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The Metamorphosis of Monsters:
Christian Identity in Medieval England and the Life of St Margaret

by

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines several late medieval Lives of St. Margaret written in England to show that the monsters of the Life offer both a synchronic and diachronic perspective on the construction of Christian sexual identity in both professional religious and lay communities in medieval England.

St. Margaret was one of the most popular saints in medieval England, and monsters play a key role in her martyrdom. Throughout her narrative, Margaret is accosted by a demonic prefect, hungry dragon, and loquacious black demon. Having defeated each monster in turn, she is taken to the place of her martyrdom where she prays for supernatural boons for her adherents.

As a virgin martyr, Margaret’s resistance to these monstrous aggressors (and the suffering which she undergoes as a result) is the most important aspect of her story: not only does it represent Margaret’s raison d’être, but also the source of the virtus that benefits her cult. Previous scholarship has focused on Margaret’s resistance to Olibrius as a means to understand her impact on the identities of her virginal or maternal adherents, and on Margaret’s speech and deeds as important socio-cultural data which can be used to inform the context of Margaret’s medieval readers.

This dissertation also treats each version in question as a source for information on Margaret’s medieval audience, but rather than concentrating upon Margaret’s speech
and actions as previous research has, this dissertation instead focuses on the monsters that populate Margaret’s *Life*. This focus allows a new evaluation of Margaret’s simultaneous appeal to virgins and mothers through the polysemous figure of the dragon, the didactic elements of the black demon’s speech, the competing claims of religious identity in the figure of Olibrius, and the importance and content of the prayers at the end of Margaret’s *Life* for her maternal adherents. Equally important is that the diachronic focus of the dissertation reveals that while Margaret herself seems to change little over time – showing a slow metamorphosis from demonic adversary to maternal advocatrix – the monsters are more volatile, changing character as needed to create a narrative that constantly exists in the reader’s present.
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Introduction

BL Harley 2974 is a small codex bound in brown calf-skin with gilt edging on its pages. The codex is a Book of Hours and contains several illustrations, including an image of Margaret bursting from the back of a dragon. In this image, Margaret wears a blue cape covering a red dress. She stares down at the creature that has swallowed her with a look that could be either sadness or disdain. Since most of her lower body is covered by the creature’s outstretched wings, the presence of blood to the right side of Margaret – almost blending in to the dragon’s side – is the only signifier that betrays her bloody, violent exit from the creature. A bit of blue fabric can still be seen in the dragon’s mouth, indicating that the creature was in the middle of devouring her when she so rudely interrupted its dinner with her escape.

Over the course of writing this dissertation, I have seen dozens upon dozens of such images. In some, God is present in the form of a dove, in others a comforting hand that reaches from heaven, and sometimes (as in the BL Harley image) not at all. Depictions of the dragon vary from two legs to four, and a myriad colors including gold, red, green, blue, and black have been used to color its scales and wings. Some depictions – like BL Harley 2974 – feature a dragon that looks defeated, perhaps even timid, but others do not shy from depicting a beast full of ferocity and violence. In all, the dragon appears to be stuck between a state of life and death; unaware that the very thing it so recently overcame has overcome it in turn. Indeed, its look of defeat could be one of surprise.

Yet, at the same time that Margaret has defeated the dragon, she is also inextricably bound to it in her iconography. How would we identify Margaret without her
dragon? Contemplating the image once again, one finds that there are no identifying features to Margaret’s clothing, hair, face, halo, or surroundings with which a viewer – medieval or modern – could tell her apart from another female saint. Rather, it is Margaret bursting from her dragon that allows her to be easily identified. In this bursting, the only thing to indicate that she and the dragon are separate entities is the blood upon the dragon’s back and the dress emerging from the dragon’s mouth. Were it not for these indicators, Margaret would appear something like a centaur – half man, half beast: a monstrous hybrid – in her depictions.

Indeed, the centaur is a productive image in light of which to consider Margaret and her dragon. The top and bottom of the centaur are simply mundane creatures, common to everyday life in the antique and middle ages: the human and the horse. In their separate states, there is nothing unusual about either, nothing worthy of note. It is only when combined together that they signify something rare and extraordinary.

Similarly, Margaret is intrinsically tied to her draconic adversary. Before her encounter with the dragon, Margaret is full of fear and worried that her resolve will break in the face of her persecutor’s tortures. Once Margaret is swallowed by the dragon, she is capable of defeating a demon with her bare hands, causing miracles to occur, and facing her persecutor’s torments without flinching. It is as if the dragon functions as an alembic, separating fear and concern from supernatural virtue and leaving only the latter within her as she bursts from its stomach.
Of course, this also suggests the inseparability of Margaret from her monster, a suggestion that I would extend across the many monsters of her *Life*. Indeed, without the influence of these many monsters, Margaret would not have a narrative at all! It is Olibrius, a demonic monster in mortal skin, who plucks Margaret from her pastoral life and threatens to violate her virginity through torture. It is the dragon that galvanizes the
saintly *virtus* that allows her to perform her miracles and pray to God for the benefit of her adherents. It is the black demon that she subjugates who divulges important demonological lore to her medieval readers. Without her monsters, Margaret’s tale would not have ended in her martyrdom nor would it have reason to promise some of the extraordinary benefits to parturient mothers and their children which drove Margaret’s popularity. In the absence of monsters, Margaret’s public memory would have faded away.

While previous research has focused primarily upon the actions and speech of Margaret herself, I propose to give attention to the “other half” of the centaur – her monstrous adversaries. Through my analysis, I will show how the monsters allow the *Life* to speak to a variety of audiences to inform a variety of different Christian identities. The dragon will be shown to be a the polysemous figure that allowed Margaret to function as an exemplar for a virgin’s battle against sexual temptation as well as to provide comfort to mothers in labor who had succumbed to sexual temptation. The black demon is a mouthpiece for the various didactic teachings (usually concerned with sex) of Margaret’s redactors, intended sometimes for professional religious and sometimes for laity. Olibrius, a human figure connected in each version to the demonic, also becomes associated with a plurality of religious identifiers, allowing him to represent the world beyond the boundaries of the Christian community, boundaries which he strives to solidify against incursion through his torture and execution of Margaret. Finally, I will show the way in which Margaret’s prayers – and thus the cultic figure of Margaret – are dependent upon the monsters of her *Life*. 
More broadly, this dissertation will show that Margaret’s monstrous antagonists are a source of valuable socio-cultural data. As her redactors consciously and unconsciously alter the details of Margaret’s narrative, they embed socio-cultural information into the characters of the Life. While previous research has focused on the character of Margaret in her various Lives, this dissertation will show that it is frequently Margaret’s antagonists – an all-too-often overlooked element of Saints’ Lives literature – that manifest the majority of these changes through their ethnicity, body, religious persuasion, and dialogue. Through an examination of Margaret’s monsters, this dissertation will show the ways in which a dominant cultural group protected their supposed homogeneity by inscribing the imagined hybridity of their opponents on the adversaries of the saint.

In performing these analyses, I will follow a trail that twists through five centuries of literary representations of Margaret. In this literary menagerie, we will encounter Latin prose Lives meant for monastic audiences contemplating an exemplar of chastity to romantic, poetic versions in Middle English in which Margaret is an orphaned princess captured by a Saracen necromancer. The analyses throughout will show the unity of Margaret and her monstrous opponents, a unity that allows the Lives to consistently speak to contemporary audiences and inform their lay and religious sexual identities.

*The Lives of St. Margaret*

While several Latin traditions of the Life exist, the Mombritius tradition is the most popular tradition of the Life in England (or elsewhere, for that matter) and

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1 I have chosen to make use of the term “tradition” to define broadly interrelated groups of the *Life of St. Margaret* such as the Mombritius, Casinensis, Turin, etc (see below). My choice is guided by the fact that
contributed to the vast majority of vernacular Lives. Edited as Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina (BHL) 5303 by the Bollandists, the Mombritius tradition – named after the early modern publisher of the Life – is one of the oldest traditions of Margaret’s tale. Its earliest known manuscripts date to the 9th century and given the number of copies from this period, the tradition was likely already quite popular. The earliest example of the Mombritius tradition in England is in the manuscript Paris, BN, lat. 5574 which will feature prominently in this dissertation.

While this dissertation challenges the notion that various Mombritius Lives and their vernacular derivatives are similar enough to be lumped together, it is nonetheless important to orient the reader about the broad events that typically characterize a Mombritius-type narrative before moving on to the specifics that separate the individual redactions in manuscripts. By way of a brief synopsis, the Mombritius version of the Life opens with the narrator, Theotimus, offering his readers a brief autobiography. Trained in the study of literature and a fervent Christian, Theotimus decided to purchase books so that he could write a complete history of the trials that Margaret underwent. Before

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3 These traditions include BHL 5304 (the Casinensis tradition), BHL 5305 (the Paris tradition), BHL 5308 (the Rebdorf tradition), and the Turin tradition, formerly designated under BHL 5303 but shown by JE Cross to be distinct from the designation. For more information on these versions of the Life including their principal manuscripts, cf. Clayton and Magennis 1994, chp 2. The Casinensis tradition of the Life, which will also be featured in one chapter of this dissertation, will be discussed below.

4 Clayton and Magennis list five 9th century copies of the Mombritius tradition: Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Augiensis perg. 32 (Aug); Saint-Omer Bibl. mun 202 and 257; Reims, Bibl. mun., 1395 (K. 784), and Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, 649 (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 7-8).

5 In all likelihood, Theotimus is as fictional as most scholars regard Margaret herself to be. Due to the ahistorical nature of her cult, the Vatican suppressed it in 1969.
proceeding to his narrative, Theotimus exhorts his audience to listen to the *Life of St. Margaret* in order to assist with the salvation of their souls.

The narrative of Margaret’s *Life* begins with a brief backstory. Margaret herself is the child of a pagan priest and his wife. Reviled by her father from an early age since she was filled with the Holy Spirit, Margaret is given to a foster mother some distance from Antioch to be raised. She is so taken with the love of God that she devotes her life and virginity to Jesus Christ.

In those days, there is a cruel leader who rules over Antioch, the governor Olibrius. Hateful of Christians, Olibrius takes every opportunity that he can find to consign them to shackles. However, when this same governor passes by Margaret tending her foster mother’s sheep, he is so struck by her beauty that he decides he will either purchase her if she is a slave or marry her if she is free.

Sending his knights to bring Margaret back, Olibrius is shocked to hear that Margaret has devoted her virginity to Christ and locks her in prison while he debates how he will destroy her commitment to Christianity. Subjecting Margaret to a series of tortures, Olibrius demands that she recant her faith, worship his idols, and marry him. Margaret, despite being beset by tormentors on all sides, maintains her faith and commitment to her virginity and is eventually sent to prison once more to await another round of torture.

As Margaret enters the prison, she prays that God reveal her true opponent. Suddenly, an enormous dragon appears in the corner of the cell. Overcome by fear, Margaret swoons and the dragon swallows her whole. However, this is not Margaret’s end: the sign of the cross that Margaret made during her prayers instead expands in the
dragon’s stomach, splitting it in two and freeing her. A dove appears to congratulate Margaret on her success against the creature.

Emerging from the dragon, Margaret then beholds a black demon sitting on the floor. Grabbing the demon by the hair, Margaret viciously beats it into submission and demands that the demon divulge who it is and what it does. The simpering creature admits that it is the demon that inspires sexual lust in others and offers Margaret interesting tidbits of demonological lore before Margaret banishes him into the earth.

Bolstered by her success against her demonic aggressors in prison, Margaret emerges to confront Olibrius again. As Olibrius subjects her to further tortures, Margaret performs various miracles including shattering an enormous jar in which she is meant to be boiled alive, causing an earthquake to occur, and receiving another visitation by a dove. In the wake of these miracles, thousands convert to Christianity and are subsequently martyred by Olibrius.

Eventually, Olibrius realizes that he is incapable of swaying Margaret and sends her to be executed. At the place of her execution, Margaret begs her executioner for a moment to pray. Being granted momentary reprieve, she prays for supernatural benefits for her adherents and is martyred. Her body (or sometimes, just her head) is then born aloft towards heaven by angels and demons are tormented in the wake of her ascension.

This broad narrative informs the majority of the versions of the *Life* under consideration in this dissertation. As mentioned, the Latin *Life* in Paris, BN, lat. 5574 will be frequently treated, along with another Latin version in London, BL Cotton Nero E.1 that is similar in content. Two Old English *Lives* – the versions of the *Life* in London, BL Cotton Tiberius A.iii and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303 – have similar narrative
structures, but are likely informed by an older Pre-Mombritius tradition that has since been lost. Finally, Middle English Lives based upon the Mombritius tradition will also fall under consideration, including the versions of Margaret from the Katherine Group, the South English Legendary, and Codex Ashmole 61, and the “Stanzaic Life” and the Lyfe written by John Lydgate.6

It also bears mention that one other tradition of the Life will be featured in this dissertation, the Caligula tradition. First identified by Elizabeth Francis, the Caligula – so named for the manuscript in which it was discovered, London, BL Cotton Caligula A.viii – differs from the Mombritius narrative in several ways, most notably for this dissertation in the fact that the Caligula dragon does not swallow Margaret, and Margaret’s prayers at the end of her Life contain blessings for parturient women whereas the majority of the Mombritius versions do not. It is for these notable divergences that the Caligula is addressed in this dissertation (specifically, in chapter 4). However, since the majority of the vernacular versions derive their material from the Mombritius tradition, this tradition will not be treated as extensively.

State of the Question

The various Lives of Margaret have benefited from a significant amount of scholarly attention, both textual and interpretive. I work from several important and thorough editions of the vitae in Latin, Old and Middle English. In the Old English Lives of St. Margaret (1994), Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis edit the two extent Old English versions of the Life of St Margaret (those in BL Cotton Tiberius A.iii and

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6 Editions will be discussed below in the “State of the Question” and elaborated upon further in each chapter.
Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303) and the Latin version in Paris, BN, lat. 5574.  

Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse (1990) by Bella Millet and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, contextualize the Westmidlands English text of the version of St. Margaret belonging to the Katherine Group, including a discussion of the individuals for whom it was likely written and the way in which such texts might have been used. In Middle English Legends of Women Saints (2003), Sherry Reames offers transcriptions of several Middle English Lives, including the Stanzaic Life and Lydgate’s Lyfe of St. Margaret. Finally, The South English Legendary (1956) by Charlotte D’Evelyn and Anna Jean Mill and Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse (2008) by George Shuffelton both contain additional versions of Margaret in Middle English.

Branching off from these critical editions is an array of interpretive research. Since the majority of this dissertation is concerned with the reception of Margaret by her audience and the Lives’ roles in building lay and religious sexual identities, it is convenient to treat first that secondary research that examines the way Margaret’s vita informs identities. Since I treat the information of identity as in part governed by the monsters in the tale, I will then turn to the research already extant on the monsters of the Life.

A significant portion of the scholarship on Margaret focuses on her ability to inform the identities of female virginal readers. Far and away, the Katherine Group Margaret has been the subject of the most research in this regard. Maud Burnett

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7 In addition to these translations and transcriptions, Clayton and Magennis offer a wide variety of information regarding the structure of the cult of Margaret in Anglo-Saxon England (particularly feast days and celebrations), manuscript information, and linguistic analyses of the Old English versions.

8 Such studies frequently make use of ideas from the field of virginity studies which will be discussed in more detail below.
McInerney’s “Rhetoric, Power and Integrity in the Passion of the Virgin Martyr” suggests that the Margaret of the Katherine Group – although never specifically encouraging speech among its readers – was an example of a virginal figure whose speech was active and transformative as well as being rooted in the female body.\(^9\) The prison scene of Margaret was also rooted in a cell much like those that medieval anchoresses would have occupied, a feature of the story that Karolyn Kinane argues would have encouraged imitation of the saint.\(^10\) In *Choosing Not to Marry: Women and Autonomy in the Katherine Group*, Julie Hassel argues that the five texts of the Katherine Group are powerful representations of independence for virginal women, and represent an argument for virginity based on the positive benefits of autonomy from marriage.\(^11\) Julie Fromer’s “Spectators of Martyrdom: Corporeality and Sexuality in the *Liflade ant te Passiun of Seinte Margarete*” focuses on the language of corporeality and the scenes of torture in the Katherine Group Margaret, showing the way in which such language invites the reader to participate in and identify with Margaret’s suffering. Sarah Salih argues that the behavior of the virgin martyr under torture serves to build and reinforce the gendered identity of virginity that such women sought. It is under this torture that the virgin

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\(^9\) This position is reiterated again in her 2003 work *Eloquent Virgins: From Thecla to Joan of Arc*.
\(^10\) “To Imitate and Inspire Awe: Enclosure and Audiences in the Katherine Group Saints’ Lives”
\(^11\) The anchoresses of the Katherine Group were not the only individuals to use Margaret to build a virginal identity. Sarah Salih’s *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (2001) argues that Margery Kempe drew on a version – or versions – of Margaret that “‘celebrated the exploits of a charismatic heroine who defies society and humiliates her adversary’ and in which ‘the authority, strength, and desires of men are invariably the objects of contempt’” (Salih 2001, 196). Through her identification with Margaret, Salih argues that Margery Kempe sought to construct an identity which drew on virginal hagiography. Salih further argues that one of the reasons for Margery’s identification with Margaret may have been that Margaret was a patron of childbirth and Margery was herself a “veteran” of many births. That is, while Margery was engaging virginal hagiography in order to construct an identity, she herself had given birth to many children (14 to be exact!). While this is an excellent example of performative virginity, it also suggests the capacity for Margaret to speak to a variety of different roles and the potential permeability of those same roles.

Moreover, other articles have pointed to the use of Margaret as a model for male monastics as well such as Elaine Treharne’s “A Note on the Sensational Old English Life of St Margaret” (2012).
martyr’s body becomes “a body that is unfeminine, unashamed, impenetrable, [and] miraculously self-healing.”

While Margaret herself contributed much to the identity of medieval virgins, her Life has also been shown to impact the identities of her lay adherents as well. Tracey Anne-Cooper has argued that the Cotton Tiberius A.iii Life reflects both a monastic interest in the contemplation of Margaret and her chastity and the catechetical needs of the laity. Hugh Magennis shows that the Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303 Life is highly affective in nature, allowing vernacular audiences to see a personal spirituality and devotion modeled in Margaret. In “‘Lete Me Suffre’: Reading the Torture of St Margaret of Antioch in Late Medieval England,” Katherine Lewis suggests that contrary to previous scholarship which considers the torture scenes of the Life as “pornographic,” such scenes would have been read by Margaret’s devotees “in terms of voluntary self-sacrifice and the power that can be bestowed and shared through suffering.”

Work on Margaret’s maternal blessings during childbirth also represents a substantial portion of the research that focuses on Margaret’s lay audience. Wendy Larson’s “Who is the Master of This Narrative?: Maternal Patronage of the Cult of St. Margaret” addresses several texts, arguing that some versions endorse Margaret’s role as a protector during childbirth while others condemn it. For Larson, the texts that reject Margaret’s role as maternal patron “are the product of male clerical culture,” while

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12 “Performing Virginity: Sex and Violence in the Katherine Group”
13 Why Is Margaret’s the Only Life in London, BL, Cotton MS Tiberius A.iii?“
14 “‘Listen Now All and Understand’: Adaptation of Hagiographical Material for Vernacular Audiences in the Old English Lives of St. Margaret”
15 Lewis 2000, 82
16 Among them, the Golden Legend, Wace’s La Vie de Sainte Margarete, and the Katherine Group Margaret in addition to drawing on evidence from the South English Legendary and Old English Martyrology.
17 Larson 2002, 104
those that advocate such a role represent feminine influence and the impact of Margaret’s female adherents on the Life. Drawing primarily on the Golden Legend version and stained glass and screens, Women and Religion in Late Medieval Norwich by Carole Hill suggests that women in childbirth identified with Margaret as a “female icon of transcendent physical endurance” and that “St Margaret’s tortured and bloody body was perceived as a mirror or text of Christ’s passion, like him being ‘fecund’ in bearing and saving the world.”

Finally, there has also been some scholarly interest in the monsters of the Life as well. In Satan Unbound: The Devil in Old English Narrative Literature, Peter Dendle addresses the features of the black demon in the Old English Lives of Margaret including the curious attribution that the demon causes others to engage in bestiality. The religious character of Olibrius has also been addressed, with scholars claiming a Jewish identity for him in Paris, BN, lat. 5574 and a Saracen one in the Auchinleck Manuscript. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the importance of the figure for her iconography, the dragon has received excellent press: being read as a narrative of a veiled rape, as a sexual symbol, or as a conundrum of demonic corporeality.

There is also considerable research interest in the importance of the dragon to Margaret’s maternal audience. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne’s “The Apple’s Message,” hypothesizes that the dragon stood as a mimesis of the mother and that Margaret’s suffering transforms and redirects the meaning of her pain for the benefit of her parturient

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18 Hill 2010, 84
19 Cf. Anke Bernau’s “Blood, Jews and Monsters in Medieval Culture”
20 Cf. Siobhain Bly Calkin’s Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript
21 Cf. Katherine Gravdal’s Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law
23 Cf. Jocelyn Price (Wogan-Browne)’s The Virgin and the Dragon: The Demonology of Seinte Margarete
audience members. In *Not of Woman Born*, Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski argues that the dragon can instead be understood as the labor process itself. Via the dragon’s consumption, Margaret undergoes “torments not unlike those experienced during childbirth. Through her ability to sympathize with tormented women she became their ideal intercessor.” Finally, Jean-Pierre Albert’s “*La légende de sainte Marguerite: un mythe maïeutique?*” claims that the dragon should instead be considered the womb itself. In this sense, Margaret bursting from her dragon is the Virgin treading upon the snake: the defeat of the curse of Eve.

Finally, there has also been some diachronic work on the *Lives of St. Margaret*, work that has significantly impacted this dissertation. Wendy Larson’s previously mentioned “Who is the Master of This Narrative?: Maternal Patronage of the Cult of St. Margaret” attempts to track the informal power that women exerted over the *Life* through the dragon in Margaret’s iconography. Juliana Dresvina’s *The Cult of St. Margaret in Medieval England* was also an immensely important work for this study, tracking as it does the vast manuscript traditions of the *Life* in England.

**Approach**

Aside from these notable exceptions, one thing that the majority of the aforementioned studies have in common is that they tend to focus on one particular

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24 Blumenfeld-Kosinski 1990, 11
25 While not germane to the questions of religious or lay identity and the *Life of St. Margaret*, the following studies are of significant note in the study of the *Life*:
26 In particular, this article will serve as the framework for an expansion of Larson’s research in England in chapter 4. Another article by Larson, “The Role of Patronage and Audience in the Cults of Sts Margaret and Marina of Antioch,” is also interesting for its diachronic perspective, but less useful overall to this dissertation due to its partial Byzantine focus.
27 I am also indebted to Julie for her feedback on portions of this dissertation and for sharing her own research and manuscript work with me.
version of the *Life*. While this provides an excellent synchronic view of how one particular community made use of the text, it obscures the potential diachronic commonality in the way a particular tradition of the *Life* was used by its various audiences.

In order to draw out this commonality, I will be focusing the analyses in my chapters on the monsters of several different *Lives*. My choice to do so is based primarily upon the observation that the monsters in the Mombritius tradition are subject to surprising degrees of change in appearance, speech, and deed, while Margaret herself tends to be depicted in surprisingly similar ways across the tradition. Thus, if there is variation and adaptability to be found in Margaret’s message to her various audiences, it will be found in the changes to her adversaries, in the metamorphoses of her monsters, rather than in Margaret herself.

Thus, my approach to the *Lives of St. Margaret* relies upon an analysis of her monstrous adversaries, the method for which has been informed by several different scholarly trends. My initial interest in Margaret’s monsters was kindled by reading some of the books in the burgeoning area of monster studies, and it seems worthwhile to give a sketch of some of the major trends here and the places that monster studies informs my thought. Pioneered by John Block Friedman’s *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (1981), Jeffrey Jerome Cohen is often credited with bringing the field into its own. In his contribution to *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (1996), Cohen lays out several theses that have since largely defined the direction of monster studies. In brief, Cohen argues that monsters function as boundary markers. These boundaries can be physical (e.g. many authors placed monstrous races in the “East” such as the author of the
Old English work *Wonders of the East*\(^{28}\), but more often take the form of social (e.g. gender, race, sexuality)\(^{29}\) or cultural (political, economic, religious) boundaries that factor in the formation of identity.\(^{30}\)

As a boundary marker, the monster has three functions. First, the monster embodies that which lies outside the boundary it marks. As a manifestation of social and cultural boundaries, the monster reflects the perceptions of a particular in-group’s own identity in relation to an out-group or set of illicit practices. The boundaries most often demarcated by the presence of the monster are “cultural, political, racial, economic, [and] sexual.”\(^{31}\) In their capacity to signify such out-groups and practices, monsters function as gatekeepers for the boundaries they mark, warning those away who would cross such a boundary and violate the in-groups identity.\(^{32}\) In this sense, they contribute a sense of identity to the in-group through circumscribing what the in-group “is not” rather than what it “is.” Finally, while warning away, the monster also entices: although monsters clearly demarcate the boundaries of what is (un)acceptable, they also hint at the possibility of transgression and invite the indulgence of escapist fantasies. Thus, the

\(^{28}\) Cf. Mittman’s *Maps and Monsters in Medieval England* and Braham’s “The Monstrous Caribbean,”

\(^{29}\) Cf. Six and Thompson’s “From Hideous to Hedonist: The Changing Face of the Nineteenth-century Monster”

\(^{30}\) Cf. Looper’s “The Maya ‘Cosmic Monster’ as a Political and Religious Symbol”

\(^{31}\) Cohen 1996, 7


Heng’s discussion of nation building in England through the text *Richard Coer de Lyon* in “The Romance of England: Richard Coer de Lyon, Saracens, Jews, and the Politics of Race and Nation”, could be taken as another example of the way in which monstrosity demarcates social boundaries, but with Richard feasting upon the flesh of a Saracen adversary in the narrative it is unclear which group is more monstrous!

For the monster as both literal and metaphorical border markers, Cf. Mittman’s *Maps and Monsters in Medieval England*. 
monster warns away those who would advance to the border it represents while simultaneously beckoning them to do the same.\textsuperscript{33}

This seemed to be much what I was seeing in the \textit{Lives of St. Margaret}. The monsters of Margaret’s \textit{Life} are an unusually fertile ground for sexual boundaries. From Olibrius’ open hostility to Margaret’s virginal Christian identity to the black demon’s frequent assertion in the \textit{Lives} that it sent the dragon to threaten her virginity, the \textit{Life} seemed rife with threats to the Christian ideal of chastity that Margaret embodied. Effectively, the monsters become the gatekeepers of Margaret’s virginity, suggesting that her succumbing to sexuality would invite her – and thus, her virginal adherents – into the arms of the ultimate Christian antithesis: the demonic.

In addition to this conception of Margaret’s monsters as marking important boundaries and borders, monster studies also helped to solidify the concept of positive and negative identity markers that I use in this dissertation. Specifically, this concept relies on the fact that any identity (religious, national, racial, etc.) is constituted by descriptors in two broad categories: “that which I am” and “that which I am not.” While Margaret herself stands as an exemplar for the aforementioned positive descriptors, it is the monsters of her \textit{Life} which most clearly signify those practices and identity markers that are to be avoided.

Of course, Cohen – and the vast majority of the research branching off from his work – deals with the physical inscription of difference upon the monster, often in the

\textsuperscript{33} The sense of “beckoning” performed by the monster is persistently present in much of the literature in monster theory, but also difficult to point to directly in the theses of individual works. Rather, there are contributions to the field in which this element is easier to see than in others. Cf. Hirsch’s “Liberty, Equality, Monstrosity: Revolutionizing the Family in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein,” Miller’s “Monstrous Sexuality: Variations on the Vagina Dentata,” and Felton’s “Rejecting and Embracing the Monstrous in Ancient Greece and Rome.” Though not necessarily related to monster studies, Dor’s “The Sheela-na-Gig: An Incongruous Sign of Sexual Purity?” examines the eponymous grotesques as figures that are meant to both sexually repel and fascinate.
form of physical hybridity – bits and pieces of different beasts mixed. In the key
exemplar for the major tradition I focus on here, the dragon bears signs of such hybridity:
In the Mombritius exemplar that I use in this dissertation, Paris, BN, lat. 5574, the dragon
is described as something that is partially between man and beast. As a hybrid\(^{34}\) of man
and beast, the dragon is not unlike the hermaphroditic cynocephalus that visits the French
court in Vincent of Beauvais’ *Speculum naturale*.\(^ {35}\) The cynocephalus has the body of a
man and the head of a dog, while Margaret’s dragon has a multi-colored coat and
breathes fire and smoke (physical markers of “dragonhood,” if you will), but at the same
time has a golden beard and carries a “two-edged sword” in its hands (markers of
“manhood”).\(^ {36}\) This hybridity is in the background of my thinking in chapter one.

There can be cultural hybridities also. Over the course of the *Lives*, I began to
notice that Olibrius displayed markers of multiple religious identities, appearing
simultaneously pagan and Jewish (and sometimes, Saracen as well). These were not
physical markers of identity\(^ {37}\) but rather actions or attributes that heralded the presence of
a particular religious group: the worship of idols or the suggestion that Olibrius’
ancestors killed Christ. A part of my understanding of Olibrius’ role thus comes out of
postcolonial studies, an area of theory which has had an array of impacts on the study of
the Medieval period as a whole.\(^ {38}\) In this view, Olibrius’ shifting and hybrid religious

\(^{34}\) That is, a creature that combines traits from two creatures which are usually discreet.
\(^{35}\) Cohen 1996, 9
\(^{36}\) Other examples of this physical hybridity include a wolf that speaks and begs for last rites for its mate (Cohen 2006, 86-87; Bynum 2001, 15-18 and 77-111), Welshmen eating grass like beasts (Cohen 2000, 86-87), and images of Jews inscribed with demonic features (cf. Strickland 2003).
\(^{37}\) One potential physical marker of ethnicity is the *pileum cornutum*, the “horned hat” forced upon Jews in England. Interestingly enough, while the headpiece was instituted precisely so that the Jews could be told apart from the English, monstrous fantasies festered underneath the cap, leading to the belief that the Jews themselves *chose* to wear the iconic cap to hide their horns, a marker of demonic heritage.
\(^{38}\) Cf. Warren’s “Making Contact: Postcolonial Perspectives through Geoffrey of Monmouth’s ‘Historia regum Britannie,’” Cohen’s *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ,Holsinger’s “Medieval Studies, Postcolonial
identity may be seen to reveal certain things about the construction of national identity in medieval England, which relies primarily upon the rejection of the religious “Other” as a means of expressing English Christian and crusading identities. Different redactors of the lives of Margaret can be seen to reinforce different stereotypes of the Other that assist in building identity. This kind of hybridity is in the background of my thinking in chapter three.

Finally, the black demon displays no hybridity, either cultural or physical. Rather, it identifies itself as the creature that inspires Christians to lust, thereby causing them to stray from acceptable sexual practices. The demon’s address either focuses on its ability to defeat chaste intentions or to drive individuals to specific sexual sins. In its role as a threat to Margaret’s virginity and an opponent of chastity, the demon connects itself to the virginal identity of Margaret and her religious readers. Here, the important area in the background of my thinking is virginity studies. Focusing on both fictitious virgins (such as Margaret) and historical virgins (such as the Katherine Group anchoresses for whom Margaret was written), virginity studies seeks to contextualize the use of virginity and the discourse which surrounds it. Of particular interest to this dissertation is a method of interpretation that concentrates upon literary representations of virginity through the lens of Virginia Studies, and the Genealogies of Critique,” Heng’s Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy, Huot’s Postcolonial Fictions in the Roman de Perceforest: Cultural Identities and Hybridities. For a differing perspective on the validity of the concept, cf. Gaunt’s “Can the Middle Ages Be Postcolonial?”


Siobhain Bly Calkin has written about the Life of St. Margaret in the Auchinleck Manuscript, pointing to the Life’s ability to speak to the crusading identity of its English readers. By defeating a Saracen Olibrius, Margaret’s narrative allowed readers to “imaginatively revise late thirteenth-century crusading setbacks, and envision an overwhelming Christian triumph” (Bly Calkin 2005, 166).

John Bugge’s work Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal, though not of practical interest to this dissertation, is the seminal work in the field and bears mention along with Peter Brown’s The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity.
of performance studies. According to this method of analysis, virginity is not a physical state but a performance which makes use of traditional signifiers of virginity (e.g. wearing white, speaking softly, etc.) in order to construct a virginal identity. This performance is then “read:” the intended audience evaluates the signifiers chosen by observing the performance and then either accepts or rejects the identity which the performance is meant to convey (that is, they reject the individual’s claim to virginity or reify it). Virginity studies especially informs my thought in chapter two.

The categories of *imitatio* and audience are unifying points for this entire dissertation. Margaret’s own *imitatio* is plain though it is remarked differently in different versions and traditions. For instance, in Lydgate’s *Lyfe* Margaret is referred to as “This daysye, with leves rede and white./Purpul hewed, as maked is memorye./Whan that hir blode was shad oute by victorey./The chaste lely of whos maydenhede/Thorugh martyrdam was spreynt with roses rede.” When Olibrius threatens to torture Margaret, she proclaims “Sytthe Criste for me suffred peyne and dethe./Shad al His blade for my redempcyoun./So for His sake, of hole affeccyoun./Be assured that I have no drede/To

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42 Cf. Katherine Coyne Kelly’s *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages*, the seminal work in this line of inquiry.
43 Cf. Sarah Salih’s analysis of Margery of Kempe’s construction of a virginal identity after the birth of her 14 children in
44 Other writings that have had an effect upon this dissertation include Arnold’s “The Labour of Continence: Masculinity and Clerical Virginity,” Mills’ “Can the Virgin Martyr Speak?,” and the majority of the essays in the collected volume *Menacing Virgins*, edited by Kelly and Leslie.
45 Caroline Walker Bynum has written extensively on the concept of *imitatio*, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, and *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*.
46 Reames 2003, 147-48
deye for Him, and al my blode to shede.”47 Through her speech, Margaret signifies her desire to suffer and die as Christ did, a desire that Olibrius is happy to oblige.48

While Margaret herself exists in imitation of Christ, I am far more interested in the way that individuals metaphorically or allegorically imitated Margaret or saw Margaret as a figure whose behaviors – but not necessarily the events of her Life – were meant to be imitated. In the first case, my thought process is guided by Katherine Sanok’s *Her Life Historical*, in which Sanok suggests that women who performed imitationes of saints were not necessarily seeking to repeat the exact events of the Lives, but rather to understand a facet of their own life as an abstraction of a particular saint’s Life. For instance, Julian of Norwich’s imitatio of St. Cecilia did not involve taking three blows to the neck from a sharp sword, but rather to understand these wounds as three figurative wounds: one each of contrition, compassion, and desire for God.49 Similarly, Margaret’s maternal adherents did not draw comfort from Margaret’s tale by searching out a dragon to swallow them, but rather by understanding Margaret’s consumption by the dragon as a metaphorical representation of their parturiency. By identifying with Margaret metaphorically or allegorically, these women hoped to escape from pregnancy just as Margaret escaped from the dragon, whole and unharmed.

I am also deeply interested in the way in which Margaret was seen as an exemplar for Christian behavior, something which many prior authors have pointed to in their interpretations. For instance, scholars have argued that Margaret stood as an example of

47 Reames 2003, 153
48 More generally, Cf. Heffernan’s *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages*, esp. 216-221 regarding the saint’s Life as a mimetic manifestation of Christ’s life.
49 Sanok 2007, 4
transformative speech,\textsuperscript{\text{50}} a positive gendered identity,\textsuperscript{\text{51}} profound physical endurance,\textsuperscript{\text{52}}
and more broadly the ideal Christian way of life.\textsuperscript{\text{53}} When treating Margaret as an
exemplar, both lay and religious alike are looking to Margaret’s behavior as a model for
their own, thereby imitating Margaret’s positive characteristics and rejecting the negative
characteristics that the monsters represent.

