime, if, continually in men's clothes, she dwelt incognito in the monastery of monks, communicating in the sacraments with the monks. Similarly, concerning blessed Eugenia, who lived for a very long time and very chastely in men's clothes.[0]

The nullification trial had clear political motivations to posthumously absolve Joan and restore her reputation with France, but what is also clear from this court record is that behaviour that was socially transgressive and contributed to a guilty verdict in one context was acceptable, even religiously sanctioned in another.

The judges at Joan's later trial chose not to conflate the St Margaret Joan claimed to hear with St Margaret/Pelagius. However, she was compared with both Saint Marina/Marinus and Saint Eugenia/Eugene who are described as having adopted masculine clothing in order to enter a religious space open only to men to better worship God, as mentioned earlier.[0]

[0] *Joan of Arc: La Pucelle*, ed. Craig Taylor, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p.54.
[0] Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man,* p.67.
[0] *Procès de condemnation et de rehabilitation de Jeanne d'Arc dite La Pucelle,* ed. Jules Quicherat, ((Paris: Renouard, 1841-49), 2:42, translated in Hotchkiss, *Clothing Makes the Man,* p.67.
[0] For St Eugenia/Eugene see Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, pp.551-3. In the *vita* of St Eugenia/Eugene, the religious man, Helenus 'would not allow a woman to come near him', yet when St Eugenia/Eugene approached in a 'man's clothing', he replied, 'Rightly do you call yourself a man, because you act like a man though you are

At various points in her trials, Joan, too, described feeling it necessary to adopt masculine clothes for various reasons which hint at her shifting motivations. From the practicality of masculine clothing as protective when travelling long distances or when confined to a cell, to her clothing becoming a key marker of identity and her perhaps enjoying the new-found status that went along with it, Joan clearly had multiple, converging motivations to disobey expected clothing practices. However, throughout her trial she claimed her reason ~~to wear~~for wearing masculine dress was that it was a God-given order.[0] Article 5 of the Twelve Articles of Accusation is concerned with Joan's wearing of masculine clothing, describing her as having adopted a 'short tunic, hood, doublet, breeches and hose with multiple *aiguilettes* [laces]~~–~~' with her hair cut short 'above her ears'.[0] Joan had been condemned to solitary confinement in prison, having signed a statement confirming her past heretical behaviour including 'in wearing a dissolute, shameful and immodest outfit, against natural decency, and hair cut in a circle in a masculine fashion, against all decency of womankind'.[0] Joan agreed to resume wearing feminine clothing, and to having her head shaved entirely but within four days, had begun wearing masculine clothing again.[0] Under questioning, she asserted that it was more 'lawful~~–~~' and 'convenient~~–~~' to wear male clothing while surrounded by men in prison.[0] This implies that Joan felt that her physical and sexual safety were continually under threat from the English prison guards.

While Joan maintained that her wearing of masculine clothing was a command from God that she would adhere to until told otherwise, it also seemed to have acted to neutralise any potential desire that her men had for her, even when seeing her naked. Concerning her

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~~a woman'.~~
~~Clearly the *vita* of this saint bears striking similarity to the scene in St Cuthbert's life and mimics the actions of Matilda and Margaret's sartorial transgression in order to seek closeness to a religious man and enter a gender-segregated space.~~
[0] *Joan of Arc: La Pucelle*, ed. Taylor, p.154.
[0] Ibid, p.210.
[0] Ibid, p.218.
[0] Ibid, p.220.
[0] Ibid.

fear of sexual assault whilst in prison, Guillaume Manchon, the clerk and eyewitness to Joan's trials, reported at her posthumous trial in 1456 that Joan said 'she did not dare take off the hose, or to keep them otherwise tightly knotted, because as the Bishop and Earl well knew, her guards had tried many times to violate her; and once when she was crying, this Earl, hearing her cries for help, came to her and if he had not come her guards would have raped her'.[0] Although other scholars have argued that masculine dress, in particular hose tied to doublets with numerous laces, would have done little in themselves to protect Joan as she was shackled into her prison cell, it may certainly have slowed down a potential attacker more than feminine garments would have done and bought her time for someone to intervene.

The idea that masculine clothing was able to provide more protection to female bodies than feminine clothing could is laid out in the didactic text, *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*. Written between 1371 and 1372, it was intended by its author, Geoffrey de la Tour-Landry, to teach his daughters appropriate behaviour for young women at court and as wives-to-be and instilling in them virtues such as modesty and chastity which were particularly crucial for women. It was clearly thought to be a useful text for educating high status women, and it is also possible that the pedagogic tales were entertaining in themselves as the text was translated into various languages and disseminated across northern Europe. The British Library possesses an early edition of the manuscript which dates from between 1400 and 1450, while the text was one of the first to be printed in English by William Caxton in 1483 suggesting that this had been a popular text in England for many decades.[0] One of the tales in the manuscript, titled 'Of the roper's wife who was false to her husband', concerns marital infidelity, condones domestic abuse, uxoricide and murder and includes some partial cross dressing as it claims that for women, wearing breeches protects their chastity. The short tale

[0] Taylor,Ibid, p.329.

[0] British Library, Harley MS 1764, ff.1-54. For information on the familial context of the text, see Geoffrey de La Tour-Landry, *Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry: Ceompiled for the Iinstruction of his Ddaughters: Ttranslated from the Ooriginal French into English in the Rreign of Henry VI*, ed. Thomas Wright (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd, 1906).

focuses on the roper, and his wife who is continuing an affair with the local priest who she brings into the marital home. In his haste to leave after a rendezvous, the priest forgets his hose which he hung by the roper's bed. Early the next morning, the roper, believing the hose to be his work bag, takes the article of dress to market before realising what they are. On coming home, he confronts his wife who has been advised by her friend to claim that the trousers are her own. The friend explains to the troubled roper 'that there nis not a truer wiff to her husbonde in this towne, nor kepithe her selff clenner nor trulyer to her husbonde; for in good sothe she and y weren breches for because of the harlotis that handelithe women, and takithe hem hastely bi thaire priuite'.[0] The friend then demonstrates this by showing the roper the breeches she wears under her own skirt. The roper accepts this but his suspicions are again raised by the wife's behaviour and, after getting approval from a surgeon, he breaks both his wife's legs with a pestle to prevent her from leaving the house to meet her lover. After some healing, the wife again invites the priest to her home and continues the affair while the roper is sleeping but upon waking and discovering the lovers still intertwined, he 'hastely toke oute a long kniff and persed [pierced] hem bothe through into the bedde'.[0] The roper is unanimously absolved of his murders by his community who said 'all with one uoys [voice], that it was wel done to ponisshen hem in suche wise'.[0] Sir Geoffrey then ends the tale by reminding his daughters to remember the lives of St Katherine, St Margaret, St Lucy and the eleven thousand virgins who preferred martyrdom over sexual sin and reinforcing the threat of 'shame and dishonour'' that would await them if they also fell into such sin.[0]

This text certainly acknowledges the protective qualities that male hose could offer a female body and demonstrates an awareness in the author that breeches, which would have

[0] 'I assure you that there is not a truer wife to her husband in this town, nor one who keeps herself cleaner or truer to her husband, for surely she and I wear breeches because of the lechers who feel women and grope their genitals', Geoffrey de La Tour-Landry, *Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry,* p.82. Translation mine.
[0] Ibid, pp.81-82.
[0] Ibid, p.82.
[0] Ibid, p.84.

covered the body from hips to ankle and been secured with cords, offered a greater level of protection to bodies and less access to genitals than a woman's kirtle and smock alone. Of course, Geoffrey de la Tour-Landry was in no way suggesting that he would expect his daughters to wear breeches beneath their skirts to protect their own bodies from the molestation of others. Rather, he would likely have been mortified if they had been found to have done so because of the implications of libidinousness and immorality that masculine trousers on female bodies could suggest. Instead, the tone of the tale is deliberately grotesque and exaggeratedly grim, perhaps to both frighten the girls into compliance and to amuse with horror. Within the text, the breeches act as a sign to the audience of the wife's devious nature, insatiable sexual appetite and the reversal of gender expectations.

Lucas van Leyden created two woodcuts which included depictions of low status women wearing ankle length hose under their skirts. Dating from 1510 and 1520 respectively, *The Milkmaid* (Figure 357) and *The Beggar* (Figure 368), both currently held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, suggest that social status may have made the wearing of hose beneath skirts socially permissible. Naturally, it would be inaccurate to assume that works of art are only ever truthful depictions of life, but van Leyden's woodcuts are an example of an artist intending to depict~~ure~~ a figure who is recognisable to viewers because of the familiarity of their dress and other identifying markers. Thus, it can be taken that van Leyden was drawing somewhat from life. That both the women he depicted in footless hose are low status with one working and the other depending on charity is telling as it indicates a level of sartorial necessity. For their profession, milkmaids would spend a greater portion of the time outdoors in rural or pastoral locations attending to their cows and possibly outside of the hearing of anyone they could turn to for help. In van Leyden's depiction, the milkmaid is paired with a cowherd, between which there might be some flirtation. Van Leyden might then be using the trope of the milkmaid to hint at lust, with the

suggestion of an element of sexual innuendo based on the motion of a woman milking a cow. The beggar family in van Leyden's *The Beggars* is based on a part of Sebastian Brandt's *Ship of Fools* (c.1494) which bemoans beggars who are capable of ~~able to~~ work but fail to, out of laziness; he~~and~~ accuses them ~~even~~ of harming and disfiguring their children in order to incur the pity of others who might donate and further fund their lifestyle. In similar straits, a beggar woman might live a largely itinerant life, spending much of her time exposed to the elements, for which hose would provide~~d~~ an added layer of defence since~~and~~ without the physical protection of a home, she would ~~might~~ have been vulnerable to opportunistic attackers. Both women's lifestyles and lowly status within society meant they were living on the outskirts (no pun intended) of society which made the wearing of hose a valuable method of protection, as hinted at in Geoffrey de la Tour-Landry's didactic tale.



Figure ~~41~~ 35 Detail of Lucas van Leyden's The Milkmaid, *c.1510, engraving, housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York*



Figure ~~42~~ 36 Details of Lucas van Leyden's The Beggars*, c.1520, engraving, housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York*

Conclusions

The aim of this chapter has been to examine the ways women could use dress autonomously and deliberately, with a specific focus on the previously overlooked case of Matilda Burgin and Margaret Usshar. Masculine clothing provided the tools for them to temporarily gain access to a religious space they had been cut off from due to their gender. Their act of sartorial transgression against the bishop of Durham and the most eminent saint in northern England put the pair in considerable spiritual and legal jeopardy under the threat of excommunication. It also exposed them to the risk of ~~the~~ physical violence and being ostracised~~ation~~ from their peers. The punishment they both received was unusually harsh, especially when compared with other people found guilty of cross-dressing who were expected to wear women's clothing with sartorial elements referencing their cross-dressing habits.

Cross-dressing could provide social freedoms to women whose lives were controlled and constricted by deeply embedded socio-religious patriarchal dogma, as in Matilda and Margaret's case. It could also provide women with the means to carry out illicit sexual activities such as sex work, and might even have been used to drum up customers by playing up to the crossed taboo of inverted gender presentations. Cross dressing could also offer women physical protection from sexual assault either by disguising their gender entirely or by action as a physical barrier between the intended victim/survivor and the attacker, as described by Joan of Arc and suggested in the *Book of the Knight of the Tower*.

~~Yet they were not the only ones to have carried out an act of cross dressing in medieval England. This chapter has demonstrated that historical figures, as well as characters from popular contemporary literature and, most crucially, saints from religious texts were shown to have cross dressed for a variety of nuanced and multifaceted reasons.~~

Cross dressing appears as a popular motif ~~in the~~in medieval ~~cultural imagination~~secular and religious literature, crossing centuries, geographic regions and genres, with authors employing the trope to different ends. In some texts, it opens up a female character's narrative options, such as in Zinerva's tale where masculine garb allows her to escape her murderous husband and live independently of him as a musician. It allows other characters to undermine and benefit from fictional inheritance laws as in the *Romance of Silence*.

The largest corpus of texts which feature cross dressing are religiously endorsed hagiographies. Regardless of whether these cross-dressing saints really existed as historical figures or whether they were patch-works of early Christian imagination and half-forgotten pagan deities which were subsequently moulded and used by later male authors, the effect their biographies had on the men and women who heard or read about them and the

admiration or devotion they inspired is critical.[0] Perhaps Matilda and Margaret had the lives of these saints related to them through sermons or plays and felt justified in disguising their own womanhood through clothing in order to attain closeness to a renowned saint.

To male ~~, usually religious,~~ authorities, particularly chroniclers, ~~and~~ judges and religious, female cross dressing was understood to be the external, material evidence of a woman's depraved and insatiable sexual appetite. However, ~~the reality~~ for most cross-dressing secular and religious characters, as well as historic women, the reality seems with some exceptions ~~to have been, with some exceptions,~~ the opposite. Cross dressing was frequently used to protect one's body from sexual assault, as in the case of Joan of Arc. It could also be employed to protect one's soul, as might have been the intention behind Matilda and Margaret's actions. It seems that the lived experience of cross dressing was that it afforded women bodily autonomy and physical~~ly~~ protection, and enabled them some control over their own lives. So~~, as~~ Christina of Markyate was able to pursue a chaste religious life having escaped a forced marriage, and Jacqueline of Bavaria was able to escape political imprisonment. Cross dressing provided some medieval women with~~hich~~ an, albeit prohibited, method of undermining male familial control, and allowed them to navigate a male-orientated social system and male-focused religion.

Margaret and Matilda were not the only ones to have carried out an act of cross dressing in medieval England. This chapter has demonstrated that historical figures, as well as characters from popular contemporary literature and, most crucially, saints from religious texts, were shown to have cross dressed for a variety of nuanced and multifaceted reasons. That being said, it would be impossible to accurately tell just how many women at this time used male dress for their own benefit, simply because the women who were more successful at cross-dressing would not have been detected and so were never brought to court to face

[0] The 19th century scholar, Hermann Usener, posited that the earliest cross-dressing saint, Pelagia, can be traced back to the cult of Hermaphroditus in his work, *Legenden der heiligen Pelagia*~~, (~~ (Germany: A. Marcus, 1879), pp.210-215.

punishment. Yet, despite living in a society in which gender-conformation was strictly encouraged, cases such as John/Eleanor Rykerner's, who was mentioned earlier in this chapter, indicates that there was a tolerance and an inclusive approach to people with gender non-conforming behaviours. Margaret and Matilda, as well as the other people examined in this chapter may well be further indication of a widely held acceptance towards temporary or permanent changes to one's gender presentation. Their case could also demonstrate an undercurrent of cultural tolerance towards women sartorially pushing against the restrictions placed on them, and regaining agency in a society which often attempted to limit them.

Considering Matilda and Margaret for the final time, there are many potential reasons which might have driven them to defy the ruling of St Cuthbert as well as subvert expected gender norms within late medieval English society. The notion of a female body being clothed in masculine apparel was, as I have shown, not new to late medieval English society as Christianity had long praised biologically female saints'–' temporary or life-long adoption of masculine clothing for spiritual gain. Perhaps then, we should look at Matilda and Margaret as two women reinterpreting religious teachings and examples and applying it to suit their own needs. The popularity of the cross-dressing saints demonstrates a ready appetite not only for gender non-conforming figures but also female characters who used masculine clothing to reap spiritual benefits within religious literature. It could be a combination of their devotion to St Cuthbert and simultaneously their objection to the gender-segregated ruling that drove them to seek closeness to his body under the guise of masculinity. To medieval English women and men, it is clear that sartorial acts that were devotional and redemptive in one setting were deviant and transgressive in another.

Chapter Four: (Un)dress and Gender Violence in Late Medieval England

On reading Rebecca Solnit's essay, 'Men Explain Things to Me', one event to stand out from the barrage of artillery-like fire of fact after statistic after example of ceaseless violence against women in the first few decades of the twenty-first -century was an event in an American suburb. Solnit recounts the time the nuclear physicist uncle of an early boyfriend of hers had described:

> – as though it were a light and amusing subject – how a neighbor's wife in his suburban bomb-making community had come running out of her house naked in the middle of the night screaming that her husband was trying to kill her. How, I asked, did you know he wasn't trying to kill her? He explained, patiently, that they were respectable, middle-class people. Therefore, her-husband-trying-to-kill-her was simply not a credible explanation for her fleeing the house yelling that her husband was trying to kill her.[0]

Putting aside the blatant classism of the uncle, Solnit's anonymous twentieth-century woman likely had little idea, or in that moment would not have cared at all, that she was running in the footsteps of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century women who had also run naked, or in a state of undress, into the night to escape a violent husband or partner. While many (all?) women would balk at the thought of entering a street naked or in their underwear because of the possibility of sexual violence from strangers, from catcalls and wolf whistles to outright violence, Solnit describes a woman pushed beyond her limit of tolerable violence. She describes a woman for whom entering a public street naked has become less of a threat than remaining in the privacy of her home; and yet this was a woman whose story is doubted and ridiculed by those around her. Solnit's essay highlights the point that even in contemporary society, women are still not seen as 'reliable witnesses to their own lives'.[0]. Returning to

[0] Rebecca Solnit, '-'Men Explain Things to Me'', *Men Explain Things to Me*, ((London: Granta, 2008), 1-16, p.6.
[0] Ibid.,Solnit, p.8.

Judith Bennett's argument regarding women's status versus experience, Solnit's anecdote comes into focus. It demonstrates that while women's status has changed, their experience of gender violence has changed little and that medieval and modern women's experience of domestic violence can be hauntingly similar. Through Solnit's report and the case records of domestic violence discussed in this chapter, we can see the medieval and the modern experience in conversation with one another.

Being naked, in a state of undress or being forced to strip out of clothing in the late medieval English cultural imagination had diverse connotations which sometimes complemented, sometimes contradicted each other. In Middle English literature, a female character presented to an audience in a smock had overt sexual overtones in many instances, and yet in hagiographies, the nude or nearly nude female, or male, body had differing symbolism with the ability to inspire piety, sorrow and arousal in male and female audience members.[0] Similarly, the stripping of Christ and his crucified body was the focal point of every altar of every church in England which brought the nude, abused body into the daily consciousness of medieval people. The prelapsarian Adam and Eve had been content to be naked but on the introduction of sin into the world by Eve's eating of the apple, they adopted animal skins and, later, textiles to hide the shame of their naked bodies.

The discussion will touch on a range of contemporary sources in which the nude or partially nude body of a woman is met with violence: from religious stories of virgin saints stripped before a fictional and literal audience, to the heroines of romances stripped of their clothing and tied to a tree by their hair.[0] In these examples, the women are shown to be in more danger while naked or partially dressed, as their bodies are made vulnerable to figurative sexual assault by the narrative's villains. Similarly, in their *vitæ*, a number of virgin

[0] For scholarship on the eroticism of the saints, see Rachel Wall's 'Saint Sebastian in the Renaissance: The Classicization and Homoeroticism of a Saint', *Art Journal*, vol. 1, no. 2, ((2012), 11-23.
[0] *Le Bone Florence of Rome*, Carol Falvo Heffernan, ed., ((Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976), ll. 1513-1518.

saints faced the stripping of their bodies as part of the torture which preceded their martyrdom and which exposed their bodies to both a figurative and a literal audience. Thus, the presence of the partially or fully naked female body in the cultural imagination of late medieval England meant the sartorial state could have been viewed as tantalisingly sexual and profoundly saintly. However, the experience of real medieval women as they appear in legal cases is very different. Instead, we see that medieval women were faced with the choice of withstanding potentially fatal violence in the home or fleeing it naked into the street. This chapter will attempt to demonstrate how a historian might reconcile these disparate readings and the implications it has for how the (un)dress and violence in the medieval cultural imagination can be understood.

This chapter will examine the social, religious or sexual connotations of a female body being stripped of its clothing or a woman being seen to be naked or in a state of undress. We will see how a specific item, the smock, should be 'read' by modern historians: this garment was an intimate item of clothing with multiple, contrasting meanings from the deeply sacred to the deeply sexual. This analysis will ask whether the publicly naked female body or the act of public stripping were always sexual and if the stripping of female figures in religious and secular literature was sexually exploitative as well as humiliating. By applying sexual script theory to this literature, this chapter will demonstrate that naked women's bodies, either real or figurative, were frequently open to vast range of sexual interpretations. The violence enacted on the naked or partially dressed female body in religious and secular literature, reinforced the belief that the female body was open to being objectified, sexualised and abused despite the objections of the body's owner. Finally, this chapter will examine whether there are instances where being in a state of undress, rather than being exploitative, could actually be empowering and used as a way for women to regain control of their situation, and retain their autonomy and reframe their narrative in the face of violence.

Domestic Violence, Undress and Female Autonomy

A short poem by the Welsh poet, Gwerful Mechain (c.1460-1502) is perhaps one of the earliest, and certainly one of the rawest, expressions of desire for revenge against a husband for beating his wife written by a woman on the British Isles:

> ‘A dagger through your heart’s stone – on a slant
> To reach your breast bone
> May your knees break, your hands shrivel
> And your sword plunge in your guts to make you snivel.’[0]

Although it is unclear whether Gwerful was writing on her own behalf having suffered at the hands of her own husband, or whether she was urged to write this *englyn* on behalf of a woman in her community who had been beaten, what is clear is the poet’s hate-filled fury at the violence directed at women.[0] Her poem conveys her own desire for retribution and to enact fatal violence on his body instead. ~~and powerfully demonstrates that despite the dearth of records to the contrary, few (if any) medieval women were tolerant of domestic violence.~~ Indeed, the popularity of the cult of St Wilgefortis, a saint appealed to by abused women~~e~~n~~,~~ throughout northern Europe, ~~is~~ is testament to medieval women’s resentment at – and ~~also demonstrates~~ the prevalence of – domestic violence that necessitated a pan-European mediating and comforting figure to reassure women in inescapable, abusive relationships that their pain was understood.[0]

Some ~~wome~~women ~~n were no longer able to suffer their husband’s violence and~~ were driven naked, or nearly so, into the street to escape the violence of their husbands~~em~~. In doing so, either knowingly or unwittingly they turned their bodies into a spectacle to be seen

[0] Gwerful Mechain, ‘To her husband for beating her~~’, in~~’, in *The Works of Gwerful Mechain*, trans. And ed. Katie Gramich~~, ((~~Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2018), pp.88-89.
[0] *Englyn* is the Welsh word for a short poem with a strict rhyming pattern.
[0] Ilse E. Friesen, *The Female Crucifix: Images of St Wilgefortis since the Middle Ages*~~, ((~~Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001), p.65.

by their communities. In the case of Alice Softley which was presented between 1504 and 1509 to the Chancellor in the Court of Chancery~~y~~, who happened also to be the Archbishop of Canterbury, her torturous and humiliating ordeal was documented within the ~~as~~ wider context of ~~within~~ a battle between her son from her first marriage, Richard Westwood, and her avaricious new husband, George Softley of Latton, Essex.[0] To pressure his new bride into handing over land including two messuages as well as 'woodland, meadows and pasture', Softley went to extreme and brutal lengths.[0] 'In shamefull and unmanly wise [ways]', Softley starved Alice, keeping her 'so streit that she hath not her Sustenance of mete and drynke'. He also 'often tymes … hurt and bete her that she was thereby in perell of her liff~~'~~' until finally he 'drove her owte of her owne hous'.[0] In the next sentence, the court clerk again repeated that Alice had been forced out of her own house, using her nakedness to emphasise the shocking injustice of the situation. It states that she had been 'so beten and driven away~~'~~' that she had neither 'a kerchief on her head nor clothes able to cover her body'. It seems, then, that Alice was in a state of total nakedness when she was driven out of her home and forced to travel one mile away to her son's house to seek 'sucour'. The record does not reveal where her son lived, but the moderately sized parish of Latton was situated next to the Augustinian Latton Priory and held an annual fair every year. This suggests that Alice lived in a community that was tied to its faith, for whom such avarice and violence on the part of Softley would have been viewed as deeply damaging, with Alice's public escape demonstrating her husband's lack of Christian virtues. ~~-~~Richard, seeing his mother 'in such plite', took her in ~~briefly and although the document does not state that Richard provided his~~

[0] Matthew Bristow, 'The Former Augustinian Priory of St John the Baptist, Latton, Essex', *Historic England Research Magazine*, 10th July 2020, [online], https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/research/back-issues/the-former-augustinian-priory-of-st-john-the-baptist-latton-essex/ (accessed 13th July 2025).

[0] TNA, C/1/162, m.46, Alice Softley vs George Softely. Translation from Middle English mine and all subsequent quotes are from this document. A messuage is a farmstead or dwelling. Chancery petitions were undated although Sara Butler suggests Alice's case dates from between 1504 and 1509 in '~~"~~The Law as a Weapon in Marital Disputes: Evidence from the Late Medieval Court of Chancery, 1424-1529~~"~~', *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 43, no. 3~~, ((~~2004), 291-316, p.311.

[0] The *MED* suggests 'streit~~'~~' meant 'strictly~~'~~' or 'oppressively', https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED43256/track?counter=1&search_id=2564823, [accessed 24th May 2024].

~~mother with clothes, it would be impossible to imagine that he would allow his mother the indignity of nudity~~. It can be assumed therefore that when Richard then returned her to the house from which she had fled, Alice was dressed in the usual, possibly fairly modest, fashion for the period: a smock, kirtle or dress, with shoes and a hood at least. Accompanying them, Richard brought his neighbours, presumably hoping they could intimidate Softley into good behaviour and to 'kepe and cherissh his seid wyff like a woman'. The intimidation or persuasion tactics failed to work on the wrathful and violent, and ironically named, Softely, who 'rebuked and reviled the seid Richard and bete him and d~~D~~rove him oute of his hous and wold have slayed him'. The document states that both Alice and her son, Richard, then lived 'in grete [fear] and jeoperdie of their lyves~~'~~' and then goes on in obsequious terms to plead that the Archbishop of Canterbury ensure that Richard receives his rightful inheritance.

The plea's description of Softley behaving in a 'shamefull and unmanly~~'~~' way towards his wife is useful as it highlights the plaintiffs~~'~~' abhorrence and disapproval of Softley's abusive behaviour towards his wife as well as the expectation that the archbishop will concur. If we accept Hanawalt's and Butler's summations that a certain level of domestic abuse, in the modern sense of the phrase, was acceptable, then this condemnation of Softley's abuse demonstrates that his behaviour went ~~well~~ beyond the tolerated level. But it is also crucial to note that rather than being a case intended to charge Softley with abuse of his wife, of which her being forced into the street naked was a critical part, it is evident her ordeal formed part of a wider complaint about inheritance. Indeed, Alice's maltreatment was included to emphasise that Softley had a cruel and violent nature which he was utilising to wrongfully withhold his step-son's rightful inheritance.

For any medieval woman regardless of status or age, being seen publicly naked would have been a humiliating, traumatising and possibly socially and reputationally damaging event as a woman's body was property of her male relatives and modesty was a virtue exalted

and promoted by Christian teachings. If we assume that with an adult son, Alice was a woman of middling age who possessed some financial substance and so likely held~~olding~~ a respectable place within her community, to be seen travelling a mile to her son's house completely naked and without even a kerchief to cover her hair would have been a demeaning and disgracing experience which could have damaged her reputation with her neighbours. Furthermore, it would have exposed her not only to the penetrating glances of onlookers ~~whilst~~ but also made~~king~~ her more vulnerable to assault in such a state. While many in her community would no doubt have been horrified at her actions, the figure of St Wilgefortis and the poetry of Gwerful Mechain are testament to the silent women in her community who would have empathised with~~hich~~ Alice and understood what drove her from her house and whose own experiences of domestic violence went unrecorded. Skoda has noted 'networks of solidarity~~' in~~', in French cases, with women especially coming forward to support the victim-survivor.[0] Sara Butler's earlier work on English wives deserting their marriages suggests a similar situation with family, friends and even clergymen offering help and refuge, although those who assisted women in leaving their marriages risked being accused of ravishment which could result in imprisonment, penance and fines.[0] Butler has noted the fourteenth century case of Beatrice who had been forcibly married while underage to Henry le Wyle, and who was aided in her escape by her mother, Sabina Herring, and her uncle. For rescuing Beatrice from her marriage, both Sabina and her brother, Beatrice's uncle, were later accused by le Wyle of ravishment.[0]

The fact that the clerk saw fit to pick out a single item of clothing, the kerchief, is telling. The glossary of *The Multilingual Sourcebook* defines a medieval 'kerchief~~'~~'

[0] Hannah Skoda, 'Violent Discipline or Disciplining Violence? Experience and Reception of Domestic Violence in Late Thirteenth-and Early Fourteenth-Century Paris and Picardy', *Cultural and Social History* vol. 6, no. 1, (2009), 9-27, p.17.
[0] Sarah M. Butler, 'Runaway Wives: Husband Desertion in Medieval England', *Journal of Social History*, vol. 40, no. 2 (2006), 337-359, pp.350, 345.
[0] Ibid, p.342 citing TNA KB 27/232, m.64d.

somewhat ambiguously: ‘piece(s) of cloth primarily used to cover the head (as a veil or similar) or worn in various other ways’.[0] While the exact definition or method of wearing a kerchief in the medieval period is difficult to ascertain, it is clear that it was a heavily gendered piece of clothing designed to be worn around the head, neck or over the decolletage. A medieval woman’s hair held significance within contemporary standards of beauty and signified her youth and fertility so to be seen without a kerchief to contain or cover one’s hair had connotations of sexual impropriety and an uncontrolled sexuality. The link between a woman’s uncovered hair and sexuality is clear in the medieval imagination, as the figure of the goddess, Venus, in John Lydgate’s text, *Reason and Sensuality*, is without a kerchief, ‘For plenly she had non’.[0] In this text, the character’s lack of a kerchief contributed to the impression of her sexuality and proclivity for sexual intercourse.

The Consistory Court of the Diocese of London records the abuse suffered by~~of~~ Eleanor Brownyng, with witnesses focusing~~’s abuse~~ on the visibility of ~~focused on~~ her head and hair in such a way that emphasised her undressed state as she fled her house and an abusive man. A witness testified to two events of violence against her. Firstly, that seven years ago, he saw her running down the street near to the Hospital of St Bartholomew on the western edge of the City of London ‘in her tunic with her head uncovered and her hair streaming behind her~~’~~’ and being chased by a man named Alexander holding a dagger.[0] Eleanor ran to the house of her sister who sheltered her from Alexander’s bellows and threats to kill her which caused the witness to state that they believed he would have ‘at least mutilated~~’~~’ her. On a more recent occasion five years before, the witness had seen Alexander threaten Eleanor with a dagger while she socialised in a ~~the local~~ tavern on Lombard Street,

[0] ~~Louisa~~ Sylvester *et al*, ~~, Gale Owen-Crocker and Martin Chambers, eds.,~~ *Medieval Dress and Textiles*, ~~*in Britain: A Multilingual Sourcebook*, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014),~~ p.379.

[0] John Lydgate, *Reason and Sensuality*, p.43.

[0] ~~Sarah Butler~~Sara Butler, *Divorce in Medieval England: From One to Two Persons in Law*~~, ((~~Oxford: Routledge, 2013), p.33. Eleanor Brownyng’s case dates to 1467-1476 and is translated in full in Shannon McSheffrey’s *Love and Marriage in Late Medieval London*~~, ((~~Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), pp.82-83.

in the centre of the city, which caused her to 'jump the distance of four men long~~'~~' to escape. The witness~~'~~' testimony paints Eleanor's relationship with Alexander as having long been a violent, turbulent one in which she faced regular threats to her body and her life, and provides contextual details of her attire and behaviour to authenticate their story and demonstrate the exceptional circumstances Eleanor faced. Not only had she been forced to make an almost impossibly athletic feat in leaping away from danger, but she also took the step to run through the street which, due to its close proximity to the church and hospital of St Bartholomew, would have likely had high foot traffic, in her underclothing and with her head uncovered and her hair loose.

This last detail, her undress and undone hair, could indicate a time of day the violence occurred, suggesting ~~and suggests~~ Eleanor had been caught unawares and that Alexander's violence had been so spontaneous that she had not had time to dress or style her hair. Eleanor's undressed state, combined with her undone hair could indicate that the violence began either first thing in the morning or last thing at night as she was getting ready for bed. It is impossible to tell from the deponent's testimony what time he saw Eleanor being chased by Alexander, except seasonally, as he ~~did~~ mentioned that it was during the summer and he was busy about town, completing chores by taking a 'repaired gown~~'~~' to the house of a man named Burgoyn, possibly the husband of Eleanor's sister.[0] Accepting, then, that the event happened in the early morning as people started to ready themselves for the day and go about their business, Alexander perhaps began to threaten and intimidate Eleanor as she rose from bed, with the level of violence rising to such an intolerable level for her that she felt the safest route was to flee, despite still being in the smock which doubled as both undergarments and a nightgown.

[0] ~~Shannon~~ McSheffrey, ~~trans.,~~ *Love and Marriage in Late Medieval London*, ~~(Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995),~~ p.83, quoting from GLRO MS DL/C/205, f.203v-204r (now the London Metropolitan Archive).

~~Even~~ W~~w~~omen who had remarried after the death of their husband, and who had in their widowed state held autonomy and a level of independence that was uncommon for their married counterparts, could be chased into the streets in their underclothes. The 1348~~9~~ case of Margery de Devoine against her husband, Richard Scot, exposes a relationship which was darkly underscored by extreme violence going back many years.[0] Scot, a resident of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, had been called before the archdeacon of York and charged with adultery with at least five other women, having illegitimate children with them whom his lawful wife, Marg~~are~~ery~~t~~, was caring for. Frederick Pedersen has noted that Richard justified the violence towards his wife by declaring that he had 'a licence to beat his wife and other women [*licentiam habere verberandi uxorem suam et alias mulieres*]'.[0] Scot ~~was not~~ could have been referring to the legality of a low ~~referring to a legal licence~~level of physical chastisement of one's wife as well as ~~, but rather~~ his belief that he held socially accepted freedom to do so. While it is likely that this line was recorded simply because the court clerk had to record Scot's words verbatim, it is also possible that in the world of the ecclesiastical court and surrounded by men of the cloth who perhaps had little experience with overt aggression, Scot's justification for violence, which was not contained within the confines of his home, may well have shocked them. As Sara Butler has suggested, this admission could also suggest that 'the witnesses and archdeacon of Northumberland did not agree.'[0] What is abundantly clear is that Scot was undoubtedly a man who was not only accustomed to violence but who wholeheartedly endorsed it and enacted it against the women in his life.

There may well have been plenty of examples of bodily violence which Margery~~aret~~ experienced over the years which were~~as~~ never brought before the court and indeed, Butler

[0] YBI, CP.257, Margery de ~~aret~~ Devoine vs Richard Scot (1349).
[0] A fuller translation can be found in Frederik Pedersen, *Marriage Disputes in Medieval England*~~, ((~~London: Hambledon Press, 2000), p.136. Another case from 1504 records a husband's unpleasantly phrased defence at beating his wife by asserting he 'wolde punysshe his wyff at his pleasour~~' in~~', in ~~Sarah~~ Butler, ~~'~~'The Law as a Weapon~~' in Marital Disputes: Evidence from the Late Medieval Court of Chancery, 1424-1529', *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 43, no. 3, (2004), 291-316~~, p.314, citing TNA C1/287/47, John Baker~~, ((~~1504-1509).
[0] Butler, *The Language of Abuse*, p.138.

has noted that the petitions show an 'ongoing level~~'~~' of abuse which suggests women were 'living with a high degree of violence~~'~~' before taking legal action.[0] However, one particularly gruesome example occurred eight years before when Scot had beaten Margery~~aret~~ around the head with a stick so severely that one of ~~Margaret's~~ her eyes was knocked from its socket.[0] Neighbours, presumably alerted to Margery~~garet~~'s plight by the noise and commotion it caused, called for a doctor to attend to her who recommended that she be taken to a hospital, so serious was her situation. Scot then threatened to break the doctor's arms and legs if he did not leave the house.[0] ~~Margaret~~ Margery managed to flee the house 'only in her underclothes~~'~~' and presumably only partially sighted, and reach the safety of the hospital, refusing to leave as she was in fear for her life.[0] The ~~is sartorial~~ detail is crucial in demonstrating the severity of her situation – she had felt so threatened that she did not have time to dress.

Some of the witnesses, however, reported that Margery~~aret~~, rather than being the abused wife, was actually a frequent contributor to the aggression and discord in the home with some even claiming they had heard ~~Margaret~~ Margery boast that she could murder Scot if she so chose.[0] Although worth acknowledging, it also cannot be ignored that this could have been a lie told by a witness who was friends with or had been intimidated by Scot in order to incriminate ~~Margaret~~ Margery and call her character into question while providing Scot with justification for his attack. It is possible that ~~Margaret~~ Margery and Scot had been warring before he picked up the baton to beat her with and that she had threatened to murder him~~,~~ but what is certain is that she ran from her home, with her eye dislodged and wearing only her smock~~,~~ which conveys a desperate, terrified woman. ~~Margaret~~ Margery had been a victim and survivor of abuse long before she stood before the jury recounting her experience.

[0] Butler, *Divorce in Medieval England*, p.32.
[0] Butler, *The Language of Abuse*, p.136. Pedersen records the Latin: '*Vidit dictum Ricardum prefatam Margaretam verberare cum uno bacculo tam in humeris quam in caaput eiusdem et [sic Ricardus occulum] extraxit*~~'~~', Pedersen, *Marriage Disputes*, p.136.
[0] Butler, *The Language of Abuse*, p.136.
[0] Ibid, p.136.
[0] Ibid, p.146.

But this time was different as she found herself forced from her home in only her underclothes and it was this lack of clothing which truly revealed the severity of her situation.

Bronach Kane has suggested that ~~Margaret~~ Margery de Devoine's running away from her husband in only her smock revealed 'the inversion of marital and domestic intimacy~~'~~' as it turned the private public and brought their community into their turbulent relationship.[0] Yet in doing so, it shows the role of the community in cases of domestic abuse and could indicate that the victim-survivor used her state of undress to attract witnesses to the commotion of a partially clad woman in the public sphere. Those witnesses, having been convinced of the seriousness of the violence by the woman's state of undress, might then go on to testify on her behalf in court and secure her the separation or divorce she sought. Thus, it could be tentatively argued that for some victim-survivors of domestic abuse, undress or partial dress could be a valuable tool to highlight danger to one's community and could convince a jury of the irrevocable fracturing of a marriage.

While cases in which couples seek a divorce do appear in ecclesiastical court records, very few of them were ever granted a separation owing to Christian beliefs in the sanctity and spiritual permanence of marriage. Separations could take the form of a straightforward annulment such as in instances where marriages could be shown to have not been consummated for which a charge of impotence might be levied against the husband, or when impotence prevented the creation of children.[0] ~~-~~Marriages could also be annulled in the event that a couple could prove consanguinity, that they were too closely related to marry. In cases of cruelty, or chronic infidelities, couples could be allowed to separate *a mensa et thoro*, or 'from table and bed~~'~~' meaning that they would be expected to live separately and neither owed the other the marital debt but they were also not allowed to contract new marriages as

[0] Bronach ~~Bronach~~ Kane, *Popular Memory and Gender in Medieval England: Men, Women and Testimony in the Church Courts, c.1200-1500* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2019),~~: Men, Women and Testimony in the Church Courts, c.1200-1500, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2019),~~ p.96-7.

[0] For more on impotence trials, see Ruth Mazo Karras and Jacqueline Murray, '~~'~~The Sexual Body~~' in~~', in ~~Linda Kalof, ed.,~~ *A Cultural History of the Human Body, Vol. 2: In the Medieval Age*~~, (~~, ed. Linda Kalof (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010), 59-76.

they remained married in the eyes of God.[0] For this outcome, irrefutable evidence of intolerable cruelty needed to be provided and include the statements of reliable witnesses who observed the abuse themselves.[0]

While female nudity usually had a negative impact on the reputation of the woman, male undress had less so. However, impotence trials were one of few scenarios in which a man was forced to undress, and the reason for the trial would have been emasculating and shaming.[0] These trials had a legal, ecclesiastical and pseudo-medical function and the stripping of the male body, in the presence of sex workers who conducted themselves in a way that intended to demonstrate the man's impotence, or lack of, was not necessarily intended to be shaming or humiliating. The sex workers' reports to the court on their findings would have been public but the visibility of the man's body would not. Still, the accusation of impotence against him would have been harmful to his reputation.

Recent historians have been careful not to assume that modern definitions of domestic violence can be assigned neatly to experiences of violence between couples in the Middle Ages, as the language with which gender violence is understoodand and described in the twenty-first century has vastly altered alongside societal and legal attitudes to the unacceptability of violence against women and other groups.[0] Understandings of what constitutes "domestic violence" havesaltered enormously since the late medieval period, with Phillipa Maddern noting that 'domestic'' and 'violent'' are both 'heavily culturally

[0] Butler, *The Language of Abuse*, p.14 and James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, ((Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p.453. See also R. H. Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England (*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

[0] Ecclesiastical courts seemed to especially favour the testimonies of male witnesses over female witnesses. See P.J.P Goldberg, *Women in England, c. 1275-1525: Documentary Sources*, ((Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p.141 for Margery Nesfeld's request for divorce due to domestic abuse which was denied on the testimony of a single male witness despite two female witness testimonies in her favour. Sara Butler has also discussed the gendered element of this case in *The Language of Abuse*, p.168.

[0] For further discussion of impotence and male undress, see Bronach Kane, *Impotence and Virginity in the Late Medieval Ecclesiastical Court of York* (York: Borthwick Publications, 2008).

[0] Having said this, some legal attitudes to gendered violence have been slow to modernise. For example, in Britain, marital rape only became illegal in 1991. See *The Law Commission*, 'Rape within Marriage', ((1992), p.1.

conditioned terms’–’ which would have had no bearing on the rulings of medieval judges.[0] Barbara Hanawalt has cautioned against generalising about any level of ubiquitous domestic violence in the late Middle Ages, but she has asserted that ‘corporal correction of the wife by the husband was a generally accepted social custom’.[0] In her study of domestic violence across medieval Europe, Sara Butler, has called for a more nuanced, less fixed interpretation of what modern historians would identify as domestic violence or ‘domestic discipline’.[0] Within the medieval context, violence could play an important, and in the medieval mind even beneficial, role in the maintenance of social hierarchy in the form of discipline. Certainly, the castigation of women in particular was believed to have been ordained and approved of by God himself, reinforced through Eve’s creation from the rib of Adam symbolising her – and therefore all women’s – inferior place in society. St Paul repeated the order for female subservience in his letter to the Ephesians saying ‘Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as you do to the Lord’–’(Eph. 5:22-24), a sentiment reiterated and reinforced by medieval theologians including Thomas Aquinas.[0]

While Derek Neal has argued that excessive cruelty to one’s wife indicated a lack of control in a man, other scholars have suggested that a certain level of violence was permissible.[0]So, as Sara Butler has articulated that, ‘to hit one’s wife was acceptable as long as it was not excessive but “excessive” was open to interpretation’.[0] Martin Ingram, noting a shift towards an intolerance of domestic violence in England after the Reformation, has noted

[0] Philippa Maddern, ‘‘Interpreting Silence: Domestic Violence in the King’’s Courts in East Anglia, 1422-1442’ in‘, in Eve Salisbury, Georgiana Donavin and Merrall Llewelyn Price, ed. *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, ed. Eve Salisbury, Georgiana Donavin and Merrall Llewelyn Price, ((Florida: University Press of Florida, 2002), 31-56, p.33.

[0] Barbara Hanawalt, ‘Violence in the Domestic Milieu of Late Medieval England’ in’, in *Violence in Medieval Society*, ed. Richard W. Kaeuper, ((Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2000), 197-214, p.201.

[0] Sara Butler, ‘Attitudes to Domestic Violence in Christian Europe’ in‘, in *A Companion to Crime and Deviance in the Middle Ages*, ed. Hannah Skoda, ((Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2023), 397–414, p.400.

[0] Emma Hawkes, ‘‘The “‘‘Reasonable”’’ Laws of Domestic Violence in Late Medieval England’ in‘, in *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, eds., ed. Eve Salisbury, Georgiana Donavin and Merrall Llewelyn Price, ((Florida: University Press of Florida, 2002), 57-72, p.60.