In this dissertation I argue that Margaret’s positive characteristics are shaped
significantly and in very specific ways by her interactions with monsters. A literal
martyrdom is scarcely imitable; in the \textit{Life of Margaret}, through progressive
allegorizations that happen in and through the monsters, Margaret’s vita is made
available for readers as inspiration and guide, is made – in short – imitable.

The specifics of how she becomes imitable through these allegorizations of
monstrosity are the topic of each of the four chapters. Each of the first three chapters
focuses on a different adversary: chapter one attends to the dragon that in some versions
swallows Margaret, chapter two concentrates on the black demon that appears afterwards
in Margaret’s jail cell, and chapter three is largely concerned with the different valences
of the prefect Olibrius who challenges Margaret’s virginal condition through a series of
tortures. In chapter four, I look at the way demonic adversaries pave the way for
Margaret especially in her role as a patron of women in childbirth; the guiding question is
how Margaret’s role as patroness is constructed in particular by and through the dragon

\textbf{Chapter Synopses}

\textsuperscript{\text{50}} McInerney 1999
\textsuperscript{\text{51}} Salih 1999
\textsuperscript{\text{52}} Hill 2010, 84
\textsuperscript{\text{53}} Cooper 2013
My first chapter – “In the Belly of the Beast: Sexual Temptation in the Life of St. Margaret” – focuses on the dragon as an emblem of lust. Beginning with an exposition of Athanasius’ The Life of St. Anthony and Gregory the Great’s Life of St. Benedict, I argue that these two Saints’ Lives inform images of the dragon and demon in the Mombritius tradition (as exemplified by the version of Margaret in Paris, BN, lat. 5574). In the Life of St. Anthony, Anthony is sexually tempted by a “spirit of fornication” that is described first as a dragon and then as a little black boy. In the Life of St. Benedict, several stories are told in which dragons feature prominently. In each case, the dragon represents some worldly pleasure and being swallowed by the dragon suggests that the one being consumed has succumbed to its temptation. Considering these images, I argue that Margaret can be seen to struggle with her own lust (“personified” by a disturbing hybrid: a man-like dragon with sexually-charged features) and emerge from the battle triumphant.

Given this interpretation, Margaret’s experience with the dragon is polysemous and can be read in two ways by two distinct imagined audiences. The first group – medieval mothers – would have seen Margaret’s encounter with the dragon as a source of hope for survival during childbirth. For these women, Margaret is much like them: someone who struggled with and succumbed to sexual temptation. Yet, Margaret emerges from the dragon “without any injury,” mirroring the way in which medieval mothers wished to escape from their own process of childbirth.

For the image’s virginal reception, I turn to the version of Margaret edited by Millett and Wogan-Browne from the Katherine Group. This version of the Life scorns the sexually-charged image from Paris, BN, lat. 5574 and instead focuses upon the fear that
the dragon invokes in Margaret. I trace this fear not to the threat of Margaret’s death, but to her prayers that she will emerge from her experience with her virginity “inviolate.” Corroborating evidence is drawn from another Katherine Group text, *Hali Meiðhad*, to show the way in which Margaret can be seen both as an example of right practice for women attempting to maintain their virginity and as a sister in their struggle with sexual temptation.

At the same time, both versions feature a scene in which Margaret’s contemporary readers are invited to participate in her combat with the dragon. This suggests that Margaret’s narrative is not perceived as taking place in a distant time and place, rather it is reenacted every time that one of her adherents reads the *Life*.

Chapter two, “The Devil Made Me Do It: Audience Partitioning and the *Life of St. Margaret,*” focuses on teasing out specific portions of the audience in the versions of the *Life* in the Katherine Group and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303 by focusing on the didactic speech of the black demon in each. In the former case, the black demon’s speech contains a lengthy tale of the demon’s influence over an unnamed chaste man and woman. The demon indicates that it allows these two individuals to come together and be confident in their platonic friendship, only to strike at them when they least expect it. Filled with lust, the two fall into carnal filthiness, and the demon provides several techniques to avoid their unfortunate fate. I argue that the black demon’s speech is directed at an audience very much like – if not the same as – the group of anchoresses that *Ancrene Wisse* was directed, using *Hali Meiðhad* and *Ancrene Wisse* to further establish this anchoritic audience.
Regarding Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303, I begin with Elaine Treharne’s argument that the original audience was “monastic and ascetic.” While acknowledging that Treharne is likely correct, I point out that the black demon’s speech suggests the presence of another audience beside the monastic: a rural lay audience likely given over to the pastoral care of the monastic audience who wrote the text. In particular, I interpret the sin of bestiality to which the black demon refers – unique to the Corpus Christi College version and (as Peter Dendle has pointed out) strangely explicit for non-penitential literature\(^{54}\) – as evidence of this additional audience.

The analyses from this chapter also strengthen the assertion that Margaret’s narrative is eminently contemporary. Instead of a static figure with a canned speech, the black demon’s narrative is frequently being updated to reflect the sexual needs of the audience. Through this supernaturally charged speech, the redactors of the Life controlled a powerful means to curb or encourage patterns of sexual behavior in their audience.

Turning from the more obvious monsters in the Life, my third chapter – “Circumcising Olibrius: Threatening Sexuality and Religious Alterity in the Life of St. Margaret” – addresses the different depictions – particularly, religious depictions – of the prefect who accosts Margaret. While the majority of the research concerning the various Lives characterizes Olibrius as a Roman pagan prefect, I argue that this attribution obscures the mutable nature of Olibrius’ religious identity. Rather, the Mombritius tradition contains markers of both pagan and Jewish identity, rendering Olibrius’ religious identity as simply “un-Christian.” This un-Christian identity is subject to change, in some versions becoming “more Jewish,” while others add markers for a

\(^{54}\) Dendle 2001, 55
Saracen identity. In all cases, Olibrius is further linked with the demonic, further exacerbating his un-Christian identity.

This had a profound effect upon the way Margaret’s readers understood proximal religious groups. In the context of the narrative, Margaret’s struggle against Olibrius is not simply the struggle of a long-dead, young woman against a cruel overlord. Instead, it is the struggle of Christianity against its contemporary opponents, the virtuous against the demonic, and the Christian against the un-Christian. In this context, Margaret’s rejection of Olibrius is the rejection of the un-Christian by the Christian, a rejection that reinforces the necessity of sexual boundaries between Christians and non-Christians.

With Margaret’s adversaries addressed, I turn to the prayers at the end of Margaret’s Life in order to evaluate her role as a patron of women in childbirth. Through her struggle with her monstrous opponents, Margaret acquires the sanctity required to pray for the benefit of her adherents. In my final chapter – “Paging Dr. Margaret: Prayers and Pregnancy in the Life of St. Margaret” – I explore what these prayers mean for the representation of Margaret in her cult. Specifically, I argue that Margaret begins her cultic existence in England as a castigator of demons, a role which associates her only peripherally with safe childbirth via the ability to prevent demonic ailments.

This role is relatively static for several centuries until the explosion of vernacular Lives in the 13th century and beyond. Due to the increasing influence of Margaret’s maternal adherents, these Lives incorporate the Caligula tradition’s blessings for parturient women into vernacular versions that rely upon the Mombritius tradition. At first, these Lives struggle to create an identity for Margaret that merges her role against demons and her role as a guardian over expectant mothers, but eventually Margaret’s
protection against demons vanishes, to be replaced by an image of Margaret as a women’s advocate with a sympathetic connection to her adherents.

I further supplement this analysis with a discussion of the importance of the dragon swallowing Margaret to Margaret’s blessings for pregnant women. While Margaret being swallowed and her blessings for parturient women are often connected together, there is little textual evidence in the Lives to suggest such a connection. Instead, I propose that this association was developed by women for their own benefit in labor and discuss the major interpretations of this association: the dragon as mother, the dragon as labor, and the dragon as womb. To this, I add my own interpretation of the dragon as lying-in room and suggest that all four may have benefited women in the frequently lethal process of labor.

Considering these analyses, I conclude that the Life is not a stagnant narrative, but rather a story that exists in a state of the perpetual present. However, it is not Margaret that allows the narrative to remain contemporary over the centuries but her monstrous adversaries. These monsters carry negative indicators of identity, indicators that must be constantly updated in order to effectively guide Margaret’s adherents in imitatio. In this way, the monstrous antagonists of Margaret’s Life shape the Christian identity (particularly, the Christian sexual identity) of her adherents just as surely as Margaret herself does.
Chapter 1: In the Belly of the Beast – Sexual Temptation in the *Life of St. Margaret*

Although the *Life of St. Margaret* overflows with dramatic scenes, the time Margaret spends in prison is arguably the most gripping. In the iconic version of this scene, which goes back to the Mombritius version, Margaret is thrown into the dungeon by her persecutor Olibrius. After being tortured repeatedly, Margaret prays to God that her real adversary should be revealed to her. Suddenly, out of the dark corner of her prison, a terrible dragon emerges, spewing smoke and fire and hissing menacingly. Overcome by fright, Margaret crumbles to the floor and the dragon – eager for its meal – slithers over to Margaret and devours her. However, when all seems lost, a miraculous thing happens: the sign of the cross, which Margaret so recently made during her prayers, splits the dragon in twain and our hero emerges unscathed. With her true opponent defeated, Margaret is armed with a new courage, a courage she uses to battle another demon that appears – this time, in the shape of a black man – in a violent and one-sided struggle. Planting her foot on its neck, Margaret orders the creature to divulge bits of demonological lore for the benefit of her eager readers.

Considering the importance that the dragon plays in Margaret’s medieval iconography, the scholarly debate that surrounds the scene is particularly intense. Scholars have found much in the scene that warrants attention: various contributions have pointed to the draconic visitation as an indication of perceptions of demonic
corporeality, as an index of feminine control over the contents of the *Life*, and as the site for a symbolic and romanticized rape.

Of particular interest to scholarship has been the interpretation of the dragon as a sexual symbol. This debate emerges out of the different perspectives that scholars have expressed as to whether or not and to what degree the dragon might be read in a sexual manner. In 1985, Jocelyn Price (Wogan-Browne) writes of the dragon of the Westmidlands English *Seinte Margarete*: “It is perhaps worth noting at the outset, that however much classical associations inform a virgin-dragon encounter for us, this is very much a medieval dragon: the eroticism of the Perseus-Andromeda legend is almost entirely lacking from it.” Five years later, Kathryn Gravdal writes of the 10th century Latin *Passio Sancte Margarite* that the draconic visitation represents “a discourse of sexual violence” and that the swallowing of Margaret by the dragon is a symbolic rape which displaces the sexual violence of the “heathen seducer” (Olibrius) onto the dragon and devil of the narrative. Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff writes in *Body and Soul* regarding Margaret (and other saints who encounter dragons) “there can be little doubt that for most medieval persons the serpent and dragon imagery in these female saints’ lives was symbolic of the threat of sexuality.” In “Rhetoric, Power and Integrity in the Passion of the Virgin Martyr” Maud Burnett McInerney identifies the dragon of the Westmidlands English *Seinte Margarete* as being “fully masculine” and the demon that follows to be a

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55 Cf. Price 1985  
56 Cf. Larson 2003  
57 Cf. Gravdal 1991  
58 Price 1985, 338  
59 Gravdal 1991, 37  
60 Petroff 1994, 103  
61 McInerney 1999, 53
destroyer of virginity by his own admission,\(^{62}\) assertions which she echoes in her later book *Eloquent Virgins* (2003) when addressing the Anglo-Norman *La Vie de Sainte Marguerite*. Finally, Aviad Kleinberg asserts that Jacobus de Voragine’s rejection of the draconic swallowing in the Latin *Legenda Aurea* version of the *Life* emerges from the contact Margaret makes with “earthly, phallic forces of passion and the body.”\(^{63}\)

Although many suggestions have been raised, no degree of consensus regarding the sexual significance of Margaret’s dragon seems to have been reached. The problem – as I will argue – is the backdrop against which this scene of the *Life* has been evaluated. Heffernan said it first – if not best – that saints “share collectively in the luminous life of the incarnate Christ. In sum, sanctity is derived from the sacred, which is radically singular.”\(^{64}\) Thus, Saints’ *Lives* must be interpreted against the backdrop of other Saints’ *Lives* that share narrative elements or as an imitation of Christ. To date, Margaret’s encounter with the dragon has mainly been internally evaluated or compared against inappropriate backdrops, such as Greek myths or unrelated Saints’ *Lives* literature.\(^{65}\)

In this chapter, I propose to use the *Life of St. Anthony* and Gregory’s *Dialogues* – two works which I will argue influenced the prison scene in the *Life of St. Margaret* – to evaluate the dragon as a symbol of sexual temptation. I will begin with an analysis of the

\(^{62}\) McInerney 1999, 65
\(^{63}\) Kleinberg 2008, 276
\(^{64}\) Heffernan 1992, 7
\(^{65}\) Price’s article draws a comparison between the Perseus-Andromeda myth and Margaret’s dragon. While such a comparison might be appropriate for the *Life of St. George*, Margaret is no nude maiden chained passively to rocks waiting for her champion to appear: as is clear from her destruction of the dragon and her violent subdual of the demon, Margaret’s gentle demeanor and beautiful appearance belie a warrior nature. Gravdal on the other hand is primarily interested in the differences between how male hagiographers (in this case, Wace) and female hagiographers (Hrotsvitha) portray scenarios of rape. Although it is not exactly comparing apples to oranges, such an analysis would be substantially more rewarding if it were paired with either a version of St. Margaret by Hrotsvitha (which apparently does not exist) or with the *Lives* of the same saints Hrotsvitha wrote about by male hagiographers. In short, both make compelling cases, but these cases draw their compelling nature from comparisons between pieces of literature dissimilar to Margaret’s *Life*. 
little black boy in the *Life of St. Anthony* and move on to the appearance of several
dragons in Gregory’s *Dialogues*, paying attention to the way in which both types of
creatures are represented. After completing my analysis, I will compare these two works
to the Mombritius version of the *Life of St. Margaret*. In so doing, I will argue that the
demon and dragon in Margaret’s prison scene can be illuminated by the treatment of the
same characters in the *Life of St. Anthony* and Gregory’s *Dialogues*. The evidence from
each suggests that Margaret’s encounter with the dragon in the Mombritius tradition is
meant to be read in the same fashion as Anthony’s encounter with his demon: as a
struggle with her own lust.

Moreover, this struggle can be read in two ways. The first reading emphasizes
Margaret’s ingestion by the dragon as a succumbing to sexual temptation. The second
reading focuses on Margaret escaping from the dragon unharmed, thereby overcoming
her lust and emerging victorious. This dual reading for the same scene is the reason that
Margaret can be both a role-model for mothers (who focus on the first reading) and
virgins (who focus on the second).

*The Life of St. Anthony and Gregory’s Dialogues*

*The Life of St. Anthony* was written in Greek by Athanasius of Alexandria after
Anthony’s death in 352 and translated into Latin shortly thereafter by Evagrius of
Antioch in the second half of the fourth century. The *Life* describes the career of the

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66 The Greek and Latin versions of the *Life of Anthony* were published as part of Jacques-Paul Migne’s
massive *Patrologia Graecae* and *Patrologia Latina*. While scholarly interest in the Greek *Life* has been
relatively persistent (resulting in G.J.M. Bartelink’s critical edition of the text in *Vie d’Antoine*), the Latin
*Life* has largely languished leading this study to use Migne’s original editions as the source for the Latin
desert monk Anthony who forsakes the city in favor of a pious life in the wastelands. In so doing, he attracts demonic attention and is forced to battle the forces of the Devil to secure the desert as a dwelling place for eremites.

Anthony’s *Life* was immensely popular throughout the Middle Ages. From the time of its writing in the late fourth century, Anthony’s struggles with his demonic adversaries have been a source of *imitatio* for those living eremitic and monastic lives.67 The *Life of Anthony* features prominently in the eighth book of Augustine’s *Confessions* as one of the principal texts to inspire him to renounce worldly pleasures. Jerome’s lives of Paul and Hilarion are conscious imitations of Anthony,68 the *Life of St. Guthlac* is closely modelled on the Latin version of Anthony’s *Life*,69 and Anthony’s vita functions as a model for Benedict’s in Gregory’s *Dialogues* (to be discussed later).70 Add to this the “*ingens numerus* of Latin manuscripts, and the imitation of its details in countless monastic biographies,”71 and it becomes clear that the *Life of Anthony* looms large in the minds of religious authors during the medieval period.

I find particularly important for the interpretation of Margaret’s prison scene Anthony’s interactions with the so-called “Spirit of Fornication.” Having decided to live a pious life, Anthony strives to discipline himself. However, the devil cannot bear such virtue in a young man and sets about attempting to lead him from his strict discipline. Among other things, he tries to guide him from his path by whispering about his family (particularly, the care of his sister), attempting to incite greed and gluttony in him, and reminding him of the enormous effort involved in the eremitic life. When these fail to

68 Schaff and Wace 1994, 193
69 Cf. Kurtz 1926
70 Cf. Petersen 1984 esp. chapter 2
71 Schaff and Wace 1994, 193
dissuade the young man, the devil goes so far as to inflame Anthony’s passions and appear before him as a seductive woman in an attempt to ruin Anthony’s chastity. To counter these demonic thoughts and visions, Anthony comforts himself with thoughts of hell and bodily decay until the creature realizes that it is unable to sway him from his path:

Afterwards, when that most hideous dragon was unable to destroy Anthony through this appeal, and saw that he was always repelled by his thoughts, according to what has been written: Gnashing his teeth and wailing, just as he really is, he manifested in his appearance as a horrid and black boy, falling to his knees, he wept in a human voice, saying, “I have seduced many, I have deceived more, but now as by the other saints, so also I am overcome by your labor. When Anthony asked who he was that he said such things, he said, “I am the friend of fornication, and I have taken up the manifold arms of baseness against all adolescents, such that I am called the spirit of fornication! How many devoted to living in chastity have I deceived! How many weakly starting off have I persuaded to return to their original filth. I am he regarding whom the prophet scolds the fallen, saying ‘You have been seduced by the Spirit of Fornication!’ and truly they were overthrown by me. I am he who often tested you and was always repulsed.” When the soldier of Christ heard this, giving thanks to God, strengthened with a greater bravery against his adversary, he said: “You are very despicable and contemptible; for both your obscurity and your age are signs of weakness. From now on there will be no more
trouble from you. The Lord is my helper, and I will rejoice over my enemies.” And then, at the sound of this psalm [vocem cantantis], the phantasm that had appeared, vanished.\(^7\)

After seeing that he is unable to sway Anthony with his charms, the *spiritus fornicationis* – specifically identified as a *draco* – then gives up and appears to Anthony in another form. Rather than adopting an aggressive posture, the creature appears to Anthony as a little black boy in a dejected state (i.e. on his knees). This submissive posture signals that Anthony has overcome the demon, which no longer troubles him but instead proceeds to reveal to Anthony the various ways in which he leads individuals astray through his sexual “weapons” (*arma*). After listening to the various operations of the demon, Anthony berates the creature, who disappears.

One element of Anthony’s struggle that is important to note is that the demon assaults Anthony by reminding him of worldly pleasures. As Anthony hears thoughts, perceives visions, and has a demon appear before him, all of these attacks highlight very human concerns: the disposition of his family, concerns over material prosperity, and the undoubtedly raging carnal desires of a young man. From a narrative perspective, these concerns are personified in the figure of the little black boy, thereby externalizing

\(^7\) “Postremo cum nec hoc argumento destruere posset Antonium draco tetrerrimus, et videret se semper ab eius cogitationibus repelli, secundum quod scriptum est, stridens dentibus et ejulans, qualis est, talis merito apparebat et vultu: puer horridus atque niger, ad eius se genua proovolens, humana voce flebat, dicens: Multos seduxi, plurimos decepi; nunc autem ut a caeteris sanctis, ita et tuo sum labore superatus. Quem cum interrogaret Antonius quinsum esset, qui talia loqueretur, ait: Ego sum fornicationis amicus, ego multimoda adversum omnes adolescentes turpitudinis arma suscepi; hinc et spiritus fornicationis vocor. Quantos pudice vivere disponentes efelli! quo teniit incipientes, ad sordes pristinas redire persuasi! Ego sum, propter quem propheta lapsos increpat, dicens: Spiritu fornicationis seducti estis, et revera per me et illi fuerant supplantati. Ego sum qui te ipsum saepe tentavi, et semper repulsus sum. Cum hoc Christi miles audisset, gratias agens Deo, et largiore adversus inimicum confortatus audacia, ait: Multum ergo despicabilis, multumque contemptibilis es; nam et obscuritas tua et aetas infirmarum signa sunt rerum.
Nulla mihi jam de te cura est. Dominus mihi adjutor est, et ego exsultabo super inimicos meos. Et statim, ad vocem cantantis, phantastma quod videbatur, evanuit” (PL 73:130; Latin translations my own unless otherwise noted).
struggles that would otherwise be internal.\textsuperscript{73} That this internal struggle is primarily a struggle with sexual temptation is later confirmed by the demon in the form of the little black boy.\textsuperscript{74} Of course, Anthony’s readers did not think this scene was “all in his head,” rather visions such as Anthony perceived were viewed as a manipulation of internal weakness by demonic forces, demonic forces that were not necessarily visible or physically tangible to anyone save the individual undergoing the struggle.\textsuperscript{75}

Although there is only the briefest mention of a dragon in \textit{The Life of Anthony}, Gregory’s \textit{Dialogues} have several far more substantial portrayals of dragons.\textsuperscript{76} The \textit{Dialogues} is a collection of miracles and wonders performed primarily by monastic holy men of sixth century Italy. Containing four books, the second is entirely devoted to Benedict of Nursia, and Gregory’s indebtedness to the \textit{Life of Anthony} for Benedict’s \textit{Life} has already been noted.\textsuperscript{77}

Since all of the draconic encounters are so similar – at least, for the purposes of this analysis – I will treat the text of each before turning to my argument. In the first of Gregory’s stories that contain a dragon (Book 2; chapter 25), a monk – despite being repeatedly chastised by Benedict – decides to leave the monastery. Setting off on the road:

\textsuperscript{73} An interesting discussion of the function of demons for externalizing what might otherwise be internal dialogue can be found in Brakke’s “Making Public the Monastic Life: Reading the Self in Evagrius Ponticus’ \textit{Talking Back}.”

\textsuperscript{74} This use of a black-skinned other to externalize sexual desire in a monastic setting is well-noted in Brakke 2001b.

\textsuperscript{75} We will see these motifs repeated in Gregory’s \textit{Dialogues} in which other members of the monastic community are incapable of seeing the dragons that their suffering brothers claim to be before their very eyes.

\textsuperscript{76} The Latin text for Gregory’s \textit{Dialogues} can be found in Adalbert de Vogüé’s \textit{Grégoire le Grand, Dialogues} (1979-80).

\textsuperscript{77} Much like the \textit{Life of Anthony}, Gregory’s \textit{Dialogues} were enormously successful – something of a medieval “bestseller” – and Werferth, the Bishop of Worcester (c.873-c.912 for office), translated them into Old English for Alfred the Great, attesting to their popularity and importance in England. The Old English version can be found in the edition by Hecht, Johnson and Zupitza (Werferth et al. 1900).
No sooner had he left the monastery, than he discovered a dragon in his way waiting for him with an open mouth. And when he saw that the dragon was intent on devouring him, he began shivering and trembling and to cry out in a great voice, saying “Hurry, hurry, because this dragon wants to devour me!” The monks running to him saw no dragon, but they led the shivering and trembling monk back to the monastery. Then he promised he would never again leave the monastery, and from that very hour he made good on his promise: for obviously through the prayers of the holy man he saw the dragon that was waiting for him, whom he first followed without seeing it.78

The second draconic appearance (Book 4; chapter 37) features one of Gregory’s own charges, a monk named Theodorus who is barely worthy of the title. Despising anything good for his soul, he finally lies close to death when abruptly he shouts at his brothers:

“Leave me! Behold, I have been given to a dragon to be devoured that is not able to eat me due to your presence. Even now, he has swallowed my head into his mouth. Leave now so that you do not increase my suffering, but let it do what it will do. If I am given to it to be devoured, why must I bear your delays?” Then the brothers began to say to him: “What are you talking about, brother? Bless yourself with the sign of the holy cross.”

78 “Qui mox ut monasterium exiit, contra se adsistere aperto ore draconem in itinere inuenit. Cumque eum isdem draco qui apparuerat deuorare uellet, coepit ipse tremens et palpitans magnis uocibus clamare, dicens: «Currite, currite, quia dracon iste me deuorare uult.» Currentes autem fratres draconem minime uiderunt, sed trementem atque palpitantem monachum ad monasterium redurerunt. Qui statim promisit numquam se esse iam a monasterio recessurum, atque ex hora eadem in sua promissione permansit, quippe qui sancti uiri orationibus contra se adsistere draconem uiderat, quem prius non uidento sequebatur” (Vogüé 1979, 212)
responded with great shouts, saying: “I want to but I can’t, because I am held fast by the scales of this dragon.” And when the brothers heard, prostrating themselves on the ground with tears they began to pray more vehemently for his freedom. And behold, suddenly the sick brother began to shout with a great voice, saying: “Grace be to God! Behold, the dragon who sought to devour me has fled. He was banished by your prayers and was unable to remain. Now, intercede for my sins, because I am prepared to convert and utterly renounce the secular life.”

Finally, Gregory tells the story of a nameless monk in the monastery of Thongolaton. Appearing to be a great man in life, as he dies the monk confesses to his fellows his dalliance with gluttony:

“When you thought that I fasted with you, I ate in secret. And now behold, I am delivered up to a dragon to be devoured: it has wrapped its tail around my feet and knees, and is placing its head in my mouth and, drinking, it withdraws my spirit.” Then having said these things he immediately died, and did not wait to be able to be liberated by repentance from the dragon that he saw. Which indisputably establishes that he saw it

for the sole utility of his audience, since he both made known the enemy
to whom he had been given and did not escape.  

The motif of the dragon is used in all three of these passages as either a metaphoric or
literal and visual representation of an internal struggle with some form of temptation. For
Anthony, this internal struggle is with a plethora of sensual temptations: gluttony, sex,
and worldly responsibilities and pleasures. Similarly, the monks in Gregory’s Dialogues
struggle with their fitness for the monastic lifestyle. In the first story, the monk is clearly
scared to death by the creature’s appearance and returns to the monastic community,
indicating that the dragon was waiting for the monk to succumb to the temptation of
worldly pleasures. In the second story, we find much the same situation: Theodorus
hates living his life as a monk and only renounces “secular life” when his brothers have
saved him from the predations of the dragon on his death bed. In the third story, the
temptation is less general: the monk is a glutton who cannot overcome the temptation of
food when his brothers fast. In essence, both Anthony and the monks are struggling with
their ability to maintain the challenging lifestyle that they have chosen.

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80 “Quando me ubiscum ieiunare credebatis, occulte comedebam. Et nunc ecce ad deuorandum draconi
sum traditus, qui cauda sua mea genua pedesque conligauit, caput uero suum intra meum os mittens,
spiritum meum ebibens abstrahit.» Quibus dictis statim defunctus est, atque ut paenitendo liberari potuisset
a dracone quem uiderat, expectatus non est. Quod nimirum constat quia ad solam utilitatem audientium
uderit, qui eum hostem cui traditus fuerat et innotuit et non euasit (Vogüé 1980, 146).

81 While we may not necessarily see such responsibilities and pleasures in the same light as the more
obvious carnal appetites of gluttony and lust, the whole reason that the eremite extricates himself from the
day-to-day world is to avoid the temptations that the devil may use to seduce an holy man. For further
examples of the demonic temptations that plague the monk, cf. Cassian’s eight dangerous spirits in his De
institutis coenobiorum (Ramsey, Boniface, ed. John Cassian, the Institutes. Ancient Christian Writers 58.

82 At first blush, it seems that the dragon is present to scare the monk back to his abbey. While this is
certainly the narrative operation of the dragon, it makes little sense that a demonic creature would have
such a goal in mind. Rather, the dragon is present along the path, the path that leads away from the abbey.
Its mouth is stretched wide, and the monk shouts in fear that the dragon may devour him. This sequence of
events indicates that had the monk not happened to see the dragon – as the other monks did not – he would
have invisibly walked into the dragon’s mouth while visibly walking away from the abbey. In other words,
the dragon was lying in wait not to intentionally frighten the monk back to the abbey, but to swallow up its
due when the monk strayed away down an improper path. The dragon is the visual symbol of the monk’s
invisible temptation to worldly pleasures.
There is notably something present in Gregory’s *Dialogues* that we do not see in the *Life of Anthony*: unlike the nearly spiritually invulnerable Anthony, the monks in question partially or wholly succumb to temptation. In all three cases, this temptation is represented by a draconic figure, while succumbing to the temptation is depicted as the threat or act of being swallowed by the dragon.

It is interesting to note that this dragon – both in Anthony and Gregory – is a silent signifier: the dragon never speaks a word. Rather, it is others who are forced to interpret the significance of the dragon. In the *Dialogues*, it falls to the three monks to explain the meaning of their own dragons to their frightened brothers. On the other hand, Anthony’s struggle with his dragon is explained by the demonic creature himself in the form of a little black boy. While the creature afflicts him with numerous desires, the form of temptation that the “dragon” levies on him that receives the most attention in the *Life of Anthony* is sexual in nature. Not surprisingly, this is also the temptation which the demon concentrates his explanation upon, even going so far as to identify himself as the “Spirit of Fornication.”

*The Life of St Margaret*

This “Spirit of Fornication” can be seen in the Mombritius version of *The Life of St. Margaret*, as the black demon that illuminates the sexual nature of Margaret’s draconic adversary. The dragon also persists as a source of silent temptation, with Gregory deepening the vivid imagery of the creature by associating the swallowing of a victim with succumbing to temptation.
Keeping these representations in mind, I turn to an early English representation of the Mombritius tradition, whose Latin text is contained in Paris, BN, lat. 5574 (hereafter, Paris text). We pick up the story as Margaret is thrown in prison, where she prays to God that she might “see my enemy who fights with me.” With her prayer completed:

> Behold: suddenly from the corner of the prison came a horrible dragon completely gilded with various colors of hair and with a golden beard. Its teeth were like the sharpest iron. Its eyes shone like a flame of fire, and it blew flame and smoke from its nostrils, and its tongue was panting over its neck, and it seemed as if a two-edged sword was in its hands. For it was terrible and made a stench in the prison from the same fire which issued from its mouth. And St Margaret became as pale as grass and the fear of death came upon her and all her bones were shattered… The dragon opened its mouth and placed it over the head of the blessed Margaret and extended its tongue over her heel and swallowed her into its stomach. But Christ’s Cross, which the blessed Margaret had made over herself, expanded in the mouth of the dragon and split it in two parts. Then, blessed Margaret came out of the dragon’s belly without any injury to her.

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83 “videam inimicum meum qui mecum pugnat” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 202).
After Margaret’s conquest of the dragon, she offers a prayer of thanks to God. When her prayer is completed:

She looked to the left side of the prison and behold she saw another devil sitting, like a black man with his hands clasped around his knees. And he rose and began to walk towards her and grasped her hand. Then Margaret said to the demon, “Let what you have done be enough. Leave me now, for you have perpetrated many evil deeds.” The demon responded, “Indeed, I sent my brother Rufo to you in the likeness of a dragon in order that he might swallow you and bear your memory from the earth. But you destroyed him with the sign of Christ. Do you now wish to slay me with your prayer as well?” Then the holy virgin Margaret seized the demon by his hair and threw him to the ground, and she placed her right foot over his neck and said to him, “Cease your attempts on my virginity, evil one.”

After the second demon is subdued, a cross appears, shining with light. A dove sitting upon the cross praises Margaret, after which she demands that the demon tell her about itself. After an account of its demonic genealogy, the black demon begins to relate its works to Margaret:

I am he who sweeps away the efforts of many. I am he who fights with the just and inflames their kidneys and blinds their eyes and makes them forget all heavenly wisdom. And when they are asleep I come over them and wake them from sleep to wicked works, and those who are unable to move from sleep I cause to sin in their sleep. By whatever art possible I inspire [to lust] those I find without the sign of the cross and I never cease to fight against them or do them harm. But those whom I find sealed with the sign of the cross and who are similar to you, I leave confused and empty-handed, just as I do from you today. O blessed Margaret, what can I say? I have been overcome by you. I do not know what I am to do! All my arms have been destroyed, my strength is confounded, and I am overcome by a tender girl.”

The demon then tries to tempt Margaret with information regarding it and its ilk. Soundly rejecting its offer, Margaret banishes the demon into the earth.

Comparing St. Margaret to St Anthony yields several striking similarities between the two texts. First, both Anthony and Margaret feature a demon described (or alluded to) first as a dragon and second as a black-skinned male figure. With the dragon having been defeated in each tale, the black man/boy then emerges to confront the saint in a gesture of contrition or subjection (in Anthony’s case, by falling to his knees, in Margaret’s case, by

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86 Although seemingly an odd statement, Joyce Salisbury points out in “When Sex Stopped Being a Social Disease” that ancient physiology identified the kidneys as the producer of male semen (Salisbury 2008, 52).
87 “Ego sum qui pugno cum iustis et incendo renes eorum et abceco oculos eorum et facio eos obliuiscre omnem caelestem sapientem. Et cum dormierint uenio super eos et excito illos a somno ad mala opera, et quos non possum mouere de somno favio eos in somno peccare. Quacumque arte ventilo quos sine signaculo crucis Christi inueni <et> contra eos pugnare atque eis nocere non cesso. Illos uero quos cum signaculo sancte crucis signatos inuenio et quo tibi sunt similes confusus et uacuus ab eis disceddo quemadmodum a te hodie. O beata Margareta, quid dicam? Superatus sum a te. Quid faciam ignoro. Arma mea contracta sunt, uirtus mea confusa est, a tenera puella superatus sum” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 208).
appearing seated with hands wrapped around knees in something of an upright fetal position or position of child-like worry). The black demons in each story then relate their works to the saints, both of whom describe these acts as their _arma_ and all of which appear to be focused on leading people to sexual sins. After bewailing their defeat, both demons are then banished at the command of their respective “tormenters.”

Moreover, this dragon embodies temptation away from Margaret’s chosen path as a virgin martyr, just as it embodied the monks’ temptations to leave the monastic life in Gregory’s _Dialogues_. In the beginning of the narrative, Olibrius is overcome with sexual desire for Margaret. When it is revealed to Olibrius that Margaret is Christian, he takes a disturbing carrot-stick approach to having her renounce her Christianity: For as long as she remains Christian, he will subject her to gruesome tortures, but should she renounce her faith he promises her wealth, status, and sexual pleasure. When Margaret is first brought before Olibrius, he declares:

Rather give in to me and worship my gods and I will give you great wealth and it will be good for you above all my household… If you do not adore my gods, my sword will devour your flesh and I will destroy your bones over a burning fire. Yet, if you obey me and worship my gods and join your body with me in love, behold: I say to you before everyone: I will accept you as my bride and it will be as good for you as it is for me.88

The offers that Olibrius makes are reminiscent of the worldly pleasures that the black boy attempts to remind Anthony of: wealth, social belonging, and sexual fulfillment. Just like

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88 _“Magis autem consente mihi et adhora deos meos, et multam tibi dabo pecuniam et bene tibi erit super omnem familiam meam… Si non adoraueris deos meos, gladius meus deuorabit carnem tuam et ossa tua disperdam super ignem ardentem. Nam etsi obedieris mihi et adoraueris deos meos at corpus tuum copularis mihi in amorem, ecce ante omnes tibi dico, ego accipiam te ad coniugium et bene tibi erit sicut et mihi”_ (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 198).
Anthony, Margaret has her eye on the ultimate prize: she persistently rejects these offers from Olibrius, insulting him and claiming that greater rewards await her in heaven.