[0] See Derek Neal, *The Masculine Self in Late Medieval England*, ((Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[0] Sara Butler, *The Language of Abuse, : Marital Violence in Later Medieval England*, (Leiden, Brill: 2007), p.223.

that violence in the household was intended to 'uphold order, not to subvert it'.[0] Hannah Skoda has pointed out, albeit in relation to French domestic violence cases, that for canon lawyers, whether a case of domestic violence was prosecutable rested on the level of 'brutality~~'~~ ' enacted in it.[0] This level of brutality would be difficult to ascertain in court without evidence of bodily harm or eye~~-~~witness accounts of the violence in action to back up the allegations of the victim-survivor of abuse.

This is where fleeing into a public space in a state of undress could be a useful tactic, even a way for a victim-survivor to 'best defend herself'.[0] T~~For t~~he woman in Rebecca Solnit's example, given at the start of the chapter, ~~of a woman who,~~was forced by extreme circumstances to run~~ran~~ into her suburban street in the dead of night naked and screaming. Yet~~,~~ her escape was not necessarily protection as those in her own community chose not to believe her terror and even scoffed at her. Centuries behind her, medieval women were also running out into the street naked or partly dressed to escape abuse or violence in the home, some with more success than Solnit's woman. ~~Unfortunately, there are too few cases to really be able~~It would be difficult to argue that this was a particularly common occurrence or that it amounted to any sort of widespread strategy to evade violent husbands owing to the few cases that record this specific scenario. Indeed, the ones discussed here provide the clearest insight with the most detailed witness statements, perhaps because of the very public nature of the incidents, and because of this have been discussed in the research of scholars such as Butler and McSheffrey, as already cited, although without the focused attention on lack of dress as here. The handful of women present in the legal records who each resorted to the same action, leaving the privacy of the home in a state of undress, is striking and leaves a

[0] Martin Ingram, 'Pushing Back Male Violence in Marriage, England 1400-1600~~' in~~', in *Disciplined Dissent in Western Europe, 1200-1600*, ed. Fabrizio Titone~~, (~~ (Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2022), 307-341, p.308.
[0] ~~Hannah~~ Skoda, ~~'~~'Violent Discipline or Disciplining Violence? ~~Experience and Reception of Domestic Violence in Late Thirteenth- and Early Fourteenth-Century Paris and Picardy', *Cultural and Social History*, (2009), vol. 6, no. 1, 9-27, '~~, p.10.
[0] ~~Skoda,~~Ibid, p.19.

number of questions open for interpretation. Where these women driven by the practicality of needing to escape potentially deadly abuse as fast as possible, not having enough time to dress themselves before running out into the public world undressed? Is it possible these women had an awareness of canon laws on divorce in the case of abuse and that if they were to be successful in court, their situation had to be dire? While not wishing to suggest that these women's terrors, traumas and pains should not be recognised in their entirety, it is also worth considering that multiple realities could be present at any one time and each could be true and valid.

Certainly, pragmatism played a role in these cases in that the urgency with which women needed to escape violence meant she had little regard for what she was wearing and in examining these cases, we need to be alert to the fact that a lack of dress in such situations is a sign of desperation and a drive to survive. Yet, I suggest that these women were aware that by running into the street in total or partial undress, their victimhood was made highly public. While there can be little doubt that this would have made them feel more vulnerable physically and socially, they may well have understood their nakedness as a social and legal advantage because in drawing attention from onlookers, the severity of the situation would have been immediately apparent. This would then be all the more memorable to witnesses who would then recount in court how the woman had fled a violent husband in desperation.

Erotic Dress or 'Godes clotheyng'?: Smocks in the Medieval Cultural ~~Imagination~~ Landscape

In the late medieval English cultural imagination, to be in one's smock signified a liminal space between being dressed and naked. It was a deeply private state to be in, meant only for the bedchamber and the private realm. So when women were seen in public in a smock, as in the cases of Alice Softely and Margery de~~aret~~ Devoine, their dress opened them up to a range of complex interpretations, from a sexualised spectacle through~~or~~ penitential sinner to~~or~~ desperate victim.

Laura Hodges has noted that within Middle English literature, being clothed in a smock denoted a 'state of virtual nakedness~~'~~' and yet the wearer's body is clothed and concealed.[0] As will be shown through analysis of secular and religious literature which reflected the cultural consciousness, publicly wearing a smock could turn the female wearer into a penitent or imply that she was a woman of loose morals.

In purely practical terms, being worn closest to the body, linen was the ideal fabric for smocks as it acted as a hygienic, protective layer between sweaty, dirty or unwashed skin and less easily laundered woollen garments. It was itself an easily laundered, quick drying fabric. Lying so close to the body, it is easy to see why smocks could symbolise saintly purity, penitential humility or barely contained sexuality depending on the wider social, religious or literary context. As St Augustine observed, 'linen garments are worn next to the body, beneath those of wool as the woollen garments are visible and the linen invisible, so the actions of the flesh are externally perceptible while those of the soul are not'.[0] Perhaps in St Augustine's mind, the ability to launder one's linens and make them clean again echoed the

[0] Laura Hodges, *Chaucer and Array: Patterns of Costume and Fabric Rhetoric in The Canterbury Tales, Troilus and Criseyde and Other Works* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2014), p.91.

[0] John Carmi Parson, 'Violence, the Queen~~'~~s Body, and the Medieval Body Politic~~' in~~', in ~~'~~*A Great Effusion of Blood*~~'??:~~ *Interpreting Medieval Violence*, eds. Mark Meyerson, Daniel Thiery and Oren Falk~~, ((~~University of Toronto Press, 2003), p.247 citing J. Pepin, 'St Augustine et le symbolisme néoplatonicien de la vêture', *Augustinus Magister: Congrès international augustinien~~, ((~~*Paris, 1954), vol. 1, 293-306.

way one could atone for one's sins and cleanse one's soul. These conflicting and contrasting ideas of sexuality and sinfulness could be held concurrently and harmoniously in the medieval ~~cultural imagination~~world view.

The standard medieval smock would have consisted of a simple linen dress, although silk smocks might have been the choice of those wealthier and higher up the social scale. They could be knee- or ankle-length, sleeveless or fitted with long, tight, or billowing sleeves which might pe~~e~~ak out from the cuffs of long~~-~~-sleeve~~d~~d~~s~~ gowns, with low, scooped or high necklines. Their variation depended on the popularity of a style at any given time, one's personal wealth and personal preference, as well as intended activity whilst being worn. In the *Très Riches Heures de Duke de Berry* from around 1410, the Limbourg brothers depicted idealised peasant women working as agricultural labourers in the month of June and are shown wearing calf length smocks with long sleeves rolled up to the wrist.[0] This small detail that the Limbourg brothers chose to include in their work adds a sense of realism and uses ~~a~~ visual signifiers that the book's elite audience would have recognised, perhaps reflecting with accuracy the needs of early fifteenth-century female agricultural labourers to wear clothing which allowed for ease of movement whilst keeping their forearms protected from the glare of the summer sun. Similarly, the hems of the smocks reach to the middle of the wearers~~'~~' calves, which could indicate a need by those lower down the social scale for more utilitarian garments which were cheaper to make owing to less fabric required and which had the benefit of not getting tangled up in the legs of the wearer. Shorter smock lengths would also have been easier to launder as the hems would not have dragged on the ground picking up dirt.

Smocks could be left plain or embroidered depending on the wearer's wealth and social status, and certainly embroidered smocks are frequently described in contemporary

[0] Limbourg brothers, *The Très Riches Heures de Duc de Berry*, 'June', Musée Conde, MS 65, f.6v, c.1410-1412. See above, p.100 for Figure 20.

literature, such as the smock worn by Alison in Chaucer's *The Miller's Tale*: 'whit was hir smok, and broyden al before / And eek bihynde, on hir coler aboute / Of col-blak silk, withinne and eek withoute'.[0] Here, the colour and surface decoration of Alison's undergarments are brought to the audience's attention in a way that highlights her own pride in her youth, beauty and sexuality as well as her desire to be seen to be wealthier than she and her husband may be. Hodges has also noted that while Chaucer did not assert the exact material of her smock, so it can be safely assumed that a contemporary audience might imagine her in a middling quality linen smock as silk would be too extravagant an item for a woman of her position, and a lowly hemp smock would not have the extravagance of silk embroidery on it.[0] A medieval audience would have been 'clothes-conscious', able to understandood the wider social and technical implications of embroidered smocks, demonstrated on a fictional figure, as an embroidery could signal that a husband was so well-off that his wife had the luxury of time to perform activities which were not necessary for income or the running of the family.[0] Crucially, for Chaucer's earliest audiences in the 1380s would have recalled the failed sumptuary law of 1363 banning 'People of Handicraft'' from wearing embroidered clothing.[0] As such, Laura Hodges has suggested that Chaucer's contemporary audiences would have seen Alison's embroidery as 'signalling social disorder and excess'.[0] They may well have understood Alison's wearing of a recently prohibited garment to indicate her disobedience and deliberate undermining of social order which had

[0] 'White was her smock and embroidered at the front / And even behind, around her collar with coal-black silk, outside and inside',((translation mine) from Geoffrey Chaucer's 'The Miller's Tale' in', in *The Canterbury Tales*,((ll.3238-40) and also cited in Laura Hodges'' *Chaucer and Array,* p.99. The black of the silk embroidery perhaps hints at the forthcoming Tudor and Elizabethan blackwork embroidery style which would become so popular in the late 15the fifteenth and early 16thsixteenth centuries. Regarding the definition of 'coler', or collar, one should imagine a boarder, ornamental or plain, at the neck of a garment rather than a collar in any modern sense of the word, see Laura Hodges' discussion on the 'coler' in', in *Chaucer and Array*, pp.121-123.

[0] Laura Hodges, *Chaucer and Array,* p.121.

[0] Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*,((Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p.144.

[0] *Statutes of the Realm, 1235-1377*, vol. 1,((London: Dawsons, 1963), digitised at *HeinOnline*, <https://heinonline-org.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/HOL/P?h=hein.engrep/realm0001&i=447>, [accessed 5th March 2025].

[0] Hodges, *Chaucer and Array*, p.125.

been demarcated though clothing and which revealed both her pride and inflated sense of importance. The audience's mind's eye is also brought to rest on the undergarments of Alison, a woman whose sexuality is made evident over the course of *The Miller's Tale* as she begins an extra-marital affair with an Oxford student and has her bottom kissed by a priest, both considered outrageous and shocking activities in the eyes of the Church and wider society. Chaucer was aware that his audience, despite possibly being illiterate, would have been well practised at "reading" the clothing of their neighbours and peers, and he anticipated that his audience would do exactly the same with his character's clothing, using it to indicate specific traits or values. In this case, it is Alison's sexuality that Chaucer wants his audience to recognise. Similarly, in Chaucer's version of *The Romance of the Rose*, the most popular work of imaginative fiction in northern Europe during the period, the character of Largesse is described as wearing a 'smokke wrought with silk'–' through which '[the] flesh was seen as whit as mylk'.[0] While this encourages the audience to imagine and sexualise the skin and body of the woman beneath the garments, it also suggests an economic element as finer linen, particularly that coming from Rheims or Holland, or silk were within the financial grasp of only the wealthiest.[0]

Lying so close to the skin of the wearer, smocks were intimately linked with the female body and, by extension, female sexuality in the medieval cultural imagination, which has led Laura Hodges to suggest that literary smocks largely function as 'erotic dress'.[0] There is certainly plenty of competing evidence which points to smocks being thoroughly multivalent, a highly prominent connotation was the smock's link with female sexuality. The anonymously authored fifteenth-century dream sequence poem, *The Assembly of Gods*,

[0] Chaucer, *Romance of the Rose*, ll.1195-6.
[0] Hodges, *Chaucer and Array*, p.93. Indeed, the name Largesse, itself, indicates wealth and generosity; 'largess', *MED*, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED24697/track?counter=1&search_id=2493537, [accessed 24th May 2024].
[0] Hodges, *Chaucer and Array*, p.119. This is a somewhat simplistic view, as smocks in literature held a multitude of meanings, as this chapter demonstrates.

described the goddess of love, Venus, for whom ‘a smocke was all her wede, garnysshed curiously [adorned exquisitely]’.[0] The author’s figurative painting of the goddess of love and sex being dressed only in a beautifully embellished smock and nothing else reinforces the notion that she is always ready to engage in sex, being always in a state of suggestive undress. Coupled with the title ‘Patronesse of pleasaunce’ ~~in~~’, in line 376, Venus’ ~~–~~’ smock acts as a sartorial signifier of her associated traits of sensuality, beauty and sexual pleasure.[0] It should be acknowledged that while this poem does not seem to have been particularly popular during the Middle Ages, as only one copy of is exists in one manuscript in Trinity College, Cambridge, yet its presence demonstrates the prevalence of these links between dress and sexuality in learned circles.

A raunchy reference to a smock is contained in the love lyric, ‘A wayle whyt ase whales bon’ ~~–~~’ from MS Harley 2253, in which the rejected suitor pines for his uninterested lover, noting her various qualities and lamenting his heartbroken state. At the end of each verse, the narrator repeats the chorus, ‘Ich wolde ich were a threstlecok, /A bountyng or a lavercoke / Swete bryd! / Bituene hire curtel ant hire smoke Y wolde ben hyd!’.[0] The wish of the speaker to be transformed into a small bird and placed between his love’s dress and her undergarments perhaps might at first appear to be less overtly sexual than the reference to Venus’ ~~–~~’ smock until we focus on the word play of the bird names. ‘Threstlecok’ ~~–~~’ is the medieval name for a male song thrush and the spelling of ‘lavercoke’ ~~–~~’ has since been modernised to a less penile ‘laveroke’, or lark, but the medieval originals are undeniably

[0] Anonymous, *The Assembly of Gods*, p.12, line 377. The poem had previously been thought to be the work of John Lydgate although this is no longer widely accepted.

[0] ~~Anonymous, *The Assembly of Gods*, p.12,~~Ibid, line 376. The Middle English Dictionary provides the meaning of ‘plesaunce’ ~~–~~’ as ‘a wish, will, desire or sexual desire, or love’ ~~–~~’ but also ‘a feeling of ‘sensual pleasure’ ~~–~~’ or ‘sexual gratification’ ~~–~~’ among other definitions, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED33709/track?counter=1&search_id=60023576 [accessed 6th March 2024].

[0] ‘I wish I were a throstle-cock / A bunting or a lavercock / Sweet bird! / Between her kirtel and her smock I would be hid!’ ~~in~~‘, in Susan Greer Fein, ~~ed.,~~ ed. *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, vol. 2, trans., David Raybin and Jan Ziolkowlski, ~~((~~Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2014), p.67.

bawdy and a contemporary audience would have been well aware of the sexualisation of the smock in connection with the phallic word play.

The colour preference for smocks during this period was white or as close to white as possible, although those who were the least economically advantaged may have had to settle for undyed, rough-woven linen or even hemp smocks in a natural light beige colour.[0] White was an important colour theologically as it was a garment which lay closest to the body and so could betray the wearer's bodily cleanliness, and by extension their spiritual cleanliness, through becoming discoloured. The colour of one's smock could also be an indicator of socio-economic status as it portrayed to what extent one was able to launder their clothing or whether they had the income to employ a laundress's services.[0] Peter Langtoft, in his *Chronicle* from before 1305, provides the example of Empress Matilda (c.1102-1167) escaping 'In þe snowe for scho ȝede out in hir smok…Withouten kirtelle or kemse, saue kouerch alle bare vis'.[0] Given that Langtoft had not thought it necessary to detail the colour of Empress Matilda's smock and that she was a royal woman who would have had access to high quality garments and white smocks, he seems to imply that Matilda used her smock as camouflage against the snow to aid her escape, having forgone any outer clothing despite the cold.

White outer garments also held important religious symbolism as they could reveal externally the wearer's spiritual cleanliness, in much the same way that St Augustine compared the soul to the white smock described above. In Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea*, St Elizabeth of Hungary was said to have appeared post-mortem 'clothed in white'–' to a monk, while in Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of* Ladies, God is described as sending angels to drape St Barbara is a white robe to hide her naked, tortured body during her

[0] Hodges, *Chaucer and Array*, p.92.
[0] For a chronologically broad discussion of the significance of white clothing and the importance of washing one's linen, see Nina Edwards, *Pazazz: The Impact and Resonance of White Clothing*,-((London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2023), especially pp.135-138.
[0] Peter Langtoft, *Peter Langtoft's Chronicle*, trans. Robert Mannyng,-((London: Thomas Hearne, 1810), p.122.

martyrdom.[0] In the 1430s, Margery Kempe requested permission to dress in white clothing after taking a vow of chastity in front of the bishop of Lincoln who, out of hesitancy to agree, referred her to the archbishop of Canterbury.[0] The mayor of Leicester was particularly affronted by her adoption of white garments, especially after finding out that she was a married woman when white clothing was understood to be a 'symbol of virginity'.[0] Outraged at her deviation from theologically accepted sartorial practice, he accused her of heresy and had her chained up for a time. Although Margery was not explicit about her motivations for adopting a colour of dress that went against sartorial norms, it seems plausible that multiple factors fed into it. This was certainly a way of differentiating herself from others, and perhaps showing herself to be humble, even penitential, through sartorial performativity.

Within the wider cultural imagination, smocks held deep religious significance and were connected with the Fall of Adam and Eve, the Virgin Mary, a number of virgin martyr saints and the transformative powers of baptism. The only other smocks to have survived from this period were also kept as relics following the death of pious, elite men, if we accept the shirts~~'~~' provenance. The smock of the Virgin was an important relic which it was believed she had worn during the Nativity, held at the shrine in Aachen, Germany, although the Cathedral of Chartres also claimed to possess it. A simple, T-shaped, plain smock with long sleeves, it attracted pilgrims from all over Europe including Margery Kempe who recorded the sight in her biography from 1433.[0] References to the smock of the Virgin appear in Middle English literature from 1330 with the hero of the romance, *Roland and Verngau*, being presented with an array of relics including '…Godes clotheing / Our Levedi smok that

[0] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan~~, ((~~Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.66; Christine de Pisan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Rosalind Brown-Grant~~, ((~~London: Penguin Books, 1999), p.216.

[0] Connor McCarthy, *Marriage in Medieval England: Law, Literature and Practice*~~, ((~~Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2004), p.124.

[0] ~~McCarthy, *Marriage in Medieval England*,~~Ibid, p.125.

[0] Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Book 2, ll.413-417.

hye had on'.[0] A pilgrim badge currently housed in the Museum of London and dating from the late ~~15th~~ fifteenth century further demonstrates English devotion to the smock of the Virgin, so much so that someone travelled to Aachen to see the smock and brought back a physical reminder of it in the form of metal souvenir brooch (Figure 3~~8~~).[0] The presence of this badge in south east England is evidence of a widespread popular awareness of smocks within the cultural and religious imaginations of the period with medieval Britons demonstrating their piety and devotion of the Virgin Mary through reverence for her smock. Within the context of penitential undergarments, smocks were decidedly less explicitly gendered and, on pious men, less sexualised. This is in stark contrast to the men's clothing Matilda Burgin and Margaret Usshar were forced to wear, as discussed in the previous chapter. The shirt of Louis IX of France, who posthumously became known as St Louis, was first documented in 1418 despite its wearer having died 200 years before.[0] St Louis was also known to have worn a hairshirt, or *cilice*, as an undergarment closest to the skin which was intended to cause irritation and discomfort as a constant reminder of the suffering of Christ.[0] Wearing animal hair shirts in order to seek closeness to God and humble oneself was not uncommon for pious men: Thomas Becket had been wearing a hair shirt at the time of his martyrdom and Thomas More's hair shirt has recently been placed on public display in Buckfast Abbey on Dartmoor.[0] Indeed, even literary heroes could be shown to wear hairshirts to highlight their piety and self-restraint as in Thomas Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* in which the

[0] 'Our Lady's smock that she had on~~'~~' from Elizabeth Melick's *The Roland and Otuel Romances and the Anglo-Norman Otinel*~~, (~~ (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2019), ll.~~line~~ 115-116.

[0] London, Museum of London, Pilgrim badge in the shape of the smock of the Virgin Mary~~g~~, accession number 91.124.

[0] Tina Anderlini, ~~'~~'The Shirt Attributed to St. Louis~~'~~', *Medieval Clothing and Textiles*, vol. 11~~, (~~ (2015), 49-78, p.50.

[0] St Louis~~'~~' *cilice* is held in St Aspais Church, Melun, France.

[0] Karen Bollermann and Cary Nederman,~~-~~ 'Dirty Laundry: Thomas Becket's Hair Shirt and the Making of a Saint~~' in~~', in Clare Monagle, ed. *The Intellectual Dynamism of the High Middle Ages*~~, ed. Clare Monagle, (~~ (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 131–146, p.135; Simon Caldwell, 'St Thomas More's H~~h~~air S~~s~~hirt now E~~e~~nshrined for P~~p~~ublic V~~v~~eneration', *Catholic Herald*, 22nd November 2016, < https://catholicherald.co.uk/st-thomas-mores-hair-shirt-now-enshrined-for-public-veneration/>, [accessed 25th November 2024].

character of Lancelot ‘toke [the hairshirt] mekely and suffirid the payne’.[0] Women were seldom, if ever, depicted or described as wearing hair shirts.



Figure 37 A pilgrim badge depicting the smock of the Virgin Mary from the shrine at Aachen, Germany. Housed in the Museum on London, accession number 91.124.

In Middle English literature, a smock in a darker colour signalled externally the negative qualities of the character, as in the Arthurian romance, *Ywain and Gawain*, from at least the early ~~15th~~ fifteenth century and which was based on Chrétien de Troyes~~’~~’ *Ywain, the K~~k~~night of the L~~l~~ion* authored 200 years before.[0] Towards the end of the tale, the knight, Sir Ywain, sees a group of young women in partial undress crying:

> He loked in bitwix the trese,
> And many maidens thare he sese

[0] Thomas Malory, *Morte D’Arthur*, and cited in Raluca L. Radulescu, *Romance and Its Contexts in Fifteenth-Century England: Politics, Piety, and Penitence*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2013), p.182.
[0] Christopher Jensen, ‘The Role of the Lion in the Middle English *Ywain and Gawain*’, *Arthuriana*, vol. 30, no. 1~~,~~ ~~(~~ (2020), 104-124, p.104.