This exchange of insults and tortures is a well-worn trope in virgin martyr stories. In “Rhetoric, Power and Integrity in the Passion of the Virgin Martyr,” McInerney notes Eulalia of Prudentius’ *Peristephanon* incites anger in her judge by denouncing idol worship and openly inviting her own rape, and St. Cecile’s passionate repudiation of her judge in Chaucer’s *Second Nun’s Tale* causes him to demand that she be boiled to death in her own home. The popular *Lives* of St. Catherine and St. Barbara also feature the martyrs of their respective stories insulting their judges with injurious consequences: Saint Catherine insults the emperor and invites him to torture her (resulting in the famous wheels which feature so prominently in her iconography), and Saint Barbara insults the false gods of her judge filling him with rage and resulting in her various tortures.

However, among all of these virgin martyrs Margaret stands out in her first prayer to God in the prison. In asking to see her true opponent, she rejects what may be the audience’s assumption that Olibrius is her enemy. This drives home the point that there

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89 McInerney 1999, 62-63  
90 Ibid. 66-68  
91 “Cui imperator: reconde, oro, quod moneo, in corde tuo et noli dibiis respondere sermonibus; non te quasi famulam possidere cupimus, sed regina poteus et electa decore in regno meo triumphabis. Cui virgo: attende et tu, obseco, et judicii examine veridica sanctione decerue, quem magis eligere debeo, an potentam, aeternum, gloriosum et decorum vel infirmum, mortalem, ignobilem et deformem. Tunc imperator indignatus ait: e duobus unum tibi elige, aut sacrifica, ut vivas aut exquisita tormenta subi, ut pereas. Et illa: guaecumque tormenta potes cogitare, ne differas, quia carmem et sanguinem meum Christo offerre desidero, sicut et ipse pro me se ipsum obtulit; ipse enim Deus meus, amator meus, pastor et sponsus unicus meus. Tunc qaidam praefectus furenti regi suasit, ut intra triduum quatuor rotas serris ferreis et clavis acutissimis circumseptas praepararet, ut eam tam horribile tormentum dissecare et caeteros christianos tam dirae mortis exemplum terreret” (Jacobus de Voragine 1965, 793).  
92 “Mane autem facto iussit praeses afferri eam et intuens, quoa illata tormenta nusquam comparuerunt, dicit ei: ecce quomodo repropitatisunt tibi tuo Dii et diligit te, quia plagas suas sauavertunt. Respondit Barbara: similes sunt tibi Dii tui sardi, caeci et muti. Et quomodo plagas meas curare potuerunt, qui sibi ipsis remedium conferre non possunt? Ille autem, qui curavit, est Christus filius Dei vivi, quem to non vides, quia induratam est cor tuum a dyabol. Tunc praeses, ut leo fremens, iussit ei lampades ardentes applicari ad latera et malleo caput iis caedi, ipsa autem intuita in coelum dixit: tu nosti, cognitor domine, quia amoris tui occasione patior, me ergo ne derelinquas” (Jacobus de Voragine 1965, 900).
are no human enemies in virgin martyrdoms, rather the judge of each martyrdom functions as an unwitting partner and instrument of the virgin’s death and exaltation. The effect of this prayer is instantaneous: the dragon appears in the corner of the prison and advances on Margaret. The dragon then is her true opponent. Yet, in both the *Life of Anthony* and the Gregory’s *Dialogues*, we have seen that the dragon is the external embodiment of an internal struggle with sin or moral failing.

With an echo of both Anthony and Benedict, it is not the dragon that supplies the explanation but the victim (Margaret) and the black demon. When the black demon appears and acknowledges Margaret’s superiority, she throws him to the ground and demands that he cease his attempts on her virginity. Once the black demon has recovered slightly from his melee with Margaret, he admits that he is the demon who leads the faithful away with sexual desire and that he was the one who sent the dragon to swallow her. As in Anthony, the demon then wails to Margaret that his *arma* have been destroyed by her actions and that he has been brought to shame by his defeat at the hands of a tender girl.

As in *Anthony* and the *Dialogues*, the dragon represents a temptation, a temptation which the black demon identifies by its presence and words as a sexual temptation. Margaret’s struggle is with sexual temptation, a fact that is not surprising given the fact that she need only submit to Olibrius’ sexual advances in order to receive a reprieve from heinous torture as well as the worldly pleasures of wealth, esteem and sexual enjoyment.

While consideration of such temptations might seem ludicrous in the context of a virgin martyr legend, Margaret is not depicted as a bastion of resistance and spiritual fortitude at the beginning of her *Life*, but rather as a profoundly human figure (a depiction
which makes her more relatable and sympathetic to her audience). When Olibrius’ soldiers first approach her, she does not come to them haughtily spitting insults but falls to her knees and prays that God have mercy on her. As Olibrius first subjects her to torture, Margaret pleads “Look upon me Lord and have pity on me, and free me from the hands of my enemies and from the grasp of this tormentor, lest perhaps my heart may be stricken into fear. But send dew from heaven, so that my wounds may be soothed, my sorrow may find repose and my sadness may be turned to joy.”\(^93\) As the torture continues, Margaret prays for confidence and aid so that she can stand against her oppressors. Although Margaret shows astounding resilience in the face of adversity, her prayers give her away: she is worried and in pain, and although she weathers the beatings she receives, she fears that she will succumb, just as those reading her story could or might have already.

It also highlights the amazing hybridity of the story that results from its borrowing from monastic literature. Although Margaret occupies the role of a virgin martyr, her virginity is not portrayed as untouchable. Instead, like the desert father Anthony or Gregory’s errant monks, Margaret is subject to trials and temptations. Furthermore, due to Margaret’s swallowing by the dragon, the audience is never entirely sure that Margaret has escaped her trials and temptations unscathed.

**Succumbing to Temptation: The Paris Text**

It is this ambiguity that allowed Margaret’s female readers such latitude in interpreting her *Life*. I contend that through the well-known parallels with *Anthony* and

\(^{93}\) “Respice in me, Domine, et miserere mei, et libera me de manibus inimicorum meorum et de man istius carnificis, ne forte percussum formidet cor meum. Sed mitte rorem de caelo ut mitigentur plagae meae, et dolor meas requiescat, et tristitia mea uertetur in gaudium” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 200).
the *Dialogues* that Margaret could have been read by medieval mothers as a saint who had been subject to sexual desires, sexual desires with which they themselves were very familiar.

In order to elaborate on this familiarity further, I return to the Paris version. Rather than focus on attempting to uncover the audience for the Paris text, I instead argue that the version anticipates an “imagined audience” of prospective parents. This imagined audience is addressed in Margaret’s prayers: “I pray further Lord that he who erects a basilica in my name or who prepares a book of my passion through his own labor, fill him with your Holy Spirit, the spirit of truth, and in that house let an infant not be born deaf or blind or mute.” Regardless of whether the Paris text actually reached any expectant mothers or fathers, Margaret’s prayers are clearly directed at them, indicating that the author imagined future parents among his prospective audience. At the same time, it speaks to Margaret’s capacity as a patron saint of childbirth, an intrinsically feminine and maternal activity.

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94 This imagined audience can be defined as the audience that the redactor believed might consume the text, the audience that the redactor envisioned in their mind’s eye. This may include the actual audience of the text, but might also include a wider extended audience. For instance, Margaret’s prayers in Paris BN 5574 address an imagined audience of maternal adherents when Margaret prays: “I pray further Lord that he who erects a basilica in my name or who prepares a book of my passion through his own labor, fill him with your Holy Spirit, the spirit of truth, and in that house let an infant not be born deaf or blind or mute.” Regardless of whether the Paris text actually reached any expectant mothers or fathers, Margaret’s prayers are clearly directed at them, indicating that the redactor imagined future parents among either his immediate audience or those who might generally consume the Life. Similarly, the narrator of the Katherine Group Margaret exhorts his imagined audience as “all who have ears to hear, widows with the married, and maidens above all.” While it may be that women of one or more of these sex roles never would have consumed the Katherine Group Margaret, the redactor clearly considered the salubrious message that Margaret offers to be relevant to all women. For another example of the use of the concept of imagined audience in the analysis of Saints’ Lives literature, see Catherine Sanok’s *Her Life Historical: Exemplariness and Female Saints' Lives in Late Medieval England*.

95 “Adhuc peto, Domine, et qui basilicam in nomine meo fecerit, uel qui de suo labore comparauit codicem passionis mee, reple illum Spiritu Sancto tuo, spiritu ueritatis, et in domo illius non nascatur infans claudus aut cecus neque mutus” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 214).

96 However limited that capacity may be at the time of the Paris text’s redaction, see chapter four.
Within this imagined audience, I would like to focus my analysis on the mothers who might have found solace in Margaret’s aid (real and/or imagined). To begin my analysis, I return to the description of the dragon. Carole Hill has noted – regarding an Old English version of the *Life* – that the description of the dragon “makes it difficult for the reader to see the horror so much as to feel the overwhelming of the physical senses.”\(^{97}\) The Paris version’s description is much the same: the reader is overcome by the vivid portrayal of the dragon at the same time that Margaret is overcome by the beast itself:

Behold: suddenly from the corner of the prison came a horrible dragon completely gilded with various colors of hair and with a golden beard. Its teeth were like the sharpest iron. Its eyes shone like a flame of fire, and it blew flame and smoke from its nostrils, and its tongue was panting over its neck, and it seemed as if a two-edged sword was in its hands. For it was terrible and made a stench in the prison from the same fire which issued from its mouth. And St Margaret became as pale as grass and the fear of death came upon her and all her bones were shattered… The dragon opened its mouth and placed it over the head of the blessed Margaret and extended its tongue over her heel and swallowed her into its stomach. But Christ’s Cross, which the blessed Margaret had made over herself, expanded in the mouth of the dragon and split it in two parts. Then,

\(^{97}\) Hill 2010, 62
blessed Margaret came out of the dragon’s belly without any injury to her. Margaret’s dragon is a feast for the senses: the audience is invited to see the colors, feel the heat of the flame, and smell the stench of its breath. Furthermore, this invitation is not only extended by the text but by the internal narrator, Theotimus. At the beginning of the Paris version, Theotimus describes himself as someone who purchased accounts of Margaret’s *Life* and other documents in order to compile his version. Thus, Theotimus comes to the *Life* after it is finished: he is a literary spectator just like other medieval readers. Yet, prior to the prison scene we read: “Theotimus and her foster-mother appeared in the prison and gave her bread and water. And he watched through the window and wrote her prayers.” Indeed! Abruptly, the narrator – who has previously told his audience that he was never there – is present at Margaret’s struggle with the dragon.

This sudden presence accomplishes two things. First, it emphasizes the importance of the scene to Margaret’s *Life*. The only other place that Theotimus inserts himself into the narrative is to pick up Margaret’s relics, the remnants of her body that...
will tie her presence to earth.\textsuperscript{101} Second, it invites the audience to participate. Just like Theotimus, they come to Margaret’s \textit{Life} after Margaret’s death, yet the presence of Theotimus suggests that – at the very least – the prison scene is not 4\textsuperscript{th} century Antioch but \textit{illud tempus}: anyone at any time anywhere can be a spectator. In short, the audience is not only invited to watch the dragon, but to be overcome by it in much the same way that Margaret is.

And overcome she is. Margaret does not stand tall before the dragon, but rather pales at its appearance and collapses onto the floor. Moreover, the dragon’s appearance requires further investigation. When read closely, the dragon’s appearance is not so much draconic as frighteningly masculine, a hybrid of man and beast: it – or perhaps, he – is hairy, sports a beard, and grasps “something like” a sword in both hands as it bears down on Margaret.\textsuperscript{102} Panting (with lust? exertion?) the creature extends its lascivious tongue and swallows Margaret whole. It is here that Margaret – as Kleinberg asserts – comes in contact with “something carnal.”\textsuperscript{103}

It is this carnality to which Margaret briefly succumbs. As we have already seen in Gregory’s \textit{Dialogues}, a successful swallowing by a dragon suggests that the victim has given in to the urges the dragon represents: the secret glutton to his gluttony and the unwilling monk to the lures of the world. Even when the dragon fails to consume his intended – as in the case of the monk leaving Benedict’s abbey – the threat of swallowing is made explicit (as with the same monk’s cries to his fellows) and it is only by turning

\begin{footnotes}
\item[101] And even in this scene, his claim to authority is “I am the one who ministered to her in prison with bread and water (\textit{Ego enim eram qui ministram in carcere panem et aquam}).”
\item[102] It bears mention that “\textit{gladius}” was commonly used as a double-entendre for the penis. Cf. Adams 1982 esp. 19-22 for the frequent use of weapons in sexual innuendo in Latin prose and poetry.
\item[103] Kleinberg 2008, 276
\end{footnotes}
back (and thus, not succumbing to temptation) that one avoids filling the hungry dragon’s belly.

And so, within the allegory suggested by the hybrid narrative, Margaret succumbs, much as her maternal readers succumbed to the same desires and became pregnant as a result. Yet, in this shared identity there must have been hope, for unlike the glutton of Gregory’s Dialogues this is not Margaret’s end. Rather, the sign of the cross expands powerfully in the dragon’s stomach and Margaret emerges *de utero* without injury.

This is a form of *imitatio* that might have drawn the imagined audience of mothers to the dragon scene. Although one might first suppose that the dragon is the maternal figure (being that it bears Margaret from its *uterus*), to suggest that medieval women somehow identified with the dragon is both unflattering and creates an expectation for a birth with grisly results.\(^{104}\) Instead, I suggest that this identification functioned in much the same way as exemplarity functions in *Her Life Historical.* In brief, Sanok suggests that women who performed *imitationes* of saints were not necessarily seeking to repeat the exact events of the Lives, but rather to understand a facet of their own life as an abstraction of a particular saint’s *Life.* For instance, Julian of Norwich’s *imitatio* of St. Cecilia did not involve taking three blows to the neck from a sharp sword, but rather to understand these wounds as three figurative wounds: one each of contrition, compassion, and desire for God.\(^{105}\)

In the same way, mothers were invited to look on St. Margaret not as a figure with whom to directly identify and imitate, but rather as an exemplar for their current

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\(^{104}\) I discuss this issue more fully in my fourth chapter.

\(^{105}\) Sanok 2007, 4
“predicament.” As I have suggested before, the context supplied by the hybrid narrative depicts Margaret as a woman much like them: someone who had succumbed to sexual temptation. As a result, she is frightened and fears for her life, not unlike women facing the always dangerous and frequently lethal process of childbirth in the Middle Ages. Yet, miraculously Margaret does not die, rather she emerges from the results of succumbing to her sexual temptation “without any injury.” In this way, Margaret served as an exemplar of a painless and productive birth process, experiencing metaphorically what the author imagined his feminine audience would hope to experience literally. 106

Resisting Temptation: Seinte Margarete of the Katherine Group

But mothers were neither the only readers of St. Margaret’s Life nor the only individuals interested in carrying out an imitatio. I will now shift gears and address the way in which virgins read the Life of St. Margaret as a source of spiritual strength for resisting sexual temptation.

In the interest of analyzing a text that is specifically interested in a virginal audience, I have selected Seinte Margarete from the Katherine Group. The Katherine Group (a title referring to the five works in Bodley 34: the three saints lives Seinte Katerine, Seinte Margarete, Seinte Iuliene; an exhortation to the virginal life entitled Hali Meiðhad; and a work on the custody of the soul called Sawles Warde) has a history of significant scholarly work that surrounds it, dating back over a century. 107 One focus of such scholarship has been identifying the audience of the Katherine Group, and opinions

106 This imitatio is further explored in my last chapter.
107 Cf. Millett 1996, an annotated bibliography of some 480 sources which pertain to the Katherine Group and the literature that is often associated with it (Ancrene Wisse and the Wooing Group).
have ranged from recluses¹⁰⁸ to the inhabitants of a nunnery¹⁰⁹ to women practicing domestic monasticism.¹¹⁰

While many of these arguments are compelling, I want to once more focus upon the audience which the redactor of Seinte Margarete (whoever he or she may have been) intended to address, to the redactor’s “imagined audience.” Clearly, when we look at Seinte Margarete, we see a text that the author intended to be especially directed towards a virginal audience. We read in Seinte Margarete’s introduction:

Listen, all those who have ears to hear, widows with the married, and maidens above all should attend most earnestly to how they should love the Living Lord, and live in virginity, the virtue dearest to him, so that they may, through that holy maiden we commemorate today with the honor due to virgins, sing that blessed virgins’ song together with this maiden and with the heavenly host eternally in heaven.¹¹¹

While the text specifically calls out widows and the married as part of its audience (suggesting that the author expected an audience that was not only virgins), it nevertheless places special emphasis on the meaning of Margaret to a virginal audience and the special place that such virgins hold. Moreover, this makes clear that the author had virgins and their identification in mind when he (or she) wrote the text.

¹⁰⁸ Largely due to the possible association of Ancrene Wisse – which is directed specifically at anchoresses – and the Katherine Group. An association is frequently imagined between the two groups particularly because Ancrene Wisse references “eower englische boe of seinte Margarete.”
¹⁰⁹ Cf. Wolpers 1964
¹¹⁰ Cf. Hassel 2002 esp. chapter 2. The Katherine Group Margaret, its audience, and previous scholarship will be addressed in more depth in my second chapter.
¹¹¹ “Hereneð, alle þe earen ant herunge habbeð, widwen wið þa iweddede, ant te meidnes nomeliche lusten swiðe þeornliche hu ha chulen luuien þe liuiende Lauerd ant liiben i meiðhad, þet him his mihte leouest, swa þet ha moten, purh þet eadie meiden þe we munneð todei wið meiðhades menske, þet seði meidnes song singen wið þis meiden ant wið þet heouenliche hird echeliche in heouene” (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, 44; the translation of the Katherine Group Margaret is adapted from Millett and Wogan-Browne’s translation in the same volume).
These differences in the redactor’s intentions are reflected in differences between the appearance of the dragon in Seinte Margarete and the Paris text.\textsuperscript{112} As in the Paris text, Margaret has been subjected to various tortures prior to her draconic visitation. Locked in her prison cell she prays to God to show her true opponent:

Her foster-mother was the one who cared for her, and came to the dungeon and brought her food, the bread and spring water that kept her alive. Now this woman and many others were watching through a window as she prayed; and suddenly, out of a corner, there came towards her a fiend from hell in the shape of a dragon, so dreadful they were aghast at the sight of that evil monster, glittering all over as if he had been gilded. His hair and long beard shone with gold, and his grisly teeth were like black iron. His eyes gleamed brighter than stars or jewels, broad as basins in his horned head on either side of his great hooked nose. Out of his hideous mouth, flames were flickering, and from his nostrils billowed noxious smoke, a smoke most foul, and he darted out his tongue, so long he could swing it around his neck; and it seemed as if a sharp sword was coming from his mouth that flashed like lightning and blazed with fire; and it happened that the place was filled with a strong and foul stench, and the shadow of the demon flickered and shone over all. He began to close in on this meek maiden, and his jaws gaped threateningly above her and started to stretch and crane his neck as if he were about to swallow her whole. If she was afraid of that horrible fiend, it is little wonder!… And then she traced down her body, then across, the beloved sign of that dear cross that he was

\textsuperscript{112} The Katherine Group Margaret is an an “adaptation of the Mombritius version” (Mack 1934, xxiv).
raised on. And the dragon rushed at her in that same moment and set his
hideous mouth, cavernously huge, high above her head, and stretched out
his tongue to the soles of her feet and tossed her in, swallowing her into
his great womb – but to Christ’s honor and his own destruction. For the
sign of the cross that she was armed with swiftly set her free, and became
his swift death, as his body burst in two in the middle; and the blessed
maiden, inviolate, without a mark on her, walked out of his womb,
praising aloud her Savior in heaven. 113

The differences between the depiction of the dragon in Seinte Margarete from the Paris
text is telling. Unlike the vaguely lustful and man-like dragon of the Paris version, Seinte
Margarete features a dragon you can really sink your teeth into (and vice versa): vicious
teeth, luminescent eyes, a horned head, and an enormous mouth preparing to swallow
Margaret whole. Moreover, the author does not clinically describe a progression of events
as in the Mombritius (“the dragon opened its mouth and placed it over the head of the
blessed Margaret and extended its tongue over her heel and swallowed her into its

113 “Hire uostermoder wes an þet frourede hire, ant com to þe cwalmhus ant brohte hire to fode bred ant
burnes drunch, þet ha bi liude. Heo þa ant monie ma biheolden þurh an eilpurl as ha bed hire beoden; ant
drakes liche, se grislich þet ham gras wið þet sehen þet unselfe, glistinde as þah he al ouerguld were. His
lockes ant his longe berd blikenden at of golde, ant his grisliche teð semden of swart irn. His twa ehnen
steareden steappe þen þe steoren ant ten þimstanes, brade ase bascins in his ihurnde heauen on eider half
on his heh hokede nease. Of his speatwile muð sperclede fur ut, ant of his nease-þurles þreste smörðinde
smoke, smeche forcuðest; ant lahte ut his tunge, se long þet he swong hire abuten his swire; ant semde as
þah a scharp swoerd of his muð scheate, þe glistnede ase gleam deð ant leitede al o leie; ant al warð þet
stude ful of strong ant of steare stench, ant of þes schucke schadewe schimmede ant schan al. He stragte
him ant stureden toward tis meoke meiden, ant geapede wið his genow upon hire ungeinliche, ant bigon to
crahien ant crengre wið swire, se þe hire walde forswole mid alle. Þef ha agrisen wes of þet grisliche
gra, nes na muche wunder!... Ant droh þa endelong hire, ant þwertouer prefter, þe deorewurðe taken of þ
deore rode þet he on reste. Ant te drake reasde to hire mit tet ilke, ant sette his sarliche muð, ant
unmeåðlich muchel, on heh on hire heauen, ant rahte ut his tunge to þe ile of hire helen ant swengde hire in
ant forswelh into his wide wombe – ah Criste to wurðmund ant him to wraðer heale. For þe rode-taken
redliche arudde hire þet ha wes wið iweepnet, ant þet eadi meiden allunge unnenret, wiðuten eauereuch
wem, wende ut of his wombe, heriende on heh hire Healent in heouene” (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990,
58–60).
stomach”), but invites the audience to experience Margaret’s terror as it slowly advances on her, opening its jaws with deliberation until it rushes at Margaret and tosses her into its mouth. Certainly, the same sensual quality that pervades the Paris text is present in *Seinte Margarete* but with a different goal: this is not a dragon that seduces but one that terrifies. In fact, the author even gives the audience permission to feel such terror by calling attention to Margaret’s own: “if she was afraid of that horrible fiend, it is little wonder!”

As in the Paris version, this emotional resonance in *Seinte Margarete* – fear rather than sensuality – is enhanced through an invitation for the audience to participate. Whereas Theotimus slyly inserts himself outside the window of Margaret’s prison and invites his readers to do the same, the author of *Seinte Margarete* envisions a community of women fearfully watching Margaret’s travails: “Her foster-mother was the one who cared for her, and came to the dungeon and brought her food, the bread and spring water that kept her alive. Now this woman and many others were watching through a window as she prayed.”

Who are these “many others” who attend the nursemaid and watch Margaret in her encounter? They are the women of the community to which the author of *Seinte Margarete* envisioned writing. At the most crucial point of the narrative, the author brings a nameless group of women to the window of the prison so that they may be “aghast at the sight of that horror.”

As it turns out, Margaret has little to fear from such a “horror:” just as she did in the Paris version, Margaret emerges from the dragon “inviolate, without a mark on her.”

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114 “Hire uostermoder wes an þet frourede hire, ant com to þe cwalmhus ant brohte hire to fode bred ant burnes drunch, þet ha bi liuede. Heo þa ant monie ma biheolden þurh an eilpurul as ha bed hire beoden” (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, 58).
115 It seems likely that this group is composed of women as the precedent to “many more” (“monie ma”) is the feminine noun “heo.”
Yet, this emergence is not precisely the same as in the Paris text. In the Paris version, Margaret emerges from the dragon “without any injury to her (nullum dolorem in se habens);” in Seinte Margarete, she emerges “inviolate, without a mark on her (unmerret, wiðuten eauereuch wem).” Why does the author “double up” his assertion of Margaret’s safety? Wouldn’t wiðuten eauereuch wem suffice to explain Margaret’s physically sound state, as nullum dolorem in se habens does in the Mombritius version from which it was based?

It is precisely because “inviolate (unmerret)” is not describing a physical state of health that the author of Seinte Margarete includes it. The word is instead indicating the state of Margaret’s virginity, just as it did in Margaret’s prayer prior to the dragon’s appearance: “For one thing, I beseech you, forever and overall, that you protect my virginity inviolate (unmerret) for you.”

Through the repetition of unmerret, the author is confirming that Margaret’s prayer was answered: despite being (literally) consumed by sexual temptation “personified,” Margaret has resisted it and remained uncorrupted. Unlike the Paris version, this author is making it perfectly clear to his audience that Margaret is still virginal and did not succumb to the sexual temptation represented by the dragon, despite being swallowed.

This is especially important for a virginal audience, because the demon “blacker than any black man” that follows (and who, as we have seen in previous texts, explains the silent dragon’s role) is even more explicit about the dragon’s role as a sexual tempter:

116 “For an þing I biseche þe eauer ant oueral, þet tu wite to þe mi meiðhad unmerret” (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, 58).
117 One might also note that – considering the Mombritius version is the source for Seinte Margarete – this is further support for the reading that Margaret succumbing to sexual desire in the Paris version. That is, if there was never any threat of Margaret succumbing to sexual desire in the Mombritius version, then there would be no need for the author to qualify for his audience that Margaret remained “inviolate;” the condition would be assumed.
118 “muche deale blackre þen eauer eani blamon” (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, 60).
“You have defeated my brother most terribly and slain the most cunning devil in hell, whom I sent to devour you in the form of a dragon and attack with his great power the virtue of your virginity.”

As in the Paris version and the Life of Anthony, the foul creature then recounts its ways to Margaret, weeps over how its wiles – referred to as “my weapons (mine wepnen)” – have been overcome, and expresses his shame at being defeated.

It is interesting to note that this pattern of attack and shame is also identified by the author of Hali Meiðhad (another text enclosed in the Katherine Group), who warns:

If you reply in this way to the desire of your flesh and to the fiend’s temptation, he will flee from you with shame; and if he makes any stand at all after this, and still keeps trying to afflict your flesh and provoke your heart, then your Lord God is allowing him so as to increase your reward… For then the Devil is shamefully overthrown with his own strategy, since – as the Apostle says – you will not be crowned unless you are attacked. If God wishes to crown you, he will certainly let the Evil One attack you so that you may earn a victor’s crown by it. Therefore it is best for you when he afflicts you most and assails you more fiercely with his temptations.”

Much like the audience of Seinte Margarete, the audience of Hali Meiðhad is cautioned that they will be tempted by demonic figures that are intent upon

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119 ¹¹¹ “Þu hauest frimliche ibroht mi broðer to frunde ant islein þen sleheste deouel of hell, þe Ich o drake liche sende to forswolhe þe ant merren wið his muchele mein þe mihte of þi meiðhad” (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, 62).
120 ¹²⁰ Focusing on sexual themes which I will discuss later in this chapter.
121 ¹²¹ “Ȝet were hit þurh a mon – ah is þurh a meiden!” (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, 70).
122 ¹²² “ȝef þu þus ontswerest to þi licomes lust ant to þe feondes fondunge, he schal fleo þe wið scheome; ant ȝef he alles efter þi inohreaðe etstonde, ant halt on to eili þi flesch ant prokie þin heorte, þi Lauerd Godd hit þeauð him to muchli þi mede… For þenne is þe deofel wið his ahe turn scheomeliche awarpen, hwen þu, as þe apostle seið, ne schalt beon iccrunet bute þu beo asailent. ȝef Godd wule cruni þe, he wule leote ful wel þe unwiht asaili þe, þet tu earni þerþurh kempene crune” (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, 42).
violating their virginity. This temptation will take the form of weapons – in this case, arrows – directed at the virgin, who should remain steadfast as God would only allow such testing if she were to be crowned.

Given these similarities between Seinte Margarete and Hali Meiðhad, I advance a comparison between the two works. It should be noted that given the problems of authorship already discussed when working with the Katherine Group, I am not necessarily suggesting that the authors of the two texts are one and the same. Rather by comparing these two texts side-by-side, I believe that Margaret’s status as a role-model for overcoming sexual desire for virgins will be made clearer.

Specifically, I argue that Hali Meiðhad was read as an instructional text for achieving the status of St. Margaret. That is, virginal women would read Seinte Margarete and recognize Margaret as an exemplar of the state to which they aspired (i.e. virginal bride of Christ), and would then turn to Hali Meiðhad as an instruction manual on how to achieve this state. Alternatively, this reading may have been inverted, making Seinte Margarete something of a proof text of Hali Meiðhad: After reading Hali Meiðhad, which detailed a specific way of approaching the maintenance of virginity (as we shall see), virgins would then read Seinte Margarete and see the same techniques and concerns parroted back to them in the actions of Margaret and the speech of the demon.

To begin this comparison, I focus on Hali Meiðhad’s warning to virgins. After discussing the wretched state of women who choose to forgo their virginity, the author begins to describe the way in which the devil might cause them to fall:

\[123\text{Although it does seem to me that one was written with another in mind (although which one came first I refuse to speculate upon).}\]
Now the old fiend looks around, and sees that you stand so high in this virtue, like her and her son, like an angel in heaven, in the honor of virginity, and swells with fury; and night and day he shoots his arrows, drenched in a venomous potion, towards your heart to wound you with feeble will and cause you to fall, which Christ forbid! And always the more strongly you stand against him, the more furiously he attacks out of spite and anger; because it seems to him all the more shameful to be overcome, that something as weak as flesh is – and especially a woman’s – able to prevail over him. Every carnal desire and lecherous lust which arises in your heart is the Devil’s arrow; but it cannot wound you unless it is lodged in you and remains long enough that you wish your desire could be acted out.\textsuperscript{124}

Margaret’s story reaches like a ghost through the pages of \textit{Hali Meiðhad}. The author of \textit{Hali Meiðhad} discusses an ancient enemy (kin to the devil in Margaret’s cell, no doubt) who is so infuriated by virginity that he constantly shoots arrows (while the word here is \textit{earewen}, these are very much a form of \textit{arma} as used in Margaret’s \textit{Life}) at his opponents. These arrows are clearly meant to incite sexual desire because they are dipped in a “venomous potion” (\textit{attri healewi}) meant to cause virgins to fall from their state of grace. This “potion” appears to be a collection of sexual thoughts or suggestions because such arrows are tipped in “every carnal impulse and lecherous desire.” The only cure for

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{124}“Nu bihalt te alde feond, ant sið þe I þis mihte stonde se hehe, ilich hire ant hire sune, as engel in heouene, i meiðhades menske, ant toswelleð of grome; ant scheoteð niht ant dei his earewen, idrencete of an attri healewi, towart tin heorte to wundi þe wið wac wil, ant makien to fallen, as Crist te forbeode! Ant eauer se þu strengeeluker stondest aþeim him, se he o teone ant o grome wodeluker weorreð; for swa much e þe hokerluker him þuncheð to beon ouercumen, þet þing se feble as flesch is, ant nomeliche of wummon, schal him ouerstihen. Euch fleschlich wil ant lust of leccherie þe ariseð i þe heorte is þes feondes fla; ah hit ne wundëð þe nawt bute hit festni in þe, ant leaue se longe þet tu valdest þet ti wil were ibroht to werke”
\end{quote}
(Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, 12).
such arrows is to be aware and pluck them from your heart quickly since they can only wound if the poison is allowed to fester. Finally, when he fails he suffers great shame because – like Margaret’s demon – he cannot bear to be overcome by a woman of all things!

While these are common narrative elements of many of the Lives, Seinte Margarete also contains more specific and deliberate links between itself and Hali Meidhad. In Seinte Margarete, after Margaret has beaten the black demon it tells her:

After Beelzebub, I have been the destroyer of the most men, and devoured their labors, and caused the rewards they had built for themselves for many years to vanish completely through some of my wiles – which I wrenched down when they least expected it – and not yet was anyone able to overcome me but you… I am forever going busily about the good, and those I follow most diligently are the ones who are able to be pure without the desire for men and who flee carnal filth, to see if I might make any way for them to fall and defile themselves. I have overthrown many that truly thought they could escape my wiles, and in this way: I sometimes allow a chaste man to remain near a chaste woman, at whom I throw nothing nor attack, but let everything happen of its own accord. I let them talk about God and discuss things of goodness, and truly love each other without sexual desire or wicked thoughts, so that each is confident in themselves and the other, and they feel more secure sitting by themselves and jest125 with each other. Then in the midst of this safety I make my first

125 It is interesting that the word gomenin (gamen) can also be used euphemistically to indicate intercourse of a nonverbal nature as well.
attack on them, and shoot very secretly and – before they realize it – wound their unwary hearts with a venomous potion. Lightly at first, then with loving looks, with one gazing intently at the other, and then I incite them to more through playful speech until they are romping and wrestling together. Then I drive amorous thoughts into them – at first against their will, but then they grow to tolerate it such that it seems good. And so I, when they let me, neither stopping me nor preventing themselves nor standing strong against it, I lead them into the mire and the loathsome lake of that filthy sin.  

Considering that *Seinte Margarete* is based on a Mombritius version of Margaret, it is not surprising to see that many of the same features discussed in the previous paragraph are present in this version. What is surprising is the degree to which this scene reflects the language of *Hali Meidhad*, something which the Mombritius version of Margaret under consideration (the Paris version) most certainly does not. Rather than address all sexual activity, *Seinte Margarete*’s demon admits to a special hatred of virgins: “the ones that I have to follow most closely are those who are trying to keep themselves chaste and untouched by men and flee carnal filth, to see if I might somehow cause them to fall and untouchable...”

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126 “Ich habbe efter Belzebub meast monnes bone ibeon, ant forswolhen hare swine, ant to aswinden imaket þe meden þet ha moni þer heffen ham þ Jianget wið sum of mine wiheles, þet Ich wrencete ham adun hwen ha lest wenden; ne neauer þet ne mahte me ouercume na mon bute þu nuþe... Ich fòlhi neodelukest þe cumnið to beon cleane wiþuten monnes man ant fleòðflesches fulðen, þef Ich mahte eanies weis makien ham to fallen ant fulen hamseoluen. Monie Ich habbe awarpen þe wenden mine wiheles ful witerliche etwrenchen, ant of þisse wise. Ich leote ôðerhwiles a cleane mon wunien neh a cleane wummon, þet Ich nawiht towart ham ne warpe ne ne weorri, ah leote ham al iwurðen. Ich leote ham talkin of Godd ant teuelin of godlec, ant trewliche luuien ham wiþuten uuel wilnunge ant alle unwreste willes, þet eiðer of his ahne, ant of þe oðres ba, treowliche beo trusti, ant te sikurene beon to sitten bi hamseoluen ant gomenin togederes. Penne þurh þis sikerlec seche Ich earst upon ham, ant scheote swiðe dearnliche ant wundi, ear ha witen hit, wið swiðe attri healewi hare unwarre heorte. Lihtliche on alre carest, wið lueliche lates, wið steape bihaldunge eiðer on oðer; ant tolïð togederes. Penne þude Ich þus, hwen ha leoteð me, ne ne letteð me nawið ne ne steorið hamseolf ne ne stondeð strongliche aþein, leade ham i þe leiuem ante i þe ladliche lake of þet sutin sunne” (Millet and Wogan-Browne 1990, 64-66).
defile themselves.” He further claims to incite carnal desire by “shooting” his targets with the same venomous potion (attri healewi) found in Hali Meiðhad. Perhaps most interesting is the extended example that the demon gives of luring virgins into carnal filthiness. According to the creature, he allows two chaste individuals to remain near to each other and engage in discussion of their mutual love of God. Then, very secretly he wounds their hearts with an arrow dipped in his “venomous potion.” Due to the comfort that they feel in each other’s presence, they neglect to pluck it out and as the arrow and potion festers in their hearts, they are spurred to greater and greater acts of physical intimacy until finally the virgin falls.

Of course, this is an elaboration of the previously discussed warning that Hali Meiðhad offers to its imagined audience of virginal readers: Seinte Margarete simply outlines a scenario which might occur to bring about the fall of a virgin. Moreover, it outlines a likely scenario: regardless of the type of community to which such virginal readers would have belonged (anchoritic to domestic monasticism), contact with at least a male confessor would have been required. This contact between a chaste man (theoretically, the confessor) and a chaste woman (the virginal reader) is precisely what Seinte Margarete warns against. In short, Seinte Margarete offers a likely story of the fall of a virgin, while Hali Meiðhad uses the same narrative elements (the arrow, the venomous potion, and the festering) to provide its warning.

The relationship between Hali Meiðhad and Seinte Margarete creates a powerful imitatio for avoiding sexual temptation. In Seinte Margarete, Margaret successfully overcomes the sexual temptation represented by the dragon and emerges from its belly

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127 Contact between anchoritic women and male religious (and non-religious) figures is further discussed in chapter two.
unmerret. To her virginal readers, this becomes the metaphorical *imitatio*. That is, virgins are not searching for dragons to swallow them in direct imitation of Margaret’s *Life*, but rather they seek to overcome sexual temptation in the same way that Margaret did. The emergence of the black demon lays out the demonic impediments to this *imitatio*, detailing the way in which demons may attempt to seduce them into sexual acts. Realizing that in order to carry out their *imitatio* they must defeat such demonic adversaries, Margaret’s virginal readers would then turn to *Hali Meiðhad*, in which they would encounter familiar language and scenarios from *Seinte Margarete* that would guide their identification process.

In this way, *Seinte Margarete* narrativizes the elements of attack, temptation, and resistance in which *Hali Meiðhad* personally instructs the virginal reader. In doing so, *Seinte Margarete* establishes the figure to be imitated, but *Hali Meiðhad* directs this *imitatio* in a specific way. By offering strategies and reasons for maintaining virginity, *Hali Meiðhad* shapes the way in which virgins reading both texts would have identified with St. Margaret, understood sexual temptation, and even conceived of their own virginity. At the same time, during this focused identification the virgin is again urged to continue her *imitatio* of the saint:

Think of St. Catherine, of St. Margaret, St. Agnes, St. Juliana, St. Lucy, and St. Cecilia, and of the other holy virgins in heaven, how they not only forsook the sons of kings and noblemen, with all worldly wealth and earthly pleasures, but suffered cruel tortures rather than accept them, and a
painful death in the end. Think how happy they are now and accordingly how blissful they are in the arms of God, as queens of heaven.¹²⁸

Through this *imitatio* of the Margaret narrative – guided by the instructions in *Hali Meidhad* – the imagined audience did not acquire a distant, sanctified role-model, but a sister in their struggles with whom they would one day “sing that blessed virgins’ song together” and a companion in their ongoing struggle with sexual temptation.

**Conclusion**

By using the dragon as a symbol of temptation – and being swallowed by the dragon as a sign of succumbing to temptation as seen in Gregory’s *Dialogues* – the narratives provide a context in which Margaret is tempted from her path as a virgin martyr towards the pleasures of this world. While these temptations could take a variety of forms, the appearance of and explanation by the black demon – a debt which Margaret owes to St. Anthony’s *Life* – indicates that the dragon embodies a sexual temptation that Margaret faces.

This temptation is not static, and the two narratives in question handle Margaret’s temptation in fundamentally different – yet complimentary – ways. In the Paris text, whose author imagines an audience of mothers, the dragon completes its seduction of Margaret. The author depicts Margaret facing a dragon with distinctly masculine traits and invokes sensual language that invites the audience to experience what Margaret is experiencing. This invitation to experience as Margaret did is embodied by the character

¹²⁸ “Þench o Seinte Katerine, o Seinte Margarete, Seinte Enneis, Seinte Iuliene, Seinte Lucie, and Seinte Cecille, ant o þe oþre hali meidnes in heouene, hu ha nawt aue ne forsoken kinges sunes ant eorles, wið alle worldliche weolen ant eorðliche wunnen, ah þoleden stronge pinen ear ha walden neomen ham, ant derf deað on ende. Þench hu wel ham is nu, ant hu ha blissið þeuore bituhe Godes earmes, cwenes of heouene” (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, 40).
of Theotimus, living after the time of Margaret’s narrative but still nonetheless present at her prison window. Swallowed into the dragon’s “womb,” Margaret is then expelled from her grisly faux birth miraculously unharmed, as unharmed as the maternal audience imagined by the author hoped to emerge from their own labors.

On the other hand, the author of *Seinte Margarete* writes to an imagined audience of all women but prizes virgins above others. Continuing to engage the senses of the reader, the redactor of *Seinte Margarete* concocts a terrifying dragon meant to warn his imagined charges away from any sexual temptation. Although Margaret is swallowed and emerges from the dragon’s “womb” – as she did in the Paris text – she emerges “inviolate,” her virginity secured against succumbing to temptation through her prayers to Christ. Furthermore, the black demon – no doubt speaking in the voice of the redactor – warns Margaret’s listeners about how he causes virgins to succumb to sexual desire and provides them with the means to defeat its wiles.¹²⁹

“Sanctity is derived from the sacred, which is radically singular.” It is this concept of singularity that allows the narratives of the *Life of St. Margaret* under consideration to engage tropes from both virgin martyr legends and monastic writings and to produce a character in Margaret who is both pure as the driven snow and sullied by sexual temptation. It is this singularity of sanctity that produces the polysemous nature of Margaret’s narrative. This narrative was capable of functioning as an *imitatio* for virgins and mothers alike, an *imitatio* which allowed Margaret to contribute to the sexual identities of both groups.

Moreover, both narratives lend immediacy to this *imitatio* by grounding the draconic visitation not in 4th century Antioch but in the instant and location that the

¹²⁹ This is the focus of chapter two.
reader encounters the scene. The presence of Theotimus in the Paris text and the group of unidentified women in *Seinte Margarete* both serve to invite the audience to experience Margaret’s draconic encounter as if they were present at her prison window. Both presences beckon the audience to participate in Margaret’s narrative as if they were there, and in so doing they render the *imitatio* that Margaret’s adherents performed a contemporary *imitatio* for contemporary concerns.

Of course, the polysemous narrative of the draconic visitation allows both virgins and mothers to benefit from either version under consideration. For instance, virgins were not the only beneficiaries of *Seinte Margarete*. The author specifically addresses the *Life* to wives and widows, as well as virgins. Moreover, while the section from *Seinte Margarete* that I analyzed had special importance to the virginal component of the audience, the wives and widows of the audience likely profited from it as well. For instance, Margaret’s encounter with the dragon is the source of her blessing for parturient mothers. Thus, while the virgins of *Seinte Margarete*’s audience read the encounter with the dragon in one way, expectant mothers read it in another. The section would have spoken differently to each audience subdivision, but ultimately was capable of addressing the interests of both groups.

However, Margaret’s blessing for parturient women in the piece clearly does not. While Margaret’s actual encounter with the dragon is applicable to both groups, when Margaret prays “In the house where a woman lies in labor, as soon as she remembers my name and my suffering, Lord, hasten to help her and listen to her prayer”¹³⁰ this clearly excludes virgins. That is, although the author addresses the entire *Life* to wives, widows,

¹³⁰ “I þet hus þer wummon pineð o childe, sone se ha munneð mi nome ant mi pine, Lauerd, hihendliche help hire and her hire bene” (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, 78).
and virgins, it is only the mothers who stand to benefit from this particular section of the *Life*. This separation is nothing more than a curiosity in most *Lives*, but in others – such as *Seinte Margarete* and the version of Margaret in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303 – there is enough substance from which to meaningfully derive audience participation, the focus of my next chapter.
Chapter 2: The Devil Made Me Do It – Audience Partitioning and the Life of St.

Margaret

While the *imitatio* of the draconic visitation was used to inform the sexual identities of both mothers and virgins, Margaret’s narrative could also be used to inform the identities of other groups as well. Maud Burnett McInerney has argued that *Seinte Margarete* was used as a model of empowered feminine speech by medieval women,\(^\text{131}\) Karolyn Kinane has shown that the same redactor used the *Life* to “shape the anchorite’s interior, spiritual life and also to define her as intercessor, as link between the earthly community that supports and reveres her and the heavenly kingdom with which she communes.”\(^\text{132}\) Regarding the version of the *Life* contained in BL Cotton Tiberius A.iii, Tracey-Anne Cooper notes its capacity to assist in lay instruction by acting as a “prime example of the good Christian life and the fully formed Christian conscience” and that through the *Life* “the laity were exhorted to behave in their ordinary lives in the same manner that Margaret had behaved in her extraordinary *Life*.\(^\text{133}\) Sarah Salih has argued that Margery of Kempe made use of the narrative elements of Margaret’s *Life* – and the *Lives* of other virgin martyrs – in order to forge a virginal identity for herself.\(^\text{134}\)

In a broader sense, these authors are all speaking to a similar issue: the fact that Margaret’s narrative served as a guide for her readers to proper lifestyle and behavior. Regardless of whether the reader was a professional religious (e.g. an anchoress, monk, etc.) or a member of the laity, Margaret’s *Life* offered valuable advice for acceptable

\(^{131}\) McInerney 1999, 70
\(^{132}\) Kinane 2011, 52
\(^{133}\) Cooper 2013, 80
\(^{134}\) Cf. Sarah Salih’s *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* esp. chapter 5.
behavior and interactions and a role model for the ideal Christian life. By imitating Margaret, Margaret’s readers were guided towards a socially acceptable Christian identity.

One portion of Margaret’s *Life* that is particularly fertile ground for such instruction is her encounter with the black demon. In the Mombritius tradition, the demon frequently claims to be responsible for coercing Christians into a variety of different sexual sins. By associating specific sexual practices with the influence of demons, the narrative implicitly warns its readers to reject such practices as a part of their Christian sexual identity. At the same time, this creates a powerful didactic tool for redactors of the *Life*: by targeting specific sexual behaviors in the demon’s speech, redactors were able to cultivate or condemn specific sexual behaviors in their audience.

On occasion, redactors single out a specific portion of their imagined audience in the black demon’s speech to such a degree that this portion of the audience can be isolated from the larger imagined audience. In versions of the *Life* where this phenomenon occurs, the black demon’s speech becomes an even more telling indicator of the sexual identities of the targeted portion of the audience. I have chosen to call this phenomenon “audience partitioning” and the isolated portion of the audience a “partition.”

By way of a brief example, the Katherine Group redactor addresses a broad imagined audience of “all who have ears to hear, widows with the married, and maidens.”

While the vast majority of the text is relevant to the entire imagined audience, it is possible for the redactor to speak specifically to the concerns of one

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135 “Hercneð, alle þe earen ant herunge habbeð, widewen wið þa iweddede, ant te meidnes nomeliche lusten swiðe þeornliche hu ha schulen luuien þe liuiende Lauerd” (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, 44).
particular portion of the imagined audience (let’s say, the “maidens” of the imagined audience of the “widows, married, and maidens”). For instance, when the black demon begins to talk about the means to defend one’s virginity from outside influences, this is clearly an irrelevant concern to the widows and mothers who have already lost their virginity but is of primary concern to the virginal readers. Since the redactor is speaking directly to an isolated segment of the larger audience (the partition of virgins), these sections of the Lives become an important source of data regarding the sexual identity of the virgins who imitated the Katherine Group Margaret, allowing the close reader to emerge with valuable historical cultural insights about the audience’s makeup.

There are two version of Margaret’s Life that I would like to address in which audience partitions yield valuable historical data. In the first section, I will address Seinte Margarete. At the beginning, the redactor identifies his general audience as composed of “all who have ears to hear, widows with the married, and maidens above all.”\(^\text{136}\) In “The Audience of the Saints’ Lives of the Katherine Group,” Bella Millett argues that, despite this internal address to an audience of maidens, widows and virgins, the audience of Ancrene Wisse must have found Seinte Margarete useful based upon the Katherine Group’s shared presence in manuscripts. Building on this research, I will argue that the black demon’s speech is clearly preoccupied with the proper ways in which virgins are to conduct themselves in sexually threatening situations, suggesting that the redactor is addressing the virginal community among his general audience of widows, wives, and virgins. A further analysis of the contents of this portion of the Life reveals that the

\(^{136}\) “alle þe earen ant herunge habbed, widewen wið þa iweddede, ant te meidnes nomeliche” (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, 44).
virgins to whom the black demon’s speech pertained must have been either the same community as that in *Ancrene Wisse* or a very similar one.

In the second section, I will turn my attention to Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303 to address Elaine Treharne’s argument that the original audience of the *Life of St. Margaret* contained therein is “monastic and ascetic.” While I believe that Treharne is correct in her assertion that Margaret’s *Life* in the Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303 manuscript is especially suited for such an audience, I will argue that the black demon’s speech – once more – betrays another distinct audience partition. My analysis (particularly of the demon’s claim that he causes men to have sexual relations with four-footed beasts) suggests that the version of the *Life* was originally written for two audiences: one that was “monastic and ascetic” and another a rural, lay audience that fell under the monastic audience’s pastoral care.

**The Mombritius Version**

Since both of the versions under consideration either use the Mombritius version as a direct source (in the case of the Katherine Group *Seinte Margarete*) or are closely related to it (CCCC is derived from the Pre-Mombritius/Mombritius tradition), it makes sense to revisit the Mombritius version from the previous chapter (the Paris text) to serve as a useful baseline. Moreover, this baseline will serve to indicate how profoundly dissimilar the demon’s speech in the Paris text is to either *Seinte Margarete* or the version in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303.

After Margaret encounters the dragon in the Paris text, the black demon appears and discusses his role in sexual sins:

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137 Treharne 2012, 8
I am he who sweeps away the efforts of many. I am he who fights with the just and inflames their kidneys and blinds their eyes and makes them forget all heavenly wisdom. And when they are asleep I come over them and wake them from sleep to wicked works, and those who are unable to move from sleep I cause to sin in their sleep. By whatever art possible I inspire [to lust] those I find without the sign of the cross and I never cease to fight against them or do them harm. But those whom I find sealed with the sign of the cross and who are similar to you, I leave confused and empty-handed, just as I do from you today. O blessed Margaret, what can I say? I have been overcome by you. I do not know what I am to do! All my arms have been destroyed, my strength is confounded, and I am overcome by a tender girl.”

The demon’s speech serves to signify three things to the Paris version’s stated audience of “men, women and virgins.” First, the demon suggests that it is the source of improper sexual lust, a topic that would have been important to men, women, and virgins. It suggests a specific group of people that it targets (those whom it finds without the sign of the cross), a group that could include all members of the original audience. Finally, it

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138 “Ego sum qui pugno cum iustis et incendo renes eorum et abceco oculos eorum et facio eos obliuiscere omnem caelestem sapientem. Et cum dormierint uenio super eos et excito illos a somno ad mala opera, et quos non possum mouere de somno favio eos in somno peccare. Quacumque arte uentilo quos sine signaculo crucis Christi inueni <et> contra eos pugnare atque eis nocere non cesso. Illos uero quos cum signaculo sancte crucis signatos inuenio et quo tibi sunt similes confusus et uacuus ab eis discedo quemadmodum a te hodie. O beata Margareta, quid dicam? Superatus sum a te. Quid faciam ignoro. Arma mea confracta sunt, uirtus mea confusa est, a tenera puella superatus sum” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 208).

139 In the beginning of the story, the narrator exhorts his intended audience to “listen with your heart and understand: men, women, [and] virgins imagine yourself as tender girls in your hearts.” “audite corde, et intelligite uiri; mulieres, uirgines, <uelut> tenere puelle proponite <uos> in cordibus uestrís” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 194).
arms this same audience with a defense against the demon’s wiles via “the sign of the cross.”

_seinte Margarete_

Of course, little can be derived from this description by the demon. The demon’s speech offers little specific information and nothing that is applicable to only one segment of the originally stated audience. Moreover, scholarship has shown relatively little interest in the audience of the Paris text, with Clayton and Magennis being the only scholars who address the text in any depth.

Neither is the case with regard to _Seinte Margarete_ of the Katherine Group. Throughout a significant portion of its scholarly history, the works comprising the Katherine Group (_Hali Meiðhad_, _Sawles Warde_, and the Lives of St. Katherine, Juliana and Margaret) have been linked to _Ancrene Wisse_, due to their shared presence in manuscripts (e.g. BL Cotton MS Titus D. xviii), linguistic characteristics (discussed in Tolkien’s seminal article on the AB variety of Middle English “*Ancrene Wisse* and _Hali Meiðhad_” (1929)), themes (virginity and the life of a sponsa Christi) and style (alliterative prose and considerable skill in composition).

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140 _Ancrene Wisse_, an anonymous rule for living as an anchoress, was written sometime around the second quarter of the 13th century. The guide is roughly separated into 8 parts which have two further divisions of the Outer Rule (parts 1 and 8 which deal with exterior elements of the anchoritic life such as dress, habitation and behavior) and the Inner Rule (parts 2-7 which relate to the interior elements of anchoritic life such as kinds of love and the wiles of the devil). In all likelihood, _Ancrene Wisse_ was originally written for three sisters (who are frequently referenced in manuscript versions) and later adapted for wider audiences including a reference in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402 to a larger community of twenty or more women (Wada 2003, 1-4).

141 Tolkien’s article could be viewed as something of a setback for the search for audience as well when he declared “‘By whom’ and ‘for whom’ are sentimental questions, and knowledge at any rate of the latter is not likely to have any importance to scholarship. Neither is likely to be answered by any form of research, short of miraculous luck” (Tolkien 1929, 116).

142 Millett 1990
Despite this long-standing association, some scholars are beginning to move away from grouping *Ancrene Wisse* and the texts of the Katherine Group together. Millett and Wogan-Browne point out that the Katherine Group texts are addressed to “a more general audience” than *Ancrene Wisse: Hali Meðhad* could be directed towards an audience of either established virgins or those contemplating virginity, *Sawles Warde* is relevant to all Christian individuals, *Seinte Margarete* is addressed to wives, widows, and virgins, and the *Life of St. Juliana* is addressed to “all lay-people who cannot understand Latin.”\(^\text{143}\) Julie Hassel even goes so far as to argue that the Katherine Group and *Ancrene Wisse* are “stylistically and thematically… quite different.”\(^\text{144}\) Rather than treating the two together, Hassel argues that the Katherine Group should be read on its own terms and reaches the conclusion that the Katherine Group’s first audience was a group of women practicing “domestic monasticism,” a form of piety in which women “lead a religious life unmarried, as consecrated virgins, within their own households.”\(^\text{145}\)

One source of this disparity may be the issue that Bella Millett points out in “The Audience of the Saints’ Lives of the Katherine Group.” In her contribution, Millett argues that there are really two audience groups that must be considered when contemplating the Saints’ Lives of the Katherine Group. On the one hand, there is the audience that the individual narratives claim to be addressing. Two of the three Saints’ Lives in the Katherine Group call attention to audiences of “wives, widows, and virgins” (St. Margaret) and “all lay-people who cannot understand Latin” (St. Juliana). This would run counter to associating either text with an anchoritic audience, instead suggesting a more mixed audience of religious and lay. On the other hand, these same Saints’ Lives are

\(^{143}\) Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, xiii
\(^{144}\) Hassel 2002, 4
\(^{145}\) Hassel 2002, 32
found in manuscript together with *Ancrene Wisse* (BL Cotton MS Titus D. xviii) and *Ancrene Wisse* itself refers to “ower englische boc of seinte Margarete” which may be a reference to the *Seinte Margarete* of the Katherine Group. Thus, there is evidence to suggest that while the Katherine Group Saints’ Lives may have been written with a broader intended audience, a very specific audience (the same one as *Ancrene Wisse*) found it useful.

I believe that this audience analysis can be taken one step further. By focusing on the audience partitioning within the *Life of St. Margaret*, I will show that a portion of *Seinte Margarete* (the black demon’s speech) is specifically directed towards an audience of anchoritic women that is similar to, if not the same as, the audience of *Ancrene Wisse*. That is, *Seinte Margarete* was not of later use to audiences of *Ancrene Wisse*, but rather was written with such a community in mind (possibly even the specific community to which *Ancrene Wisse* was originally directed).

In order to drive this point home, I argue the dissimilarity of *Seinte Margarete* to the Paris text in my analysis, thereby showing the degree to which the author deviates from his source material. I then continue to show the correspondences between *Seinte Margarete* and *Hali Meiðhad* as I did in chapter one, and finally draw connections between *Seinte Margarete*, *Hali Meiðhad*, and *Ancrene Wisse* in the final portion of my analysis.

After Margaret defeats the dragon in *Seinte Margarete*, the demon appears sitting to Margaret’s right in the prison cell. Margaret then enters into an extended prayer, one which seems to cause the demon pain since he pleads with her to stop. Seizing the creature by his hair, she swings him around the prison cell, mercilessly beating him until
he is firmly planted underneath her foot. This beating is followed by the demon lamenting Margaret’s deeds and waxing complimentary:

And you, woman, are not at all like other women. It seems to me you shine brighter than the sun, but though all your body blazes with light, more than anything else your fingers seem to me so beautiful and so fair and so blindingly bright, those that you used to bless yourself and to make the sign of the cross that stole my brother from me and to bind me cruelly with vicious bonds. It seems to me that I cannot bear to look at them, that light blazes and flashes so.¹⁴⁶

Margaret responds to this speech by accusing the demon of flattery,¹⁴⁷ at which point he continues with his narrative.

Much like the Mombritius source material, the function of this paragraph is to establish the power of the sign of the cross. According to the demon, not only are Margaret’s fingers “so dazzling” that he cannot look upon them, but it was the sign of the cross that kills his brother and binds him. In the first case, the dazzling fingers establish a sensory manifestation of an otherwise invisible phenomenon. Much like the stories in which people expressing incredulity at the Eucharist find the host transformed into a finger when it passes their lips,¹⁴⁸ the demon confirms with its senses what Christians are meant to believe: that the sign of the cross invokes the power of God. While this power is invisible to human eyes (a state which can present problems for belief), the demon claims

¹⁴⁶ Ne nawt nart tu, wummon, aþfre wummen ilich. Me þuncheð þet tu schinest chenre þen þe sunde; ah ouer alle þine limen þe leitið of leome, þe fingres se freoliche me þuncheð, ant se feire, ant se briht blikinde, þet tu þe wið bliscedest ant makedest te merke of þe mihti rode þe reauede me mi broðer, ant me wið balde bondes bitterliche bindest, þet Ich lokein ne mei, swa þet leomeð ant leiteð, me þuncheð.” (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, 64-66).
¹⁴⁷ “‘Þu fikest,’ quoð ha, ‘ful wiht.’” (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, 66).
¹⁴⁸ O’Donnell 1989, 172
to see it, thereby allaying any lingering suspicions of audience members. Furthermore, this invisible power is shown to have real efficacy against demons: according to the demon it is this power which destroyed his brother and bound him to Margaret’s will, making it an effective defense against demonic seduction.

While this portion of Margaret’s dialogue with the demon seems generally applicable to the entire audience of “wives, widows, and virgins” discussed by the author in the opening of the story, the next passage of note, the first pairing of the chaste man and woman, is only relevant to virgins. After Margaret rejects his praise, the demon launches into a lengthy dialogue regarding the individuals whose lives he plagues:

“Alas, lady!” he said then, “I wish I may die if I am not he who makes war at all times against the righteous… I always busy myself around the good, and the ones that I follow most diligently are those who are trying to keep themselves chaste and untouched by men and to flee carnal filth, to see if I might somehow cause them to fall and defile themselves. Many have I overthrown who thought they could entirely escape my wiles and in this way: Sometimes I let a chaste man remain near\textsuperscript{149} a chaste woman, and do nothing against them, neither attacking nor besieging them, but let them do what they will. I let them talk about God and discuss goodness, and truly love each other without illicit desire or any depraved thoughts, so that each is trusting of their own feelings and the other’s too, and they feel more secure sitting by themselves and talking pleasantly together.

Then by means of this safety, I make my first attack on them, and shoot

\textsuperscript{149} The word choice of \textit{wunien} may be a play on words by the author, since it not only means “to be present” or “abide” but also contains the sense of cohabiting with a mate and having sexual relations. In this way, \textit{Seinte Margarete} may be implying that proximity leads to sexual activity.
very secretly and wound, before they know it, their unwary hearts with a venomous potion. Lightly at first, then with loving looks, then with gazing intently at one another and then more and more I incite them with flirtation until they are romping and wrestling together. Then I stab at them with amorous thoughts – at first against their will, but when they tolerate it that evil grows so greatly that they think it good. And thus, when they let me, and neither stop me nor control themselves nor stand strong against me, I lead them into the mire and the loathsome mud of that filthy sin.”

One finds in this lengthy report that the fiend claims a special hatred of virgins and a strong desire to see them mired in carnal filthiness. The demon even goes so far as to describe a specific way in which he has previously caused virgins to fall: by lulling a chaste man and woman into a seemingly platonic relationship, he eventually causes their friendship to fester into lust through the “venomous potion” which causes their thoughts to turn amorous.

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150 *Plōhe-speche*, literally “playful speech.” Given the topic of the demon’s discussion, flirtation seems a likely valence of the term.

151 “‘Wumme, leefdi!’ quoð he þa, ‘wa me mine liues, bute Ich hit am þet eorri a wið rihtwise… þe gode Ich ga aa bisiliche abuten, ant ham Ich folhi neodelukest þe cunnid to beon cleane wiðuten monnes man ant fleoð flesches fulðen, þef Ich mahte eanies weis makien ham to fallen ant fulen hamseoluen. Moni Ich habbe avarpen þe wenden mine wiheles ful witerliche etwrenchen, ant o þisse wise. Ich leote oðerhwiles a cleane mon wunien neh a cleane wummon, þet Ich nawiht towart ham ne warpe ne ne woorri, ah leote ham al iwurðen. Ich leote ham talkin of Godd an teuelin of godlec, ant trewliche luuien ham wiðuten uuel wilnunge ant alle unwreste willes, þet eðer of his ahne, ant of þe oðres ba, treowliche beo trusti, ant te sikure beon to sitten bi hamseoluen ant gomenin togederes. Þenne þurh þis sikurlec seche Ich earst upon ham, ant scheote swiðe dearnliche ant wundi, ear ha witen hit, wið swiðe attri healewi hare unwarre heorte. Lihtliche on alre earest, wið luueleche lates, wið steape bihaldunge eðer on oðer; ant wið plōhe-speche sputte to mare, se longe þet ha toggid ant tollið togederes. Þenne þudde Ich in ham luuefulc þohtes – on earest hare unponkes, ah swa waxed þet wa þurh þet ha hit þauieð þet ham þuncheð god þrof. Ant Ich þus, hwen ha leoteð me, ne ne letteð me nawt ne ne steorið hamseolf ne ne stondeð strongliche aþeþin, leade ham i þe leiuæ ant i þe ladliche lake of þet suði sunne” (Millet and Wogan-Browne 1990, 66).
Of course, this is a dramatically different dialogue than the demon offers in the Mombritius source text, a source text whose stated audience (men, women, and virgins) is somewhat similar. Gone is the broad audience of lay and (possibly) religious practitioners: instead we have the demon describing his attacks upon chaste men and women in significant detail. Clearly, this is of little use to the wives and widows who were originally discussed by the author, instead he or she is creating an audience partition that speaks only to the virgins.

Furthermore, as I pointed out in chapter one, there is a clear parallel to this section in *Hali Meidhad*, a fact which strengthens the association between this passage and virgins:

> Now the old fiend watches and sees you stand so high in this virtue… and night and day he shoots his arrows, dipped in a venomous potion, towards your heart, to wound you with a weak will and to make you fall, but Christ forbid! And always the more strongly you stand against him, the more furiously he attacks out of anger and rage; because it seems to him even more shameful to be overcome, that something so feeble as flesh is – and especially a woman’s – shall surpass him. Every fleshly desire and lecherous lust which arises in your heart is the arrow of this devil; but it does not wound you unless it is lodged in you, and remains so long that you wish to act on your desire. While your reason resists and subdues your will, although your desire may incline towards pleasure, it will never harm you nor defile your soul, for reason is its shield under God’s grace. While that shield is intact – that is, the wisdom of your reason – so that it does
not break or bend, even though your fleshly desire may be false beneath it
and would like to do as it pleases, the arrows of the devil will all fly back
on himself.\textsuperscript{152}

Just as \textit{Seinte Margarete} does, \textit{Hali Meiðhad} makes use of the venomous arrows that the
devil shoots to inspire lust.\textsuperscript{153} However, while these arrows may seek to wound the heart
of the virgin, they are incapable of doing so unless they remain lodged in the victim’s
heart through her own desire to act out the carnal deeds that the venom suggests. Not
surprisingly, the previous passage from \textit{Seinte Margarete} reveals virgins in just such a
situation: lowering their defenses due to the chastity of their male companions, they
ignore the warning signs of mutual attraction until it is too late. Nevertheless, reason can
be used as a shield against these attacks: so long as the “shield of reason” is intact, the
virgin is safe from the devil’s arrows. Unfortunately, the author of \textit{Hali Meiðhad} says
nothing as to how reason can be used by virgins to turn aside these lecherous darts.

That is, until one turns again to \textit{Seinte Margarete}. Directly after the previously
analyzed passage, one finds the following:

If they want to resist my despicable deceptions and my treacherous tricks,
they must wrestle and grapple with themselves, and they may not cast me
down before they overcome themselves. I hate to tell you how best to

\textsuperscript{152} “Nu bihalt te alde feond, ant sið þe i þis mihte stonde se hehe… ant scheoteð niht ant dei his earewen, idrencte of an attri healewi, towart tin heorte to wundi þe wið wac wil, for swa muche þe hokerluker him þuncheð to beon ouercumen, þet þing se feble as flesch is, ant nomelicche of wummon, schal him ouerstihen. Euch fleschlich wil ant lust of leccherie þe arised i þe heorte is þes feondes fla; ah hit ne wundeð þe nawt bute hit festni in þe, ant leaue se longe þet tu waldest þet ti wil were ibroht to werke. Hwil þi wit edstont, ant chastieð þi wil, þah þi lust beore to þet te leof were, ne hearmeð hit te nawiht, ne suleð þi sawle; for wit is hire scheld under Godes grace. Hwil þe scheld is ihal – þet is þe wisdom of þi wit – þet hit ne breoke ne beie, þah þi fleschlich wil fals beo þerunder ant walde as hire luste, þes feondes fla flesch æsein alle on himseluen (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, 12-14).

\textsuperscript{153} Another parallel presents itself here as well: The devil in \textit{Hali Meiðhad} is ashamed of being overcome
by a woman, a sentiment expressed by the devil in \textit{Seinte Margarete} as well (Millett and Wogan-Browne
1990, 70).
overcome me, but must do it all the same… These are the weapons that wound me the worst, and guard them unharmed and strengthen them most strongly against me and themselves and their ever-present lusts: Eating in moderation and drinking even more so. Mortifying the flesh in some way and never being idle. The prayers of holy men for them, along with their own, and pious thoughts that they should reflect on during their prayers, to counter the scandalous thoughts that I thrust into them: They should think that it is through me that their lust leads them to do shameful things; they should think what a vicious creature they are paying homage to if they submit to me, and whose love they are forsaking; what a precious thing they are losing, that is, the honor of a maiden with their virginity, and the love of the gracious Lord of Heaven and his beloved queen, the lady of angels; how they make themselves contemptible to all the heavenly host, and dishonor themselves among mortal men, and forsake the love not only of those who are on high in heaven but also those low on earth, and make the angels mourn and us laugh out of much mirth at seeing them fall so low from so very high, from the highest in heaven to the lowest in hell. This is what they should often contemplate when alone:

They should think of sin’s blackness, and how filthily it stains;

They should think of heaven and its joys, of hell and its pains;

They should think often how Jesus died, how their own lives slip away,

And the horror and the terror there will be on Judgment Day.
They should think that the pleasure of that fleshly lust is over very soon, and the punishment for it lasts forever. And as soon as they commit any kind of sin, they should go at once without delay to reveal it in confession, however little or light the sin might be. For the thing I despise most under the sun is people hurrying often to confess their sins. For I can make that little sin grow enormously if they cover it up; but as soon as it is disclosed with remorse in confession, then I am shamed by it, and trembling, I flee from them.154

The prescribed use of reason from *Hali Meīðhad* is evident in this passage. One can easily see these commands linked through the common question “is it worth it?” That is, given the loathsome nature of the creature they submit to, the love of Christ that they forsake, the punishment for their sin, and the dishonor they garner for themselves, is the sexual act really worth it? Should all of these questions be difficult to remember prior to

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154 “Jef ha edstonð wulleð mine unwreste wrenches ant mine swikele swenges, wreatstlin ha moten ant wiðerin wið hamseoluen; ne me akeasten ha ne mahen ear ha hamseoluen ouercumen. Lað me is ant noðes nedilunge Ich do hit, cuðe þe hu ha mahen best ouercume me. Lowse me þe hwile, leafdi, ant leoðe me, ant Ich þe wile seggen. Þis beoð þ wepnen þet me wurst wundið, ant witeð ham unwemmet ant stregeð ham sterelukest æþin me ant æþin ham ant hare wake lustes – þet beoð: - Eoten meðliche ant meðeluker drinken. Do þet flesh i sum derf, ne neauer ne beon idel. Hali monne bone for ham, wið hare ahne; ant beoðelule þohtes þet ha schulen þenchen bimonghare benen, æþin unwreste þohtes þet Ich in ham þudd, þenchen hit is þurh me þet hare lust leadeð ham to wurche to wundre; þenchen þef ha beieðme, to hu bitter beast ha huðeð, ant hwas luue ha forleteð; hu luufsum þing ha leoseð, þet is, wið meðhad meidenes menske, ant te luue of þe luueliche Lauerd of heouene ant of þe luufsume cwen, englene leafdi; ant henlunges makieð ha wið al þet heouenliche hird, ant unmenskið hamseolf bimong worldliche men, ant forleoseð þe luue nawt ane of heh in heouene ah of lah ec on eordæ, ant makieð þe engles murne ant us of much emurhðe to lahhe se lude, þe seoð ham lihte se lah of se swiðe hehe, from þ heste in heouene to þe laheste in helle. Þis ha moten ofte munien bi hamseolfen,
   Þenchen luæ swart þing ant suti is þet sunne;
   Þenchen of helle-wa ant of heouriche wunne;
   Hare ahne deadð ant Drihtenes munegin ful ilome,
   Ant te grisle ant te grure þet bið et te dome;
   Þenchen þet te licungue of þet fleschliche lust alið se swiðe sone, ant te pine þeruore leasteð aa mare. At sone se ha gulteð eawiht, gan anan würðiht þet ha ne firstin hit nawt to schawen hit i schritte, ne beo hit ne se lutel ne se liht sunne. For þet is under sunne þinge me laðest, þet me ofte eorne to scrifft of his sunne. For þet lutle Iche me makien to mutlin unmeðliche þef me hut ant heleð hit; ah sone se hit ischawet bið biwesinde i schritte, þenne scheomeðe þe þerwið, ant fleo ham from schuderinde as Ich ischend were” (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, 66-68).
the act itself, the author even condenses all of the most threatening thoughts into a four line, rhyming poem that would have been easy to remember and call upon in times of need (italics). At the same time, the passage also offers additional practical methods of warding away lust. These methods include moderation in food and drink, avoiding idleness, mortification of the flesh, and prayer. It is interesting to note that this list could also just as easily be the daily schedule for a monastic or cloistered audience; the demon is reinforcing the necessity of the lifestyle that such women lead to maintain their virginity.