Wirkand silk and gold-wire;
Bot thai war al in pover attire.
Thaire clothes war reven on evil arai;
Ful tenderly al weped thai.
Thaire face war lene and als unclene,
And *blak smokkes* had thai on bidene;[0]

This description is complicated as 'black'~~–~~' did not always refer to the colour black in a way that a modern reader might understand but could in fact suggest that the smocks were simply dark in hue or even discoloured.[0] This latter definition would fit with the description of the image of the starving women who we are already told are 'unclene'. Further complicating this literary reading, 'black'~~–~~' could also refer to a sombre or sorrowful mood which, if this understanding was accepted, would suggest the author's intention to emphasise the anguish of the women.

Visible smocks, both in the lives of medieval people and in their broader cultural imagination, acted as sartorial signifiers of the wearer embodying an ambiguous space between social acceptance and rejection, spiritual devotion and disobedience and sexual restraint and freedom.

'Make nakyd, or strypyn, or streppyn': Humiliation and Removal of Clothing[0]

Smocks, with their particular religious significance, could be used as a tool through which the social, bodily and spiritual humiliation of the wearer was achieved. The act of forcibly removing someone's clothing is a powerful way to assert control over the body of another person, demonstrating the enforcer's power in negating the autonomy of the other and

[0] 'He looked between the trees, and there he sees many maidens, Working silk and gold wire but they were in poor attire. Their clothes were ripped from? Wretched clothing, they wept very pitifully, their faces were thin and also unclean, and black smocks they had on, one and all…', Mary Flowers Braswell, ~~ed.,~~ ed. *Sir Perceval of Galles and Ywain and Gawain*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), ll.2965-2972, italics and translation mine.

[0] 'Blak', *MED*, < https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED5068/track?counter=1&search_id=905849>, [accessed 5th March 2024].

[0] Geoffrey the Grammarian, *Promptorium Parvulorum, Sive Clericorum Dictionarius Anglo-Latinus Princeps*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (London: Camden Society, 1865) p.351. The first English-Latin dictionary, it was originally written around 1440.

permitting visual access to the intimate parts of another's body. It allows the perpetrator to override the autonomy of the wearer by exposing their body in a way they never consented to. Much as when people were seen in only their smocks, the stripping of the body in the medieval English cultural imagination was multifaceted and could be interpreted by audiences as dehumanising, sexual, humiliating, penitential or a complex combination of these. This part will examine the implications of the stripping of the female body in both popular secular literature and in the stories about saints'–' lives which circulated at the time. I suggest that the virgin martyr saints who endured forced stripping may even have influenced the self-fashioning of medieval women.

In the medieval religious consciousness, the act of being stripped was heavily linked with the stripping and humiliation of Christ before his death, a scene that worshippers were reminded of every Easter while statues of a stripped and crucified Christ were the focal point of almost every church in England. This is not to suggest that all those who were stripped felt themselves to be re-enacting Christ's final hours and neither did those who forced another to strip align themselves with his tormentors, but rather that we should be receptive to various, polysemous readings. Yet these ubiquitous crucifixion statues of an almost nude Christ, alongside the widespread depictions of the Stations of the Cross sequence of images, of which number 10 depicted the actual act of Christ being stripped of his clothes, was intended to inspire heightened sorrow and grief in devotees. Indeed, as explained in the popular hagiographic text, *The Golden Legend*, Jesus was stripped at his death in order 'to clothe with his pardon the nakedness of [Christians'] primal privation', a poetically put justification for the public stripping of the Messiah.[0] Jesus *had* to undergo such public humiliation in order to save mankind and, indeed, that he was willing to endure was taken as evidence of his love for mankind.

[0] Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p.69.

Nudity, then, could be used with the intention of humiliating someone but, within a literary context, could be used to excite an audience. Indeed, partial nudity could be almost more exciting than total nudity and this might be behind the popularity of folkloric tale of Lady Godiva, whose nude procession through medieval Coventry in the year 1057 has been retold, re-enacted and depicted through the nine centuries since her life, while her position as a wealthy, independently landholding noblewoman has been largely forgotten.[0]

The real-life Godgifu (died *c.*1067) was the wife of the Mercian lord, Leofric. She was a wealthy landowner in her own right, overseeing properties in the north-west Midlands and was recorded in the Domesday Book.[0] Her landholding wealth amounted to the sum of £160 which, while a lower amount than that of her husband, meant that she was an extraordinarily wealthy woman for her time.[0] The town of Coventry was entirely under her control and demonstrates, as Daniel Donoghue has argued, that the idea that Godiva had to beg her husband to show mercy when taxing the people of that town is a much later invention which has been narratively used as a catalyst for her later semi-nude trial. Rather, it reveals the author's ~~i~~ignorance of 'pre-Conquest social and political institutions~~'~~' and assumes that Anglo-Saxon women were also subject to the financial and legal restrictions which were enacted on later medieval women after the Norman Conquest which reduced women's landholding powers.[0] So then, why was this fabrication made of a nude ~~,~~ noblewoman publicly paraded~~, produced~~ and where did it sit in the medieval cultural imagination?

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[0] Matthew Paris gives the year as 1057, Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, vol. I, ed. Henry Richards Luard~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p.527. From Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem, 'Godiva~~'~~ '(1840) to possibly the most well-known depiction of her journey painted by John Collier in 'Lady Godiva~~'~~ '(1898), Godiva's erotic, yet entirely fictional, travel through Coventry has aroused much artistic and popular interest. The tale of Lady Godiva seems to have particularly fascinated the Victorians, who were perhaps titillated by the idea of public, nubile, naked beauty mixed with romanticised medieval history.

[0] Her name had been Latinised from the Anglo-Saxon name, Godgifu, meaning 'good gift'. Ann Williams, 'Godgifu [Godiva]', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, [online], https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/10873, [accessed 25th June 2024].

[0] Daniel Donoghue, *Lady Godiva*: *A Literary History of the Legend*~~, (~~ (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p.19.

[0] Ibid, p. 27.

Although Godiva died in the mid- to late-eleventh century, and despite being a well enough documented figure by her contemporaries that she was described as being 'saintly'', as well as 'noble, pious and dedicated to the Blessed Virgin', not a single reference was made to her nude parade until almost a century and a half later.[0] In the narrative, written first by Roger of Wendover[0] (d. 1236) and then embellished in Matthew Paris'' *Chronica majora* (1250), the fictional Godiva is horrified by her husband's extortionate taxing of the inhabitants of Coventry:

> '…this pious countess, wishing to free Coventry from an oppressive and shameful servitude, often begged her husband the count, under the guidance of the Holy Trinity and the Holy Mother of God, to deliver the town from this servitude. And when the count rebuked her for uselessly persisting in demanding something ruinous to him, he firmly ordered her never again to raise this subject with him. She nevertheless persevered in her request and relentlessly exasperated her husband with it, until she finally forced this answer from him: ""Mount your horse naked",," he said, ""and ride through the town's marketplace from one end to the other when all the people are gathered, and when you return you will get your demand",,"
> And in response, the countess said, "And if I am willing to do so, will you give me permission".
> The count replied, "I will".
> Then the Countess Godiva, dear to God, mounted her horse naked on the day agreed upon and, by loosening the braids of hair on her head, she veiled her whole body except her brilliantly white legs. And when she finished her journey unseen by anyone, she returned rejoicing to her husband, who considered it miraculous. And Count Leofric, releasialisising the city from its servitude, confirmed its charter with the stamp of his own seal''"[0]

Godiva is cast as somewhat of a 'nag', a woman with cunning who is bold enough to take her husband up on his wager and who sits within the 'scheming wife'' trope popular in fabliaux

[0] Ibid, pp. 26 and 19. William of Malmesbury first refers to Godiva as 'saintly' in', in his *History of English Kings* ((1126).

[0] *'Ascende', ,' inquit, 'equum tuum nuda et transi per mercatum villæ ab initio usque ad finem, populo congregato, et cum redieris, quod postulas impetrabis;' ' cui Godiva respondens ait, 'Et, si hoc voluero, licentiam mihi dabis?' 'as quam ille, 'Dabo,' ', inquit. Tunc comitissa Deo dilecta duobus comitata militibus nude, ut prædictum est, equum ascendens crines capitis et tricas dissolvit corpusque suum totum inde velavit, et forum pertransiens a nemine visa, apparentibus cruribus tamen candidissimus, iter complevit, et ad virum gaudens reversa, hoc factum admirantem, quod petierat impetravit…' in', in* Roger of Wendover, *Flores Historiarum*, vol. 1, trans. J. A. Giles, ((London: Henry Bohn, 1849), pp.496-497. Subsequent quotations are taken from this source.

[0] Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, ((1250) in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 26, f.85r and translated by Daniel Donoghue in *Lady Godiva*, pp.26-27. Paris' chronicle has been printed in Latin in *Chronica majora*, vol. I-VII, ed. Henry Richards Luard, ((Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 London: Longman & Co., 1872-1883), pp.526-7. Subsequent quotations are taken from this source.

of the time.[0] She contrasts enormously with the downtrodden Patient Griselda, a character who will be discussed shortly, and who had pan-European popularity.

However, while within the text she is able to feign humility to her husband in a way that manipulates him, when her nude ride through Coventry is described, both Wendover and Paris reduces her to a sexual object in the minds of the audience by focusing on her white legs – Paris writes it as (‘*crura candidissima*’ while Wendover has it as ‘*apparentibus cruribus tamen candidissimus*’.) which These legs are seen through the veil (‘*velavit*’) of her long hair which she lets go from her braids (‘*crines capitis et tricas dissolvens*’) that otherwise covers her entire body (‘*corpus suum totum*’).[0] Donoghue has suggested that this partial covering would have been more tantalising than straightforward nudity which makes Godiva’s narrative ‘erotically charged’ ’ and has examined the ways Godiva’s nudity and loose hair would have been perceived within the text as a sign of her sexual availability.[0] In almost daring her to reveal her body, her husband is assuming that the shame which Godiva would be inflicting on herself and her husband would be too great, but in declaring these terms to Leofric’s wife, the author has set up both the fictional audience and the real medieval audience as voyeurs, complicit in Godiva’s sexualised humiliation. Paris seems to have been encouraging his readers to partake in the taboo of voyeurism and writing at the edges of cuckoldry because the medieval understanding was that a woman’s body belonged to her husband and so to view a naked wife would have been to take something from the husband. It is crucial to recognise, too, that the main audience for Roger of Wendover’s and Matthew Paris’ ’ text would have been other religious, learned, ((supposedly) celibate men residing in the homosocial space of St Albans monastery. As Paris’ ’ chronicle grew in popularity, it would have been shared and reproduced by and for other men of a similar demographic, each

[0] Donoghue, *Lady Godiva*, p.27.

[0] Because Paris’ ’ version differs slightly from Roger of Wendover’s text, the Latin is taken from Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, vol. I, ed. Henry Richard Luard, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.526-7 here, as Wendover made no mention of a ‘veil’ of hair. –

[0] Donoghue, *Lady Godiva*, pp.29, 30.

likely delighting in the mental image of a naked-but-not-naked woman with long, flowing hair – also symbolic of female beauty and sexuality – who is seen but not seen in Paris'–' Godiva tale.

Donoghue has noted the similarity between Godiva's veil of hair and the hair which covers Mary Magdalen's body and which grows to cover St Agnes'–' body during her martyrdom.[0] Mary of Egypt is another saint whose hair grows to hide her naked body.[0] When Godiva accepts the deal she passes through the city unseen by its inhabitants and it is taken as a miracle ('*miraculo*') by her husband which implies, in much the same way that God grew St Agnes's hair so that it covered her naked body, and sent St Theodosina a cloud and draped St Barbara in a celestial white robe during their martyrdoms, that God has here too protected Godiva's nude body and therefore her honour.[0]

The saints'–' highly visible stripping echoed Christ's own stripping, although of the many martyred female saints who were stripped of their clothing, their public torture that preceded their gory end and ascension into heaven was grotesque and highly sexualised. In these fictional, religious works, the saints'–' bodies being stripped by violent or sadistic pagans before a fictional audience as well as a very real medieval audience created a powerfully emotive image designed to inspire a combination of devotion and sorrow as the bodies of exalted women suffered the indignity of public stripping. These examples are complex in that these saints are both forcibly stripped by their tormentors and yet simultaneously accept the stripping as a way of proving their humility to God. More recently, scholars have argued that arousal and titillation could have been a deliberate decision behind the explicit descriptions and representations of nude, stripped or partly dressed saintly bodies suggesting that in the particularly popular *vitæ* of the virgin martyrs, the eroticism was a key

[0] Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p.103.
[0] Donoghue, *Lady Godiva*, pp.29, 30.
[0] Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, vol. I, ed. Henry Richard Luard, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p.527. For Saints Theodosina and Barbara, see Christine de Pisan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Rosalind Brown-Grant, ((London: Penguin Books, 1999), pp.215, 216.

element of the popularity of the narratives.[0] Within these saintly tales, clothing frequently functions as an external metaphor for the inner journey of the saints'' souls: some holy women's lives begin with sumptuous silks and jewels, which they discard in favour of rags or modest religious habits, while other women's clothing is removed without their consent, turning the audience's focus on their exposed bodies on which both torture and salvation are enacted.

The legends of the virgin martyrs compromise a number of early Christian saints who, having committed their virginity to Christ, are threatened with defilement and sexual violence at the hands of pagan lords, fathers or would-be-suitors. St Lucy and St Agnes are threatened with rape or gang rape if sent to a brothel, St Juliana is ordered to be stripped naked and beaten by her pagan father, St Agatha has her breasts cut off by pagan Roman soldiers and is forced to roll naked over hot coals, while St Christina has a combination of these punishments.[0]

The extreme violence so present in each virgin martyr's life has prompted some scholars to suggest that these legends functioned as 'religious pornography', initially titillating a perhaps sexually frustrated clerical male audience.[0] Karen Winstead has even argued that in the early medieval period, these erotic, virgin legends were frequently written 'by monks… for other monks', and that copies of these legends have also been found in later manuscripts alongside treaties on secular male conduct which may have promoted 'fantasies of

[0] For example, Robert Mills describes the loin cloth of St Barbara as being 'wound seductively around her waist', *Suspended Animation: Pain, Pleasure and Punishment in Medieval Culture* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2005), p.107. See also Mills' 'Violence, Community and the Materialisation of Belief', in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, ed. Sarah Salih (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), 87-103. p.99.

[0] Voragine, *The Golden Legend*: St Lucy, pp.27-29; St Agnes, pp.102-103; St Juliana, p.160; St Agatha, p.155; St Christina, pp.386-389.

[0] Catherine Innes-Parker, 'Sexual violence and the female reader: Symbolic "Rape" in the Saints' Lives of the Katherine Group', *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol.24, no.3, (1995), 205-217, p.211; Catherine Sanok disagrees with this reading as pornography by her definition transgresses societal acceptability, while the sexually explicit tales of the virgin martyrs were a tolerated and mainstream genre of religious literature, *Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints' Lives in Late Medieval England*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p.27.

"harmless" violence against women'.[0] Perhaps 'harmless'–' because the saints'–' bodies are ubiquitously restored to their former beauty by God, if not on earth then at least in heaven, and of course the saints'–' sexualised torture must occur if they are to be granted martyrdom at all. Perhaps the titillation for medieval audiences stemmed from the taboo of violence and sexual aggression against God's chosen women, who had devoted their virginity to him yet whose bodies were made available to audiences of their *vitæ*.

Later when the legends became more readily accessible having been translated into vernacular languages and printed in large quantities, virgin martyr *vitae* may have aroused both lay male and female readership, exciting them with descriptions of the 'exposure and penetration of the female saint's body' in', in a religiously sanctioned format.[0] Robert Mills notes that this perspective would require the reader to identify with the male torturer, rather than the assaulted virgin which is unlikely to have been the intention of the medieval authors.[0] Instead, the male, clerical authors and disseminators of the early medieval virgin martyr legends may have hoped that readers would see the assaulted but ultimately indomitable virgins as metaphors for the Christian Church.[0]

In the late medieval period, women from all social strata would have been exposed to the lives of the saints, as hagiographies were the 'only genre universally recommended to women', as it was hoped the *vitae* would be a 'model of imitation', showcasing Christian behaviour suitable to a medieval woman, with even the illiterate hearing the saints'–' lives

[0] Karen Winstead, ;*The Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Cornell University Press, 2018), pp.17, 12. This is perhaps a reference to Andreas Capellanus'–' text, *The Art of Courtly Love*, from the late 12th century which encouraged the violent raping of peasant women by men: '…do not hesitate to take what you seek and embrace them by force,'–' p.150. Karen Winstead has also noted that evidence points to the earliest Middle English collection of virgin martyr legends which make up the Katharine Group and include the lives of St Margaret, St Katharine and St Juliana, being written especially for anchoresses, (p.14).

[0] Mills, -'Violence, Community and the Materialisation of Belief', p.99.

[0] Rather than the physical act of penetrative sex/rape, Mills is referring to the puncturing of the virgins'–' flesh with weapons and torture devices as a metaphor for rape.

[0] Beth Crachiolo, ''Seeing the Gendering of Violence: Female and Male Martyrs in the *South English Legendary*', in', in 'eds., Mark D. Meyerson, Daniel Thiery and Oren Falk, *A Great Effusion of Blood*'?*: Interpreting Medieval Violence*, ed. Mark D. Meyerson, Daniel Thiery and Oren Falk, eds., Mark D. Meyerson, Daniel Thiery and Oren Falk, ((Toronto, London: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p.147.

from the pulpit or seeing their statues or images in churches.[0] Of course, medieval women were not expected to imitate the saints in action or dress, but they certainly formed a model of spiritual imitation in that the submission to the will of God they showed during their ordeals was expected to inspire the same in their audience. Wealthy women actively patronised the production of specific female saints'–' lives such as Elizabeth de Vere who commissioned a copy of the life of St Elizabeth of Hungary and Katherine Howard who ordered a copy of St Katherine's vita from Osbern Bockenham in the 1440s and which made up the author's text, *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*.[0] Women might bequeath items of their dress to the statues of saints in their local churches with whom they felt particular spiritual resonance, as we saw in Chapter One. Religious women produced hagiographic manuscripts, including copies of the *Legenda aurea,* contributing to the 'cultural expectation that good women read saints'–' legends'.[0] Despite this, it was not anticipated that medieval women would in any way re-enact or copy the behaviour of the martyred saints. Rather, it was the very trials such as public stripping and torture of the saints that made them so inimitable and therefore worthy of adulation and admiration.

The genre of saints'–' *vitae* was highly accessible literature in the late medieval period, and women were actively encouraged to read in order to learn and aspire to the saintliness of the women documented, depicting 'patterns of ideal behaviour'–' appropriate to medieval society, for religious or lay women (and men).[0] The authors of lives of the holy women were attempting to make some of the teachings of Christ–- to eschew worldly luxuries in favour of

[0] Sarah Salih, 'Introduction: Saints, Cults and Lives in Late Medieval England', in *A Companion toof Middle English Hagiography*, y, ed. Sarah Salih, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), pp.11, 18.
[0] Catherine Sanok, *Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints' Lives in Late Medieval England,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007),, p.34. For biographical details on the women to whom Bokenham dedicated his *Legends*, see Sheila Delany, 'Matronage or Patronage? The Case of Osbern Bokenham's Women Patrons', *Florilegium*, vol.6 (1999), 97-105, especially pp.100-101 for the link between St Elizabeth of Hungary and Elizabeth de Vere, who both married for love despite opposition. See Osbern Bockenham, *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* (London: Early English Text Society, 1938).
[0] Catherine Sanok, '[1]Reading Hagiographically: The Legend of Good Women and Its Feminine Audiencee'[1], *Exemplaria*, vol.13, no. 2, ((2001???), 323-354, p.325. The Bodleian Library's MS Laud Misc. 415 includes a copy of the *Legenda aurea* written by Jutta, a thirteenth-century Cistercian nun.
[0] Anke Bernau, 'Gender and Sexuality' in', in *A Companion toof Middle English Hagiography*,, ed. Sarah Salih, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), p.104.

modesty and poverty, and living a life of chastity–- admirable and potentially imitable.[0] Indeed, the thirteenth-century theologian, Jacques de Vitry felt that one of the purposes of saints'–' lives was to 'provoke the devout to emulation'.[0] Karen Winstead has noted a shift in the attitudes of hagiographers in the thirteenth and fourteenthlater centuries who wanted to move away from the earlier outspoken, heroic female saints towards a more demure, meek female saint who could be '"'"safely" emulated'–' by members of the emerging mercantile strata and 'middle-class readers'.[0]

The stripped saintly body featured as an important locus on which anti-Christian physical violence is enacted.[0] Although some male saints, notably St Sebastian and St Laurence, do endure stripping and torture, their virginity is never the focus and comparatively little of the audience's focus is on their physical body and more on what they say.[0] The difference of treatment between the male and female saints sets in stark relief the sexualised nature of the stripping in female saints'–' *vitæ*. Indeed, Beth Crachiolo writing on gender violence in the genre of *South English Legendaries* (fl.12th century), has noted that for male saints the representation of torture focuses away from the 'suffering male body'. On the other hand, she notes, the audience of female saints'–' lives was encouraged to 'concentrate its attention on the sight of a suffering female body'.[0] That said, some female saints are able to engage rhetorically with their tormentors and in so doing become active participants in their

[0] Karen Winstead, *The Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England*, (Cornell University Press, 2018), p.15.
[0] Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Mariae Oigniacensis*, quoted more fully in Michael Goodich, 'The Contours of Female Piety in Later Medieval Hagiography', *Church History*, vol. 50, no. 1, (1980), 20-32, p.32.
[0] Winstead, *The Virgin Martyrs*, pp. 14, 15.
[0] It should be noted that there has been extensive debate as to whether saintly martyrs are treated different depending on their gender. Some scholars, including Evelyn Vitz, disagree with the argument that male and female saintly bodies are treated differently in hagiographic texts. See Evelyn Vitz, 'Gender and Martyrdom', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, 26, (1999), 79-99 with counter arguments in Elizabeth Robertson and Christine Rose's 'Introduction' in', in *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Robertson and Christine Rose, (, ed. Elizabeth Robertson and Christine Rose (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).
[0] St Laurence has particularly witty retorts when, having been stripped and placed on a grill, he exclaims, 'Look, wretch, you have me well done on one side, turn me over and eat!', *The Golden Legend*, p.453.
[0] Beth Crachiolo, 'Seeing the Gendering of Violence: Female and Male Martyrs in the *South English Legendary*', , in *A Great Effusion of Blood: Interpreting Medieval Violence*, eds., Mark D. Meyerson, Daniel Thiery and Oren Falk, (Toronto, London: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 147-163, p.147.

martyrdom. This includes St Christina who, despite having a plethora of sexualised violence enacted publicly on her body, is able to physically retaliate against her pagan enemy by spitting her own severed tongue in his face, blinding him.[0] For St Christina, it is her father who first humiliates her by forcibly stripping her body after she rejects his pagan idols which adds a shockingly incestuous angle to the revealed saint's body. Incest is not an uncommon threat in female saints' lives and it also frequently appears in the popular literature as a catalyst for the heroine to flee her home.[0] This motif turns the heroine into 'Virtue beleaguered by Vice' and whose trust in God saves them from illicit sexual relations which was 'useful exemplary material' to warn elite readers about sexual continence where incest threatens 'patrilinear' lineage.[0]

Specific parts of the life of Isolda Parewastel of Bridgwater, Somerset echo the stripping tropes in the virgin martyrs~~'~~' narratives. In her account, she portrays herself as a deeply pious woman who had lived in Jerusalem for three years, where 'inflamed with the fervour of devotion, [she] visited the tomb of the Lord and other sacred places of the holy land every day'.[0] On ~~On~~ her return to England via France, ~~from three years living in Jerusalem, having been 'inflamed with the fervour of devotion',~~ Isolda petitioned the Avignonese pope, Urban V, for permission to build a chapel in Bridgwater for the glorification of the Virgin Mary and the salvation of her own soul and those of her ancestors.[0]

[0] *The Golden Legend*, p.386-388.