Returning once more to the Mombritius comparison, it becomes clear that this demon is monastically/anchoritically focused in a way that its predecessor never was. While the demon of the Paris text makes reference to vague sexual threats such as causing people to sin in their sleep, the demon of *Seinte Margarete* focuses on defeating sexual urges through contemplation of eternal punishment, restraint in diet, and the mortification of the flesh. Moreover, the demon is focused on the maintenance of virginity and chastity, something that would have been of significant concern to a monastic/anchoritic audience but would be of little interest to other audience members.

The demon further counsels chaste individuals who are unable to fight their lust through these methods to flee the presence of one another:

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155 Credit for the italicized portion of the translation goes to Millett and Wogan-Browne: rhyming a translation while retaining its meaning is no easy task and underscores the exceptional nature of their translation.

156 While this would seem to be something of a standard piece of advice, it may be recalling Cassian’s *Conferences* or a similar advice that sexual pollution can be avoided by keeping one’s diet “strictly regulated and the intake of water reduced so that the bodily humors become sluggish and slow” (Elliott 1999, 16).

157 In fact, this is very like St. Anthony ruminating upon the worm and hellish fire.

158 A likely influence upon the text is John Cassian’s *Collationes patrum in scetica eremo*: Chapters II.XVIII-XXVI deal extensively with proper abstention from food and appropriate fasting. Chapter II.XXIII even deals with the impact of such fasting upon the seminal fluid: a clear connection between restraint in diet and sexuality.
The only remedy for this is fleeing, so that neither is anywhere alone with the other, and nor should they see or meet each other or sit together without a witness who can see what they do and hear what they say. If they do not stop me like this but tolerate and accept me and still expect to escape, I lead them with false love little by little into such a deep mire that they drown therein; and kindle in them sparks of lust so terrible that they are inwardly consumed and blinded by that blaze, such that they no longer have the power to see themselves.  

As before, the author stresses the threat of temptation, adding a new layer to the previous narrative of the chaste man and woman. In this hypothetical situation, the author acknowledges that if both parties are unable to free themselves from the downward spiral of lust in which they have engaged, their only choice is to flee from one another and ensure that they are never alone. If they fail to do so, then they are surely lost. This portion of the speech serves to highlight the pragmatic nature of Seinte Margarete’s demon as a whole. The main focus of the Paris text’s demon is on his demonic lineage and ruing his defeat at Margaret’s hands. In contrast, Seinte Margarete’s demon is focused upon describing the way in which an anchoress should behave in order to avoid the sin of lust: if you want to resist the impulses of your body, practice a lifestyle of moderation; if you happen to have shameful thoughts, think of what you would be

159 “Ne nis þear na bote bute fleo þenne, þet nowðer ne beo nohwer ane wið oðer, ne seon ham ne simpnin ne sitten togederes wiðuten witnesse þet mahe iseon hweat ha don ant heren hwet ha seggen. Þef ha þus ne letteð me nawt, ah þeauieð me ant þolieð, ant weneð þah to edwrenchen, Ich leade ham wið leas luue lutlen ant lutlen into se deop dunge þet ha druncnioð þerin; ant sperki in ham sperken of lustes se luðere þet ha forberneð inwið ant þurh þet brune ablindeð, þet ha nabbeð sihðe nan hamseolue to biseonne” (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1994, 68).
giving up if you gave into them; and if none of these work, just run from your desires so that it is impossible to give in to them.

Finally, almost as an afterthought, the demon claims that even when he is defeated by those who stand against him he still manages to “busy myself with them in their beds so that they may defile themselves in some way while sleeping.”160 This claim seems to reflect concern over nocturnal orgasm or sexual dreams, warning the reader that such occurrences are not to be taken lightly but rather viewed as the activity of the frustrated demon. Luckily, there is hope for this as well because the “sign of the cross hinders me everywhere, and most of all now when it comes from you.”161

Turning to a general overview of the text, it is clear that the demon’s speech is directed at a group of women engaging in what is likely an anchoritic lifestyle. The demon is specifically addressing maidens in its speech, it counsels them to maintain their virginity, and lays out a cycle of behavior very similar to a monastic rule.

Moreover, whatever community of anchoresses that this portion of Seinte Margarete was directed towards was very similar to the audience of Ancrene Wisse. Both texts place a high value on the virtue of virginity and chastity,162 take a dim view of sexuality163 and warn the virgin to be constantly on her guard against temptation.164

160 “am in hare beddes se bisi ham abuten þet summes weis ha schulen ham slepinde sulen” (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1994, 70).
161 “Ah þe rode merke merreð me oueral, ant meast ed te nuðe” (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1994, 70). It should be noted that this is not a change of partition: the demon specifically states that he only assaults in their sleep those whom he fails to seduce via the other methods discussed.
162 E.g. “If someone is carrying a precious liquor, a valuable liquid like balm, in a fragile vessel, an ointment in a brittle glass, would she not avoid a crowd, unless she were a fool? Habemus thesaurum istum in vasis fictilibus, dicit apostolus. This brittle vessel, which is woman’s flesh – though the balm, the ointment is maidenhed held within it (or chaste purity once maidenhed is lost) – this brittle vessel is nonetheless as brittle as any glass; for if it is once broken, it is never mended to the wholeness it had, any more than glass” (Savage and Watson 1991, 109).
163 Although Ancrene Wisse seems to lack the vituperative language that characterizes Hali Meiðhad’s perspective on marriage, noting only that “for, except in wedlock, it amounts to a mortal sin in whatever way it is wakingly and willingly satisfied for the flesh’s pleasure” (Savage and Watson 1991, 124).
Moreover, both *Seinte Margarete* and *Ancrene Wisse* characterize these threats as the enticements of the devil\(^\text{165}\) and suggest some of the same methods to counter sexual temptation, such as making the sign of the cross\(^\text{166}\) and abstaining from excessive food and drink.\(^\text{167}\)

While these similarities could be somewhat anticipated (considering that all three texts arose in roughly the same place and time period), the less common similarities are telling of a potentially deeper relationship. For instance, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* notes that even after enclosure, the virginity of the anchorite continues to be under threat, from both external and internal threats. Externally, the anchorite is potentially threatened by those with whom she interacts. As the writer of *Ancrene Wisse* attests, male religious were a potential source of sexual threat: “Now, here comes a weak man – though he holds himself estimable if he has a wide hood and a closed cloak – and he wants to see some young anchoresses. And he just has to see whether her looks please him, she whose face has not been burnt by the sun – as if he was a stone! And he says she may confidently look upon holy men – yes, someone like him with wide sleeves.”\(^\text{168}\) The author goes on to caution the reader against such contact, lest the anchorite inspire lust and be damned as a result: “Yes, my dear sisters, if anyone is eager to see you, never

\(^\text{164}\) E.g. “Holy men and women are tested most often with every kind of temptation, and for their better health; for through fighting against them, they win the joyful crown of the champion” (Savage and Watson 1991, 119).
\(^\text{165}\) E.g. “Yet the devil naturally urges us to poison, for example to pride, to disdain, to envy and to anger, and to their poisonous offspring” (Savage and Watson 1991, 119).
\(^\text{166}\) “Therefore, dear sister, as soon as you ever notice this dog of hell coming sneaking with his blood flies of stinking thoughts, do not lie still, or sit either, to see what he will do or how far he will go… But seize the staff of the cross right away, by naming it with your mouth, by drawing it with your hand, by thinking of it with your heart, and order him sternly, the foul cur” (Savage and Watson 1991, 154).
\(^\text{167}\) “Lechery comes of gluttony and of bodily ease, for as St. Gregory says, ‘More food and drink than is necessary breed three offspring, light words, light works and lechery’s lusts’” (Savage and Watson 1991, 153).
\(^\text{168}\) Savage and Watson 1991, 68. The two texts also seem to be concerned with outward appearances, either the outward appearance of a platonic friendship that causes the virgin to let down her guard, or the outward appearance of holiness which does the same.
believe good of it, but trust him the less. I would not have it that anyone see you unless he has special leave from your director. For all the three sins I have just spoken about… came about not because the women looked foolishly on men, but because they uncovered themselves in the sight of men, and did things through which they had to fall into sin.”

But what if an anchorite chose to receive a seemingly harmless visitor, accidentally admitting a temptation into her cell? While Ancrene Wisse does not discuss the possibility in any detail, a reader could turn to Seinte Margarete’s (“ower englische boc of seinte Margarete,” perhaps?) story of the chaste man and woman for guidance, which not only lays out specific defensive measures for dealing with such a temptation but also grave warnings about continuing what may yet be a seemingly innocuous relationship to the reader. Furthermore, while Ancrene Wisse does not offer a specific scenario of male intrusion, it does warn that an anchoress should not “romp nor play with a man,” recalling the suggestion that the demon will cause the chaste man and woman to “romp and wrestle” with one another.

The narrative elements in the story also conspire to make the advice offered by Seinte Margarete especially compelling and relevant for the anchoress: As Karolyn Kinane suggests in “To Imitate and Inspire Awe,” the transformative elements of the prison scene would have been particularly relevant to an anchoress confined as she was in a cell similar to St. Margaret’s. While Kinane primarily focuses upon the Christ-like elements of this transformation in Margaret’s cell, the prison scene is transformative in a

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169 Savage and Watson 1991, 69
170 Instead the author notes that “it is as good as over for those who comes so close together that they handle on another or in any way touch one another” and advises the anchorite to guard against lechery’s three kinds of weapons (Savage and Watson 1991, 70).
171 Savage and Watson translate “ne toggen mid him, ne pleien” as “sport or flirt” (Savage and Watson 1991, 205). I have simply clarified the first word toggen which is the same in both Ancrene Wisse and Seinte Margarete.
172 Kinane 2011, 33-34
sexual sense as well. In chapter one I suggested that, unlike its predecessor the Mombritius version, Seinte Margarete establishes a narrative in which Margaret’s virginity is tested within her cell but never compromised. This test proves both the purity of Margaret’s virginity and her commitment to its maintenance. After this encounter, Margaret is then visited by the black demon who instructs her in the ways to maintain this commitment. In a similar fashion, virginal anchoress would descend into their cells, proving their devotion to God by artificially separating themselves from the rest of the community and preserving their virginity, potentially making use of the same techniques that the demon taught Margaret to maintain their own chastity.

Finally, the monastic undertones of both texts would have also served to link their content even further. I noted in my first chapter that the Mombritius version of Saint Margaret – upon which Seinte Margarete is based – draws on literature such as the Life of St. Anthony and the Dialogues of Gregory the Great to create a prison scene in which Margaret is embattled by sexually-valent monastic monsters. Similarly, Ancrene Wisse argues that – like the desert fathers – the anchorite is in the “wilderness” of her cell and like her predecessors is embattled by the devil and his ilk. Moreover, like Seinte Margarete this battle includes a physical component: just as Margaret mercilessly beat the demon that appeared in her cell, the anchoress of Ancrene Wisse is encouraged to think of the sign of the cross as striking, beating, and spitting at the devils who assail her.  

173 “And lay into [the dog of hell] with hard blows fiercely on the back with the staff of the holy cross… With imploring prayers in your own language, drive your knees sharply down to the earth and lift up the staff of the cross and swing it in four directions against the hell-dog: this is nothing else than to bless yourself all around with the sign of the holy cross. Spit at him in his beard with contempt and scorn, who trifles so with you and deceives you with dog-like fawning, when he bargains with such worthless things – with the satisfaction of a single lust for so brief a time – for your soul” (Savage and Watson 1991, 154).
While it cannot necessarily be assumed that the audience which the author addresses in the demonic dialogue of *Seinte Margarete* and the audience of *Ancrene Wisse* are one and the same, if they are not, the resemblances between the two indicate a remarkably similar community. Similarly, the correspondences between *Seinte Margarete* and *Hali Meidhad* are also indicative of a deeper relationship between the two texts, likely that one functioned as a proof text for the other as I suggested in my first chapter. Clearly, all three (the section of *Seinte Margarete* under consideration, *Hali Meidhad*, and *Ancrene Wisse*) are directed at an audience of virginal professional religious (or individuals contemplating such a life), while the section from *Seinte Margarete* and *Ancrene Wisse* were more specifically directed at an audience of anchoresses that were either identical or nearly identical to one another.

**Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303**

Compared to *Ancrene Wisse* and its associated materials, Cambridge, Corpus, Christi College 303 (hereafter, CCCC) has only a sparse amount of secondary writings that pertain to its audience. Nevertheless, this scholarship has significantly illuminated the context of CCCC. The manuscript itself, as described by Clayton and Magennis, is a substantial collection of homilies and saints’ lives literature whose content is drawn primarily from Ælfric.\(^{174}\) The manuscript is plain with little ornamentation and was the work of three scribes.\(^{175}\) N.R. Ker’s *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* places the text in Rochester based on the “prickly” script associated with the location, and the relationship between CCCC and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 162 (also likely

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\(^{174}\) The *Life of St. Margaret* is one of three unique saints’ homilies that are no part of Ælfric’s corpus, the others being the Life of St. Giles and the Life of St. Nicholas (Richards 1988, 90).

\(^{175}\) Clayton and Magennis 1994, 92-93
from Rochester) which suggests that the two compilers had access to similar materials.\textsuperscript{176} Mary Richards has suggested that the manuscript dates from the first half of the 12\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{177}

Regarding the audience for the manuscript, Richards notes that the miscellaneous items of CCCC include forms of excommunication that call upon Nicholas and Augustine as witnesses. These two saints were of considerable interest to the people of Rochester, the first being the saint associated with an important lay altar at Rochester Cathedral and the second, the founder of the see. Margaret was also of note as the “patron of a local church owned by the priory.”\textsuperscript{178} Richards suggests that this is evidence of a continuing need for catechetical materials in Old English through the twelfth century at Rochester,\textsuperscript{179} a claim supported by Magennis’ research into the affective quality of the CCCC Margaret, a quality that reveals “a purpose of stimulating piety and devotion among an unlearned audience.”\textsuperscript{180} Treharne echoes this assertion to some extent, noting that the manuscript continued to have pastoral significance through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries based on the annotations and \textit{nota} in the margins, notes which betray concern over the spiritual well-being of the laity in a post-Lateran III (1179) and eventually IV (1215) environment.\textsuperscript{181}

The version of Margaret in the CCCC manuscript is unique. Clayton and Magennis note that CCCC Margaret is independent from the other extent Old English \textit{Life} to which we have access (London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius A.iii) and that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{176} Clayton and Magennis 1994, 93
\item \textsuperscript{177} Richards 1988, 90. Treharne (2012) amends this date to c. 1150 for unclear reasons, citing Richards’ work on the dating. Although the footnote is unclear, this may be part of the vague findings that “now require modification” (Treharne 2012, 5 fn. 2).
\item \textsuperscript{178} Richards 1988, 91
\item \textsuperscript{179} Richards 1988, 92
\item \textsuperscript{180} Magennis 1996, 40
\item \textsuperscript{181} Treharne 2012, 6
\end{itemize}
both represent different strains of a Mombritius/Pre-Mombritius tradition. Moreover, (unlike the Tiberius A.iii version) many unique discrepancies within CCCC Margaret’s narrative make it impossible to determine whether such additions were the work of the Old English author or copied from an unknown version of the Mombritius/Pre-Mombritius passio tradition.\footnote{Clayton and Magennis 1994, 61-62}

Treharne’s article, “The Sensational ‘Life of St. Margaret,’” seeks to push past the discussion of the CCCC manuscript and instead focus on the original audience of CCCC Margaret. Treharne argues regarding the audience of the text that:

The Corpus 303 version is especially suited to its twelfth-century audiences because of the emphasis on Margaret’s humanity, her self-awareness, her imitative qualities and her sustained activity, even within the enclosed space of imprisonment. The immediate audience for this vernacular Life is likely to have been monastic and ascetic, practising daily, to varying degrees, an active emulation of Christ and simultaneously engaging in contemplation of Christ’s humanity and the intercessory powers of the Saviour himself, together with his communion of saints. This combination of distinctively twelfth-century spiritual endeavour is highlighted throughout the Life of St. Margaret, making this an eminently suitable text for the encouragement of devotion and meditation within a reformed coenobitic environment, such as that at Rochester.\footnote{Treharne 2012, 8}
At the same time, Treharne notes that CCCC Margaret was likely turned towards goals of pastoral care at a later date.\textsuperscript{184}

While I agree with Treharne that the original audience of the CCCC Margaret text was likely “monastic and ascetic,” I believe that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that it was also \textit{originally} used for pastoral purposes rather than later being adapted to such purposes.\textsuperscript{185} Thus, there are two groups among the audience this piece was directed towards. I will argue that the demon’s speech in CCCC Margaret once more creates an audience partition, one that addresses a rural lay audience rather than a monastic one.

Like \textit{Seinte Margarete}, CCCC Margaret focuses some of its attention on sexual sins. However, there is also a much greater range of suffering to which the demon attaches itself:

After Satan was bound, I have since always dwelt among people and I have turned many of the servants of God away from God, and never was anyone ever able to overcome me except you alone. You slew my brother and you have complete power over me, because I see that God is with you. And I will tell you still more of my deeds, one by one. For I have deprived mankind, who is with God, of all its fruit:

I deprived some of speech and some of hearing, some of their feet and some of their hands, and on account of that they became cripples;

I deprived some of their eyes and some of their senses;

I seduced some who were sleeping and some others while awake;

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{184} Treharne 2012, 6-7
  \item \textsuperscript{185} That is, there was in fact a “dual” audience – one monastic and one lay – to whom the text was originally addressed.
\end{itemize}
some by means of wind and some by means of water;
some by means of food and some by drink,
often when they were unblessed;
some with slaughter and some with concord;
some by evil deeds and some by fornicating with the wife of another man;
some on my account had sex with four-footed beasts and some vexed their elders with words.\textsuperscript{186}

The sins and maladies that CCCC Margaret chooses to address are rather interesting. The majority of the ailments (blindness, lameness, madness, etc.) are associated with demons and with Jesus’ cure of such conditions. For example, in Matthew 12:22, a “demon-possessed” man who is both blind and mute is brought before Jesus who promptly heals him. Similarly, Jesus cures the Gerasene demoniac\textsuperscript{187} afflicted by an unspecified form of madness. Finally, while no demon is explicitly mentioned in the healing of the Capernaum paralytic\textsuperscript{188} or the deaf man in Decapolis,\textsuperscript{189} all of these afflictions (paralysis, muteness, deafness, blindness, and madness) are prevented in children through Margaret’s pre-execution prayers in CCCC Margaret.\textsuperscript{190} Since Margaret’s power is typically associated with the ability to ward off demonic influence, this pairing suggests

\textsuperscript{186} “Siððan Sathan gebunden weard, siððan ic mid mannum æfre gewunode and manega Godes þeowas ic gehwearf fram Gode and næfre ne mihte me nan man ofercuman buton þu ane. Minne broþor þu ofsloge and þu mines eall geweald ahst, forþan ic geseo þæt God is mid þe. And get ic þe mare sece of minum dædum ealle syndrice. For ic nam ealle wæstmes fram mancyunne þe on Gode gelefdon: sume ic spræce benam and sume heora hlyste; sumen heora fot and sume heora handa, and heo þurh þæt creopeles wurðon; sumum ic eagen benam and sumum his geweittes; sume ic slepende beswac and sume eac wacigende; sume mid winde and sume mid waerete; sume mid mæte and sume mid dæcne, ofte þonne hio ungeblesodon wæren; sume mid slehte and sume on some; sume on morðædum and sume mid oðres mannes wife gehæmdon; sume mid feowerfoted nytene for minum willen gefremedon and sume heora eldran mid wordon gegremedon (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 164).


\textsuperscript{189} Mark 7:31-37

\textsuperscript{190} “nan unhal cild sy geboren, ne crypol, ne dumb, ne deaf, ne blind, ne ungewittes” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 168).
that the remaining illnesses were likely seen as demonically induced by CCCC Margaret’s author. Treharne notes that sensation is associated with devotion and faith in the story, whereas a lack of sense perception (e.g. deaf and dumb idols and the people who worship them) is associated with demons and false faith. Thus, it seems likely that the author is strengthening this association between a lack of perception (being deprived of hearing, eyes and senses) and the worship of idols by also associating such absences with demons.

After the list of afflictions comes the list of sins for which the demon claims responsibility. It is worthy of note that these sins, just like those in Seinte Margarete, represent a substantial departure from the sins in the Paris text. First, there is the rather vague “I seduced some who were sleeping and some others while awake.” Although this seems to conjure up the threat of nocturnal pollution, masturbation and illicit sexual activities, this conclusion may be too hasty. The demon’s claims are by no means ubiquitously focused on sexuality in CCCC Margaret as they were in Seinte Margarete or the Paris text, and the vague reference to seduction is significantly displaced from the other two sexual sins in the list. Rather, the list appears to proceed from general to specific: the demon first claims to seduce individuals during the day and night, then with wind and water, and then with progressively narrower descriptions until the reader reaches three very specific sins for which the demon claims credit (adultery, bestiality, and the disrespect of elders).

While all three of these sins – to my knowledge – are unique to this version of Margaret’s *Life*, it is bestiality that is the most interesting and, as I will argue, the most telling. Bestiality is something of an oddity in the study of medieval sexuality: despite its
frequent discussion in penitentials, legal texts, and theological treatises, the practice itself
has not warranted serious attention from scholars. 191 This is likely due to several factors.
First, the term does not necessarily have a specific definition in the medieval period (or
for that matter, modern times192). Early Christian attempts to define bestiality were
usually predicated upon the difference between human beings and animals: humans
engaged in “bestiality” when they had sex as animals do. In this schema, humans were
marked by reason, whereas animals were defined by lust. Sexual congress that was
marked by irrationality – or in many cases, any sexual activity – caused one to descend to
the level of beasts.193

The treatment of bestiality itself was marked by two distinct schools of thought.
In the Eastern church, sexual sins tended to be lumped into one category of unnatural
acts. Conversely, the Latin West tended to maintain multiple categories of associated acts
that were deserving of specific penalties.194 For example, the early Western penitentials
typically equate bestiality with masturbation, suggesting that the animal was not seen so
much as a sexual partner as not present in the act at all.195 However, this slowly changed
as the edicts of the Council of Ancyra (314) which equated bestiality with same-sex
intercourse were spread.196

In the Summa Theologica, Aquinas makes use of three different valences of the
term “bestiality”, in some cases using bestialitas to mean “bestial,” in others, human
copulation with animals, and in at least one case, the fashion in which animals have sex

191 One of the exceptions to this trend is Salisbury’s The Beast Within (1994), which provides an overview
of the treatment of animals in medieval thought.
192 Cf. Dr. Hani Miletski’s work on the subject, Understanding Bestiality and Zoophilia.
193 Salisbury 1994, 78-79
194 Salisbury 1994, 89
195 Salisbury 1994, 90
196 Salisbury 1994, 91
with each other. To complicate matters further, bestiality was also placed under the category “vices against nature” which also includes under its aegis same-sex sexual acts, masturbation, and sexual acts not given to procreation.\textsuperscript{197} Bestiality is also connected to cannibalism “under the notion of bestial desire.”\textsuperscript{198} In the case of legal proscriptions, such acts were frequently lumped together even prior to Aquinas’ time, and connected with other “deviant acts” such as copulation with or marriage to Jews or Muslims.\textsuperscript{199}

Furthermore, there is some difficulty in making use of some of the sources that refer to bestiality. Albrecht Classen notes “if we were to believe the penitential literature as a benchmark, masturbation, bestiality, sodomy, and lesbianism seem to have been astonishingly common. The authors of the penitentials basically worked as law makers, and we should not naively assume that they were anything but hysterical or extremely sensitive to any potential form of sexual deviation. On the contrary, we can safely claim that already the early Christian Church regularly had to deal with a plethora of sexual practices, interests, tendencies, preferences, and orientations.”\textsuperscript{200} Regarding the penitentials, Pierre Payer suggests that the best methodological approach is to treat the sins listed within them as frequently occurring enough to attract notice.\textsuperscript{201} This suggests that CCCC Margaret was likely directed at an audience who engaged in bestiality enough for it to attract the notice of the author.

While this does not offer much information from which to determine the audience of CCCC Margaret, it may prove more relevant when combined with modern

\textsuperscript{197} Boswell 2005, 323
\textsuperscript{198} Jordan 1997, 30
\textsuperscript{199} Not terribly surprising as ethnic and religious divisions are often marked by the belief that the opposing group engages in various illicit sexual behaviors.
\textsuperscript{200} Classen 2008, 15
\textsuperscript{201} Payer 1984, 120
psychological research. However, before approaching such research, something must be said of the difficulties inherent in blending modern psychology with medieval history. In his article “Sex and the Emergence of Sexuality,” Arnold Davidson comments “we tend to read back our own categories of sexuality into older moral categories, partly because it is often so difficult for us to distinguish them precisely. Blurring the two kinds of categories leads to epistemological and conceptual lack of differentiation… producing anachronisms at best and unintelligibility at worst.”

There are several reasons that this anachronism can be avoided in the current study. First, rather than the term bestiality which – I have shown – had considerable valences in the medieval period, the author uses the phrase “mid feowerfoted nytene for minum willen gefremedon” a phrase that might best be translated into vernacular English as “they did ‘it’ with four-footed beasts by my will.”

Ergo, the definition of the act is in the turn of phrase itself: rather than potentially confusing a different valence of “bestiality” the reference is clear – if oblique: the offenders engage in some form of sexual contact with animals. Furthermore, there is no implication of a community, lifestyle, or any other form of social organization, nor am I interested in attempting to differentiate between acute and chronic practitioners (the latter sometimes termed “zoophiliacs” in the literature). Rather, both the study I will be using and the text itself are strictly interested in one thing: whether or not there are individuals who engage in sexual contact with animals.

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202 Davidson 1987, 37. An example of this confusion can be seen in Boswell’s landmark work Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality (1st printing 1980) in which Boswell made use of the term “homosexuality” a term with very specific connotations and suggestions of social cohesion which was not found prior to the 19th century. For more information on this controversy, cf. Kuefler’s The Boswell Thesis.

203 Peter Dendle notes that this reference is “uncommonly explicit for non-penitential literature of the time, especially hagioraphy” (Dendle 2001, 55).

204 Again, Cf. Miletski (2002) for a more involved discussion on the subject.
For those familiar with the psychology of sex, I propose to use the Kinsey study. Arguably the first in-depth study of sexual practices, Kinsey et al. performed their interviews in the late 30s to early 60s and two books were published on the results: *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953). Kinsey et al.’s data came under fire for its selection procedures (in particular, a quarter of the original male sample population were prison inmates, another five percent identified themselves as male prostitutes, and sample participants were sometimes recruited by previous participants), and by Abraham Maslow for its lack of control in “volunteer bias.” Nevertheless, a similar study by Morton Hunt (*Sexual Behavior in the 1970's*) uncovered similar results to Kinsey et al.’s (at least with respect to bestiality), and Kinsey’s data continues to see use in the field. Similarly, it seems safe to assume that despite Maslow’s outstanding claim to volunteer bias, this has a more significant impact upon the percentage of individuals in the study who engage in bestiality rather than the geographical data which I intend to use.

Kinsey et al.’s reports concluded that 8% of men, 1.5% of preadolescent females, and 3.6% of post-adolescent females had at least one sexual experience with an animal. However, they also found that such experiences occur much more frequently in rural areas, with a rate of between forty and fifty percent in males. To paraphrase the results and Kinsey’s commentary upon them, it is not so much that those living in urban areas are less prone to engage in sexual contact with animals, but that rural areas afford far

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205 Maslow and Sakoda 1952. Maslow and Sakoda identify volunteer-bias in sexual studies as the prevalence of high esteem individuals more willing to share their sexual exploits while low esteem individuals were less willing. Bias is introduced because Maslow discovered in a separate study that high esteem individuals are statistically more likely to engage in “unconventional sexual behavior” (Maslow and Sakoda 1952, 262).

206 Laws and Donohue 2008, 391
greater opportunity both in terms of privacy and partners. Morton Hunt’s *Sexual Behavior in the 1970’s* agrees with these findings, suggesting that lower figures in his own data (roughly 5% of men and 2% of women) were due to increased urbanization and less access to animals and privacy as a result.  

Considering this evidence, it seems likely that one portion of the original audience of CCCC Margaret was an audience of rural lay individuals whom the original author felt was in danger of falling into or had previously engaged in the sin of bestiality. Although less certain, this evidence may also suggest that children (esp. a population of young boys) were present in the CCCC Margaret audience. Although adults certainly practice bestiality, Kinsey et al.’s studies found that both men and women typically engage in such behavior in their adolescent years. This practice was particularly common among young boys in rural areas. Kinsey et al. hypothesized that this was due to the lack of availability of “heterosexual relations with human females.” This conclusion regarding the youth and gender of offenders seems to be reflected in the 17th and 18th century bestiality trials in Sweden:

> It was the definite opinion of the authorities that bestiality was a boy's game sometimes growing into a man's habit. With this idea confirmed by the confessions of young boys and adult men testifying about their first temptations and attempts in boyhood, often during herding, the court could hardly believe a middle-aged man who claimed that this was the first time for him. In 1686 the Superior Court, Svea Hovratt, complained in a letter to the king about the almost daily reports of bestiality charges. Very often

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207 Beetz 2005, 48  
208 Kinsey et al. 1948, 671  
209 Kinsey et al. 1948, 675
these were said to concern young herdsboys, and the life of herding was described in the letter as a subculture of ignorance and abominable lust.  

A younger male audience might also explain why the black demon pairs bestiality and “some vexed their elders with words” together: the assumption that they are both, on some level, “a boy’s game.”

Thus, it must be concluded that there were two audience groups for which CCCC Margaret was destined. On the one hand, we have the audience that Treharne pointed out: an audience that was “monastic and ascetic, practising daily, to varying degrees, an active emulation of Christ and simultaneously engaging in contemplation of Christ’s humanity and the intercessory powers of the Saviour himself, together with his communion of saints.” This was likely the audience from which the author of CCCC Margaret was drawn. However, this author was also aware of another audience, an audience of rural lay individuals about which the author must have previously heard rumors (or corroborated fact) of the practice of bestiality and chose to address it specifically in his version of the Life.

Of course, the fact that a monastic author felt the need to address such an audience in his original narrative suggests that CCCC Margaret was not first addressed to a monastic audience and then later adapted to a lay audience. Rather, the author wrote with both the monastic and the lay audience in mind, indicating that CCCC Margaret was

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210 Liliequist 1991, 414. This may also suggest an alternate reading of the penitentials with regard to bestiality. While Salisbury argues that the penitentials continue the tradition of Germanic law codes of viewing age as a mitigating factor (Salisbury 1994, 89), it may also be that bestiality was viewed as more acceptable for children who had no other “proper” outlet for their burgeoning sexuality. Support for this view could be further argued by the fact that penitentials seemed to view bestiality performed by unmarried adults as a lesser sin (and thus, deserving of a lesser penalty) than when the act was performed by married adults (Salisbury 1994, 90).

211 Treharne 2012, 8
always originally intended for pastoral purposes as well as the ascetic contemplation of God.

**Conclusion**

One of the most striking aspects of both texts is each author’s adaptation of the didactic elements of the black demon’s speech from the Mombritius tradition. In the Paris text, the demon warns his listeners that he is the one who inflames their passion and pushes them to sexual sin, a statement that implicitly instructs the audience to remember that their illicit sexual urges are not their own but those of a demon who can be resisted with the power of the cross.

Similarly, CCCC Margaret maintains this didactic warning but sharpens its focus considerably. Gone is the vague threat that the demon “inspires” people to lust. Instead the author targets specific sins (i.e. bestiality, adultery, angering one’s elders), sins so specific that one must assume – *per* Pierre Payer – the author had heard they were perpetrated by his audience. Through the mouth of the demon, the author instructs those under his pastoral care to reject the behaviors that they have previously engaged in, condemning them as the work of demons.

Conversely, *Seinte Margarete*’s author adopts an opposite approach. Rather than rejecting specific behaviors that must be avoided in the future, the demon lays out a lifestyle that the reader should follow to avoid falling into sin. From diet to behavior to what thoughts to think, the demon lays out a rigorous anchoritic lifestyle for the reader to follow.
In both of these cases, we can see the outlines of an original community through the statements the demon has made. In the case of *Seinte Margarete*, a careful analysis shows that the virgins of the “wives, widows and virgins” must have been a community that was incredibly similar to, if not the same as, the community to which *Ancrene Wisse* was directed. In CCCC Margaret, the demon’s speech allows the reader to define a community that had previously been overlooked: a community of rural lay religious practitioners that the monastic author had in mind while he was writing.

In a broader sense, these adaptations would have been an exceptionally effective means of reinforcing or changing the target audience’s behavior. While the author of the Paris text only vaguely hints at the black demon’s area of influence, both the author of *Seinte Margarete* and CCCC Margaret are attempting to guide the behavior of a certain portion of their audience by speaking through the demon’s mouth. In so doing, the author also speaks with the authority of a supernatural being, lending additional weight to the didactic lessons contained therein.

This weight is further reinforced by the demon’s reticence to or strain over speaking the truth. In *Seinte Margarete*, the demon laments “I will be forced – though much against my will – to do what you will,” indicating that the demon does not wish to illuminate the means by which it can be defeated but that his hand is forced. Similarly, in CCCC Margaret the demon exclaims towards the end of his monologue “I am speaking truly to you, and therefore I cannot be here any longer.” Thus, not only are these truths supernatural in nature but hard won truths at that, giving them the quality of divine secrets or occult knowledge.

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212 “Ich mot nede – noðeles min unwilles hit is – don þet ti wil is” (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, 64).
213 “ic soðlice þe to sprece and for þi ne mæig ic na læng beon” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 166).
Just as the previously mentioned individuals who doubt the veracity of transubstantiation discover a finger in their mouth when they take the Eucharist, the demon’s words carry a weight that the original author’s would not have. In this way, both authors controlled powerful means to curb or encourage patterns of sexual behavior because they implicitly understood that when a demon speaks, the reader listens.

The analysis of the demon’s speech also further suggests the capacity of Margaret’s narrative to speak to the present concerns of her audience. Whereas in the previous chapter readers were invited to participate in Margaret’s prison scene, the black demon’s speech is instead used by redactors to guide contemporary sexual behavior. By placing prescriptions and proscriptions in the demon’s mouth with which the readers would have identified, the redactors of the Lives transformed the demon’s speech into a warning that spoke directly to the behavior of their contemporary audiences.

At the same time, this lends additional weight to the imitationes performed by Margaret’s adherents. The black demon’s speech is not a generic address that remains static throughout time, but rather the dialogue of a supernatural creature that is speaking directly to the audience’s personal struggles with sexual desire. Once more, the location of the prison scene is not 4th century Antioch. Instead, the demon is uncomfortably close to the reader, chiding them for their failings and lamenting the path to proper sexual practice that Margaret represents.

Nor is the black creature in Margaret’s prison cell the only demon to haunt the sexual identities of her readers. In my next chapter, I will further explore the construction of contemporary sexual roles through the prefect that tortures Margaret, Olibrius. In the versions considered, Olibrius is depicted as a demon wearing human flesh. Alternately
described as a confederate of devils and a relation of Satan himself, Olibrius is systematically linked to the demonic and painted as an intrinsically un-Christian figure. Through this depiction, Margaret’s battle with Olibrius is not simply that of a poor, virginal shepherdess against a politically powerful prefect, but the resistance of Christianity against its implacable opponents, demons.