[0] See for example, the tale of *Emaré*, a fourtheenth-century English tale in which the titular character is forced to flee her incestuous father after he presents her with an exotic garment, *The Middle English Breton Lays*, ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995) from the British Library's MS Cotton Caligula A.ii, ff.71r-76v.

[0] Elizabeth Archibald, 'Relative Roles in Medieval Incest Stories: Fathers and Daughters', in *Désir n'a repos*, ed. Florence Bouchet and Danièle James-Raoul (France: *Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux*, 2015), 177-188, paragraph 13. For further discussion of incest as exemplary motif in medieval literature and saints' *vitæ*, see Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Chapter Four, 145-191; Gail Ashton, *The Generation of Identity in Late Medieval Hagiography* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.47.

[0] Anthony Luttrell, 'Englishwomen as Pilgrims to Jerusalem: Isolda Parewastell, 1365', in *Equally in God's Image: Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Julia Bolton Holloway, Joan Bechtold and Constance S. Wright (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1990), 184-197, p.191, citing Archivio Vaticano, Reg. Supp. 45, fol. 55-55v (15 January 1366), Luttrell includes the full Latin text and translation.

[0] ~~Anthony Luttrell, 'Englishwomen as Pilgrims to Jerusalem: Isolda Parewastell, 1365' ' in , eds. Julia Bolton Holloway, Joan Bechtold and Constance S. Wright, eds., *Equally in God's Image: Women in the Middle Ages*,~~

In her petition, which was recorded in the papal register on 15th January 1366, she recounted being 'stripped in the name of Christ [*nude pro christi nomine*]', being hung upside down on a rack and beaten by 'Saracens' before having 'miraculously escaped'.[0] The Latin word, *'nudo'*, as mentioned in the title of this section, is recorded in Geoffrey the Grammarian's first English-Latin dictionary of 1440 as meaning 'nakyn, or make nakyd (or strypyn or streppyn…)'.[0] This almost sensational account of her experience in the Holy Land and her treatment by Muslims before her daring escape could almost be a conflation of Middle English romance and a saint's *vita* and it was perhaps hoped that the inclusion of it would have persuaded the Pope of the strength of Isolda's piety and the lengths she went to for it. The Pope approved her petition with the alteration that rather than Isolda building a whole new church, she should instead have a more modest chapel or chantry built onto an already existing church, and that partial pardons could be given to pious visitors on feast days. Despite this, there exists no record that Isolda ever used her papal licence 'or otherwise profited from her experience in Jerusalem'.[0] It is possible that Isolda fabricated her adventures entirely, or was hyperbolic in her account of them. For the purposes of this thesis, the truth is of less importance. Here, what is crucial is that through the record, Isolda has provided a representation of herself to the pope and sartorially *un*-fashioned herself in a way that aligns with well-known, popular Christian motifs.

Anthony Luttrell has written the most extensive analysis of Isolda's petition and her experience of pilgrimage in the Middle East but it can be argued that his analysis of the Latin wording undermines her narrative and her (un)sartorial self-fashioning. In the footnotes of his article, '"Englishwomen as Pilgrims to Jerusalem: Isolda Parewastell, 1365', Luttrell

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eds. Julia Bolton Holloway, Joan Bechtold and Constance S. Wright, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1990), 184-197, p.191, c. Citing Archivio Vaticano, Reg. Supp. 45, fol. 55-55v (15 January 1366), Luttrell includes the full Latin text and translation.

[0] Ibid, p.191.

[0] Geoffrey the Grammarian, *Promptorium Parvulorum*, p.351.

[0] Luttrell, 'Englishwomen as Pilgrims to Jerusalem', p.190.

suggests that although '*nuda*' could be used to mean that Isolda was 'literally…stripped naked', but he felt it more likely to have been understood in the sense of 'humble' or 'poor', as used in St Jerome's writing.[0] However, if we are willing to accept the Vatican's record, given that Isolda appears to have had clearly been a deeply pious woman who had lived for some time in the Holy Land, and thusshe was likely very aware of the corpus of virgin martyr texts and she perhaps felt herself to have been persecuted by non-believers. Therefore, more weight should be given to the notion that Isolda had deliberately had '*nuda*' written in the papal petition because she *had* been stripped and she wanted to be seen by the Pope as having lived in a way that emulated the lives of the virgin martyrs and in so doing, had more fully echoed their narratives through her own stripped and beaten body than probably many other medieval English women had. There may have been some satisfaction and justice for Isolda in having the Pope recognise her traumatic experience of being stripped and violated. In this way, Isolda was able to reframe her violent, humiliating experience as something spiritually beneficial, and which justified her in creating a religious space for the protection of her soul and those of her relatives.

'He strypid hir anoon…unto to hir smok': (Partial) Undress and Sexual Violence

Turning a woman's nude body into a highly gendered public spectacle occurred in the religious literature of the late Middle Ages and also in medieval life in which the dress of the wearer became a weapon to inflict further psychological pain and shame. In Marjory Hunter's case, there can be no question that her punishment was intended exclusively for a feminine body. In 1415, she had been found guilty of adultery with John Dyghton and brought before the ecclesiastical court of the Bishop of Durham, Thomas Langley who was the same bishop who would go on to charge Matilda Burgin and Margaret Usshar for wearing masculine

[0] Ibid, p.196.

clothing to see the shrine of St Cuthbert in Durham two years later. While the punishments of both Marjory and John utilised the acute shame of very visible public penances to exacerbate emotional and spiritual guilt, the expectations on the couple diverged according to their gender. John was ordered to pay an unrecorded number of 'pounds for pious use [*sub pena librarum in pios usus*]~~'~~' as well as 40 shillings.[0] As well as this, on Rogation Days, the major one being on 25th April and the minor two being in the week before Ascension Thursday, John had to parade around the Church of St Nicholas in a 'penitential fashion and form [*modo et forma penitentis*]~~'~~' with 'half a pound of wax in his hands [*cum cereo dimidie libre cere in manu*]~~'~~' which was probably to be given to the church for the making of candles.[0] While John had to forfeit money and carry a block of wax, Marjory, on the other hand, was ordered to undergo a longer public penance by processing around the Church of St Nicholas on six days and on another six days around Durham's open marketplace ~~*'circa forum Dunelm in pleno marcato'*~~ 'entirely naked of head and body except for a smock [*nude captum et totum corpus excepta camisia*]'.[0] Marjory's sartorial orders had sexual undertones as it was intended to humiliate her in the extreme in exposing her illicit sexual behaviour through the act of her body being publicly undressed. In leaving her exposed to the humiliating attention of the community, Marjory was left socially vulnerable to verbal or even physical violence from her peers, as well as potentially catastrophic damage to her reputation which would likely have long outlasted the financial and less performative repercussions meted out to John.

Through John and Marjory's case, the imbalanced financial, social and physical power dynamic of medieval England is reflected too, as John's financial punishment reflects the expectation that as a man, he would have had direct access to money and would have been somewhat financially independent so confiscating some of his own goods would have

[0] *The Register of Thomas Langley, Bishop of Durham, 1406-1437*, ed. R. L. Storey~~, ((~~Durham: Surtees Society, 1956-70), p.78.

[0] ~~Register of Thomas Langley~~Ibid.~~, p.78.~~

[0] *'circa forum Dunelm in pleno marcato,' ~~Register of Thomas Langley, p.78.~~*ibid.

wounded him more than the exposure of his body to the public. As it was anticipated that women had little access to money without going through a male relative, and when women's reputations were founded on their sexual continence, Marjory would have been most easily and deeply affected by having both her sexual behaviour and her body exposed.

More famous than Marjory's humiliating experience, Jane Shore, who had been the mistress of Edward IV of England and after his death, had been charged with conspiracy against the government of Richard III by carrying letters between the widowed queen's Woodville family and the Hastings family. The sexualised nature of her punishment in the summer of 1483 reflected Richard III's condemnation of her former life as mistress to the king as she was forced to do penance in her smock in front of an array of courtiers and the general public. *The Great Chronicle of London* recorded that she was treated as though she was a 'common harlot'–' and as such was handed a punishment befitting that role and in which a lack of clothing was intended to sexually shame the woman.[0] Sir Thomas More, who would go on to receive a more fatal punishment, documented that 'albeit she were out of al array save her kyrtle only: yet went she so fair & lovely…that her great shamje wan her much praise'.[0] As More had been only five years old at the time of Shore's punishment, his account cannot be deemed to be entirely factual, having likely relied on other people's eyewitness accounts at best or secondary, hyperbolic accounts at worst. He went to great lengths to cast her in a sympathetic light, likely due to his support for Henry VI and his dislike for the former king, Richard III whom Shore had undermined. His description of her as 'fair & lovely'–' redirects attention to her sexualised physicality rather than her moral or spiritual state. It turns her penitential trial in to an arousing spectacle. Certainly, Jane Shore's experience of being publicly undressed was sufficiently titillating to capture the imagination of subsequent artists and writers, as her penance was used as inspiration for artistic creation

[0] *The Chronicles of London*, ed., ed. Charles L. Kingsford, ((Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), p.233.
[0] Thomas More, *The History of King Richard III*, ((Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1883), pp.53-54.

from appearing in Shakespeare's *Richard III* (c.1592-94) to being the inspiration behind William Blake's artwork *The Penance of Jane Shore* (1787).

Within popular Middle English literary sources, smocks carried evident sexual connotations for the wearer as has been shown earlier in this chapter. Yet even in anecdotal accounts of penance, smocks such as the ones Jane Shore and Marjorie wore accentuated the real female body beneath the intimate garment, turning the wearer's body into a spectacle even when they were enduring a punishment.

The physical and social environments of the wearer are important here, as being in a public state of undress surrounded by fully dressed observers heightens the power imbalance within the narratives of characters such as Lady Godiva and Patient Griselda while adding and erotic, voyeuristic element. An empathetic audience would have been attuned to the emotional plight of the character and aware that public processions in which one's clothing or lack of had been dictated were viable methods of punishment which could well be inflicted upon them.

One of the most visible instances of the stripping of the female body in popular secular medieval literature, and which correlated with medieval models of idealised passive womanhood came in the form of the tale of Patient Griselda. A prominent tale in Boccaccio's widely read *Decameron* (c.1353), ~~Petrarch's translation of the same,~~ the tale of Griselda was made more accessible when translated into French by Christine de Pizan in her book, *The Book of the City of Ladies* (c.1405) and which had been written with a female audience in mind.[0] Made accessible to the increasingly literate people of England by being translated into the vernacular Middle English in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (c.1387-1400), the narrative focused on the rise, fall and subsequent rise of the eponymous peasant girl at the

[0] Boccaccio, *The Decameron*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), X.10; Petrarch, *De Obidentia ac fide uxoria mythologia* in *Chaucer: Sources and Backgrounds*, ~~ed.~~ ed. Robert Miller~~,~~ ~~(~~ (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Christine de Pisan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Rosalind Brown-Grant~~,~~ ~~(~~ (London: Penguin Books, 1999), pp.156-161. For discussion on the Griselda story in Boccaccio, Petrarch and Chaucer, see William Rossiter, *Chaucer and Petrarch*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2010).

hands of her sadistic and manipulative husband, Walter.[0] Set in Italy, it focuses on the trials of a peasant woman, Griselda, who is described as possessing all the qualities of a virtuous woman, including virginity, sobriety, chastity, devotion to her father, as well as being both hardworking and beautiful. One day, Walter, the Marquis of Saluces, is riding through the forest near her home on a hunting trip and, having been asked to choose a wife in order to produce an heir and secure the stability of his rule, he picks Griselda. The marriage is a surprise to everyone, including Griselda, and Walter has her changed into a more luxurious outfit befitting her new status. Soon after their marriage, Griselda gives birth to a baby girl and although Walter and his people rejoice at the birth that shows Griselda is not 'bareyne', he decides he needs to test his wife's constancy.[0] He wakes her in the night to tell her that his nobles detest her and want their daughter killed and in order to keep peace in the kingdom, he must agree and will send a servant of his to remove their daughter and kill her. To please her husband and obey him, she agrees. A son soon follows and Walter repeats his plan to test Griselda when the boy is two years old. Again, Griselda agrees, reaffirming that at their marriage she had promised her obedience to Walter: 'Lefte I my wyl and al my libertee, / And took youre clothing; wherfore I yow preye, / Dooth youre plesaunce; I wol youre lust obeye'.[0] Finally, Walter devises a third, ultimate test of Griselda's loyalty to him by forging a papal bull annulling their marriage and permitting him to marry another. Unbeknownst to her, Walter brings his children back from their aunt's palace and informs Griselda that his new bride will be the twelve-year-old girl. Griselda removes her rich clothing and returns to her father's house in only the smock she had on. Her father ran to her and covered her exposed body with 'hire olde coote'.[0] Walter then calls Griselda back to her marital home only so that

[0] Hodges, *Chaucer and Array*, p.109. For further discussion on Griselda, see Carloyn Dinshaw's foundational text 'Translated Griselda~~' in~~', in *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*~~, ((~~Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).
[0] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), IV.448.
[0] Ibid, IV.656-658.
[0] Ibid, IV.913. Here, 'coote' refers to a tunic or kirtle; 'cote', *MED*, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED9926/track?counter=4, [accessed 24th July 2025].

she can prepare the feast and marriage bed for her husband and his new wife. At last, Walter is satisfied by Griselda's obedience and loyalty to his every wish and he reveals that his new bride is actually their daughter and restores his downtrodden wife to her rightful position at his side, with Griselda being stripped in private by court ladies and redressed in 'clooth of gold'.[0] A recurrent theme throughout the tale is what Andrea Denny-Brown has described as an 'obsession with changing clothes' as Griselda changes, or is changed by others, three times.[0] It would perhaps be more accurate to say that this obsession is not with changing clothes as such, but rather what clothes say about one's social status. In a society with deeply entrenched social hierarchy with members keenly 'reading' each other's dress, it is little wonder this tale was so enormously popular.

I~~Although i~~t has been suggested that for some, the text's popularity amounted to being a life of a 'secular ~~hagiography~~saint~~'~~' because of the way that it could have been interpreted to commend Griselda's wifely patience in the face of abuse.[0]~~;~~ O~~o~~ther scholars have argued that Chaucer's version, far from endorsing Walter's treatment of his wife, may actually ~~-~~have been intended as a social commentary which hyperbolically 'interrogates the subordination inherent in contemporary marriage practices'.[0] Still others have suggested the tale was intended to be read as a metaphor for mankind's total submission to the will of God, with the manipulative Walter in place of God and the meek, submissive Griselda as mankind, reaffirming a commonly held belief in God's established gender hierarchy.[0] Indeed, Chaucer has the clerk end his tale by explaining that 'This storie is seyd nat for that wyves sholde / Folwen Grisilde as in humylitee' but rather as a reminder that every person goes through hardship in life, although that is not to say that female audiences did not compare themselves

[0] Ibid, IV.1117.
[0] Andrea Denny-Brown, '*Povre* Griselda and the All-Consuming *Archwyves*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, vol. 28 (2006), 77-115, p.79.
[0] Lucie Kaempfer, 'Drinking Sorrow, Bathing in Bliss: Liquid Emotions in Chaucer', *Open Library of Humanities*, vol.4, no.1 (2018), 1-24, p.17.
[0] Susan Crane, *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War*~~,~~ ~~(~~(Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), p.36.
[0] ~~Crane~~ Ibid, ~~,~~ p.29.

to Griselda's idealised characterisation.[0] Andrea Denny-Brown has read Griselda in *The Clerk's Tale* as symbolic of contemporary worries surrounding conspicuous consumption and the power clothing had to blur social boundaries in fourteenth-century England with Griselda able to move between different social strata through being dressed and undressed at her husband's will.[0] Her fluctuating circumstances are reflected in her ceremonial putting on and subsequent removal of her clothing, before her final reinstatement as Walter's wife and duchess, with her dressing and stripping acting as the sartorial mechanism through which her body and her person is utterly humiliated and abused.

Passing her peasant home, Walter sees Griselda's beauty in spite of her peasant rags and, after plucking her from her natal home, has her formally dressed by women in his court in a way that Crane has argued was intended to demonstrate her 'absorption' in', into Walter's house and her 'subordination'-' to him in marriage.[0] Certainly, Walter sartorially and materially providing for Griselda at their marriage reflected medieval English customs in which the husband agrees to care for his new bride's material needs, an argument first set out by Christiane Klapisch-Zuber.[0],[0] Walter rejects Griselda's clothing to such an extent that it is not allowed to enter his house:

> 'And for that no thyng of hir olde geere
> She sholde brynge into his hous, he bad
> That women sholde dispoillen hire right theere;
> Of which these ladyes were not right glad
> To handle hire clothes, wherinne she was clad.
> But nanthelees, this mayde bright of hewe
> Fro foot to heed they clothed han al newe'-'(ll.372-380)[0]

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[0] *The Riverside Chaucer*, IV.1142-1143.
[0] Andrea Denny-Brown, '*Povre* Griselda and the All-Consuming *Archwyves*', Studies in the Age of Chaucer, vol. 28, (2006), 77-115.p.80.
[0] Crane, *The Performance of Self*, p.33.
[0] On the question of the reception of the Griselda tale in Europe, seeSee Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, 'The Griselda Complex: Dowry and Marriage Gifts in the Quattrecento' ' in ed. Lydia G. Cochrane, ed., *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Lydia G. Cochrane, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 213-246.
[0] Denny-Brown, '*Povre* Griselda and the All-Consuming *Archwyves*', p.109.

The audience of this Middle English tale was encouraged to imagine someone so dishevelled, and with hair so matted that the noble women whom she would surpass in rank once dressed in finery, were horrified to touch her. In line 374, the verb 'dispoillen' not only translates as simply 'to undress' or 'to strip to the skin' but also, more insidiously, 'to rob, plunder or ravage', adding an undeniably violent element to this undressing.[0] This last definition suggests that rather than being an exchange of clothing, Griselda's undressing takes something valuable from her. In this case, it is her identity and autonomy which are robbed from her through the removal of her clothing.

Despite Griselda being entirely faithful, subservient and adoring to Walter during their 12-year marriage and providing him with two children, he decides to test her loyalty and total submission to him through a sequence of emotionally painful and humiliating scenarios. From being told that her children are to be removed and killed, to being divorced by her husband in favour of a newer wife and expected to prepare the new marriage bed for them, Griselda bears it all with ideal womanly passivity and tolerance, putting Walter's desires above her own and submitting to his will entirely, even at the cost of her children and her autonomy. Griselda demonstrates her acceptance of her return to peasant status by her willingness to give up her formal rich clothing and put on the 'wrecched clothes' she came to the marriage with, acknowledging that Walter 'dide me strepe out of my povre weede, And richely me cladden', adding that she brought nothing to the marriage but 'feith, and nakednesse, and maydenhede'.[0] She remarks that she must return to her father's house in the same state that she left it many years before, but hopes that she is not expected to go

[0] 'And so that nothing of her old clothing she should bring into his house, he ordered that women should undress her right there; Of which these ladies were not very happy to handle the clothing that she had worn. But nevertheless, this maid, with bright complexion, From head to foot they clothed her all new', *Riverside Chaucer,* IV.372-380.

[0] 'despoilen', *MEDiddle English Dictionary*, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED11370/track?counter=1&search_id=72524892, [accessed 27th May 2024].

[0] ***Riverside Chaucer,*** IV.850, 863-4, 866.

‘smoklees’ from the palace.[0] Griselda twice reminds Walter of her body which nourished and grew their children and asks that he does not inflict on her the indignity of being seen publicly entirely nude:

> ‘Ye koude nat doon so dishonest a thing,
> That thilke wombe in which youre children leye
> Should biforn the peple, in my walkynge,
> Be seyn al bare; wherefore I yow preye,
> Lat me nat lyk a worm go by the weye…’ (ll.876-880)

The implication here is that as Walter has known her physically and carnally, impregnated her, and her body has given him children, her body has earned her the right to dignity and modesty and should be shielded from curious eyes with clothing. Through Griselda, Chaucer draws particular attention to her belly and through it, her womb and her maternal state. While there is no explicit comparison between Griselda and the Virgin Mary here, in a society founded on Christian ideology and on which the maternity of Mary rests, motherhood and the maternal body were not things to be humiliated.[0]

The second time that Griselda is stripped of her clothing, she does it publicly to herself at Walter’s command. This time she is not given the assistance of being helped out of her clothing but has the indignity of self-stripping, showing her reversion to peasant status with fine ladies to undress her: ‘Biforn the folk hirselven strepeth she, And in hir smok, with heed and foot al bare, Toward hir fadre hous forth is she fare’.[0] Griselda’s self-imposed public stripping plays a performative role, demonstrating to the audience just how low she sees herself, having already referred to herself as a worm.[0] Her giving up of her marital clothing reflects contemporary legal practices of coverture, previously discussed, and paraphernalia,

[0] ***Riverside Chaucer,*** IV.875.
[0] The maternal journey of the Virgin Mary is reflected in Griselda’s tale to some degree as although Griselda has no miraculous impregnation, both figures are told their children have been killed before it is revealed that their children did not die.
[0] ***Riverside Chaucer,*** IV.894-896.
[0] ***Riverside Chaucer,*** IV.880.

the clothes owed to a widow on the death of her husband as long as they were not 'excessive'.[0] Griselda refers to herself as Walter's 'wydwe [widow]', in her monologue before she returns to her father's house, further linking the heroine's actions with known legal practices.[0]

Griselda's next words show that she sees the smock she leaves the marriage with as exchange for her virginity which she will never get back, and again links the garment with her womb, reminding Walter and in so doing, reinforcing for Chaucer's audience the link between the smock and her motherhood:

> 'Wherfore, in gerdon of my maydenhede,
> Which that I brought, and noght agayn I bare,
> As voucheth sauf to yeve me, to my neede,
> But swich a smok as I was wont to were,
> That I therwith may wrye the womb of here
> That was your wyf…'–'(ll.883-887)

In Christine de Pizan's translation of Griselda's story, which was intended as an example of 'a woman of unfailing virtue', it has been suggested that theat smock Griselda is allowed to retain should be understood to 'compensate'–' her materially for the virginity that Walter took from her.[0] Susan Crane has put it most explicitly by suggesting that the smock is exchanged for her hymen.[0] Indeed, this transference of textile for flesh is- made most clear when Walter, in his beneficence, allowss her to return to her father's house 'in hir smok, with heed and foot al bare'.[0] This mimics the wording of ecclesiastical court records in which people ordered to do public penance were sometimes required to appear in smocks, with bare heads and bare

[0] Janet S. Loengard, 'The Widow's Apparel: Paraphernalia and the Courts', in *English Legal History and Its Sources*, ed. David Ibbetson, Neil Jones and Nigel Ramsay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019) 358-372, pp.361-362.
[0] *Riverside Chaucer*, IV.836.
[0] Christine de Pisan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Rosalind Brown-Grant, ((London: Penguin Books, 1999), pp.156, 159.
[0] Susan Crane, *The Performance of Self, : Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), p.36.
[0] ***Riverside Chaucer***, IV.895.

feet, as in the 1516 case of Amy Martynmasse where, having been convicted of fornication by the Church Court in the diocese of Lincoln, she was instructed to process around the market 'wearing only her chemise, her head, feet and ankles bare'.[0] Griselda's audience would have likely been very aware that her return to her family home in only her smock was starkly reminiscent of actions of those forced to enact penitential rituals on the orders of ecclesiastical courts.

Griselda's journey from her husband's home in her smock is also highly reminiscent of the cases of women fleeing domestic violence covered earlier in this chapter. For Griselda at this point in her narrative, her very public, partial nudity signifies her loyalty and total submission to her husband, Walter, which obliterates her own dignity and agency.

For the women escaping domestic violence, and perhaps for their witnesses, Griselda may have been called to mind as they fled their husband's abuse, with their humiliating sartorial states recalling their wifely virtues of passivity. Griselda's and the women's appearances may well have been a stark visual signifier of the violence going on privately within the home.

Conclusions

The nudity or partial nudity of sacred bodies could be found in churches throughout medieval England, ~~with su~~inch statues and wall paintings of Christ on the cross, or St Sebastian's martyrdom, or Mary Magdalen in exile. Through a range of sources, from the deeply religious to the lay, undressing, being stripped or being seen in underclothes had an enormous scope for ~~interpretatio~~interpretation, with many~~n and~~ possible meanings within the medieval cultural imagination. We have seen how saintly bodies being publicly stripped and the~~have the~~ir naked bodies displayed could be read by pious audiences as a deeply religious act. Their

[0] ~~P. J. P.~~ Goldberg, *Women in England ~~c.1275-1525~~*, pp.227-228.

saintliness did not preclude the youthful, virginal female saints from being sexualised – both by the largely male authors of their *vitæ* and audience members–- but it did not prevent them from attaining sainthood, rather it facilitated it by demonstrating the saints~~'~~' devotion to God and willingness to endure torture and the humiliation of their bodies being on display.

In a similar vein, smocks, the whiteness of which carried heavy religious and cultural symbolism, could cast the wearer as either sexualised or pious, or in transition from one state to the other. Ecclesiastical courts utilised the shame of a woman's body being publicly visible in issuing ~~might set women the~~ punishments, including ~~of being seen publicly in only their smock~~processions in one's smock, while their male counterparts might receive a fine without bodily exposure. This stark contrast in financial versus sartorial punishments demonstrates that within the medieval cultural imagination, the threat of a punishment which exposed her body was a better deterrent to women than it was to men due to the negative connotations a visible woman's body carried. In the contemporary literature, the smocks of some female character~~-~~s were described in detail to heighten their allure or sexualise them. For others like the Patient Griselda, her public stripping by her husband was intended to humiliate her and shame her while sartorially demonstrating her social ostracism.

Yet the legal records show that there were instances in which medieval women perhaps found autonomy, agency and self-protection in being seen in partial or total undress. We have seen how even within the culture which routinely objectified, sexualised and criticised the female body and the clothes placed on it, medieval women were able to utilise accepted cultural norms and gendered expectations for their own benefit. By doing exactly what they were not expected or supposed to do – allowing their bodies or their underclothes to be seen - they were able to demonstrate the severity of the domestic violence they faced as they were forced into the street partially dressed to escape and in so doing, perhaps persuade the judge to grant a separation and save her~~erself~~ from further domestic danger.



Figure 43 A pilgrim badge depicting the smock of the Virgin Mary from the shrine at Aachen, Germany. Housed in the Museum on London, accession number 91.124.

Chapter Five: Objects of Exchange: Material Knowledge, Negotiation and Gifts

> For gode women with gyftys
> Men ther honour fro them lyftys[0]

This advice comes from the mid-fourteenth century conduct poem, 'How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter'. It makes clear the ways that gift-giving could create a highly unequal power dynamic between a couple which made women vulnerable to potential exploitation by men. This chapter begins by examining the widespread practice of giving clothing as romantic or marriage tokens, which formed a crucial element of late medieval courtship practices but which were sometimes used to expose women to danger by creating a relationship founded on unequal power dynamics, which made them vulnerable to exploitation.

Through the analysis of clothing gifts described in popular literature and consistory court records, I will show how this practice spoke directly to the themes discussed in previous chapters. Drawing on analysis from Chapter One of clothing as an emotional and emotive object which could be used to shame the wearer, this chapter will extend the discussion by focusing on cultural and legal examples where gifts of clothing held enormous emotional value but could also be used to coerce women into an exploitative relationship. The consistory court cases in this chapter also speak directly to the relationship between violence and dress discussed in Chapters Two and Four which looked at harm done to a woman's body and how the victim/survivor described her clothing in court after the assault. In these cases, women's clothing acted as evidence of violence committed against their bodies. As will be shown, in the consistory court cases, women describe the giving and receiving of clothing as evidence of their exploitation after a sexual relationship did not lead to the marriage they

[0] 'How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter', *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse*, ed. George Shuffleton, ed., ((Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publication, 2008), f.7v, ll.91-100.

were told would happen. In this way, it is clear that there were processes by which clothing could materially 'speak up'' for women in court as evidence of a harmful act done to the body. Lastly, in Chapter Three, I considered how male authorities controlled and punished women because of their dress. Here we will see how women interacted with the court to answer for the gifts of clothing they had given and received which could result in them being forced into marriages and so exposing them to further coercion, control and violence.

Gift-giving was a crucial element of late medieval courtship which intensified unequal power dynamics between a couple, potentially exposing women to danger and exploitation. It was also a highly gendered element of courtship in this period, as men might purchase textile items such as gloves, purses or dresses while women's reciprocal gifts were more likely to be self-made textile items. This allowed women to display key garment construction and embroidery skills which indicated a woman's aptitude and readiness for marriage and the management of a household and family. It should be made clear, however, that while the pastourelles and fake gift giving as a means for men to lure women into a sexually exploitative situation were covered in Chapter Two, this chapter will focus for the most part on clothing as gifts as part of a consensual relationship preceding an anticipated marriage, or in which a marriage contract has broken down or been reneged on.

Recent research by of Judith Bennett, Ruth Mazo Karras and Janelle Werner, has outlined how single women might engage in courtship practices with little intention of actually contracting the marriage and were happy to engage in casual sexual relationships to benefit from any material gifts given.[0] These single women form part of a vast array of responses to courtship practices. My analysis of gift giving within courtship, as documented in the records of the Consistory Court of London, suggests that this relaxed and transactional approach to intimate relationships was not vastly widespread as a number of women in the

[0] Judith M. Bennett, Ruth Mazo Karras and Janelle Werner, ''No Romance without Finance: Courtship in Late Medieval England'', *Speculum*, vol. 99, no. 1, ((2024), 75-101.

records are clearly very affronted by their supposed fiancé claiming the gifts were only given in exchange for sex. I demonstrate that women used these gifted items, frequently articles of dress, as evidence that a legitimate courtship or even an engagement had taken place even if there had only been an informal sexual relationship. By bringing the man to court, these women were trying to legitimise a relationship in the eyes of the law and by bringing in witnesses, in the eyes of their communities, with textiles and articles of dress playing key emotive symbols. By utilising the symbolism of items of clothing to demonstrate that an exchange of vows had taken place, I argue that these women were attempting to retroactively legitimise a relationship that had been exploitative and in so doing, protect themselves from familial shame and societal scorn. Women could use textiles to negotiate their relationships with men, but also with one another as signs of friendship and solidarity. The discussion then moves on to the reanalysis of a cleric's critical observation ~~by a cleric by who viewed~~that women ~~wearing their best clothing to visit friends or borrowing~~who borrowed clothes from their friends~~'~~ in order ~~clothes~~ to go dancing was a damning sign of pride. However, I suggest he is describing female solidarity and friendship within which the sharing and borrowing of clothing forms a central tenet. Through these legal, literary and moral examples, I have demonstrated some of the ways late medieval women were able to navigate a society which was stacked against them and for whom clothing was an invaluable tool for gaining incremental advantages if not freedom.

Objects of Exchange: Sex, Gifts, Courtship and Negotiation

The poem, *In a fryht as Y con fare fremde*, which dates from around 1325, sits somewhat outside the genre of the pastourelle (previously discussed in Chapter Two). Although it takes the form of a dialogue between a man and the woman he stumbles upon, no assault takes place. Rather, the man attempts to convince a woman to enter into a relationship with him,

promising to protect her from cares and cold with beautiful clothing: ‘Casten Y wol the from cares ant kelde / Comeliche Y wol the nou clethe.[0] Her response demonstrates the conflicting thoughts and predicaments a young woman might find herself in and she deliberates aloud. At first she convinces herself that despite the offer of new, beautiful clothing, her own clothing is suitable enough and does not carry the heavy price of sin from having been gained through engaging in illicit sex:

> Clothes Y have on forte caste,
> Such as Y may weore with wynne;
> Betere is were thunne boute laste
> Then syde robes, ant synke into synne.[0]

The young man attempts to cajole her still and assures her that he will love her until his hair greys. Unconvinced, she continues that she is sure of his fickleness and that her family would let her starve and that she would be ‘hated’ ’if their illicit relationship was ever revealed.[0] She then comes to the crux of her argument:

> Betere is taken a comeliche yclothe,
> In armes to cusse ant to cluppe,
> Then a wrecche ywedded so wrothe
> Thah he me slowe, ne myht I him asluppe![0]

She deliberates as to whether it is better to have an illicit yet romantic relationship with a beautifully clothed man than to marry a man whose violent moods she would be unable to escape. For this unnamed woman, penned by an anonymous hand, the decision is unclear and while it could be argued that this poem contributes to the medieval belief in women’s innate greediness, it seems likelier that this poem voices concerns about accepting material goods

[0] ‘I will rescue you from hardships and cold; Beautifully will I clothe you now’, *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, vol.2, ed., ed. Susan Greer Fein, trans., David Raybin and Jan Ziolkowlski, ((Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2014), Art. 35, lines 11-12.
[0] Ibid, l.ines 13-16.
[0] Ibid, l.ine 34.
[0] ‘“Yet it’s better to accept one beautifully clothed, To kiss and to embrace him in arms, Than be wed to a wretch so ill-tempered / That were he to beat me, I might not escape!’.” ibid, l.ines 37-40.

for an illicit sexual relationship over a licit, violent marriage. The poem uses the premise of the well-established practice of gift giving during courtship to initiate the couple's interaction, although it plays on fears about how a woman might be expected to reciprocate any gifts and find herself in an exploitative situation which would harm her reputation.

How this poem would have been understood by a contemporary audience is a complex question. Male – and perhaps some female - audience members may have understood this poem as speaking to the stereotype that women are greedy and materialistic, while it seems likely that a largely female audience might have identified with the woman's weighing up of love over being trapped in an abusive marriage. Moreover, female audience members may well have been keenly aware of warnings about accepting gifts from men as laid out in 'How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter'–' which would then trap them into potentially exploitative sexual relationships and exposing them to spiritual and social harms. The text's multivocality means that different medieval audiences would have interpreted it in a plethora of different ways, each reflecting their own world view. By analysing it with an understanding of material culture, modern historians can access new facets of the text to gain clearer insight into the culture in which the poem was produced and performed.

Echoing one possible interpretation of the poem, the late fifteenth-century poet, John Skelton, wrote that a woman could be bought with 'a goodly ribbon or a gold ring', clearly voicing a widespread medieval belief that women were by nature avaricious, grasping and greedy and whose bodies could be easily bought with pretty material gifts to adorn her body and beautify her clothing.[0] Certainly, the act of gift giving was expected to be reciprocal in some way, whether that be with the receiver giving a gift in response or with the continuation of a platonic or sexual relationship. Gifts given by men to women were understood to carry wider social implications in medieval England as the gift had the potential to both elevate a

[0] John Skelton, *Magnificence*, ll.1579-80. Skelton did not comment on the morality of men attempting to buy sex from a woman with material objects or money.

woman's standing through marriage to the giver, or destroy her by forcing her into a sexual relationship with him as recompense for the "gift". In so doing, gifts could force an unbalanced power dynamic of giver and receiver. Wider medieval society viewed women's virginities as the most valuable thing they had, and with many women living in relative poverty, many would have had little in the way of expendable material goods to give in return.

Similarly, within the realm of matchmaking and the forging of familial alliances through marriage, Claude Lévi-Strauss has written on the transactional usefulness of women between groups of men in premodern societies, stating that the 'total relationship of exchange which constitutes marriage is not established between a man and a woman…but between two groups of men, and the woman figures only as one of the objects in the exchange, not as one of the partners'.[0] This is a somewhat reductive argument that casts women as mute objects and neglects to assign medieval women the agency they *did* have. As we shall see, clothing could also function as an object of exchange between a man and a woman but also between wives, as husbands passed down a deceased wife's wardrobe to subsequent spouses, with the deceased's clothing transferring the role of wife and mother to the living.

Gifts given in a sincerely or deceptively romantic context largely followed set conventions with the exchange of rings carrying less significance than modern engagement rings and there being no stigma around women giving rings to men after having been given other gifts.[0] Other items which could be worn or kept close to the body such as rosaries could act as engagement gifts but it is the gifts of textiles, such as from a deceased wife's wardrobe to small textile accessories to reams of fabric expected to be used for the new bride, that are of particular interest here. McSheffrey has noted that men were more likely to give women

[0] Claude Levi Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kindship*, p. 481.
[0] Shannon McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), pp.61-62.

gifts although female gift-giving and mutual gift giving were by no means exceptional.[0] Both men and women frequently gave textiles and clothing as gifts which signified the gendered roles of the giver. A would-be groom offering textiles signalled his willingness and, more crucially to the pragmatic medieval mind, his financial ability to provide materially for his bride during their marriage. On one level, this seems to be a romantic and generous act of giving from the man to the woman but underscoring it is the tacit knowledge that this act demonstrated the woman's innate inferiority and receptive position within the relationship. It is very easy to look at this dynamic with a cynical eye, particularly with Mary Douglas~~'~~' analysis that 'gift cycles engage persons in permanent commitments that articulate the dominant institution~~' in~~', in mind.[0] The clothing and textiles bought by the man will cover the body of the woman who will also be legally regarded as his, and in accepting them, she is accepting being subsumed into his household as another useful object. Equally, when women gave textiles to their potential groom, the textiles acted as a tangible demonstration, almost an advertisement, of the woman's wifely skills and her aptitude for domestic labour within a marriage, much of which would entail the production of and caring for the family's clothing.

Textile gifts were often deeply symbolic, and could create or strengthen ties between people. As we saw in the last chapter, Griselda's tumultuous social status was visualised through the clothing her husband gave to or removed from her. A complex, exquisite object now lies in storage at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York which depicts this moment of sartorial removal while being an object that was likely gifted. It is a purse embroidered with scenes from the tale of Patient Griselda~~, discussed in the previous chapter.~~. Embroidered in France sometime in the fourteenth century, on the first side Griselda is shown being carried away from her father's house on horseback towards a building as the man sitting behind her, likely Walter, turns back to look at the old man (Figure 42). On the reverse,

[0] Ibid, p.62.
[0] Mary Douglas, 'Foreword', p.xxi.

Griselda can be seen being received into the arms of her father as she is chased away from Walter's house by a woman who has grabbed Griselda's skirt to begin stripping her whilst brandishing a distaff (Figure 43). The scenes are embroidered with silk threads in green, pink, yellow, brown and blue on a canvas background. This is an object which speaks directly to the ways in which textiles testify to the coercive, exploitative and abusive ways in which women were treated. Why were scenes of coercive kidnap and forced stripping embroidered onto a woman's purse? To understand where this object sits within the cultural imagination and how it may have been interpreted by its maker, giver or receiver, we must understand the role of textile gifts given between medieval men and women. In this way, we will gain insight into the ways medieval women used textiles to vouch for them in court cases.



Figure 3844 Purse with embroidered image of Griselda being carried from her home by Walter, 14th fourteenth century, The Metropolitan Museum, New York, accession number 27.48.2.



Figure 3945 Reverse of purse with image of Griselda being returned to her father's house as a woman tries to remove her dress and beat her with a distaff, 14th-fourteenth century, The Metropolitan Museum, New York, accession number 27.48.2.

Although Sharon Farmer has done some excellent research on the technological and global effort that went in to making an embroidered silk purse that is roughly contemporaneous with the Patient Griselda purse, it is impossible to know the specific details that surround the creation of this purse.[0] However, we can make informed speculation about it. Purses were worn by anyone regardless of gender as a repository for useful or precious items including money. As containers of valuable objects, within the cultural imagination, they could symbolise vulvas, the uterus and scrotums.[0] Both Paris and London had burgeoning textile markets with English merchants importing raw silk, silk threads and textiles, through couriers or in person from regional French and Parisian fairs while French merchants sold textiles at English fairs.[0] While the merchants selling silk wares would have been almost invariably men, the makers – spinners and embroiderers – would likely have been women. In Paris, Sutton has put the number of female embroiderers at thirty-three, while male embroiderers numbered eleven.[0] Although exact figures on the silkwomen of medieval London are difficult to come by, there is plenty of evidence for their presence in the capital and regional towns in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, including that they banded together to petition parliament in order to protect their craft from continental competition.[0]

[0] Sharon Farmer, "Global and Gendered Perspectives on the Production of a Parisian Alms Purse, c. 1340," *Journal of Medieval Worlds*, vol. 1, no. 3, (2019), 45–84.

[0] Diane Caddy, 'The Purse and My Person: "The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse" and the Gender of Money' in', in eds., Craig E. Bertolet and Robert Epstein, ed. *Money, Commerce, and Economics in Late Medieval English Literature*, eds., Craig E. Bertolet and Robert Epstein, ((Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 109-126, pp.113-114.; *MED,* 'purse', *MED,* < https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED35297/track?counter=1&search_id=589332>, [accessed 5th May 2025].

[0] Anne Sutton, *The Mercery of London: Trade, Goods and People, 1130-1578*, pp.37-41.

[0] Ibid, p.29.

[0] Marian, Dale, 'The London Silkwomen of the Fifteenth-Century', *The Economic History Review*, vol. 4, no. 3 (1933), 324-335, p.324. See also Kay Lacey, 'The Production of "Narrow Ware" by Silkwomen in Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century England', *Textile History*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1987), 187–204; For an overview, see Kate Ash, 'Silkwomen', in *Encyclopaedia of Medieval Dress and Textiles Online*, ed. Gale Owen-Crocker, Elizabeth Coatsworth and Maria Hayward (Brill: 2012), [online], https://doi-org.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/10.1163/2213-2139_emdt_COM_577, [accessed 28th June 2024].

The tale of Patient Griselda was extremely popular with men and women and, as discussed in Chapter Four, contained significant symbolism for Christians. However, the character of Patient Griselda had specific resonance with women as the character was also held up as a figure with the ideal wifely qualities of patience, obedience and loyalty. So, for a purse to display embroideries of Griselda, it is likely that the purse was intended for or made by a woman, similar to the way, elsewhere in Europe, Griselda was a popular figure painted on brides'–' marriage chests during the Italian *Quattrocento*.[0] If this is the case, then two possibilities lie before us: the purse was purchased by a man for a woman he intended to marry or who was perhaps already his wife, or the purse was made by a woman for herself or another woman.

If we consider this item to have been made by a woman for herself or another woman as a marital gift, we would have an object that had been designed, crafted and embroidered by a woman which depicts another woman being stripped of her clothing.[0] Whether it was intended for the embroideress herself or for a female family member ahead of her marriage, to carry around a purse with such decoration would have been intended as a signal to onlookers that she was not only culturally aware of the expectations placed on married women, but that she aspired to embody them herself. She was stitching not only a popular figure in medieval European culture, but a figure which embodied the praised denigration of women and encouraged a lack of female agency. In embroidering these scenes, she was stitching the visual reinforcement of her own oppression.

Alternatively, if a man bought the purse as a gift for a woman, it has vastly different, complex set of connotations. It would mean that a man purchased a textile object which had been through a lengthy process of production by men and women, from dyeing

[0] See marriage chest panel, *The Story of Griselda* by Apollonio di Giovanni di Tommaso, ((c.1415-1475) in the Galleria e Museo Estense, Gallerie Estensi, Modena, Italy.