However, this is not the only identity which Olibrius bears. In addition to this demonic heritage, Olibrius also bears markers of two or more religious identities (pagan-Jew, pagan-Saracen, or pagan-Jew-Saracen). This hybrid religious identity allows Olibrius to invoke contemporary fears of Jews and Saracens, as well as to solidify the sexual boundaries between Christians and non-Christians.
Chapter 3 - Circumcising Olibrius: Threatening Sexuality and Religious Alterity in the Life of St. Margaret

In my first two chapters, I addressed monsters in Margaret’s narrative that were overtly inhuman. The dragon of the Mombritius version – though sporting certain human characteristics such as a beard – has iron teeth, pants fire, and is large enough to swallow Margaret in one gulp. The demon – though less obviously physically monstrous – bears the black skin used as a marker of lust in the writings of the desert fathers and speaks of being enclosed in glass jars and moving invisibly among people to tempt them to sin.

I now turn my attention to Margaret’s most human opponent: the prefect who persecutes her, Olibrius. Next to Margaret, Olibrius is arguably the most frequently analyzed character in studies of the various Lives of St. Margaret. Considering that Olibrius’ purpose within the narrative framework of the Lives is to contest Margaret’s claim to virginity and her commitment to Christianity, it is not surprising that many scholars write about Olibrius in light of his reaction to Margaret. Maud Burnett McInerney argues in “Rhetoric, Power, Integrity and the Passion of the Virgin Martyr” that the attempts that the Olibrius of Seinte Margarete makes to convert Margaret to paganism are indistinguishable from his assaults on her chastity,214 and that Olibrius’ increasing use of force throughout the narrative is an attempt to silence the increasing power of Margaret’s words.215 Regarding the Olibrius of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Elaine Treharne claims that he is “utterly inactive,”216 a passivity that is reflected in the gods he worships and which makes room for the active and efficacious speech and

214 McInerney 1999, 51
215 McInerney 1999, 51-52
216 Treharne 2012, 9
prayer in which Margaret engages. In *Flesh Made Word*, Aviad Kleinberg asserts that the
*Golden Legend* Olibrius’ reaction to Margaret’s beauty “combines the sexual and the
political, the physical body and the body politic,” and that Margaret’s rejection of
Olibrius’ sexual advances converts this body from “a source of pleasure to a battleground
of wills.”

Tracy-Anne Cooper argues for another manifestation of the body politic
acting upon the character, claiming that the Olibrius of BL Cotton Tiberius A.iii is
constrained in his lust by the negative legal ramifications of having sex with a Christian
while in his position as a Roman prefect.

Cooper’s piece also begins to explore elements of Olibrius’ identity that do not
wholly depend upon his reaction to Margaret, namely his ethnic/religious identity. In
doing so, Cooper joins several other scholars who reflexively label Olibrius as a
“Roman” or “pagan.” While this is certainly a historically appropriate assumption, it can obscure the presence of different forms of religious alterity that other authors have
pointed to. For instance, Siobhain Bly Calkin notes that the Auchinleck Manuscript refers
to Olibrius and Margaret’s persecutors as Saracens, which allowed readers to
“imaginatively revise late thirteenth-century crusading setbacks, and envision an
overwhelming Christian triumph that would have gladdened the hearts of English

\[\text{References:}\]

217 Kleinberg 2008, 275
218 Cooper 2013, 71
219 As Schulenburg does when discussing the narrative in general (Schulenburg 1998, 230); McInerney in
her discussion of *Seinte Margarete* (1999, 51); Larson in her discussion of the Mombritius version (Larson
2003, 96); and by Clayton and Magennis while discussing the general structure of the narrative (Clayton
and Magennis 1994, 28).
220 As Shuffelton does in his discussion of the Mombritius version (Shuffelton 2008, 570); Sanok’s frequent
use of the term “pagan” to describe the context of Bokenham’s *Life* (Sanok 2007, 64)
221 Clayton and Magennis locate the general historical period of the narrative as some time during the
persecution under Diocletian and Maximian at which time Romans would have been the primary opponent
of Christians (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 3).
222 Bly Calkin 2005, 141-143
proponents of crusade in the early fourteenth century.”

Others have made note of the way Jewishness is associated with Olibrius through the accusation that his ancestors killed Christ.

In this chapter, I will argue that Olibrius represents a series of polar opposites to Margaret’s character. The first of these poles is sexual: Margaret’s identity in the narrative is sex-negative, whereas Olibrius is sex-positive. It is Olibrius’ desire that Margaret share his sex-positive nature that drives the narrative. However, Margaret’s sex-negative nature is intrinsically bound up in her Christian faith, which leads Olibrius to threaten Margaret’s Christian nature at the same time that he threatens her sexual one.

Since Margaret’s Christian identity is predicated around this sex negative pole, Olibrius’ religious identity takes on the opposite value – “un-Christian” – in two ways. First, each of the texts in question associate Olibrius with demonic forces, the ultimate adversary of Christianity. As I will show, this is accomplished either through associations between Olibrius and the demons Margaret will eventually face in her prison cell or by associating Olibrius with Satan.

However, Olibrius cannot be made entirely demonic, since he is clearly a very human character (e.g. he has social rank, wishes to marry and copulate with Margaret in a very human fashion, etc.). This forces the texts to associate Olibrius with other human un-Christian elements, namely pagans, Jews, or Saracens. At this stage, I will be building on points other scholars have made (e.g. Bly Calkin and Bernau) about specific versions

223 Bly Calkin 2005, 166
224 Bernau 2003, 172
225 I use the terms “sex-negative” and “sex-positive” as there is no extent term that appropriately designates the opposite of “virginal.” Just as Margaret’s sex role in the story is predicated on the fact that she may never have sex (sex-negative), Olibrius’ role in the story is predicated on the fact that he will not cease his aggressions until he has sex (sex-positive).
226 Particularly the dragon, a fact which serves to strengthen the sexually threatening nature of Olibrius’ character.
of Margaret’s *Life* by broadening the scope to multiple versions. Doing so reveals that the opposite value of Christian is not distinctly pagan, Jew, or Saracen, rather the narratives create a hybrid identity that contains an amalgamation of traits and descriptors that point to no particular religious group but instead to an ill-defined “enemy” of all Christendom. Nevertheless, as individual scribes alter terminology in the story they (un?)intentionally emphasize certain traits in this amalgamation, either making Olibrius resemble a particular religious group to a greater degree (as the Old English texts under consideration do with Jewish identity) or by introducing a new religious group into the mix (as the Middle English *Lives* do with Saracens). These alterations to Olibrius then combine with his demonic sexuality to reinforce already salient sexual boundaries between Christians and other religious groups over the diachronic stretch of the *Lives*.

**Demonic Sexuality**

Since McInerney’s findings are the starting point of this section, a brief summary of her work is in order. According to McInerney, Olibrius’ attempts on Margaret’s chastity (his sexual desires) are indistinguishable from his demands that she convert (his religious desires). To elaborate further, the narrative places Olibrius in such a position that his sexual urges cannot be consummated until Margaret becomes un-Christian (to use my own term). It is this sexual desire that predates and informs his desire for Margaret’s conversion. Thus, while Margaret’s primary agenda in the narrative is to maintain her Christian identity, Olibrius’ goal is to consummate his sexual lust, a goal that cannot be realized until his primary impediment (Margaret’s virginity predicated upon her Christian identity) is removed.
Building on McInerney’s point, I argue that in each of the versions under consideration, the descriptions and dialogue attributed to Olibrius create a connection between the character of the prefect and the demonic (typically and more specifically, the demons that Margaret will eventually encounter in her prison cell or the Devil). This ties the character of Olibrius to the demonic agenda in the narrative which intrinsically changes his theological position: Olibrius is not a human being who happens not to be Christian, but a confederate to demons who can never be Christian, an “Other” with no chance of assimilation. Moreover, as with all martyrrological legends, both characters stand for larger worldly and theological positions beyond the roles that they play in the story. Thus, as Margaret contends against Olibrius it is not only two characters arrayed against each other, but truth against falsehood, Christ against his persecutors, the weak against the strong, and the Christian against his/her enemy. In this larger, transhistorical narrative, as the sole named representative of his tradition, Olibrius becomes the symbol of his entire religious group: In the reader’s imagination, Olibrius’ flaws become his religious groups’ flaws, his desires signify the desires of the entire group, and his sexuality, a sexuality guided by demons that renders the object of its desires intrinsically un-Christian, becomes theirs.

As I have in previous chapters, I begin with the Paris text. As previously noted, the Paris text is a Latin version of the Life of St. Margaret found in Paris, BN, lat. 5574, attributed to Mercia, and dated to c.900, making it one of the earliest Lives of St. Margaret written in England. It is also a representative of the Mombrtius tradition,

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227 Namely, the destruction of Margaret’s virginity.
228 “A small collection containing a uita of St Christopher, an account of the Invention of the Cross and the uita of SS Margaret and Juliana” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 95).
229 Both the attribution and date are based on the Paris manuscript’s similarity to London, BL Royal 5.F.III (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 95-96).
the same tradition to which the version in BL Cotton Nero E.1 belongs and the inspiration for the vast majority of vernacular English Lives (including the Stanzaic Life and the version in Ashmole Codex 61 under consideration here). Moreover, the Cotton Tiberius A.iii Life and the Life in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303 have as their inspiration a similar tradition (the Mombritius/Pre-Mombritius tradition), making all of the Lives in question rather similar to one another. As a result, I will be treating the Paris text in detail and afterward weaving in relevant portions of the other Lives under consideration into this analysis.\textsuperscript{230}

When Olibrius first comes upon Margaret’s city he is “traveling from Asia to the city of Antioch to persecute Christians and urge them to adore his empty gods, and when he heard anyone mention Christ, he would immediately shackle them with iron bonds.”\textsuperscript{231} Seeing Margaret “he immediately desired her”\textsuperscript{232} and commands his attendants to discover her sexual availability.\textsuperscript{233} However, when the attendants approach to capture her, she offers a lengthy prayer to God, a prayer which indicates to the soldiers that she is Christian. Returning to Olibrius, they report, “Lord, your power cannot be in common with her, because she doesn’t serve our gods, but invokes God and worships Christ whom

\textsuperscript{230} In particular, the versions under consideration fall into thematic groups based on how they treat Olibrius and his relation to the demonic: The Lives in the Paris text, BL Cotton Nero E.1, and BL Cotton Tiberius A.iii create associations between Olibrius and the dragon in Margaret’s cell; the CCCC and Stanzaic Life paint Olibrius with a general demonic brush as well as drawing familial connections between himself and Satan; and the Ashmole version styles Olibrius as something of a “Duke of Hell” bending knee to Satan but commanding demons of his own at the same time through necromantic means.

\textsuperscript{231} “transiret Olibrius prefectus de Asia in Antiochiam ciuitatem persequare Christianos et deos suos uanos adorare suaderet; et ubi audierat aliquos Christum nominare, statimque eos ferreis nexibus constringebat” (Clayton and Magenni 1994, 196).

\textsuperscript{232} “statim concupiuit eam” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 196).

\textsuperscript{233} “Go quickly and seize that girl. If she is free, I will take her as my wife. If she is a slave, I will purchase her and she will be my concubine. It will be good for her in my home due to her beauty.” “Ite festinanter, comprehende hanc puellam. Si est libera, accipiam eam mihi uxorem. Si ancilla est, dabo pretium pro ea et erit mihi concubina. Bene erit ei in domo mea propter puchritudinem eius” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 196).
the Jews crucified.” Upon hearing this, Olibrius becomes angry and demands that Margaret recount her name, faith and social status. Upon hearing that she is Christian and a virgin, he then orders her to be “locked up in the prison until he might discover through what machination he might destroy her virginity.”

This opening serves to both outline and foreshadow Olibrius’ relationship to Margaret. From their first meeting, Olibrius sexually desires Margaret: his first encounter with her is not through the medium of his persecution of Christians but rather the medium of his own desire for her beauty. Unable to imagine that she is sexually unavailable to him, he sends his attendants not to request her company or ask if she returns his interest, but rather to simply find out the most socially appropriate way to sate his carnal desires. When his attendants return, Olibrius is enraged that the object of his desire is Christian. However, he still insists that she attend him so that he might question her. As the story has already noted, Olibrius is wont to clap in irons those who mention the name of Christ; the fact that he does not do so to Margaret suggests he holds out hope that she can be persuaded to capitulate to his sexual desires.

It is in the context of this questioning that Margaret reveals to Olibrius that she calls upon “the omnipotent God and his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who has kept my virginity intact and inviolate until the present day.” Through this statement, Margaret solidifies the relationship between her religion and her sexual unavailability to Olibrius:

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234 “Domine, potestas tua non potest ei esse communis, quia non est serviens diis nostris sed Deum invocabat, et Christum quem Iudei crucifixerunt adorabat” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 196).
236 “in carcerem recludi donec inueniret per qualem machinationem virginitatem eius perderet” (Clayton and Magennis 1996, 198).
237 “Deum omnipotentem et Filium eius Dominum Iesum Christum, qui mean virginitatem usque in presentem diem inlesam atque inuiolatam custodiuit” (Clayton and Magennis 1996, 198).
for Margaret, the worship of Christ and her virginity are synonymous with each other. Furious at being stymied from his goal, Olibrius imprisons Margaret, but the narrative makes it clear that, although Olibrius may eventually torture Margaret in an effort to effect a conversion, his true goal is “violating her virginity.”

The (heavy-handed and violent) plan that Olibrius concocts to void Margaret’s virginity is torture. The following day, Olibrius brings her to a tribunal to be tortured. Before he does so, Olibrius asks Margaret to “have pity on the beauty of your body and on your tenderness. Moreover, give in to me and adore my gods and I will give you much money and it will be well for you above all my household.”²³⁸ Facing Margaret’s second refusal, Olibrius then adds a more overt threat to his request: “If you will not worship my gods, my sword will devour your flesh and I will destroy your bones in a burning [ardentem] flame. But if you obey me and worship my gods and you join your body with mine in love, behold, before everyone I say to you I will take you as my wife and it will be just as well for you as it is for me.”²³⁹ Once more encountering Margaret’s refusal, Olibrius then commands his torturers to beat her with rods. Despite the outpouring of her blood and the plaintive cries of the crowd,²⁴⁰ Margaret once more rejects Olibrius, and offers an extended commentary on his behavior including “You do the works of

²³⁹ “Si non adoraveris dos meos, gladius meus deuorabit carnem tuam et ossa tua disperdam super ignem ardentem. Nam etsi obedieris mihi et adoraveris deos meos et corpus tuum copularis mihi in amore, ecce ante omnes tibi dico, ego accipiam te ad coniugium et bene tibi erit sicut et mihi” (Clayton and Magennnis 1996, 198).
²⁴⁰ “O Margaret, truly we grieve for you, because we see you nude, lacerated, and your body tormented. O Margaret, what beauty you have ruined because of your unbelief! That prefect is angry at you and he hastens to destroy you and remove the memory of you. Believe in his gods and you will live!” “O Margareta, uere dolemus te, quia uidimus te nudam lacerari et corpus tuum macerari. O Margareta, qualem decorum perdidisti propter incredulitatem tuam! Iste prefectus tibi iracundus est et perdere te festinat et delere memoriam tuam. Crede deos suos et uiuas” (Clayton and Magennnis 1996, 200).
Satan.” Continuing her tirade against Olibrius, she claims he is a “horrible, insatiable lion, abominable to the Lord, confounded by Christ,” a title that appears to be repeated when she prays to God to “save me from the mouth of the lion and my humility from the horns of the unicorns.” Finally, Olibrius threatens Margaret once more that “if you will not listen to me, my sword will devour your flesh and I will destroy your bones.” Finding Margaret still unswayed, Olibrius then confines her to prison for a second time.

Given Olibrius’ sexual goals, it is not surprising that this scene is replete with sexual implications: Olibrius makes mention of Margaret’s beauty and desirability (e.g. “the beauty of your body”) throughout the scene and indicates that if Margaret “joins her body to his in love,” he will have her as his wife. The crowd surrounding Margaret similarly weeps for the loss of her beauty and comments on the beating her “nude” body has received. Even the threatening language that Olibrius uses in the scene is sexually charged, warning as he does that his sword will “devour” Margaret’s flesh and that her bones will be consumed in an ardent fire.

Yet, there is a demonic element to the scene as well, one which binds the character of Olibrius to the demonic visitors in Margaret’s prison cell. As discussed in chapter one, the description of the dragon in the Paris text is sexually charged, bearing as it does something that “seems like a two-edged sword [gladius] in its hand” and panting fire from its nostrils as it seeks to devour Margaret. This is a direct reflection of the earlier sexually-charged threat when Olibrius claims his sword [gladius] will devour

242 “O orribilis, O insatiabilis leo, abominatus a Domino, confusus a Christo” (Clayton and Magennis 1996, 200).
243 “Salua me ex ore leonis et a cornibus unicornorum humilitatem meam” (Clayton and Magennis 1996, 202).
244 “gladius meus deorabit carnem tuam, et ossa tua diserdam” (Clayton and Magennis 1996, 202).
245 “gladius utraque parte acutus in manu eius uidebatur” (Clayton and Magennis 1996, 204).
Margaret and her bones will be burnt in an ardent fire. On some level, both of these threats are carried out by the dragon: the creature does “devour” Margaret and when Margaret first encounters the dragon her bones are metaphorically destroyed when she turns “as pale as grass and the fear of death fell upon her and all her bones were shattered.”

In addition to this association with the demonic dragon in Margaret’s cell, Olibrius is also painted more generally with a devilish brush. During her indictment of Olibrius’ actions, Margaret claims “you do the works of Satan.” This attribution is later reinforced by Margaret addressing Olibrius as an “insatiable lion,” an appellation that, when combined with threats of devouring Margaret’s flesh, recalls 1 Peter 5:8: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

The similarities between Olibrius and the dragon are further drawn in the Latin version of the Life in Cotton Nero E.1 (hereafter, Nero) and the Old English version in Cotton Tiberius A.iii (Tiberius). As in the Paris text, Olibrius sees Margaret and

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246 “facta est ut herba pallida et formido mortis cecidit in eam et confrigebantur omnia ossa eius” (Clayton and Magennis 1996, 204).
247 The Life of St. Anthony also addresses the devil as “roaring like a lion” (ut leo rugiens; chapter 7) and the demonic host that appears before Anthony as “replete with images of lions” (repleuere phantassiis leonum; chapter 9).
248 The Cotton Nero E.1 manuscript is a large collection of Saints’ Lives that has been dated to c.1000 (Dresvina 2007, 229) and attributed to Worcester (Bieler 1942, 2). The version of St. Margaret (hereafter, Nero) is found in pars 2 of the manuscript (the manuscript is divided into two separate codices) starting on p. 162v (368 of the whole; entitled Vita sanctae Margaretae Antiochenae) and running until 165r, and the text is one of several later additions to the manuscript written in a different hand. This later addition appears to be a quire that was added after the surrounding manuscript was written. The Tiberius manuscript is a collection of texts dated to the middle of the 11th century and assigned to Christ Church, Canterbury “because its contents [see below] agree closely with those of a manuscript described in the medieval catalogue of Christ Church and because several of the saints invoked in its litany were culted at Christ Church” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 84). The manuscript was copied by five different scribes, three of whom worked on the version of Margaret (hereafter, Tiberius) in the manuscript. The version itself is located on fols. 73v–77v and is the only saint’s life present in the manuscript. Cooper has argued that this is because the Tiberius version “served two allied functions: first, it formed part of a practical and simple catechism for the laity in which only one exemplary Life was required; and second, it
desires her great beauty, discovers she is Christian, and tortures her amid sexually charged statements of violence.\(^{249}\) Margaret rejects his advances, and the members of the crowd once more cry out against the abuse of her body and her nudity.

Both texts also link Olibrius with the dragon in Margaret’s cell. In the Tiberius version, this association is drawn rather directly through Margaret’s curse against Olibrius: “you vile dog, and you insatiable dragon.”\(^{250}\) The Nero text, in contrast, goes about this association much more obliquely. In the Nero text, Margaret once more refers to Olibrius as an “insatiable lion” and as one who does the work of Satan, finally praying to God to “save me from the mouth of the lion and my humility from the horns of the unicorns.”\(^{251}\)

When Margaret first encounters the dragon in her prison cell, it is:

- completely covered in hair and with his beard of gold. It appeared to have teeth of iron and its eyes gleamed like a pearl. And from his nostrils came fire and smoke. His tongue panted over his neck. The serpent was like a glittering sword and he made a stench in the prison and hissed powerfully.
and a light was made in the prison from the fire which came from the mouth of the lion.  

While the author of the Nero version downplays the overtly sexual language of the Paris in Margaret’s visitation (save for the panting of the tongue), the dragon is itself described as a “sword” and a “lion,” reminding the reader of the sword Olibrius threatens Margaret with and her epithet for him: “insatiable lion.” In this scene, the dragon both becomes the sword through which Olibrius attempts to dominate Margaret’s body as well as standing in for Olibrius, “lion” for “lion.” Despite the lack of sexual descriptors on the dragon’s body, the black demon provides further evidence that both Olibrius and the dragon are after the same thing: “I sent my brother Rufus in the form of a dragon in order to absorb you and bear your memory from the earth and overwhelm your virginity and destroy your beauty.” Not only does this passage directly suggest that the dragon is meant to “overwhelm” Margaret’s virginity (as Olibrius hopes to), but it also further recalls the pleas of the crowd, when they caution Margaret “that prefect is terribly angry and hastens to destroy you and wipe your memory from the earth.”

Unlike the Paris, Nero and Tiberius versions, the Cambridge, Corpus Christi College version (CCCC) and Stanzaic Life make no effort to link Olibrius with the

252 “totus deauratus capilli et barbe eius auree. Videbantur dentes ei ferrei , oculi eius ut Margarita splendebant. Et de naribus ignis et fumus egrediebantur. Lingua ei anhelabat super collum eius. Erat serpens quasi gladius candens et fumum faciebat in carcere. Et erexit se in medio carceris et sibilavit fortiter et factum est lumen in carcere ab igne qui exibat de ore leonis” (f. 163v).
253 “Ego quidem misi fratrem meum Rufonem in similitudine draconis ut absorberet te et tolleret memoriam tuam de terra et obrueret virginitatem tuam et perderet decorum tuam” (f. 163v).
254 “Iste prefectus iratus est valde et perdere te festinat et delere de terra memoriam tuam” (f. 163r).
255 Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303 is a collection of homilies and saints’ lives literature drawn primarily from Ælfric. The Life of St. Margaret contained within is one of three unique saints’ homilies that are not part of Ælfric’s corpus, the others being the Life of St. Giles and the Life of St. Nicholas (Richards 1988, 90). The Old English manuscript is plain with little ornamentation and was the work of three scribes (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 92-93). N.R. Ker’s Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon places the text in Rochester based on the “prickly” script associated with the location, and the relationship between CCCC and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 162 (also likely from Rochester) suggests that the
dragon in Margaret’s cell. In the CCCC version, I suspect that this may be the case because the dragon in Margaret’s cell fails to swallow her:

And the devil [the dragon] was angry and wanted to swallow up the girl.

And the blessed girl thoroughly blessed herself against the demon with her right hand and on her forehead made the sign of the cross and so protected herself against the dragon. And that blessed maiden, whole and unhurt, turned from him. And the dragon burst to pieces and vanished from the prison and she felt no evil.  

Since, the dragon of the Paris, Nero and Tiberius versions engages with Margaret in a very physical way (devouring her), Olibrius’ threats – and his association with the dragon – are based on physical associations (swords, fire, and phrases that directly associate the two antagonists together, effectively making Olibrius, on a metaphorical level, the

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256 The Stanzaic Life of Margaret refers to a set of very similar poetic versions of Margaret’s Life that date from the second half of the 13th century onward. The version of the Stanzaic Life under consideration here is found in Cambridge University Library MS Addit. 4122 (~15th century) and was edited by Sherry Reames in Middle English Legends of Women Saints. Other Stanzaic Lives are found in the Auchinleck Manuscript (National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.2.1); Blackburn, Public Library MS (formerly Petworth 3); Bodleian Library MS Bodley 779; Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson poet. 34; and Trinity College, Cambridge MS 323 (Reames 2003, 128).

257 And se deofol him þa abalhc and þa fæmne forswelgan wolde. And seo eadiga fæmne sona mid hire swiðre hand wið þonu sceocca wel gebletsode and on hire forhæfde rodetacna mercode and swa wið þone draca wel generode. And seo eadiga fæmne hal and gesund fram him gewente. And eall sticmælum toðwan se draca ut of þan carcerne, and hi nan yfel on hire ne gefelde (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 162). It is interesting to note that the CCCC author seems just as intent as the author of Seinte Margarete (see chapter 1) to assure his audience that Margaret emerges from her ordeal physical and (possibly) sexually unscathed. Nevertheless, Margaret’s lack of contact with the dragon does not seem to diminish the implied sexual threat of the dragon’s presence. When Margaret first begins to beat the black demon in CCCC, she shouts “Stop, you miserable creature, you cannot seduce my virginity from me.” “Geswic þu earning, ne miht þu to nahte minne meagðhad me to beswicenne” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 162-164).
dragon). Since the CCCC version does not contain this physical engagement, the text looks elsewhere for its demonic associations.

Similarly, while the Stanzaic Life does include Margaret being swallowed by the dragon, it is significantly shorter than any other version under consideration: “There sche sawe a lothelye dragon in a corner glyde,/Brennynge as the blake fyre. His mouthe he gaped wyde./That maybe wexed alle greene as the gresse in someres tyde./The lowe fleye oute from his tonge as the fyre of brymeston./That maybe felle to grounde tylle sche craked everye boone./He toke her up in his mowthe; he swalowed her anoon;/Thorugh vertue of her he braste, that harme hadde sche noon.” In fact, the description focuses primarily upon Margaret and her response to the dragon rather than any description of the demonic creature, limiting the associations that could be drawn between the beast in Margaret’s cell and the one that tortures her.

Instead, both versions establish a demonic lineage for Olibrius, directly equating his desires with demons and Satan. In the CCCC version, when Olibrius’ soldiers first come upon Margaret she prays to God that “devils may not seduce my soul,” and as she is being tortured by Olibrius she prays “have mercy on me and deliver me from the power of the Devil.” Olibrius is later genealogically associated with the Devil by Margaret who addresses him when she says “You do your father’s work, who is the Devil himself.”

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258 Reames 2003, 121-122
259 “þaet deofle mine sawle ne beswican” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 154). The verb beswican is the same verb that accompanies Margaret’s defiance about her virginity to the black demon.
260 “Ðu wyrcest þines fæðeres weorc, þæt is se deofol self” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 160). In the manuscript, it is actually Olibrius who speaks the line. However, Clayton and Magennis argue that this is likely a translation error on the part of the scribe who first rendered the Latin into Old English: “The corresponding speech in the Latin is spoken by Margaret and is introduced by the phrase ‘Et dixit praefecto:’ here the grammatical case of the word praefecto lies at the root of the discrepancy” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 62). Similar errors are also present in the text including Margaret’s odd comment that
The Stanzaic Life creates similar parallels between demons and the Devil. In the beginning of the Stanzaic Life, Olibrius is described as the lord “Of Asye and Antioche, to geven and to selle./He served both nyghte and daye the foule fendys of helle./And alle that beleved on Jhesu Cryste, he fordes hem to qwelle.”

Upon being approached by Olibrius’ servants, Margaret prays that “If Thi swete wyll were, an angel me Thou sende./From this foule gostys I may me defende.” Finally, Margaret claims of Olibrius “Thou doyste as thou kenneste after Sathanas thin eme,” establishing an uncle-nephew relationship between Satan and Olibrius, just as CCCC established a father-son relationship.

Despite this shift in associations between Olibrius and the dragon, it should be noted that his sexual nature remains little changed. For example, when the Margaret of the Stanzaic Life is brought before Olibrius, he tells her: “my lemman thou schalte be,/And I thee wylle wedde if thou be comen of free./If thou be of thral born, I geve thee gold and fee./Thou schalte be my lemman so longe as it schal bee.”

We also learn that Olibrius’ interest in Margaret emerges from the fact that he admires her “for her fayre bewté.” Both versions feature a similar sexualization of Margaret’s torture by Olibrius, and even after the extensive tortures that Margaret is put through, the CCCC

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Olibrius will go to hell if she submits to him and the reference to two “lands” of Jamnes and Mambres held by Satan (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 62-63).

Reames notes that the use of the term “foule gostys” is specific to the Cambridge University Library MS Addit. 4122 version of the Stanzaic Life and “suggests the demonic nature of Margaret's enemies. The other MSS just refer to them again as Saracens” (Reames 2003, 129).

In the Stanzaic Life, Olibrius pleads that Margaret “have mercye on thi whyte flesshe” (Reames 2003, 119) and the townspeople “fulle sorye that thei were/Of that maydens whyte flesshe and of her yelowe here” (Reames 2003, 120).

The CCCC version features a similar scene among the townsfolk, in which they claim “we all sorely grieve for you, because we see you sitting naked like this and your beautiful body made into a wonder.”
Olibrius asks prior to Margaret’s execution – perhaps somewhat shocked – “And will you still not love me?”

Finally, Codex Ashmole 61 (Ashmole), though based upon a version of the Stanzaic Life, contains an interesting shift in the character of Olibrius. As we will see, the delightful dissimilarities between this Olibrius and previous versions will warrant a closer treatment of the text. In the beginning of the Ashmole version, Olibrius is described as:

A nobull man of grete cunnynge…
Also he servyd dey and nyght
Hys fals godys, I you behyght.
He servyd ever the devyll of helle,
And Crystine pepull he dyd quelle

Just as in the Stanzaic Life and the CCCC version, Olibrius has clear demonic associations. While there is no indication of a “familial association” between Olibrius and the Devil, Olibrius is the one who “servyd ever the devyll of helle.”

Moreover, unlike the previous versions, not only does Olibrius serve the Devil, but demons serve him in return! After Margaret’s torture, she is once again confined to

“ealle we þe bemænað sarlice, forþon þe we feseoð þe swa nacode sitan and þinne faegra lichaman to wundre macian” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 158). There is perhaps a bit of a play on words here, for the crowd – unbeknownst to them – are indeed witnessing a “wonder” or a “miracle” in the making.

“And nylt þu me get lufian…” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 166).

The codex itself is a large collection of writings that can be dated to c.1500 based on watermarks (Shuffelton 2008, 2-3), and the language of the verses contained within is Middle English. Several items contain the name of a scribe named “Rate” (typically in the format “Amen Quod Rate”), but little is known about this person save that his or her dialect seems to originate in northeast Leicestershire (Shuffelton 2008, 4). The Life of St. Margaret contained within Codex Ashmole (hereafter, Ashmole version) is one such production of Rate, likely produced in the middle of the 15th century and based upon an earlier stanzaic version that is indebted to the Mombritius (Shuffelton 2008, 570). The contents of the manuscript are varied and include romances (e.g. Sir Cleges, Sir Isumbras, and The Erle of Tolous); Saints’ Lives (e.g. Saint Eustace, Saint Margaret, and The Legend of the Resurrection); Exempla (e.g. The Knight Who Forgave His Father’s Slayer, The Jealous Wife and The Adulterous Falmouth Squire); Didactic works (e.g. How the Wise Man Taught His Son, How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter, and Dame Courtesy); as well as prayers and meditations.

Shuffelton 2008, 373
her prison cell and attacked by the dragon, after which she looks up to find another
demonic opponent, a “fouler best”\(^{270}\) (fouler beast) still. While there is frequently an
association that is made between this second demon and the threat to Margaret’s
virginity,\(^{271}\) the specific connection that the demon draws is quite startling. As the demon
begins an explanation of his presence, he confides to Margaret:

In dragons wyse we com to thee
To spyll thi wytte and make thee wode to be.
The kyng, Syr Olybryus,
In this lyknes sent us thus
For to strey thi fare body
With hys craft and nygramansy.\(^{272}\)

While in previous versions Olibrius and the demons in Margaret’s cell are associated via
metaphor and Margaret’s speech, in the Ashmole version Margaret’s demons appear in
her cell at the behest of Olibrius who commands them through “hys craft and
nygramansy” – no doubt the origin of the author’s earlier assertion the Olibrius was a
man “of grete cunnynge.” Specifically, they have been commanded to “spyll thi wytte
and make thee wode to be,” a phrase that means something akin to “deprive you of your
mind and drive you insane.” However, the nature of this insanity is left open, and Richard
Kieckhefer has noted that while necromancy could be put to many uses “erotic purposes
were among the most prominent.”\(^{273}\) Moreover, necromancy used for erotic ends was

\(^{270}\) Shuffelton 2008, 379
\(^{271}\) In previous versions, Margaret dashes the demon to the ground while shouting “Cease now from my
virginity, evil one!” (“Cessa iam, maligne, de mea uirginitate” Clayton and Magennis 1994, 206) or “Leave
\(^{272}\) Shuffelton 2008, 379.
\(^{273}\) Kieckhefer 1991, 40. It seems possible that Olibrius’ may have acquired the magical prowess that the
Stanzaic Life normally attributes to Margaret’s father. In the Stanzaic Life, one reads:
frequently conceived as driving the victim out of their right mind: Hincmar of Reims (9th century) recounts a tale in which a young woman is tortured by demons until she capitulates to their master’s desires; a Dutch manuscript recounts that the target of a particular spell will be “tormented by the conjured spirits, and will be unable to rest or do anything else until she yields;” while a 15th century German manual includes the incantation “so may the love of N. be fixed on N., so that she will burn with love of me and not be able to sleep, wake, lie down, sit or walk without burning for love of me,” with the end result being that the woman will “wail, lament, beat her breast, and so forth, until she succumbs.”

The demon also suggests that he and his brother have been sent to “strey thi fare body.” The word *strey* (from *stroien*) is often taken to mean destroy. However, I would like to point out that this runs counter to both Olibrius’ purpose (he has other plans for her body) and his abilities (surely he is capable of destroying her body, as he has shown through his tortures, without resorting to demons). Furthermore, when Margaret emerges from the prison cell after her debacle with demons, Olibrius once more begs her “Meyd Margaret, I pray thee/that thou wyll turne unto me,” clearly indicating to the audience that his desire for her flesh has not abated. Rather, it seems more likely that *strey* should

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Her fader was a patryarke, as I telle you may.
In Antioche a wyfe he chees in that false laye.
Febyle was his herte and false was hys faye;
The fendys oute of helle, thei servyd hym both nyghte and day.

Theodosy it was his name. One God loved he noghte;
He beleved in false goddys that were with hondys wroghte.
They had a chylde schulde cristened be, it ranne hym welle in thoughte.1
He comaundde whann hit was borne it schulde be broghte to noughte.
(Reames 2003, 115)

Thus, Margaret’s father in the Stanzaic Life is the one who is served by the devils of hell and works magic, while the Ashmole version attributes this practice to Olibrius.

274 Kieckhefer 1991, 40-41
275 As Shuffelton points out in his annotations on the side of the page (Shuffelton 2008, 379).
be read with one of its other valences: to conquer, subdue, overcome, or violate. In this sense, the demons have been sent to drive Margaret mad with lust and violate her body, the same goal that their commander Olibrius has.

Nor is this the only instance of Olibrius’ carnal longing in the Ashmole version. During Margaret’s torture, she tells Olibrius:

My lord to me he is full kynd;
He schall never go out of my mynd.
If thi hope were of my flessche
To do thi wyll both herd and nessche,
To rente the flessch fro the bone,
Power of my saule getys thou non.  