[0] Sharon Farmer, 'Global and Gendered Perspectives on the Production of a Parisian Alms Purse, c. 1340,' *Journal of Medieval Worlds*, vol. 1, no. 3 (2019), 45–84, p.49. Farmer's article focuses on an alms purse with embroidered scenes from the tale of *Erec and Enide*.

silk threads to embroidering the design.[0] It would have been explicitly intended as a romantic gesture which carried implicit indications of the qualities he expected a wife to model, and yet it depicted a woman being forcibly stripped of her clothing (Figure 44). The recipient would have carried around with her a purse given to her by her suitor or husband which depicted a woman being humiliated by the removal of her clothing. Thus, a wife's inferior position within a marital relationship was being reinforced through the gifting of a textile object. This symbolically-laden gift was able to ~~perpetuate~~ reinforce the unequal relationships between men and women through the scenes depicted on it, while also setting up an unequal power dynamic between the giver and the receiver of the purse.

Irrespective of the purse's obscure medieval provenance, what is clear is that this object is the manifestation of a troubling textual narrative in direct conversation with its visual representation on the textile itself and its gendered implications.

[0] Sharon Farmer, *The Silk Industries of Medieval Paris: Artisanal Migration, Technological Innovation, and Gendered Experience* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), p.107.~~Farmer, 'Global and Gendered Perspectives', p.~~



Figure 4046 Detail of the Griselda purse showing the reverse side where a woman is lifting Griselda's dress up in one hand as if to remove it while the other hand holds a raised distaff as if to hit her.

The expectation of reciprocity in the face of gift giving caused much parental anxiety as it could endanger the virtue of one's daughters. Warnings to girls and young women against accepting gifts from men can be found in a number of conduct books; the proverb, 'A woman that takes a gift sells herself,' from the Book of the Knight of the Tour-Landry, makes clear that when a woman accepted a gift from a man, she was expected to reciprocate in some way, with the fear being that the giver might think a sexual act the only suitable

exchange.[0] Behavioural advice for young women frequently cautioned against accepting gifts from men, best demonstrated in *How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter* (c.1300-1350):

> For no covetys no giftys thou take;
> Bot thou wyte why, sone them forsake.
> For gode women with gyftys
> Men ther honour fro them lyftys,
> Thos~~f~~e that thei were all trew
> As any stele that bereth hew;
> For with ther giftys men them overgone,
> Thos~~f~~ thei were trew as ony ston.
> Bounde thei be that giftys take;
> Therfor thes giftys thou forsake.[0]

The anonymous author, whom scholars suggest could have been a male cleric or a woman, was clearly aware of and troubled by the use of gifts to lure girls into unwanted, potentially exploitative sexual situations.[0] The reminder that 'For gode women with gyftys / Men ther honour fro them lyftys…~~'~~' reveals the fear that virtuous women could be easily brought down by the gifts of men who intended to sexually exploit them.

Gift giving during legitimate courtship was a customary practice but objects had to be given and received with acknowledgment of their purpose otherwise they were open to interpretation and this ambiguity allowed room for one party to extricate themselves from the agreement.[0] This could be particularly wounding for women who may have agreed to a pre-marital sexual relationship with the understanding that marriage would follow, who then

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[0] ~~Bartlett Jere and Helen Wescott Whiting,~~ *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases: From English Writings Mainly Before 1500*, Bartlett Jere and Helen Wescott Whiting, eds.~~(~~ (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014), p.660.

[0] ~~George Shuffleton, ed.,~~ *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse*, ed. George Shuffleton~~(~~ (Kalamazoo, M~~i~~~~ichigan~~: Medieval Institute Publication, 2008), f.7v, ll.91-100.

[0] Tauno F. Mustanoja has suggested that the author is a male religious writing for a female audience but Diane Bornstein has suggested that the author was a woman, or else a man who 'effectively assumed the persona of a woman', *The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter, The Good Wyfe Wold A Pylgremage, The Thewis of Gud Women*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran, 1948), p.126. Felicity Riddy has developed Mustanoja's theory further by analysing the surviving manuscripts and has posited that while it may have had a clerical author, it certainly had clerical interests, Felicity Riddy, 'Mother Knows Best: Reading Social Change in a Courtesy Text', *Speculum*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1996), 66-86, especially pp.73-79.~~;~~

[0] ~~Shannon~~ McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture* ~~*in Late Medieval London*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), ,~~ p.59.

found themselves with no groom and a damaged reputation. Despite this, Judith Bennett, Ruth Mazo Karras and Janelle Werner's insightful article has analysed the role of gifts within the late medieval marriage market and have acknowledged that single, low status, medieval women might exchange sex for material items, especially clothing, as a means of survival whilst also hoping for a marriage proposal to ensue.[0] This analysis returns medieval women's bodily autonomy to them, rather than seeing the women who engaged in this practice as informal sex workers or as victims of exploitative men.

The Consistory Court was a key destination for someone~~couples~~ wishing~~wish~~ to prove an engagement or marriage had taken place. Writing in relation to York's Consistory Court, Frans Camphjiusen has shown that it dealt with ‘“~~“~~ordinary" civil suits~~–~~' and was presided over by an official appointed by the bishop.[0] Jeremy Goldberg's work on the gender of those who used the church courts of York has shown that more women initiated legal cases relating to marriage disputes than men which suggests that the church courts were not inherently biased against women.[0] Shannon McSheffrey has worked extensively with the records of the Consistory Court of London and has shown that one of the primary uses of the court was to sort out broken engagements and promises of marriage as, unlike today, medieval people could sue for broken promises to wed.[0] The consistory court cases discussed in this chapter come from the city of London which indicate that the people who populate them lived in a highly urban, mobile society and likely had access to higher wages which

[0] ~~Judith M.~~ Bennett, ~~Ruth Mazo~~ Karras and ~~Janelle~~ Werner, ‘~~'~~No Romance without Finance: Courtship in Late Medieval England~~'~~', *Speculum*, vol. 99, no. 1~~,~~ ~~(~~ (2024), 75-101.

[0] Frans Camphuijsen, *Scripting Justice in Late Medieval Europe: Legal Practice and Communication in the Law Courts of Utrecht, York and Paris*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022), p.53. For further research on marriage litigation in the York courts, see Jeremy Goldberg, ‘~~'~~Gender and Matrimonial Litigation in the Church Courts in the Later Middle Ages: The Evidence of the Court of York~~'~~', Gender & History, vol.19, no. 1~~,~~ ~~(~~ (2007), 43-59 and the same author's 'Echoes, W~~w~~hispers, V~~v~~entriloquisms: O~~o~~n R~~r~~ecovering W~~w~~omen's V~~v~~oices from the Court of York at the E~~e~~nd of the Middle Ages~~' in~~', in *Women, Agency and the Law, 1300-1700*, ~~eds.,~~ ed. Bronach Kane and Fiona Williamson~~,~~ ~~(~~ (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013), 31-41.

[0] Goldberg, 'Gender and Matrimonial Litigation in the Church Courts', p.44. See p.47 for Goldberg's statistics on the gender and urban/rural location of plaintiffs and deponents.

[0] Shannon McSheffrey, "About the Consistory," *Consistory: Testimony in a Late Medieval London Church Court*~~,~~ ~~(~~ (2022), <http://consistory.ca/the-consistory/>, [accessed 28th May 2024].

could purchase a greater variety of goods, with imported goods more readily available than for their rural counterparts.

The frequency with which men and women tried to enforce a marriage contract in consistory court records and used the giving of textiles and other gifts as evidence for this demonstrates the culture of part-romantic, part-pragmatic gift giving as a precursor to marriage and the giving of the body. Gendered items such as kerchiefs and lace, as well as potentially sexualised items such as smocks and gloves appear frequently as objects of exchange between couples. In 1491, Margaret Flemmyng, being likely both eligible and young, was encouraged to marry a Robert Walsh. One witness claims that Margaret and Walsh exchanged vows and tokens in June 1490 and that Walsh had said he intended to solemnize the marriage upon his return from Ireland on business. The witness then asserted that he had been present when Walsh and Margaret again contracted marriage around the time of Christmas 1490. Margaret admitted that w~~W~~hile at first being interested in Walsh, she~~,~~ ~~Flemmyng~~ lost interest when he ~~left the country~~went overseas and she had heard he was interested in another, and so turned her attentions to Mark Patenson. The two discussed marriage and Patenson gave her 'a pair of gloves and a gold ring, which she gratefully accepted as from her husband~~'~~' and in return, Margaret gave Patenson a silver *gemew* ring.[0] Margaret is clear in her testimony that it was Patenson who gave her gloves and he whom she wants to marry. Gloves could and did function as a pre-marriage gift between a would-be groom and his intended, symbolising the hands grasped during a marriage ceremony. Perhaps Margaret felt that because her second suitor, Patenson, had given her a pair of gloves and her

[0] LMA, MS DL/C/A/001/MS09065, fols. 80r-82v. See also McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex and Civic Culture*, pp.61-62. This case has been transcribed in the Latin in *Depositions in the Diocese of London Consistory Court, 1486-97: A Transcription of London Metropolitan Archives, DL/C/A/001/MS09065 and /MS09065B, Libri Examinationum*, ed. Shannon McSheffrey (2024), pp.124-129.~~This case has been written up in Shannon McSheffrey's online catalogue of consistory court cases, https://consistory.org/2022/01/17/robert-walsh-and-mark-patenson-c-margaret-flemmyng/, [accessed 28th May 2024].~~

first suitor had not, he was the more serious contender for her hand as he was willing to invest in an item that had symbolic ties to marriage.

Giving gloves between romantic partners certainly indicated that the relationship was serious. In 1489, Joan Corney was unable to return the gifts of money, a ring, a pair of socks, a pair of gloves and some lace that had been given to her by Robert Philipson alongside vows of engagement with the caveat that her consent was dependent upon that of her parents and employer. If this clause occurred, witnesses to the scene did not mention that to the court.[0] Due to disapproval on the part of Joan's parents, a witness, Thomas Ann, noted the prospective bride's attempt to return the gifts to Robert but 'he refused to accept them'. Another witness, John Ward, reported advising Robert to accept the unwanted gifts, saying 'Robert, if ye will take them again it shall never be the worse for you.'[0] Robert clearly felt that in accepting the return of the gifts, he was accepting the breaking of their engagement, something he must have been vehemently against as he was the instigator in bringing Joan to court to force her hand. It seems that either Joan genuinely wanted to end the engagement or had been pressured to by her parents but that the gifts she had accepted and which she could not return trapped her in the contract in the eyes of the plaintiff and witnesses. Another London Consistory Court record documents the courtship of Richard Cressy and Alice Scrace, which was uncontested by the couple but brought to the court in 1489 to validate it in the face of wider opposition, in which gloves formed the finale of a large collection of courtship gifts.[0] The couple had known each other in their youth and become reacquainted in London but their marriage was disapproved of by Alice's brother and employer. Alice's testimony provides an insight into a mutually affectionate courtship in

[0] LMA, MS DL/C/A/001/MS09065, fols. 52r-53r and Also transcribed in Shannon McSheffrey's online catalogue, https://consistory.org/2022/01/31/philipson-c-corney/, [accessed 28th May 2024].in Latin in *Depositions in the Diocese of London Consistory Court, 1486-97*, pp.83, 85.

[0] Ibid.

[0] LMA, MS DL/C/A/001/MS09065, fols. 55r-56v and McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex and Civic Culture*, pp.63-64. This case has been transcribed in Latin in *Depositions in the Diocese of London Consistory Court, 1486-97*, pp.88-90. This case has been written up in Shannon McSheffrey's online catalogue of consistory court cases, https://consistory.org/2022/01/30/richard-cressy-c-alice-scrace/, [accessed 28th May 2024].

which go-betweens delivered items from one to the other. Early in their courtship, Richard gave gifts of a smock, two kerchiefs, a mirror, a pomander, rings, an ear pick and a few silver pilgrimage souvenirs to Alice and in an effort to appease Alice's employer, Richard also gave him a bottle of claret. It was only after the courtship had taken a more serious turn, with the couple exchanging vows that the gloves were given:

> And then Richard said to this witness, holding her by the right hand, "I Richard take thee Alice to my wife, and thereto I plight thee my troth." And then this witness said to him, "I Alice take thee Richard to my husband, and thereto I plight thee my troth." And she says that she spoke these words at that time with the intention of having Richard as her husband, and afterwards he gave her a pair of gloves.[0]

Within this context, it could be argued that the gloves were given as a marker and reminder of the vow the two had taken, mimicking the couple's own hand holding during their vows.

In some consistory court cases, however, the symbolism of gloves as romantic items preceding marriage was denied in attempts to extricate themselves from unions. In these cases, individuals have either employed plausible deniability – that although a man had given gloves as gifts, he had never intended for them to be interpreted as a marriage token but rather as payment for sexual favours. William Knollys claimed to have given Agnes Lanther money to buy a pair of gloves~~, as well as a set of knives~~ and a purse, as well as a set of knives, but he insisted that rather than being gifts from a prospective groom, he had given them with the intention of encouraging her willingness to ~~enter~~ continue~~into~~ an illicit sexual relationship.[0] Alice, likely thinking the gifts indicated the start of their courtship which would lead ultimately to a marriage, gave Knollys a girdle and 'a belt of black silk', both items which could symbolise chastity and fertility.[0] She may well have made both textile items

[0] Ibid.
[0] McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture*, p.65.
[0] Ibid. Bronach Kane, *Popular Memory and Gender in Medieval England: Men, Women and Testimony in the Church Courts, c.1200-1500*~~,~~ ((Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2019), p.117.

herself, dedicating her time and skill to them and imbuing them with emotion. It seems unlikely that Agnes~~lice~~ meant for these gifts to be read as ironic or platonic by Knollys, and certainly women did not usually give men gifts in exchange for sex. Thus this mutual exchange of sex ~~both parties were exchanging sex~~ and material items suggests that Knollys was happy for Agnes to continue under the illusion that their relationship was heading towards the security of marriage. ~~Yet~~ Agnes~~lice~~ clearly felt that ~~William~~ Knollys was behaving in the way an expected groom should and when the vows were never spoken and it perhaps became clear that he had no intention of marrying her, she took him to court. ~~While there is no record of the outcome of Alice's case, it seems plausible that Knollys' symbolic gifts to Alice and her intimate material gifts to him would have been read by a jury, as they were by Alice, as the behaviour of a loving couple on the road to marriage.~~As Shannon McSheffrey has noted, the Consistory Court agreed with Knollys' view that the manner in which he received the gifts – as a lover rather than a husband – superseded Agnes', intentions as the giver, and Knollys escaped with only a penance for fornication.[0] In taking Knollys to court and using the exchange of gifts as evidence of a relationship, and a sexual one as Knollys admitted, Agnes~~lice~~ may have felt she was fighting for justice to be done after the exploitation of her body. A similar trope appears in the pastourelle, *Ladd Y the daunce* which can be found in a fifteenth-century Oxford student's notebook alongside love songs and religious songs praising the Virgin Mary and St Thomas of Canterbury. In the lyric, a young gallant whose name is given as Jack, attempts to bribe the unnamed, female narrator with '[a] peyre wyht glouus'.[0] As discussed in Chapter Four, white was a highly symbolic colour which signified purity and cleanliness. No doubt the audience of this pastourelle, probably already being familiar with the genre's structure, would have ~~seen~~ read Jack's gift of white

[0] McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex and Civic Culture*, p.63.

[0] ~~John C. Hirsch, ed.,~~ *Medieval Lyric: Middle English Lyrics, Ballads and Carols*, John C. Hirsch, ed. ~~(~~(Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p.120. The pastourelle is recorded in a medieval Oxford student's notebook now in the possession of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, MS 383, p.41. DIMEV 3044.

gloves asre ~~forebodingprophetic~~. Having met whilst dancing, Jack goes on to use the promise of the gloves as a lure to get the narrator back to his room:

> Sone aftur euensong
> Jak me mette:
> ‘Com hom aftur thy glouus
> That Ic the byhette.’
> Wan Ic to his chambur com,
> Doun he me sette
> From hym mytte
> Y nat go wan we were mette.[0]

Thus, the fictional Jack’s “gift” of gloves is a duplicitous attempt to mimic engagement gifts and love tokens, thereby inculcating trust in the naive young woman enough that she gives him permission to engage in sexual intercourse outside of marriage. A medieval audience would have understood this to carry with it many risks including ruining her reputation within her community, bringing shame to her family and damaging her chances of a respectable marriage offer in the future. In staging the pair’s interactions with Jack dangling the promise of a pair of gloves to get the woman to a secluded location for sex to take place, the pastourelle could have been interpreted to reinforce Skelton’s misogynist verse that women’s bodies could be bought with gifts. Still others, as Alice Raw has pointed out in her analysis of medieval women’s sexual pleasure, may have understood this character as regaining her agency when she decides to consent to sex with Jack.[0] However, to some, the white gloves in this pastourelle may have forcefully underscored the unequal power dynamic between the couple and highlighted the woman’s exploitation. For female audience members in particular, this pastourelle may also have been understood as a stark warning against accepting the gifts of men or else they might have found themselves in a deeply exploitative situation.

[0] Ibid, p.120. According to the *MED*, ‘bihouten~~’~~’ and its variants as written here translate to ‘to promise’, perhaps mimicking the language of engagement: https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED4533/track?counter=1&search_id=69780662 [accessed 2nd June 2024].

[0] Alice Raw, ‘Gender, Sexual Discourse, and Women’s Pleasure in Later Medieval England, c.1300-1550’, [unpublished PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2023], p.125.

Textiles and clothing were expensive items to buy and time consuming to produce, and so gifts of clothing were important signifiers that a serious relationship to some degree, whether a sexual or romantic one, had taken place. Parties wenthen to great lengths to convince the court that the article of clothing was just that, and not an indication that marriage had been promised or contracted. In 1493, John Remyngton rejected the claim that he had contracted marriage with a woman named Alice and that the gloves she was claiming were a marriage token she had, in fact, stolen from a chest in his bedchamber.[0] That Alice had had access to Remyngton's bedroom suggests there had been a prior sexual relationship but it is unclear from the details in the record whether John had given them as a gift or if Alice had really stolen them. Unfortunately, we do not get to hear Alice's version of events but if Alice had taken them, it seems likely that she would have been well aware of the romantic connotations pairs of gloves had within the sphere of courtships. While as McSheffrey admits that Although Alice's case might seem fragile'looks weak', Remyngton's argument certainly follows the pattern of other individuals who denied that the gift of gloves had ever meant anything.[0] When clothing was given by men to women within the pre-martial stage or as a precursor to pre-martial sex, the clothing is frequently heavily gendered. Naturally, gloves can be worn by both men and women but the giving of gloves suggests a desire to protect the woman's hands from cold and mimics the holding of hands during the marriage ceremony. Lace, too, was often made by women and expected to appeal to women who might particularly delight in the surface decoration of their clothing, which corresponded to the medieval view of woman's innate superficiality and desire for prettiness. Again from

[0] LMA, MS DL/C/A/001/MS09065, fol. 171v. This case has been written up in Shannon McSheffrey's online catalogue of consistory court cases, https://consistory.org/2021/12/17/alice-unknown-c-john-remyngton/, [accessed 24th May 2024] and cited in McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture,* p.66 and transcribed in the original Latin in *Depositions in the Diocese of London Consistory Court, 1486-97,* p.243.

[0] Shannon McSheffrey's online catalogue of consistory court cases, https://consistory.org/2021/12/17/alice-unknown-c-john-remyngton/, [accessed 24th May 2024]. Other cases in which gifts of gloves were denied as serving as a precursor to marriage include Laurence Wyberd and John Austen v. Maud Gyll, LMA, MS DL/C/A/001/MS09065, fols. 3v-5v, 249v-251r and transcribed online, https://consistory.org/2022/01/11/wyberd-and-austen-c-gyll/, [accessed 24th May 2024] and LMA, MS DL/C/A/001/MS09065, fols. 72v-74r. and transcribed online, https://consistory.org/2022/01/23/hilles-c-padley/ [accessed 24th May 2024].

London's Consistory Court, in 1487, Agnes Parker affirmed that she gave John Pollyn 'silken lace', that he gave her 'a ring and two offering pennies~~'~~' and that they often discussed marrying but never went through with contracting a marriage.[0] Here, the lace bought, or possibly made, by Agnes was given to Pollyn in the early stages of their relationship which she perhaps hoped he would use to decorate his clothing and in so doing, the lace acted as~~-~~ a reminder of her. If the lace had been made by Agnes, it would have conveyed more heartfelt feelings and acted as a demonstration of her skill with the handicraft, a pastime which would be suitable for a wife. It seems likely that Agnes changed her mind about marrying Pollyn as she was also being sued for contracting a marriage with one William Thaccker. This small gift which had perhaps indicated a short-term infatuation on Agnes~~'~~' part was then used against her as evidence that she was committing bigamy when she agreed to contract marriage with Thaccker.

Gifts such as kerchiefs, which were particularly associated with femininity, seem to have been especially damning evidence. ~~as they acted to~~ In 1487, Beatrice Smyth sued John Crote in an attempt to enforce a marriage contract between them which she claimed was promised five years before as Crote lay ill. The testimony of a witness, Agnes Vaughan, asserts that in exchange for a *gemew* ring, Beatrice gave Crote a 'kerchief worth 16d~~'~~' and that these 'gifts were given and received as though from a husband and wife', contrary to ~~Thomas~~John~~'~~'s view.[0] The very fact that this case appears in the consistory court records shows that Crote clearly felt that despite the exchange of gifts and vows, he had not contracted marriage with Beatrice, despite a number of witness statements to the contrary. Indeed, members of medieval society were open to 'reading~~'~~' kerchiefs as suitable and appropriate gifts between husbands and wives as in the case brought against Joan Cardif in

[0] LMA, MS DL/C/A/001/MS09065, fols. 24v-27r, 37v, 40v. The case and witness testimonies are transcribed in the Latin in in *Depositions in the Diocese of London Consistory Court, 1486-97*, pp.31, 31, 33, 34, 40, 43.
[0] Transcribed in ~~Shannon McSheffrey's online catalogue, https://consistory.org/2022/02/18/smyth-c-crote/, [accessed 28th May 2024].~~the Latin in *Depositions in the Diocese of London Consistory Court, 1486-97*, pp.36-39.