In these six lines, the author skillfully merges Olibrius’ desires with his tortures. While Margaret is clearly claiming that she will be faithful to God despite Olibrius’ tortures, these same tortures are also sexualized by suggesting that Olibrius’ desire is “of my flessche/to do thi wyll both herd and nessche.” As the editor of Ashmole 61 notes, “both herd and nessche” literally means “both hard and soft,” but can also convey the meaning of “in every way.” Thus, while Margaret’s dialogue eventually leads into the idea of torture (“To rente the flessch fro the bone”), it is also a rejection of Olibrius’ sexual desire to do his will in every way (both hard and soft) with her body.

**Synthesis**

In each of the *Lives* under consideration, there is a strong connection between Olibrius’ sexual desire and the demonic. In the Paris, Nero, and Tiberius versions, the

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\(^{276}\) Shuffelton 2008, 377
authors draw connections between the demonic dragon in Margaret’s cell and the character of Olibrius. In CCCC and the Stanzaic *Life*, Olibrius’ desire is no longer connected to the dragon in the cell but with the diabolic in general, with Margaret even going so far as to address Olibrius as a child or nephew of the Devil. Finally, the Ashmole version introduces a curious twist to the familiar narrative in which Olibrius no longer merely serves the Devil but has other demons that he uses in his attempts to bend Margaret to his will, once more linking him to the demonic opponents in Margaret’s cell.

While this is interesting from the perspective of the character of Olibrius, it is far more interesting for the ramifications upon Margaret’s readers. As I previously pointed out, there is a larger narrative context at work, a transhistorical narrative in which Margaret represents the Christian community and Olibrius an “un-Christian” one. Their conflict is a microcosm of the conflict between the two larger communities. As Bly Calkin has noted: “a community requires the existence of outsiders to define itself. Christianity in particular, as a community of worship gathered around suffering, dying bodies, requires an outsider to inscribe that suffering and torment.” Yet, it is not with gladness and good cheer that this suffering is inscribed in St. Margaret: the outsider, both Olibrius as a character and the community he represents, is demonized in the process. Thus, it is not just the desires of Olibrius that become driven by demons and un-Christian, it is the desires of the outsider community that Olibrius represents. The message to Margaret’s readers is clear: to be like Margaret, one must resist sexual contact with the outside community for their desires are driven by forces that good Christians should never come in contact with.

277 Bly Calkin 2005, 164
Religious Identity

But what outside community does Olibrius represent? I would now like to shift focus for a moment and discuss my use of the term “un-Christian” to describe Olibrius. Many authors working on the various Lives have alternatively addressed Olibrius as either a “Roman” or “pagan” prefect. Certainly, this would be historically accurate: the narrative of Margaret’s torture and martyrdom is clearly set in a time in which the Christian religion was not a dominant tradition and within the confines of the Roman empire (Antioch). Clayton and Magennis locate the general historical period of the narrative as the persecution under Diocletian and Maximian, a historical period echoed by Cooper when discussing the Tiberius Life.

However, despite what may be a historically accurate assessment, it is worthy of note that Olibrius is never directly identified as either Roman or pagan in any of the Lives under consideration, especially interesting considering a lack of reticence on the part of the authors to label Margaret’s father in such a way. Moreover, both Anke Bernau and Siobhain Bly Calkin have both located alternate religious groups in the figure of Olibrius.

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278 As Schulenburg does when discussing the narrative in general (Schulenburg 1998, 230); McInerney in her discussion of Seinte Margarete (1999, 51); Larson in her discussion of the Mombritius version (Larson 2003, 96); and by Clayton and Magennis while discussing the general structure of the narrative (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 28).

279 As Shuffelton does in his discussion of the Mombritius version (Shuffelton 2008, 570); Sanok’s frequent use of the term “pagan” to describe the context of Bokenham’s Life (Sanok 2007, 64)

280 Clayton and Magennis 1994, 3

281 Cooper 2013, 70-71

282 Margaret’s father Theodosius, the only other named adversary in the piece, is alternatively addressed as “chief priest of the pagans and worshipped idols” (“qui erat gentilium patriarcha et idola adorabat” Clayton and Magennis 1994, 195) in the Paris version, as the “patriarch of the heathens” (“haepenre hehfeder” Clayton and Magennis 1994, 112) in the Tiberius version, and a “heathen king” (“haepen cyninge” Clayton and Magennis 1994, 152). While the term “heathen” certainly has little specificity, it is interesting that some of the authors are willing to make this attribution regarding Theodosius but remain silent on the figure of Olibrius.
in two separate versions of the *Life* (Bernau: Judaism in *Seinte Margarete*; \(^{283}\) Bly Calkin: Muslim in the Auchinleck Manuscript version of Margaret\(^{284}\)).

I would propose that in the versions surveyed, Olibrius’ religious identity is fluid and multiple rather than fixed and singular: Olibrius is neither pagan, nor Jew, nor Muslim, instead he is a proximal “un-Christian” other. In this fluidity, Olibrius does not fail to signify a religious identity, rather he symbolizes all potential opponents of Christianity.

In this sense, Olibrius can be thought of as a “pattern” in the clouds or Rorschach blot on which the viewer can project any enemy that seems appropriate.\(^{285}\) Yet, some aspects of the picture can be brought into clearer focus by emphasizing some aspects of the text over others or introducing new elements into a familiar version. In so doing, the authors bring portions of Olibrius’ identity into greater focus, thereby making one religious group more dominant among the plurality of “the enemy.” Nevertheless, this is never a firm attribution of one religious group over another, allowing Olibrius to consistently suggest an opponent that is most needed at the time of the text’s production while retaining his protean identity within the narrative.

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\(^{283}\) Bernau 2003, 172

\(^{284}\) Bly Calkin 2005, 141-143

\(^{285}\) This generalized concept of “the enemy” of Christianity is explored more fully in Anidjar’s *The Jew, The Arab: A History of the Enemy* (2003). While I will be drawing on some of his research and conclusions in this section, it should suffice as a summary that potential differences between Jews and Arabs were frequently collapsed such that anything that pertained to either the Arab or the Jew could in fact pertain to both. Jeremy Cohen offers a similar perspective on the relationship between Jews, Muslims and heretics: “Yet a further result of the classification of Jews within the same genus as other nonconformists was the attribution of one’s group’s qualities, whether real or imagined, to members of the others. Even as the Jews continued to personify that which Christian society deemed imperfect in itself, it could now be assumed that what they shared with Muslims and heretics was not limited to the fact of their opposition to Catholic Christianity. Inasmuch as Muslims and Jews shared ethnic, linguistic, and presumably religious characteristics, one could logically conclude that they harbored similar hostility towards Christendom, the former from without, the latter from within” (Cohen 1999, 158).
Suggestions of Jewish Identity

In the Paris and Nero versions of Margaret, Olibrius’ identity remains profoundly fluid. In both texts, we have some suggestion that Olibrius bears markers of a Jewish identity, as seen through Christian eyes. When his soldiers return to tell of Margaret’s devotion to Christ, they exclaim “Lord, your power cannot be in common with her, because she does not serve our gods but invokes God, and she worships Christ, whom the Jews crucified.” When Olibrius comes to Margaret, he then asks “What god do you revere and worship?” to which Margaret responds “I invoke God the omnipotent and his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who has kept my virginity unharmed and intact until the present day. I invoke the name of Christ, whom your fathers crucified and because of that perished.” Thus, Margaret draws a direct connection between Olibrius’ lineage and the Jews through the medium of the crucifixion. Nevertheless, there is little else in the text which would suggest that Olibrius conforms to a Jewish identity. Both Olibrius and Margaret constantly refer to Olibrius’ object of worship as his “gods,” such that it seems difficult to ascribe any form of monotheistic impulse to the figure.

Conversely, assertions of Jewishness take on more weight when we come to the Tiberius and CCCC versions. In the Tiberius version, as in the Paris and Nero texts, Olibrius is not explicitly identified as a Jew, but Jewishness is attributed to him through

286 The two sources are similar enough that comparisons of minute details would be excessive and yield little in the way of results. Thus, the quotations will be from the Paris text unless a notable difference appears in the Nero.
287 “Domine, potestas tua non potest ei esse communis, quia non est serviens diis nostris sed Deum invocabat, et Christum quem Iudei cruciferunt adorabat” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 196).
288 “Quem deum colis uel quem adoras?”... “Ego invoco Deum omnipotentem Filium eius Dominum Iesum Christum, qui meam virginitatem usque in presentem diem inlesam atque inuiolatam custodiuit. Ego invoco nomen Christ, quem patres tui cruciferunt et propter hoc perierunt” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 198; italics mine).
the medium of the crucifixion. However, a peculiar alteration then occurs throughout
the entire Tiberius text. Where before the object of Olibrius’ devotion is always in the
plural, the Tiberius persistently renders this object in the singular: it is not “gods” that
Olibrius worships but “god.” Perhaps, the most striking thing about this change is the fact
that three hands were responsible for copying the Tiberius text, all of whom seemed to
accept this persistent singular within the narrative. One of the scribes even frequently
edits “min” to “minne” but leaves “god” in the singular, suggesting that at least one of
the editors considered the words surrounding the singular carefully and then passed on.

The original author (who may or may not be the original scribe of the Tiberius) seems to
be deliberately making Olibrius more monotheistic than his Mombritius version
precursor, something which later editors implicitly agree with.

In the CCCC version, Jewishness is once more attributed to Olibrius through the
medium of the crucifixion: “I love Almighty God… it is he whom your ancestors hanged
and because of that deed they must perish,” a phrase that is noticeably different than
the other versions due to Margaret’s future tense. As in the Tiberius version, there is
also frequent reference to the object of Olibrius’ worship in the singular form. For
example, when Olibrius approaches Margaret prior to her first tortures he demands that

289 “’Clypest þu on þone Crist þe mine fæderas ahengon’… ‘Þine fæderas Crist ahengon and þy hi ealle
forwurdon’” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 116).
290 This is likely one of the many corrections that the latter two of the three scribes made to harmonize the
text with West Saxon conventions, since the likelihood is that the text had a Mercian and Northumbrian
stage in its transmission (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 97-98).
291 “Ic lufige God Ælmigtigne… þaet is se þe þine yldran ahengan and þurh þære dæde hi losian sculon”
(Clayton and Magennis 1994, 156).
292 The verb sculon can also carry the valence of “must, ought, or be fitting and proper.” In something of an
eerie synchrony, Bosworth-Toller notes in their examples of sculon being used to mean “shall, must, as
being decreed by fate:” “Hié (the Jews ) God sylfne áhéngon; ðæs hié sculon wergðu dreógan.” They (the
Jews) hung God himself, thus they must suffer a curse.
Margaret “have pity on your fair body and pray to my god.” Yet, Olibrius sometimes changes from singular to plural in the same monologue, as he does in his first threat to Margaret: “If you will not pray to my god, my sword shall cut your body to pieces… And if you would love me and pray to my gods, then it should be as well for you as for me.” Finally, it is difficult for Margaret’s statement to Olibrius “You do your father’s work, who is the Devil himself” not to be read as a distorted reflection of John 8:44, a passage that swiftly becomes one of the most virulent anti-Semitic sayings from the New Testament.

While Jewishness is a feature of Olibrius’ identity in each text, it is by no means his only identity: all four versions also engage a pagan identity as well when they describe Olibrius worshipping his “deaf and dumb” idols. Although the Jewish identity is certainly more pronounced in the CCCC and Tiberius versions, this Jewish identity never fully eclipses Olibrius’ pagan identity. As a result, Olibrius maintains a hybrid identity of the most un-Christian traits (Christ-killing and idol worship), the polar opposite of Margaret’s Christian identity.

Suggestions of Saracen Identity

Skipping forward approximately a century, the Stanzaic Life and Ashmole versions seem to favor the introduction of a new Saracen identity for Olibrius over the

293 “gemiltse þinum fægran lichaman and gebide þe to minum gode” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 156).
294 “Gif þu nylt to minum gode þe gebiddan, min swyrd sceal þinne þone fægran lichaman eall… And gif þu woldest me lufian and to minum godum þe gebiddan, þe sceolde beon eall swa wel eall swa me selfan” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 158).
295 “Du wyrcst pines faðeres weorc, þæt is se deofol self” Clayton and Magennis 1994, 160). As previously noted, it is actually Olibrius who speaks the line in the manuscript, but Clayton and Magennis argue that this is likely a translation error on the part of the scribe who first rendered the Latin into Old English (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 62-63).
296 “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.”
old Jewish and pagan identities. In the Stanzaic Life, Olibrius is identified as a Saracen when he first encounters Margaret:\textsuperscript{297}

\begin{quote}
For to dystroye Crysten peple he hastyd hym belyve.

He sawe Mayde Margarete the schepe before her dryve.

Sone sayd that Sarasyne he wolde have her to wyfe:

"Goo, summe of my men, and brynge her me belyve.

"Bye my lay, if sche be comen of kynrede free,

Of alle women that I knowe beste thanne schalle sche be.

"For her fayre bewté, if sche be come of thral,

By Mahound, her maryage schalle sche not lese alle.

Fulle fayre I wylle her clothen, in purpylle and in palle;

Sche schal be my lemman, I telle you nowe alle."\textsuperscript{298}
\end{quote}

Not only does the author describe Olibrius as a “Sarasyne” but also as a worshipper of “Mahound,” a Middle English version of the prophet Muhammad’s name. Moreover, Olibrius’ servants are frequently addressed as Saracens as well,\textsuperscript{299} and the author lays a

\textsuperscript{297} In addition to this reference, Olibrius is further identified with the same religious group when the author declares towards the end of the Life “Ful welle sawe that Sarysyne that he myghte not her stere” (Reames 2003, 125).

\textsuperscript{298} Reames 2003, 116

\textsuperscript{299} Examples include “The Sarystones dydde as he hem badde to mayden Margarete” (Reames 2003, 116); “The Sarystones to hym wenten and sayden alle her sawe” (Reames 2003, 117); “Tho Sarystones agayne wentyn to that mayde Margarete” (Reames 2003, 118); “The Sarystones dydde as he hem badde and to her gunne dryve” (Reames 2003, 119); and “The Sarystones dyde as he hem baade, lampys for to wellyn” (Reames 2003, 124).
general curse over all members of the religious group when he declares “I cursed be thi Saryssones! God geve hem yvel endynge.”

Beyond these direct attributions, the Olibrius of the Stanzaic Life also bears other markers of Saracen identity. In the beginning of the Stanzaic Life, Olibrius is described as a lord “Of Asye and Antioche, to geven and to selle.” Bly Calkin has noted that “the crusader’s capture of Antioch in 1098 after a seven-month siege was well known in the West not only through various chronicles but also through the circulation of the crusading cycle, the Chanson d’Antioche.” Similarly, even before the spread of the Ottoman Empire, theologians such as the Venerable Bede and Peter of Cluny located the Saracen in Asia. Moreover, while nearly all of the Olibrii in previous versions attempt to sway Margaret through the possibility of wealth and riches, the Stanzaic Life fixates upon the incredible (possibly, obscene) wealth that Olibrius can bestow upon Margaret:

By Mahound, her maryage schalle sche not lese alle.

Fulle fayre I wylle her clothen, in purpylle and in palle”

…

Truste on me and be my wyfe - fulle welle than thou schalte spede.

Antioche and Asye thou schalte have to mede;

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300 Reames 2003, 125. Reames points out in a later note that while it is possible that Margaret is cursing the Saracens, it seems more likely that the narrator is the speaker (Reames 2003, 133).
301 Reames 2003, 116
302 Bly Calkin 2005, 153
303 “Like many of his contemporary Eastern [Saxon] brethren, Bede saw this as a clear reference to the Saracen conquests: ‘Now how great is his hand against all and all hands against him; as they impose his authority upon the whole length of Africa and hold both the greater part of Asia and some of Europe, hating and opposing all’” (Tolan 2002, 75).
304 “In the long prologue to the Contra sectam… the need to refute Muhammad’s sect is particularly urgent; its acolytes are the ‘worst adversaries’ of the church, for they dominate Asia and Africa and are present even in Europe (in Spain)” (Tolan 2002, 159).
305 E.g. “bene tibi erit sicut et mihi” (Clayton and Magennis 1996, 198) suggests that things will be as well for Margaret as they will be for Olibrius, likely in an economic context.
306 Reames 2003, 116
Syclaton, purpel and palle, that schalle be thi wede;
With the beste metys of the londe we schalle thee noryse and feede.\(^{307}\)

…
He sayde to mayde Margarete, "Haste thou turned thi othe?
Believe on my goddys too, I geve thee bothe golde and clothe,
And if thou wylte not do soo, thi lyfe it schalle be fulle loth."\(^{308}\)

Thus, while previous Olibrii hint at the wealth they could offer Margaret, the Olibrius of the Stanzaic Life attempts to ply Margaret with fine clothes, gold, silk, the “best metys that is in lond” (the finest foods), and the wealth of all of Asia and Antioch. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has noted that “the superabundant wealth, plentiful luxuries, and hedonism of the Saracens were medieval commonplaces,”\(^{309}\) and that such wealth, treasures and banquets were common tropes in descriptions and stories involving Saracens.

The Ashmole version features similar suggestions of a Saracen identity for Olibrius. A direct attribution of “Saracen-hood” is evident in the Ashmole version when Olibrius first spies Margaret:

\[
\text{Anon he commandyd a knyght}
\]
\[
\text{To bryng hyr to hym anon ryght.}
\]
\[
\text{The knyght wente anon hyr to}
\]
\[
\text{And seyd that sche must with hym go.}
\]
\[
\text{The meyden was so myld of chere}
\]
\[
\text{Ansuerd hym as ye schall here,}
\]

\(^{307}\) Reames 2003, 119  
\(^{308}\) Reames 2003, 124  
\(^{309}\) Cohen 2003, 208
And seyd sche hade nothing to do
Oute of that ground with hym to go.
Sche prayd hym of hys curtassye
To pase hys wey and late hyr be.
And schortly this tale to telle,
He went awey fro that damselle
And com to Olybryus the kyng
And told hym all that tyding,
That sche wold for nothing
Cum to hym; sche ne wold
Bot thei with hyr stryve schuld.
To Jhesu Cryst gan sche calle,
That sofyrd deth for us alle,
That he wold hyr defend
That no Saryzen schuld hyr schend,
And besought hym of hys grace
Hyr to socour in every place,
And seyd, “For thi luffe, Lord, wyll I dyghe,
And forsoke all werdly compenye.”

When Margaret is first approached by Olibrius’ knights, she rejects their demands for her to accompany them. As the knights leave Margaret to confer with Olibrius, she prays that “no Saryzen schuld hyr schend” (that no Saracen should harm/dishonor her). This prayer is not a prayer against the knights who wish Margaret no ill will on their first venture,

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310 Shuffelton 2008, 374
rather it is a preview of the harm that Olibrius will inflict upon her and the dishonor that he wishes for her. Thus, the Saracen of the prayer must be interpreted as Olibrius.

The Ashmole version also contains other details that seem to support this Saracen identity. Olibrius is described as variously king over “all Azy” and having land “fro Antyoch to Azye.” Unlike the Stanzaic *Life*, by the time of the Ashmole *Life’s* composition (c.1450), the Ottoman Empire would have stood as a bastion in the east, strengthening the previously mentioned attributions by Bede and Peter of Cluny for imagining the “Saracen threat” in “Azye.”

The Ashmole version also contains the same focus on wealth and riches as the previously analyzed Stanzaic *Life*:

> If thou be born fre,
> For soth my leman schall thou be.
> I wyll have thee to my wyfe,
> To lyve in joy all thi lyve.
> Gold and ryches I wylle thee gyffe
> All the whyll that thou dost lyve.”
> ...
> Trow on me and be my wyve,
> And lyve in joy all thi lyve.
> Antyoche and all Azye
> After my deth I gyve to thee.
> Sylke and gold and purpull paule,
> And I wyll thee wed, were thou schalle,
Welle furryd with ryche ermyn —
In all this werld is non so fyne.
And with the beste metys that is in lond
I schall thee fede, I understond.\(^{311}\)

Once more, as in the Stanzaic *Life*, the Ashmole Olibrius plies Margaret with gold, silk, land, rich purple cloth, ermine and the “best metys that is in lond.”

However, just as in the previous versions surveyed, these associations between Olibrius and a particular ethnic/religious group are rendered opaque by other elements of the narrative. The Stanzaic *Life* once more makes mentions of the multiplicity of Olibrius’ gods,\(^{312}\) and Margaret implies through her statement “Thye goddys… ar made of stooine”\(^{313}\) that Olibrius worships idols. Furthermore, Olibrius’ frequent use of “goddys” and Margaret’s accusation of idol worship serve to align Olibrius with Margaret’s father who “beleved in false goddys that were with hondys wroghte” and is a “patryarke” (pagan priest).\(^{314}\) All of these attributions serve to blend distinctly pagan elements into Olibrius’ Saracen identity.

The Ashmole version engages in this blending to an even greater degree. Once more, the Ashmole version engages pagan attributions. Shortly after Margaret’s prayer,

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\(^{311}\) Shuffelton 2008, 375-376  
\(^{312}\) “Beleve on my goddys and turne nowe thi mode” (Reames 2003, 119); “Beleve on my goddys, yit I rede thee” (Reames 2003, 120); and “Myne goddys be verry good, and thyn is untrue” (Reames 2003, 124).  
\(^{313}\) Reames 2003, 120. The perception that Saracens were involved in idol worship was relatively common (cf. Camille 1989, chp. 3), a concept that the author may be using without being explicit in the text.  
\(^{314}\) Reames 2003, 115
Olibrius prays “sche shall upon my godys beleve/Or else sore I schall hyr greve,”\(^\text{315}\) once more associating Olibrius with polytheistic pagan practices.\(^\text{316}\)

Perhaps more interesting, the manifestation of the Christ-killing trope later in the Ashmole version seems to also point to Jewish associations found in previous versions:

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Than anon to hyr he seyd,

“We dyd Jhesu Cryst to dede
And dyd hym streyn upon the rode
Tyll he suet water and blode,
And crownyd with a croune of thorn:
And thou leve on hym, thou arte lorn.”\(^\text{317}\)
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Yet, even this assertion from Olibrius that “we” killed Christ is opaque: Anidjar (2003) notes that the boundaries between Jewishness and Arabness were frequently collapsed together and that from “the eighth century on, Christian writers would begin to refer to Muslims as being ‘new Jews’ or ‘consistently characterize Islamic belief and practice as Jewish, or at least as Jewishly influenced.’”\(^\text{318}\) This even extended to artistic representations of the passion whose representation in the 12\(^{\text{th}}\) and 13\(^{\text{th}}\) centuries occasionally featured “hideously deformed and dark-skinned Saracens alongside the usual Jews.”\(^\text{319}\) Similarly, Muslims were not free of associations between themselves and pagans: John Tolan has frequently called attention in his work to the representation of Saracens as idol worshippers and beholden to multiple gods in the Christian

\(^{315}\) Shuffelton 2008, 374

\(^{316}\) Other examples include “Also he servyd dey and nyght/Hys fals godys” (Shuffelton 2008, 373); “For all the peynes we to hyr gyve/Sche wyll not on oure godys beleve” (Shuffelton 2008, 376); and “My godys are trew and thyn are lesse” (Shuffelton 2008, 381).

\(^{317}\) Shuffelton 2008, 375

\(^{318}\) Anidjar 2003, 34

\(^{319}\) Camille 1989, 138
imagination. Of course, the very fact that Pagans, Jews, and Muslims can be categorically collapsed together, vitiates the very possibility of separating them within the narrative context. Once more, and for a final time, Olibrius’ identity remains decidedly “un-Christian.”

Conclusion

The portrait that I have drawn of Olibrius in this chapter is at once one-dimensional and multivalent. On the one hand, Olibrius’ identity only serves the purposes of Margaret’s narrative. His character exists only as a rejection of Margaret’s: where Margaret is sex-negative, Olibrius is sex-positive; where Margaret is Christian, Olibrius is un-Christian both through his association with demonic traits and those of opposing religious groups. This opposite polarity makes Olibrius an opponent who can never be reasoned with and never be redeemed: a straw man guided by demonic desires that the martyr strikes down again and again.

At the same time, the narratives’ treatment of Olibrius offers an interesting lens through which to view medieval Christian perceptions of proximal religious groups. In the earlier Latin versions of the Life, Olibrius is a character without a distinct pagan or Jewish identity. Both the Paris and the Nero text depict Olibrius as something of a hybrid between the two religious groups, worshipping multiple gods and idols but also taking the role of Christ-killer normally reserved for the Jews in medieval Christian theology.

Conversely, the 11th and 12th century Old English versions begin to leave this pagan context behind (although it is never completely eliminated). The Olibrius of these

\[^{320}\text{Cf. “Muslims as Pagan Idolators in Chronicles of the First Crusade” (1999); Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination (2002).}\]
versions becomes startlingly more Jewish than his Latin predecessors, worshipping only one God and engaging anti-Jewish sentiment from the New Testament. Unfortunately, given the unclear origins of these Old English variants, it is difficult to say with any accuracy what the reasons behind this shift may be.

Unlike the shift in Jewishness in the Tiberius and CCCC versions, the introduction of Saracen elements was likely precipitated by the influence of Romantic literature and poetry on the narrative. Saracens are a frequent addition to romantic literature, particularly those that deal with subject matter pertaining to the crusades. In *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England*, Dorothy Metlitzki notes that there are four archetypal roles for the Saracen character in medieval romances: “the enamored Muslim princess; the converted Saracen; the defeated emir or sultan; and the archetypal Saracen giant whom the Christian hero overpowers and kills.”

Not surprisingly, the Saracen Olibrius of both Middle English *Lives* shares much in common with the figure of the defeated sultan. For example, the sultan in the *Sowdone of Babylone* serves much the same role as Olibrius does in both *Lives*: “an emotionally

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321 Clayton and Magennis note that the Tiberius version follows a “no-longer extant Latin variant of the Mombritius and pre-Mombritius tradition” that was likely “a form of the common original from which both the Mombritius and Casinensis versions derive” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 42). As previously noted, the CCCC version, though closer to the “standard” BHL 5303 Mombritius text, has several significant differences which could either be the addition of the Old English scribe or the result of copying an unknown Mombritius variant.

322 One possible explanation for this shift that has occurred to me is the actual presence of Jews in England after the Norman Conquest. The Cotton Tiberius manuscript (produced in the mid-11th century) and the Cambridge, Corpus Christi College (first half of the 12th century) may have been copied at a time when scribes (and in the case of CCCC Margaret, the laity that I argued in chapter two that they wrote to) were struggling with an actual Jewish presence in England. This more proximal “other” may account for the “more” Jewish Olibrius present in both texts. However, this should be treated as merely a hypothesis given the difficulties in isolating the influences on both versions.

323 Certainly, the two poems display this influence in other, more banal ways such as the recasting of Olibrius’ servants into “knyghts” and Margaret being referred to as a “damysel.” Even Margaret being spirited away by her mother in both versions “recalls the romance topos of the banished child in medieval romance” (Shuffelton 2008, 573).

324 As previously noted, the fact that Margaret’s tale occurs in Antioch makes it easy for the narrative to be moved into a crusading context.

325 Metlitzki 1977, 161
satisfying caricature of an exotic and fundamentally incomprehensible enemy alien whose defeat and humiliation is the fervently desired happy ending of the tale.”

The sultan also displays the enormous wealth that the Lives attribute to Olibrius when he sets sail on an extravagantly appointed ship overflowing with riches. Finally, when he is defeated by Charlemagne and his twelve Peers – despite frequently cursing his own gods for his defeat and claiming he will no longer believe in them – he refuses to convert to Christianity when given the opportunity, mirroring Olibrius’ refusal to accept Margaret’s Christian doctrine even in the face of the miracles she performs.

More generally, Olibrius captures the general category of the Saracen enemy, frequently also described in “un-Christian” terms. In The High Book of the Grail, Sir Gawain comes upon three maidens bearing the heads of 150 knights, “some of them sealed with gold, some with silver and others with lead.” When he inquires as to the meaning of the grisly tokens, he is told that the gold heads are Christians of the “New Law,” the silver heads are those of Jews (“the Old Law”), and “the heads sealed in lead the false law of the Saracens.” The priest who reveals this information likewise declares “Of these three kinds of men is the world composed,” establishing a context whereby the signifiers New and Old Law pertain to Christians and Jews and heathen to Saracens. Guy of Warwick offers a similar binary picture of Christian/Saracen when

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326 Metlitzki 1977, 188
327 Metlitzki 1977, 189
328 Metlitzki 1977, 190
329 Metlitzki 1977, 190-91
330 Bryant 1978, 73
331 Bryant 1978, 73
332 Bryant 1978, 73
333 Cf. the conversion of the “Turning Castle” composed entirely of those worshipping the “Old Law” until such time as a good knight comes to save their souls (Bryant 1978, 161) or the deaths of the three knights of the “Mad Castle” who become so insane upon seeing a knight of the “New Law” that they cannot be reasoned with, descend to the level of wild beasts, and attack.
Guy “defines himself as one of the *cristen men*, who have God’s grace, in opposition to the *mis-bileued* Saracens,” once more creating opposing poles in which Christians represent truth and Saracens, falsehood. Similarly, the 13th century *The Quest of the Holy Grail* features the slaughter of the knights of Castle Carcelois by Galahad, Perceval, and Bors. As the three knights contemplate whether their act was just, a priest comes to confirm the righteousness of the slaughter since knights behaved “worse than Saracens. All their actions went against God and the Holy Church… the Saracens themselves would not have behaved worse.” Galahad, Perceval and Bors – the Christian pole – are righteous because they have defeated the knights of Castle Carcelois who are so evil that they exceeded the Saracens – the normally opposing pole.

The addition of Saracens to the narrative also suggests a shift in audience. Broadly speaking, the audience for the Latin and Old English versions was likely a religious or lay audience who engaged with the *Life* for religious edification. Conversely, the poetic rhyming, inclusion of romantic tropes and comparatively faster pace of the narrative suggest that the Stanzaic *Life* was likely written for entertainment and appealed to the same audience as other romantic literature. While this was no doubt true of the Ashmole version as well, Shuffelton points out that the inclusion of additional information regarding Margaret’s education by her nurse suggests that the

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334 Rouse 2002, 134  
335 Kaeuper 2009, 112  
336 The Latin of the Paris and Nero versions would likely have to have been “filtered” through a professional religious intermediary before reaching the laity. Similarly, both the Tiberius and CCCC versions contain suggestions that they were used for pastoral purposes by professional religious (cf. Cooper 2013 for the Tiberius; Treharne 2012 and chapter 2 for CCCC).  
337 Reames notes that the rhyming scheme of the Stanzaic *Life* would have made the poem entertaining for those reading or listening to it recited (Reames 2003, 112).  
338 To a norys that wonyd ther/For to putte hyre to lere./He toke with hym grete spendyng/For to kepe that meyden yenge./And sche hyr kepte ther in dede./And norysschyd her in that nede (Shuffelton 2008, 372).
text may have been used for instructive purposes. This seems a strong likelihood given the varied contents of the manuscript, all of which might have been put to the twin uses of play and pedagogy.

These religious caricatures and the demonic sexuality previously discussed combine to reinforce and solidify sexual boundaries between Christians and proximal religious groups, boundaries which were already present in England as well as the rest of medieval Europe. Moreover, it would have stressed the demonic stereotypes associated with each group, associations that were never far from the medieval imagination. In so doing, the versions of the Lives under consideration would have reinforced Christian sexuality identity against the transgressions of the “other” for centuries.

Moreover, this frequent “updating” of Olibrius’ character once more reinforces a sense of the eternal present in the narrative. Both the Cotton Tiberius A.iii manuscript and the Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303 manuscript – both of which feature a “more Jewish” Olibrius – were likely copied during times in which Jews had an actual presence in England (that is, between the Norman Conquest of 1066 and the Edict of Expulsion in 1290). Similarly, the introduction of Saracen elements found in the Stanzaic

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339 Shuffelton 2008, 571
340 Shuffelton 2008, 15
341 Regarding Jews, Peters (2009) notes that the Synod of Elvira (c. 300), one of the earliest councils of bishops, passed a ban on Jews and Christians marrying. As similar ban was later put in place by Constantine and clarified in the Theodosian Code. From there, the ban was reiterated in future legal codes and trickled into many European civil statutes as a result (Peters 2009, 180-181). This sexual segregation becomes even more apparent in England with the 13th century law code, Fleta, which declared: “Those cohabiting with Jews or Jewesses, those engaged in bestiality and sodomy are to be burned alive” (Richards 1990, 106).

Regarding Saracens, Cohen (2003) states “because they supposedly originated in the distant south, where the planet Venus was thought to be ascendant, Saracens were said to be bodily predisposed towards licentiousness. Jacque de Vitry, who had been both a crusader and a bishop of Acre, asserted that those considered most religious among the Saracens were those who had impregnated the most women. Anti-Islamic polemic and literary texts alike agreed that the Saracens permitted polygamy adultery, concubinage, and sodomy. Hutcheson and Blackmore aptly label erotic excess the ‘unique mode’ for the conveyance of Muslim cultural and racial alterity” (Cohen 2003, 208).

342 Cf. Strickland’s Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art esp. chapters 3 and 4
Life and the Ashmole Life came about during a period of time in which England was overtaken by a crusading fervor, a fervor which identified Saracens as the enemy of Christendom. Through these alterations to the character, Olibrius does not remain a 4th century Roman rule, but instead becomes the proximal religious Other that was “closest” and most feared by the intended readers of each text.

In conclusion, the narrative of Margaret and Olibrius in the English versions of the Life should not be read as simply an encounter between a pagan prefect and a virgin martyr. Rather, it is the encounter of the wholly Christian with the wholly “un-Christian,” a meeting between the insider and the outsider. Within the structure of this larger narrative, Margaret becomes capable not only of rebuffing Olibrius’ advances, but of solidifying the sexual boundaries of her readers against those outside the Christian community, an apotropaic ward against transgression by outsiders.

By way of wrapping up the first three chapters, each of the monsters that Margaret faces contributes to an imitatio that informed the sexuality of her readers. The dragon is a polysemous symbol of both Margaret’s enduring virginity and her succumbing to sexuality, a symbol that could inform both the sexual identity of virgins and mothers equally. The black demon was used by selective redactors to inscribe boundaries and borders for acceptable sexual practice among their readers, both to encourage desired identity markers (chaste abstention from sexual activity) and condemn negative ones (sex with animals and adultery). The characterization of Olibrius further

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343 I use scare quotes here to indicate that very few English Christians were ever physically close to Muslims, rather I use close to indicate that English Christians identified themselves – at least in part – in terms of their opposition to Saracens, thereby constructing a portion of their identity around the idea of Saracenhood as a negative identity.
constricts lay sexual identity to reject the transgression of proximal religious practitioners such as Jews and Muslims into its borders.

For my final chapter, I return to Margaret’s dragon and offer a further analysis of what is arguably Margaret’s most important blessing: the safe delivery of healthy children and the survival of women in labor. I then expand the claims that I made in my first chapter regarding the importance of Margaret’s dragon to pregnant women. My analysis will feature a close reading of Margaret’s prayers, the written record of Margaret’s offer of aid to women and their children. Using evidence gleaned in this analysis, I will then map Margaret’s experience onto the medieval birthing experience of the lying-in room.

344 One could argue that all of the monsters surveyed so far contribute to this blessing. For example, Olibrius’ torture and subsequent execution of Margaret make a martyr of her, thus enabling her to pray for the blessings she receives at the end of her life. On the other hand, the black demon provides the clearest sign of Margaret’s mastery over demons (especially in some versions when she places her foot upon his head in a clear act of dominance), and in some versions the creature claims to be responsible for attacking pregnant women and babies in utero (cf. chp. 4). Nevertheless, the most recognizable analogue to labor is Margaret emerging from the dragon.
Chapter 4 - Paging Dr. Margaret: Prayers and Pregnancy in the *Life of St. Margaret*

Of all the roles credited to her, the one which Margaret is best known for is the patron saint of pregnant women. Whether it is references to medieval medical practices,\(^345\) the dangers for women in childbirth,\(^346\) or simply her incredible popularity among women,\(^347\) a reference to Margaret almost always includes a reference to her aid for parturient women.