1487 by her accuser and would-be suitor, John Brocher. A witness claimed he heard the couple exchange their vows after ~~Broucher~~Brocher had brought a fish for Joan to cook with the expectation that Joan ~~would act as a wife and showcase her wifely potential being clear.~~ would demonstrate her wifely capabilities in cooking it for him.[0] That same day, ~~Broucher~~Brocher brought Joan 'a girdle decorated with silver'.[0] Aside from being somewhat costly, girdles were highly symbolic items of dress~~,~~ and, as discussed in Chapter One, were tied to femininity, fertility and the female body ~~in the cultural imagination~~, being placed around the hips and stomach and close to the female reproductive organs. A short time later, Joan was heard by the witness to confirm to ~~Broucher~~Brocher that she wanted to make their informal engagement ~~agreement~~ permanent, in response to which ~~Broucher~~Brocher gave her 'a certain kerchief which she gratefully accepted from him, kissing him and tying the kerchief around her neck'.[0] This witness testimony, provided by Joan's own stepfather, demonstrating her alleged acceptance of two highly gendered dress accessories is damning to her case as it suggests considerable enthusiasm on her part. Joan's supposed tying of the gifted kerchief around her own neck is reminiscent of modern women accepting gifts of necklaces from their male partners. Indeed, kerchiefs were an important garment for women as they provided a modest covering to the head, neck and upper chest, indicating that Brocher was perhaps intending to signal sartorially that Joan had changed from maiden to wife – which Joan seems to have enthusiastically accepted. The act is performative in the way it proudly shows

[0] Caroline Walker-Bynum has demonstrated in her authoritative book that '[one] of the strongest social links between male and female lay in the fact that the wife or servant cooked what the husband or lord provided…' , *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1988), p.277.

[0] LMA, MS DL/C/A/001/MS09065, fols. 22r-24r and ~~written up~~translated in *Love and Marriage in Late Medieval London*, trans. Shannon McSheffrey (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), pp.37-40 and McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex and Civic Culture*, pp.33-34. The case is transcribed in the Latin in *Depositions in the Diocese of London Consistory Court, 1486-97*, pp.26-30. ~~https://consistory.org/2022/02/22/brocher-c-cardif/.~~ The witness quoted here was her own stepfather, which suggests ~~Broucher~~Brocher had important familial support and that Joan was largely fighting the case on her own.

[0] Ibid.

connection to, and more darkly, ownership of the woman by the man through his providing her with clothing. ~~Although Joan no longer wanted to~~

In these cases of contested marriage and engagement contracts, gifts of clothing demonstrated that some men, such as Knollys and Crote, were deliberately and with malintent, utilising the practice of gift giving to manipulate women into sexually exploitative relationships. Similarly, men might steal items of clothing or jewellery from a woman in an attempt to pass it off as signifying a marriage contract, as in the case of Maud Knyff who found herself forced to convince the consistory court that she had not given Robert Grene the items he was refusing to give back to her. Maud accused Grene of having stolen firstly 'a gold ring with a blue gem from her finger'~~–~~' and later that he picked up a kerchief she had dropped whilst using it to bandage a wound and refused to return it to her.[0] Here the symbolism of the kerchief and the practice of giving emotive textile items which were linked to their wearer, as Maud's kerchief was, trapped her into a situation where she was forced to argue that the thief who had her possessions was not her betrothed.

In analysing these cases of contested marriage contracts, it is crucial to remember that these women were facing the potential legal endorsements of their own sexual assaults. This is because if the court found that the contract had been valid, the woman would have been compelled to go through with the arrangement or face financial or other penalties which she might not have been able to afford. This meant that she was entering into an unwanted life-long commitment with a man who had taken her to court in order to have her despite her obvious disagreement and who might be equally unconcerned at her unwillingness to consummate the marriage. She ran the risk of contracting a life-long marriage with a man who might have been as belligerent at forcing the giving of the conjugal debt as he had been about the gifts given to create the engagement.

[0] McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture*, p.65 and transcribed in part in McSheffrey's ~~Shannon McSheffrey, trans.,~~ *Love and Marriage in Late Medieval London*~~, (, Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995),~~ pp.67-71~~69~~.

Gifts of textiles especially played crucial roles in the realising of, and as evidence of broken, marriage contracts between men and women. Textiles and accessories such as purses, kerchiefs, girdles and particularly gloves were evidently much prized gifts material objects. They were also highly symbolic objects within the cultural imagination and could hold deep emotional value for the giver or the receiver. It is clear from the consistory court records, however, that men tended to purchase gifts for the women they were interested in contracting marriage, or casual sex from. Conversely, it is likelier that women tended to give gifts of textiles or small accessories as this was more financially and materially accessible. They may have been able to make the items themselves, thereby demonstrating their textile skills and workmanship expected of wifehood. Making an item for a potential spouse would have imbued the item with emotional meaning, and making the item, while perhaps not financially valuable, certainly made it emotionally valuable to the maker, as well as the receiver. Yet when engagements turned sour, the mention of gifts in court records could be an important element of whether the case was successful or not. Mentioning gifts, particularly highly symbolic gifts of clothing, at a trial could work in the woman's favour by demonstrating that her counterpart had, in bad faith, given her gifts purely to exploit her sexually which might then force him to consent to marry her. However, if she had given gifts such as lace or her own kerchief, she risked being forced into a marriage with a man which had already started with bad feeling, putting her in danger. In this way, gifts of clothing were used as evidence of courtship or even a marital contract in court records, but gifts could also be used to manipulate women in exploitative relationships where the unequal power dynamic which exposed women to danger were made visible through the gifts of textiles and dress.

Dress, Danger, Friendship and Community

So far, this thesis has for the most part demonstrated the ways in which women's dress has been condemned, stolen, destroyed or used to trap or entice women into dangerous situations or relationships. The final part of this chapter highlights the presence of the communal sharing of dress amongst medieval women, and in so doing, demonstrates further the bonds that they shared, and the ways they used dress to protect and benefit themselves and the women they cared about.

Emotional connections and relationships between people could be demonstrated through what they gave to others after their death, and clothes were often the emotive object in question. Of course, someone might wish to pass on items of gendered clothing for a variety of non-sentimental reasons. From a practical standpoint, textiles and clothing were expensive items which would be repurposed until they were just rags. Similarly, bequeathing a woman's kirtle to another woman meant that fewer alterations might need to be made in order for the garment to be used and worn. This would then mean it could be worn soon after the death of the original owner and perhaps be a comforting reminder in the months and years after the death. It could also be that an unaltered garment would act as a clearer memento of the original owner, encouraging the recipient to keep the deceased in their thoughts and perhaps feeling a sense of physical closeness as they wear the garment their loved one wore in life so that the textiles become 'repositories of deeply valued personal memories'.[0] The will of the Yorkshire woman, Elenæ de Bilburgh, which dates from 1341, suggests she had a very close relationship with her sisters to whom she gave all her clothes: 'I give and leave my sister Margery a jacket of blue cloth furred. Likewise I give and leave to my sister Juliana a pink tunic. The rest of the goods that are truly mine after my debts have been paid, I give and

[0] Lou Taylor, *The Study of Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) p.4.

leave to my sister Isabella'.[0] It seems clear that Elenæ was reinforcing the close sororal bonds she had in life through the giving of clothing after her death.

In 1431, Isabel Gregory left Idany Hale, a woman from the 'spetill [hospital]'– but more likely an almshouse – a number of household items such as coal and cushions, as well as 'a cloke and a gounne of russet, furrid'.[0] This assemblage of household items and clothing given to a woman so poor she lived on charity demonstrates Isabel's desire to posthumously provide both domestically and physically for Idany. These bequests had the added spiritual benefit of demonstrating Isabel's Christian virtue of charity, an act which would have reflected well on her in the afterlife. Although russet in this context likely referred to an 'inexpensive, woollen cloth' rather than to the reddish colour understood today, the detail that it was lined with fur demonstrates that it was created with practicality and comfort in mind, both of which would then be conferred on Idany with the cloak adding at extra layer of warmth against the harsh winters in an almshouse.[0] To her daughter, Isabel left 'a blew goune and a green kyrtyll, and a schete'.[0] Both of the gowns and the bedsheet would have been understood as deeply personal items, as her daughter would have seen her mother wearing the gowns which, along with the bedsheet, may have retained her scent, creating a sensory, as well as physical, reminder of her mother. These textiles connected Isabel's body with that of her daughter's through the sharing of her clothes and her bed sheet, perhaps acting to reinforce and remind her daughter of their maternal link.

These bequests give a sense of women wanting to provide for men and women in their family and those in need within their community, perhaps hoping that the presence of the dead person's clothing in the recipients' lives would cause their memory to be brought to

[0] *'Item do et lego Margeriæ sorori meae unum courtby de blueto cum fururâ. Item do et lego Julianæ sorori mea unam tunicam de appelblome. Residuum vero omnium bonorum meorum post debita mea solute do Isabellam sororem meam'*, Sylvester *et al*, Medieval *Dress and Textiles*, pp.30-31.
[0] Ibid, p.49.
[0] Ibid, pp.389, 374.
[0] Ibid, p.49.

mind more frequently, likely encouraging both Idany and her daughter to offer prayers for the safety of Isabel's soul. In this way, the clothes functioned as a comfort in grief, and as a tool to strengthen social bonds.

In 1303, Robert Mannyng wrote in his text, *Handlyng Synne*:

> Wymmen þat go fro stret to stret
> One or ouþer for to mete,
> Of pryde cumþ swych desyre,
> For þey haue on here feyre atyre.
> But she wyle to þe prest þat telle,
> She may þar fore go to helle.
> For yn as moche as she douþ men synne,
> Yn as moche shal she haue plyght ynne,
> And wymmen haue y seye of þo
> Þat borwe cloþes yn to karol go,
> Þat pore pryde god hyt loþes,
> Þat make hem proud of ouþer mens cloþes.[0]
>
> [Women go from street to street to meet one another: that desire comes from pride because they have on their best clothes. Unless she tells that to a priest, she might go to hell because of it. For in as much as she is causing men to sin, so much she will be in danger from it. And for women, have I spoken of them, who borrow clothes to go dancing in, God hates that poor pride that makes them show off in other people's clothes]

In Robert Mannyng's criticism of women who go out to meet friends in their finest clothes and who borrow clothes from one another in order to look their best to go dancing in, he labels the motivations for these practices as pride, with the implication that vanity and a desire to compete with one's peers in the reasoning behind wearing clothes that are not their own in public.[0] As we saw in Chapter One, wearing one's best clothing could make one look and feel beautiful and it is this pride in one's appearance and one's dress that Mannyng finds not only distasteful, but dangerous. In Mannyng's view, the women he observed intended to inspire jealousy in their female peers by their attractive clothing. However, they also risked endangering their souls by 'causing men to sin' by looking at them in their 'best clothes'.

[0] Robert Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, lines 3451-3462 in Louise Sylvester *et al*, Gale Owen-Crocker and Martin Chambers, eds., *Medieval Dress and Textiles in Britain, n: A Multilingual Sourcebook*, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), p.151.

[0] The word 'borwe' when used as a noun had a legal definition which could mean something deposited as a pledge or even a ransom, the verb used here does not seem to confer the same as it seems to describe an action within networks of friendships that is strengthened by the sharing of clothing; 'borgh', *MED*, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED5560/track?counter=1&search_id=905849, [accessed 20th April 2025].

Again, as in Chapter One, we see a moralising cleric turning the female body and the clothes on it into something than threatens the safety of men's souls and their own.

There can be little doubt that an element of Mannyng's reprehension about groups of women meeting together and dancing is the lack of male supervision which would allow for women to gossip, share information and bond.[0] Instead, I argue that beneath Mannyng's diatribe, he was acutally making an observation about medieval female friendships and the role clothing played in strengthening them. Beneath the layers of condemnation, Mannyng has described women dressing up to visit each other and be seen together in public spaces. He has provided evidence of women sharing clothing in order to benefit and help each other. Far from describing proud, deceitful women parading around to enrage other women or make them feel inferior, or in borrowed clothes to disgusies their true selves, I argue that Mannyng has described communities of women who were willing to lend garments to each other for their mututal benefit and in so doing, undermined financial restrictions on their purchasing power while also deepening and strengthening female friendship through a sense of solidarity within the group. Mannyng assumes that the women he has observed going about in their, or borrowed, finery are dressing for the medieval male gaze and while, in a deeply patriarchal society in which a woman's life prospects in part depended on the wealth of a husband, the possibility that medieval women also dressed for themselves and were lifted up by their female friendships who shared clothing must not be overlooked. It suggests that communities of medieval women turned clothing into a communal resource for the exclusive benefit of other women. Whether it be an emotional benefit of feeling good in different clothes than your own or feeling beautiful and being able to attract a potential husband which would bring

[0] The verb, 'to gossip', is now of course a highly gendered word which targets women who share information and which connotes an unpleasant, back stabbing or competitive quality. However, the word can trace its roots back to at least the Middle Ages when it referred to a child's godparents, regardless of gender, as well as a companion; *MED*, 'godsibbe', < https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED18998/track?counter=1&search_id=2496369>, [accessed 23rd November 2024]. For the social function of gossip, see Chris Wickham, 'Gossip and Resistance Among the Medieval Peasantry', *Past & Present*, vol. 160 (1998), 3-24.

with it further material benefits, there was clearly a culture of sharing clothing between women for mutual benefit.

Conclusions

Clothing was a highly visual language which contributed to the creation and performance of identity, including one's gender. When placed within complex networks of social bonds, whether romantic, sexual or in friendship, clothing performed nuanced roles. The giving of clothing and articles of dress as gifts was well known to be able to create unequal, and potentially dangerous, power dynamics which might permit the exploitation of the women who received them. Items such as girdles, gloves and kerchiefs in particular functioned as emotive, symbolic gifts which played a crucial role in the courtship between men and women, and could be used as convincing evidence that a marriage had been agreed on. Once given, it became difficult for a man, or a woman, to persuade others that it had not been intended as a romantic gift ahead of the exchange of vows. While there is evidence that men tried to extricate themselves from engagements claiming they only ever intended the gifts to be in exchange of sex, medieval women were fierce in their pursuit of a man through the courts if they felt wronged. In these cases, the highly symbolic gifts act as convincing evidence that an intimate relationship had developed and were made materially visible, and perhaps even irreversible, through the giving of clothes as gifts.

Much of this thesis has looked at the worst experiences in a medieval woman's life, from rapes, to kidnappings, sexual assaults and murder but this chapter has sought to highlight the instances in which medieval women fought for agency in the courts and community through the sharing of garments between friends or pursuing men through the courts for broken promises or sexual exploitation.

In analysing the emotional value of textile objects given between people, and the sensory knowledge used in the creation of such items by women, we can see how material items underscored or undermined medieval relationships. I have argued that the hierarchical imbalance that was so pervasive in medieval society was woven into fabric of the fourteenth-century purse of Griselda now held at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Through analysis of court records, I have shown how women presented the giving and receiving of textile objects and accessories as evidence that they had been wronged or even sexually exploited. Because of the intense emotional value of gifts of clothing, textiles and accessories, they could easily be used to deceive and manipulate women by mimicking accepted courtship rituals. However, it was just this value that made clothing an important player in strengthening emotional relationships between female friends and family.-

Conclusions

For the final time, let us turn to Isabel Carpenter. To understand the meaning of ‘in hir best arraie’–’ is to tease apart the final hours of the life of a young girl who had been stripped of her clothing and murdered by her husband. This ‘arraie’–’ had been the clothing she felt most beautiful in – clothing which had likely been her wedding dress only weeks before and might then have been the last garment she was put in to before she was lowered in to her grave. The remark that she had been ‘in hir best arraie’–’ was, as this thesis has demonstrated, in no way insignificant. It was a deeply meaningful observation by the community who found her body and sought justice for her. They were aware for the complex symbols contained within her dress, and the inclusion of the phrase reveals the nuanced relationship between dress, identity and violence.

To understand the culture of Middle Ages in England, one must understand what was worn because to know that is to understand how a people constructed their identities, how they moved and felt in the items they clothed their bodies in and how they ‘read’–’ their peers. To understand how a people presented themselves visually to their community is to get closer to understanding how they saw themselves. Thus, this thesis has taken great pains to reconstruct the physical, sensorial, emotional and visual aspects of dress and of the wearing of clothes in late medieval England. Through close analysis of a plethora of visual, literary, legal and religious sources, the interplay between dress, violence, gender and the body has been more fully explored and interrogated.

This thesis has taken a thoroughly multidisciplinary approach in its exploration of the complex relationship between women, their clothing and the violence committed against them, in late medieval England. Crucially, it has opened up discussion about the intersection between violence enacted on the body and the significance of the clothing that covers that body. It has argued that medieval England was a place of danger for many women, who faced

courts which were often intolerant or sceptical of their claims of sexual abuse, the threat of being robbed of their bodies and then also their clothes, and who were driven by such desperation to escape domestic violence that they would flee naked into the street. Medieval women also faced milder, although no less harmful, forms of violence, from being excluded from spiritually important spaces to enduring repeated accusations of being the embodiment of sin with their clothing acting to accentuate and draw attention to the body beneath. Yet, this research has shown that in spite of the condemnations, the threats to their bodies and their lives, many medieval women were able to use clothing as a means for protection, for enrichment and as a tool for empowerment.

A defining contribution of this thesis has been to analyse the semiotics of dress in late medieval English legal records and cross-analyse it with descriptions and depictions of clothing in other source types. Where previously, historians have accepted the mention of dress, its colour, or what happened to it in relation to the broader actions, I have applied an understanding of the semiotics of dress and its place within the cultural imagination of the period through approaches used by literary historians of the period to get closer to the emotional and physical realities of medieval women. I have demonstrated the role of clothing in holding emotion and shaping identity, as well as its place within the medieval Christian framework as an external marker of internal virtue or sin. Through analysis of a variety of sources, I have shown that women and men interacted with their own and other's dress in many complex ways and that women could be both manipulated by and also manipulate others through their own clothing. Far from medieval women always being meek and obedient, this thesis demonstrates that they could be creative, clever and courageous.

This discussion has advanced the argument that medieval women's lives were even more intimately linked with textiles than throughe spinning, weaving, sewing and laundering. Indeed, a woman's clothing might help identify her in death, might allow her to craft her

identity in a law court and convince a jury of the guilt of her attacker, and changing her dress might allow her to pass through social or spiritual barriers closed off to other women. Furthermore, by drawing out the implicit and immanent symbolism of dress that often went unspoken, this research has examined the silent language of dress more fully. This thesis has argued that by viewing clothing through the lenses of violence, danger and safety, a greater understanding of the experiences, motives and actions of the women as victim/survivor can be gleaned.

Utilising a thoroughly interdisciplinary approach, this thesis has offered a new methodology for the study of gender violence in the Middle Ages. By combining analysis of legal records, literature and material culture and comparing the experiences laid out in the legal sources with descriptions of dress and behaviour in the literature, a clearer picture of the emotional realities of the former can be seen. By doing this, the research offered here provides a more nuanced understanding of the intersection between lived realities, the body and the cultural imagination, foregrounding the experiences of medieval women in the society in which they lived.

It is necessary to acknowledge that this research has been limited by a few factors. Firstly, the lack of women's voices in medieval literature makes it difficult to get a clear insight into their views. While the work of Gwerful Mechain, Margery Kempe and the women's songs from the pastourelles can inform historical research greatly, their contributions pale in comparison to the abundance of male-authored works which so frequently lend their voices to the cacophony of misogynist writings. These ranged from clerical writers to paternalistic fathers, such as Geoffrey de la Tour de Landry, who were keen to impress upon young women the importance of aspiring to the feminine ideal, even if that meant they were to accept that violence against their bodies could be justified.

~~Secondly, the brevity with which the cases of gender violence were so often recorded proved a limiting factor. The more shocking crimes like those committed against Isabel Carpenter were recorded in detail. However this contrasts with the sheer number of rape cases in other record types for which a mere line or two was though sufficient to document the women's traumas. Eyre records are particularly scant, with stock phrases such as '[Woman] appeals [man] of rape' or 'of rape and robbery' hiding the true horror and denying full attention to the woman's pain. An absence of extraneous details such as the victim/survivor's clothing in many court records should not be viewed as indicative of a lack of significance placed on the clothing of the victim/survivor. Clearly, this is not the case as when clothing is mentioned it is recorded with attention and detail. Jurists, too, placed importance on the dress of victim/survivors, with damaged dress acting as key evidence that assault had happened. So any lack of detail in the court records concerning dress is likely far more indicative of the formulaic structure of wording and the strained workload that clerks of courts were forced to contend with, unable to waste time or ink on the details of a case.~~Absences and silences in the legal records present another stumbling block .The brevity with which cases were recorded limits their availability for detailed analysis: on entering a court, women's voices were translated through Latin and vernacular languages, through their navigation of the court system, through male clerks' decisions to record some things and not others, or the unpicking of their stories by judges and juries. This necessitates the use of a wide variety of sources to fill in gaps and to create an informed patchwork of women's experiences of violence, their bodies and their clothing.~~-~~

~~Despite these hindrances,~~ F~~f~~uture research could examine these themes in further detail and carry forward this comparative methodology and sartorial semiotics ~~-~~employed here. Analysis of how clothing was used and how violence was shown in the literature of Wales, Ireland, Scotland and Cornwall may well prove fruitful. Equally, casting the net

eastwards into Europe and using dress as a source to analyse gender and identity in Norse, French or Italian literature would open up a wealth of material and a new approach to medieval European dress, identity and literature.

Through this research, I have covered numerous instances in which women were subjected to violence, trauma and pain at the hands of men, but crucially we have seen how medieval women employed dress to navigate and even subvert the expectations of the patriarchal society they lived in, allowing them at times to overcome the aggression directed at them. We have seen how dress was used to formulate and display women's identities, and how, through recorded speech and intimate letters, women spoke about their own clothes, indicating an understanding of this identity formation through dress. Through analysis of a vast range of medieval sources, we have seen how it is possible to gain a deeper insight into the medieval cultural imagination and material culture. In doing so, I have demonstrated just how interdisciplinary research into historic dress should not be overlooked because of its historic association with fickle fashions and female ephemera, but is an inn ~~n in~~valuable methodological approach for analysing the past.

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