Just as frequently, this efficacy is linked to her battle with the dragon in her prison cell, specifically her being swallowed and emerging safe and unharmed. Jane Schulenburg writes in *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, Ca. 500-1100* that “shortly before her death, Margaret prayed to God that the memory of her escape from the belly of the dragon might provide help to those suffering from the pains of childbirth.”\(^348\) Jocelyn Wogan-Browne has twice noted the “mimetic principle whereby Margaret's emergence from the dragon's body prefigures and eases that of the child from the woman in labour.”\(^349\) The commentary on works of art connected to childbirth that depict associations between Margaret and her dragon has also proved to be a particularly fruitful area of analysis.\(^350\)

However, these studies tend to treat only the later middle ages, the period when this theme was well-established, or sometimes even address the dragon’s association with childbirth as a historical given. In fact, the association of the dragon with childbirth

\(^{345}\) Cf. Sculenburg 1998, 229-230; Chamberlain 2007, 26
\(^{346}\) Cf. Ward 2004, 55; Ward 2006, 48
\(^{347}\) Cf. Reames 2003, 111
\(^{348}\) Schulenburg 1998, 230
\(^{349}\) Wogan-Browne 1994, 53. A similar assertion is made in Wogan-Browne 2001, 126.
develops slowly. In “Who is the Master of This Narrative? Maternal Patronage of the Cult of St. Margaret,” Larson suggests that there was significant doubt on the part of some clerics as to the veracity of Margaret being swallowed by her dragon.\textsuperscript{351} Despite this doubt, the scene was retained due to an informal power exerted upon the narratives by Margaret’s female adherents. Larson then roughly sketches the impact of this informal power, noting an increasing concern for maternal interests in a diachronic progression of Lives.

In this analysis, Larson only briefly comments upon the prayers that Margaret makes at the end of her various Lives. In the context of the narrative, Margaret’s prayers occur just prior to her martyrdom, and typically take the form of “if someone does X, give them Y,” a clear “anticipation” of cultic veneration and the benefits that Margaret will offer to her adherents. Of course, these prayers are not an “anticipation” on the part of Margaret, but the creations of later redactors of the Life. For these prayers to speak meaningfully to her adherents, such prayers would have had to reflect blessings and requirements that Margaret’s adherents expected to receive and offer. Thus, these prayers offer a telling view of the interests of Margaret’s cult and the make-up of her adherents.

In this chapter, I focus my analytical attention upon these prayers. It is my hope that such attention will yield results that will further nuance the picture of the wake left behind by the informal power that women exercised upon Margaret’s Lives and cult, and a greater understanding of the development of Margaret’s role as an intercessor in childbirth in England. In particular, my analysis will focus upon the development of Margaret’s prayers within the Mombritius tradition, the most popular Latin tradition in

\textsuperscript{351} Cf. the Rebdorf or Golden Legend versions of Margaret
England (as well as Europe in general) and the version of the Life that contributed to the greatest number of vernacular versions.

This analysis will show that Margaret begins her cultic veneration in England primarily as a champion over the demonic. Through this role as a castigator of demons, Margaret is associated with a variety of ills in children that are biblically associated with demonic intervention. However, after the thirteenth century, a marked change occurs in the Lives: Margaret becomes more closely linked with childbirth, not through demons, but through a sympathetic connection with her adherents. I will argue that this shift corresponds to an increase in the level of informal power that women exerted over the Life, corresponding with a flourishing of Margaret’s cult in England.

At roughly the same time period, the image of Margaret emerging from the belly of the dragon surges in popularity, an image that Larson (and many others) associates with childbirth. Considering the importance of this image, I will turn to the various reasons scholars have given that medieval women may have associated Margaret and her ordeal with the dragon with pregnancy and parturition. After laying out the prevailing opinions in the field, my own research offers a more detailed reading of each interpretation, after which I present my own associations between this image and parturieny. In particular, I argue that women may have seen a mimetic association between Margaret emerging from the artificial “womb” of the dragon and their own emergence from the artificial “womb” of the lying-in room.

Margaret’s Blessings
To begin, I address the written evidence of Margaret’s blessings for parturient mothers in the *Lives*. My analysis will focus on eight versions of the Life: five versions previously analyzed – the Paris, *Seinte Margarete*, Stanzaic, Tiberius, and CCCC *Lives* (the latter two of which will receive “honorable mention” only) – and three new versions of the *Life* – the *Life of Margaret* in London, BL Cotton Caligula A.viii, an example of the South English Legendary version of Margaret found in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 145 and John Lydgate’s version of the *Life* in Durham University Library MS Cosin V.II.14. As I have already noted, I am primarily interested in the Mombritius tradition in this work, while readers may note that the Cotton Caligula text hails from a distinctly different textual tradition (the so-called Caligula tradition). However, considering that the main topic of this chapter is pregnancy, I would be remiss if I did not address the Caligula version, which contains the earliest instance in England of Margaret’s blessings for parturient women.\(^{352}\)

I will begin my analysis with the Paris text. Margaret’s prayers in the Paris text begin towards the end of her Life when her executioner, Malchus, gives her time to pray:

Then the blessed Margaret began to pray and said, “God, you who measured the sky with your palm and set the earth as a fundament, and it did not transgress your command, hear my prayer, Lord, that if anyone reads a book of my deeds or hears my passion read, in that hour let his sins be forgiven; and he who comes with his own light to the church where my relics are, forgive his sins too. Whoever is found mindful of my name at the terrible judgment, free him from torments. Furthermore, I ask, Lord,

\(^{352}\) Despite this fact, the Caligula version appears to have had little direct impact upon vernacular Lives in England. Rather, as I will argue, this impact is indirect: later Mombritius Lives incorporate the Caligula’s blessings for parturiency.
that he who reads or bears in his hand or who listens to *<my Life>*>, from that hour let his sins be forgiven. I pray further Lord that he who erects a basilica in my name or who prepares a book of my passion through his own labor, fill him with your Holy Spirit, the spirit of truth, and in that house let an infant not be born deaf or blind or mute.353

These prayers offer little in the way of comfort for women and their children. There are no blessings for parturient women, and Margaret only requests that children “not be born” with specific disabilities, rather than asking that children be born safely. The prayers regarding childbirth are rather limited in their scope and word count, and they only stand to benefit one wealthy enough to erect a basilica or have a book copied.

On the other hand, Margaret’s prayers for the forgiveness of sins are by comparison rather voluminous. Requiring nothing more than a votive light or her name, Margaret extends her protection to against sin to those in both this life and the next. Contrary to the prayers for she offers for children, the Margaret of the Paris text offers significant detail for the forgiveness of sins and her blessings are easy to acquire.

Margaret’s prayers are also typically followed by a *responsum* from a dove. While these frequently add little to the content of Margaret’s prayers, the dove’s response in the Paris text is interesting due to its additions to Margaret’s blessings:

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353 “Tunc beata Margareta cepit orare et dicere, ‘Deus, qui celum palme mensurasti et terram fundamentum posuisti et non transiuit preceptum tuum, exaudi, Domine, deprecationem meam, ut, si quis legerit librum istum geste mee uel audierit legere passionem meam, in ipsa hora deleantur peccata illius; et qui cum suo lumine uenerit ad ecclesiam ubi sunt reliquie mee similiter deleantur peccata illius. Quisquis inuenitus fuerit in iudicio terribili et memor fuerit nominis mei, libera eum de tormentis. Adhuc peto, Domine, qui legerit aut qui tulerit in manu sua, uel qui audierit eam legendo, ex illa hora deleantur peccata illius. Adhuc peto, Domine, et qui basilicam in nomine meo fecerit, uel qui de suo labore comparavit codicem passionis mee, reple illum Spiritu Sancto tuo, spiritu ueritatis, et in domo illius non nascatur infans claudus aut cecus neque mutus’” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 212-214).
“Blessed are you, Margaret, who conquered the world and sought the holy oil. Blessed are you among women, because in your prayers you remembered everyone.” Then hearing these things, Margaret fell to her face upon the earth and everyone who had come there, and the dove touched her and said, “I promise through my own self and through my glory, whatever you asked for in your prayer, your prayers have been heard and what you did not remember, I granted to you. Blessed are you, who in your torments remembered all sinners. But wherever your relics or a book of your passion or a memorial of your name may be, and a sinner comes praying to that location with tears and makes mention of your name, without doubt he will receive the remission of sins…

While the wording is not exact, it is difficult not to read Elizabeth’s cry from Luke 1:42 (“benedicta tu inter mulieres et benedictus fructus ventris tui”) into the dove’s blessing to Margaret (“Beata es inter mulieres, quia in orationibus tuis omnes memorasti.”). Likely, this could have tied Margaret’s role more firmly to childbirth and as an intercessor for the forgiveness of sins. The dove further grants Margaret everything for which she originally asked, and even those things which she forgot to request. While this has little bearing upon what Margaret’s prayers specifically say, it does open the possibility that

At this point in Paris 5574, Clayton and Magennis cite a considerable lacuna which they fill in by using another Latin version, Saint-Omer, Bibl. mun., 202. Given that the dove appears to be almost finished with his speech, I see no reason to add the three or four sentence difference from an alternate manuscript.
individuals could “discover” efficacious blessings which Margaret “forgot,” opening up the possibility of extra-textual practices.\textsuperscript{355}

While the dove tells Margaret that she has “remembered everyone in her prayers,” Margaret’s prayers in the Paris version seem destined for a smaller audience. The text is written in Latin, suggesting that the primary reader/listener of the text would be one of the educated elite, if not specifically an individual given to a religious profession.

Moreover, while the remission of sins is offered to everyone, only those of high economic status would be able to garner the benefits for childbirth which Margaret offers: for the text to speak meaningfully to its audience, at least some must be able to

\textsuperscript{355} A probable example of such extra-textual blessings exists in the Cotton Nero manuscript considered in chapter 3. The Life in Cotton Nero is in something of a subsection of the manuscript. The section containing the Life is written in a distinctly different scribal hand than the rest of the work, is noted as a later addition to the manuscript by Clayton and Magennis, and contains (in addition to Margaret) the *Vita Sanctae Fritheswithae Virginis* (retitled by what appears to be the main manuscript scribe as *Vita Sanctae Fritheswithae filiae Didani Regis Oxineforiae*) which starts on 156r and runs until 157v and the *Vita Beati Davidis archieperi et confessoris* (retitled: *Vita Davidis Archiepi Meneuensis per Ricemarchum Monachum*) which starts on f.158r and ends on f.162v. The retitling and scribal differences suggest that the folio pages were a separate document (perhaps an unbound or minimally bound sheaf of pages) which was later “retired” into the larger Cotton Nero E.1 manuscript. Given Margaret’s use during childbirth and the company she keeps (Frithuswith is often credited with the creation of a spring with healing properties and David of Wales with the so-called “corpse candles” that signaled imminent death), it seems likely that the small collection of Lives was created for medicinal use.

Upon opening the manuscript to the Life of Margaret, one is struck by several stains and discolorations on the pages. On f.163v in the middle of the second column there is a reddish-brown stain caused by a liquid that soaked through the folios and ended at 161v. There also appears to be some discoloration and un-uniform lightening of the ink on 163v, 164r and 164v. A large water stain originating in the upper left corner of 164v may account for some of this damage, but the ink discolorations on the lower portion of the manuscript do not appear to have been caused by this stain. The rest of the pages that contain the version of Margaret appear relatively undamaged (given the date of the manuscript) as do the pages in the rest of the “retired” portion of the manuscript, which leads me to believe that the damage that the version sustained on these pages likely originated from some abnormal use that these pages saw.

Considering that the damaged pages occupy both the portion of the Life that contains the draconic and demonic visitations and the portion that contains Margaret’s prayers, it seems likely that the damage to the pages originated due to some activity involving birth. It may be that the book was opened and placed – text down – upon the laboring woman’s belly, or that it was handled or touched by pregnant women prior to or during the birthing process (cf. Larson 2003, 94 and 102-103). In this scenario, the water damage would potentially have been caused by sweat while the reddish brown discoloration may be blood that found its way onto the manuscript.

Despite this evidence of handling to procure blessings in labor, Margaret’s prayers read much like those in the Paris text and offer no such benefits to parturient women or their children by handling the Life.
build the basilica or furnish the book\textsuperscript{356} which Margaret requests. Finally, the text pays little mind towards the health of the mother or the safety of mother and child during childbirth, instead focusing upon the fact that the child will be born whole and sound. Given this evidence it seems likely that this version of Margaret was destined for an audience among the wealthy, educated elite or those serving them. It seems equally likely that the piece indicates both male authorship and readership as a result. The codicology of Paris, BN, lat. 5574 contains nothing to suggest that there are any differences between the primary and secondary audiences in terms of occupation or socioeconomic class.\textsuperscript{357}

The majority of Margaret’s prayers focus upon the forgiveness of sins and not upon blessings for pregnant women. Those portions of the prayers that do focus on such blessings suggest little concern over the welfare of parturient women, are financially quite difficult to acquire, and focus upon the welfare of children after birth. This welfare is significantly tied to Margaret’s role as a castigator of demons, a role that is further reinforced after Margaret’s death when the angels come to bless her body and “and demons came and suffered and called out with their voices ‘the One God of the blessed Margaret is great and powerful’” and when “demons coming to the relics of the blessed Margaret were tormented.”\textsuperscript{358} Thus, it is not the health of the child that Margaret ensures,

\textsuperscript{356} The fact that the texts specifies that the creation must be a \textit{codex} of Margaret’s passion, serves to reinforce the economic expense. It is possible that Paris BN 5574 is just such a codex.

\textsuperscript{357} “Paris, BN, lat. 5574 is a small collection containing a \textit{uita} of St Christopher, an account of the Invention of the Cross, and the \textit{uitae} of SS Margaret and Juliana” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 95). The Latin language of the text suggests a likely origin among the educated clerical elite. The Paris manuscript’s relationship to London, BL, Royal 5.F.III (which contains Aldhelm’s \textit{De Laude Virginitatis}) seems to support this reading, although it may suggest a potential audience of female religious may have been involved. While it is possible that the lives of SS. Margaret and Juliana could suggest a female religious audience as well, it is interesting to note that it is not the topic of virginity which binds the contents of the Paris manuscript together but the concept of revelation: St. Christopher bears the Christ child on his back prior to realizing him for what he is, the Invention of the Cross features the discovery of the original Cross hidden beneath buildings constructed by “heathens,” and SS Margaret and Juliana both feature a scene in which their prayers reveal the demons that accost them.

\textsuperscript{358} “\textit{uenientes daemones ad reliquias beatae Margaretae torquebantur}
but a lack of intervention by demons in the birth, an intervention clearly tied to disability in the child rather than safety during parturiency.

While the Margaret of the Paris text is a fearsome foe of demons, the Margaret of the Caligula version is far more focused on pregnancy. Although there are many similarities between the Cotton Caligula version and Mombritius tradition, E.A. Francis concludes that the two emerge from separate traditions. However, since the Caligula version is both surprisingly well-traveled in England and contains the first instance of concrete blessings for the welfare of Margaret’s pregnant adherents, I treat it here:

God, most high redeemer of the world, I give thanks to you with my heart and mouth, you who separated me from the filth of this earth and carried me to this glory with this unstained body. Heed my prayer, most loving Father, and grant that if anyone writes the tortures that I bravely bore because of the confession of your name, or reads them, or makes a memorial to me, let him receive mercy for his crimes and let him receive the unfading crown in the future. Whosoever invokes me in his prayers having been put in a tight spot legally, let your most merciful clemency not be denied to him but pluck him from the hand of the enforcer. I also pray most merciful Jesus, that he who dedicates a basilica to you in honor of my name or who dedicates a votive candle from his own labor in it, let him have whatever he ask for that is useful for his salvation, and perpetually let the consecration of the Holy Spirit descend over that home.

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359 Francis 1937, 87
360 The version is extant in a dozen manuscripts, five of which apparently originate in Britain, making the Caligula version (named after BL Cotton Caligula A. viii) nearly as popular as Mombritius in medieval England (although whether or not it was composed in England is impossible to prove) (Dresvina 2007, 13-14).
Moreover, if in the home there is a pregnant woman is in labor invoking me, pull her from her imminent danger, and let her infant likewise having been delivered from the womb take possession of the light of this world without any deformity of his members.  

Perhaps the most striking difference between the Paris and Caligula versions is their outlook on pregnancy. In the Caligula, we have Margaret’s earliest (to-date) reference to Margaret’s blessing for parturient women: 

“if a pregnant woman is in labor in that house and calls to me, pull her from her imminent danger.”

Margaret’s blessings also request a safe birth for children (“let her infant likewise having been delivered from the

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361 Altissime seculorum redemptor deus gratias corde et ore tibi ago, qui me de mundi huius colluvione abstraxisti, et ad hanc gloriam inpolluto corpore perdaexit. Respice qui piaissime pater ad deprecationem meam, et presta ut si quis supplicia que per tui nominis confessionem viriliter pertuli scrisserit, aut legerit, vel mei memoriam fecerit, crinimum suorum promeretur veniam, et in futuro immarciscbilem percipiat coronam. Quicunque in distrecto examine positus me invocaverit suis precibus, illi tua misericordissima non denegetur clementia, de manu exactoris eum er.ipiens. Adhuc clementissime Jesu peto, ut qui basilicam in me honore nominis tibi dicaverit, vel qui de suo labore in ea luminaria ministraverit adipiscatur quicquid petierit utile sue salutis, et descendat tigitur super illam dominum consecratio spiritus sancti. Iterum si in domo me invocans mulier pregnans in partu laboraverit, ab imminente eripe eam periculo, infansque quoque ex utero fusus lumine potiatur seculi huius, absque suorum aliquo detrimento membrorum (Francis 1927, 102-103).

362 This is a slight corrigendum to Larson’s earlier work which lists Wace’s Anglo-Norman La Vie de Sainte Marguerite (1135) as the first instance of Margaret’s blessing for mothers (Larson 2002, 26; Larson 2003, 97). While the Cotton Caligula manuscript itself dates from the 12th century, the earliest version of this Life is a Paris BN lat. 5565 which dates from the 11th century (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 18-19), thus making it the earliest known example of such a blessing while the Wace is the earliest vernacular version.

363 One thing which will factor into my later analysis that bears mention at this point is that, despite being the first instance of Margaret’s blessing for parturient women, the dragon of Caligula text does not swallow Margaret: “Then rising from her prayer, she suddenly saw a dragon – surprisingly large – approaching her from the corner of the prison, and with erect head, a gaping deadly mouth of gullets, a terrible hissing, and a rattling of scales it inflicted the greatest horror on the virgin of Christ. And when she was nearly swallowed by the many open mouths of the beast, but having made the sign of the cross against it, the foul serpent immediately split in two.”

“Surgens quoque ab oratone, subito draconem mire magnitudinis ab angulo carceris agrediem conspicit, qui erecto capite, rictuque aperto faucium mortifero, teribilis sibilis ac squamarum stridoribus maximum Christi virgini ingerit horrorem.Cumque iam pene ab ipsis patentibus belue hiatibus absorberetur, vexillo dominice crucis opposto, serpens squalidus continuo crepuit medius” (Francis 1927, 99-100).
womb take possession of the light of this world”) in addition to a lack of deformity, whereas the Paris lists specific deformities that Margaret can prevent.\textsuperscript{364}

However, much like the Mombritius, there are still conditions to acquire these blessings. Margaret first prays that “he who dedicates a basilica to you in honor of my name or who dedicates a votive candle from his own labor in it, let him have whatever he asks for that is useful for his salvation and perpetually let the consecration of the Holy Spirit descend over that home.” This is then followed by Margaret’s “moreover” clause, which makes her blessings for mothers and children appear to be contingent upon a household member either endowing a basilica or at least tending some votive candles. Thus, while the addition of the votive candle “clause” in Margaret’s blessing is slightly more accommodating to the economically disadvantaged than the Paris text, it may have necessitated travel on the part of her supplicants (depending on the availability of a basilica dedicated to Margaret) and some degree of pre-planning on the part of her adherents. Moreover, these blessings are hardly the Caligula Margaret’s primary concern. Quite to the contrary, Margaret begins her prayers with a blessing for the remission of sin. This is then (quite cleverly) transformed into a blessing for mercy in difficult judicial proceedings. It is between these two blessings that the majority of the word count of Margaret’s prayers is distributed.

Shifting to audience, the Caligula version, due to its Latin language, was likely redacted by a member of the male religious elite just like the Paris text. However, the presence of prayers that offer such significant support for pregnant women may suggest a burgeoning recognition of possible lay female audience members.

\textsuperscript{364} Moreover, this prayer against birth defects cannot be concretely tied to demons due to the lack of specifically named abnormalities.
The contents of the Caligula manuscript itself suggest that the audience of the manuscript was intended for a group of religious professionals. The manuscript is a compilation of Saints’ Lives (eleven saints in total; the majority being of English saints save for Margaret, Katherine, Mary Magdalen and Benedict.), the Chronicles of Simon of Durham, and the Vision of the Monk of Eynesham. The manuscript itself likely belonged to the Prior and Convent of Ely. This combined with the Latin language of the text suggests that Cotton Caligula was copied by and likely intended for a group of religious professionals, a possibility further supported by the presence of the Chronicles of Simon of Durham and the Vision of the Monk of Eynesham in the collection – two texts of monastic interest written by monastic chroniclers.

Overall, the character of Margaret in the Caligula version is significantly different from the Paris version. Rather than focusing upon the eradication of sin and demonic influences, the Margaret of the Caligula version is much more closely allied with the concepts of justice and legal proceedings (supernatural or otherwise). While this Margaret is also more focused on her possible pregnant adherents, the Latin language of the text suggests little direct contact with such a group, a conclusion further supported by the potentially difficult conditions required to receive her blessings and the primary interest of Margaret’s prayers being judicial proceedings. Nevertheless the priests ministering to women locally must have had a different sense of these women’s needs than other Lives show.

Before shifting my attention to the vernacular Lives under consideration, I take a moment to address the Tiberius and CCCC versions of the Life. Since the prayers of the two Old English versions are very similar to Margaret’s prayers in the Paris version, it

365 Francis 1927, 97
should suffice to say where they deviate. In the Tiberius version, Margaret’s prayers are focused – as in Paris – on preventing children from being born blind, mute, or deaf, adding only that children should also not be born lame or “troubled by an evil spirit.”

The Tiberius version also requires expenses similar to the Paris text to procure Margaret’s blessings related to childbirth – adding the possibility of procuring a book of Margaret’s Life with one’s own money. The prayers of the CCCC version also address very similar ailments – “may not an unhealthy child be born, nor cripple, nor dumb, nor deaf, nor blind nor mad” – but offer conditions that appear similar to the Caligula version rather than the Paris text. Both also suggest a conception of Margaret very similar to the Paris text: a champion over the demonic.

This image is all the more striking due to the audience of both Old English versions. While the Paris text (and for that matter, Caligula) both seemed destined for consumption by a religious elite given language and manuscript contents, the Tiberius and CCCC versions suggest through both their contents and the contents of the manuscripts that they were used in pastoral care. This suggests that the image of Margaret as a champion over demons was anticipated by a lay audience. Thus, the image

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366 “ne fram unclænum gaste geswenct” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 132).
367 “nan unhal cild sy geboren, ne crypol, ne dum, ne deaf, ne blind, ne ungewitites” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 168).
368 “And further I would ask you, dear Lord, that each of the men who erect a church in my name, and of those who wish to come to me with a candle of theirs, and with other alms, and of those who write my passion, or buy it with their money, that in their houses may not an unhealthy child be born…”
369 The Tiberius reinforces this image by even including proof against the demonic in her prayers for children, while the CCCC version reinforces the demonic ailments by claiming that sufferers of the same received respite through contact with her body (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 170).
370 Cf. For the Tiberius, see Cooper 2013. For the CCCC, see chapter 2.
371 Cf. For the Tiberius, the contents include directions for confessors, a homily, and pastoral letters, see also Cooper 2013. For CCCC, see Treharne 2012.
of Margaret in the Paris text is not one reserved for the clerical elite, but rather a “standard” conception of the saint that was readily recognizable to the laity.

While this image of Margaret as a castigator of demons does not change significantly, requirements for travel and expense found in the Paris and Caligula versions (and Tiberius and CCCC) fade away in Seinte Margarete. As I have argued in chapter two, there is evidence of audience partitioning in this redaction when the demon addresses the virgins in the audience and offers guidance as to how to maintain the anchoritic life. In Margaret’s prayers, we find evidence of another such partition, this time when Margaret speaks directly to the mothers of the stated audience and offers them her blessings:

God, Lord of Men, excellent are your judgments, although they are secret and mysterious. Now a sentence of death is here on me and life with you granted; I thank you for this tender mercy. You, wisest worker of all, marked and measured heaven with your open hand and with your closed hand the earth. You, captain of the ocean, you are the guide and ruler who wrought all that is, visible and invisible, bend your ears, Savior God, and grant my prayers. I ask and beseech you that are my joy and delight that whoever writes a book of my life or procures it already written or whoever

Readers will note that this is the first foray into vernacular Lives within this chapter, despite the fact that two Old English Lives (the Tiberius and CCCC versions previously analyzed) predate the Seinte Margarete version. I have chosen to largely omit an analysis of these two Lives, largely due to the fact that it would add little to this analysis since they do not overly deviate from the Paris text.

In the Tiberius version, Margaret’s prayers are again focused on preventing children from being born blind, mute, or deaf, but add that children should also not be born lame or “troubled by an evil spirit” (ne fram unclænum gaste geswenct; Clayton and Magennis 1994, 132). Similar prayers are present in the CCCC version. The Tiberius version requires expenses similar to the Paris text to procure Margaret’s blessings related to childbirth – adding the possibility of procuring a book of Margaret’s Life for her blessings – while the CCCC version offers conditions much more similar to the Caligula version. Both present an image of Margaret similar to that in the Paris text: a champion over demonic influences.
holds it most often in their hands or whoever reads it out loud or listens to it being read with good will, Ruler of Heaven, may all his sins be forgiven immediately. Whosoever builds a chapel or a church in my name or provides it with a light or lamp, Lord, give and grant him the light of heaven. In that house where a woman is in labor, as soon as she remembers my name and my suffering, Lord, be quick to help her and answer her prayer, and let no deformed child be born in the house nor lame nor hunchbacked, nor dumb or deaf or afflicted by the Devil. And whoever calls out my name, Loving Lord, at the last Judgment save him from death.\footnote{\textsc{Drihten, leodes Lauerd, duhtie, þah ha dearne beon ant derue, þine domes. Me is nu deað idemet her, and wið þe lif ilenet; þi milde milce Ich þonki hit. Þu wisest wurhte of alle, merkedest þe heouene ant mete wið þi strahte hond, ant wið þe icluhte þe eordæ; þu steortesmon of sea-stream, þu wissent ant wealdent of alle with þe iwrahte beod, seheliche ant unsehene, buh þine earen. Healent ȝold, ant bei to mine benen. Ich bidde ant biseche þe, þet art mi weole ant wunne, þet hwa se eauer boc write of mi liiflade, oðer biȝt hit iwritten, oðer halt hit ant haued oftest on honde, oðer hwa se hit eauer redeg oðer þene redere liðeliche lusteð, wealdent of heouene, wurðe ham alle sone hare sunnen forgþeune. Hwa se on mi nome madeð chapele oðer chirche, oðer findeð in ham liht iðer lampe, þe leome ȝef him, Lauerd, ant þette gim, of heouene. I þet hus per wummon pineð o childe, sone se ha munneð mi nome ant mi pine, Lauerd, hihenliche help hire ant her hire bene; ne I þe hus ne beo iboren na mislimet bearn, nowðer halt ne houeret, nowðer dumbe ne deaf ne iðeruet of deofle. Ant hwa se eauer mi nime munegeð wið muðe, luweliche Lauerd, et te leaste dom alæs him from deaðe” (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, 78).}

While the wording of Margaret’s prayers has not changed substantially from the Mombritius source material from which the author drew, some significant differences being to emerge between the Paris and the \textit{Seinte Margarete} text that seem to suggest the influence of the Caligula.\footnote{Alternatively, it may be the influence of the Caligula (or a similar version) through Wace’s Anglo-Norman \textit{La Vie de Sainte Marguerite} (cf. Dresvina 2007, 33).} First, like the Caligula, Margaret’s blessings now focus on the welfare of the parturient mother by promising aid during labor. Moreover, these blessings are not economically out of reach for the prospective mother nor do they require any pre-planned effort, rather such women need only remember Margaret’s name
and her “pine” to derive the benefits of her prayers. This focus on Margaret’s pain—that is, on the events of her Life and her suffering—suggests that knowledge of Margaret and her Life was key to acquiring her blessings. Nevertheless, like the Paris text, Margaret prays for proof against specific deformities—once more those associated with demonic intervention—rather than a general lack of difficulty and successful birth.

At the same time, like both the Paris and Caligula, the majority of the text is not focused on Margaret’s blessings for parturient women. Perhaps not surprisingly (given the virginal focus discussed in chapter two), Margaret spends the majority of her time glorifying God and thanking him for her death, followed by prayers for the forgiveness of sins. Although Margaret’s prayers have taken a turn for the better with respect to parturient mothers, it is by no means the central focus of her requests.

Although the Margaret presented in Seinte Margarete is similar to that in the Paris text, a substantial difference has emerged. Margaret remains a champion against the demonic, as suggested by her prayers for the health of children—tied closely to demonic afflictions—and an aftermath to her execution similar to the Paris text. However, her prayers for parturient women are also easily accessible and have no expensive or difficult requirements. While it still cannot be said that Margaret is by any means exclusively

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375 There also appears to be some degree of synchrony between the prayers in the Caligula and those in Seinte Margarete. Compare for instance: “Whosoever builds a chapel or a church in my name or provides it with a light or lamp, Lord, give and grant him the light of heaven. In that house where a woman is in labor, as soon as she remembers my name and my suffering, Lord, be quick to help her and answer her prayer” (Seinte Margarete). “I also pray most merciful Jesus, that he who dedicates a basilica to you in honor of my name or who dedicates a votive candle from his own labor in it, let him have whatever he requires to be safe and consequently let the consecration of the Holy Spirit descend over that home. Moreover, if a pregnant woman is in labor in that house and calls to me, pull her from her imminent danger” (Cotton Caligula A.viii).

376 That is, demons verify the Christian God in the wake of her martyrdom (“Þe feondes þe þer weren, deadliche idoruen, fengen to ȝeien: ‘Margarete, meiden, leoðe nuðe lanhure ant lowse ure bondes. We beoð wel icnawen þet nis na lauerd bute Godd, þe þu on leuest’” Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, 82) and are tormented (“þa bigunnen þe gostes of helle to peoten ant to ȝellen” Millett and Wogan Browne 1990, 82).
focused on childbirth, this punisher of the demonic still has a hand outstretched to assist pregnant women – a hand that was not previously extended save in the Caligula Life.

While the Stanzaic Life maintains Margaret’s character as a champion against demons, it creatively shifts this role for the benefit of parturient women and their children:

"Alle that to my passyon wylle herken or reede,
Or settes chirche or chapel, or geveth ony almysdede,
Jhesu Cryste mye Lorde, with honoure Thou hem feede.
The joye that is in heven graunte hem to her meede.
"Jhesu Cryste, if ony woman that schal delyvered be,
That Thou helpe than, if sche cale to me,
And unbynde her anoone thorugh the vertue of that Tree
That thou dyedeste uppon to make us alle free.
"Lord God, I praye thee, for Thi grete myghte,
As Thou madeste sonne and moone here in erthe to geve a lynyte,
So graunte her that her chylde be borne with alle the lymmes aryghte,
And not to be dumme, nor nothynge broken, nor blynde withouten syghte.
"Also tho that have this day of my dethe in memorye,
Or with good devocyon doth me worshipe or praye,
Jhesu Cryste my Lord, the maydens Sonne Marye,
Have mercye on tho soules, where ever the bodye lye."
Than spake oure Lorde Jhesu Cryste, Saynte Maryes Sone:
"By heven and by erthe, by sonne and by moone,
Mayde Margarete, I graunte thee thi bone -
To cume to that joye that thou haste wonne.”

The prayers of the Stanzaic Life focus significantly on the safety of parturient women in labor and the health of their children. In fact, out of the twenty lines that comprise Margaret’s prayers, a full eight lines deal with her blessings for children and mothers, the same amount that are devoted to the forgiveness of sins or the listener being assured entry into heaven.

Moreover, the text of the Stanzaic Life itself betrays interest in its maternal audience as well. As Larson has noted, this version contains an explanation for the suffering of women and their children in the black demon’s address:

“There I wyste ony wyfe unborn was her barne,
Thedyr wolde I com belyve, in childyng to do her harme.
If it were unblessed, I brake it foote or arme,
Or the woman herselfe in some wyse I dydde harme.”

Once more, it is Margaret’s power over demons that is connected to her blessings at the end of her Life, but the inclusion of this explanation – absent from its Mombritius source material – suggests that the redactor was interested in more concretely tying Margaret’s blessings for women and children to the other events in her Life and her power over the demonic.

The manuscript from which the text of the Stanzaic Life was taken – Cambridge University Library MS Addit. 4122 – further separates itself from the other versions analyzed since it was commissioned by a lay buyer who made use of the codex for

377 Reames 2003, 126-127
378 Larson 2003, 97
379 Reames 2003, 123
private devotional purposes.\textsuperscript{380} Mary Beth Long notes that MS Addit is likely a custom-made legendary that allowed ready access to the purchaser’s favorite Lives.\textsuperscript{381} However, given the contents of the manuscript, it seems likely that MS Addit was created for the purpose of consoling the purchaser during childbirth and having ready access to the protection of the enclosed saints. All three Saints’ Lives in the manuscript (Margaret, Mary and Dorothy) were associated with childbirth and the aid of women in such travail. Moreover, of the three stories, Margaret must have been especially dear to the buyer, given that it holds pride of place in the book and contains a highly decorated first page which features “a full page painted border and an historiated initial depicting St Margaret emerging from the side of a dragon.”\textsuperscript{382} This illustrated capital of Margaret emerging from the dragon is no doubt a further sign of the book’s association with childbirth. The likelihood seems then that the book was either commissioned by a woman or by someone who was clearly concerned for the safety of a woman during childbirth.

Much like the Margaret of the Paris and Seinte Margarete version, the Margaret of the Stanzaic Life is prepared to battle demons on behalf of her adherents. However, the Stanzaic Life presents a Margaret who fights the demonic specifically for the benefit of her pregnant adherents and their children. In this alteration, a small but important shift has occurred. In the Paris and Seinte Margarete texts, Margaret is the bane of demons everywhere, demons who come from miles around to suffer in front of her relics. Since it just so happens that some demons may afflict children with certain disabilities, Margaret

\textsuperscript{380} The Addit manuscript itself is a mid-fifteenth century manuscript of Middle English verse, but the Stanzaic Life of Margaret contained within has its origins in the 13\textsuperscript{th} century. The manuscript contains only three narratives the first being the Stanzaic Life of St. Margaret followed by “a tretys of Oure Lady howe sche was wedded,” and the Life of St. Dorothy. Margaret’s Life takes up a considerable amount of pages in the manuscript owing to the relatively small size of the book itself (85x123mm) (Edwards 2003, 131).

\textsuperscript{381} Long 2006, 53

\textsuperscript{382} Edwards 2003, 132. In contrast, the other two items in the manuscript are only offset by large, blue-painted initials with red-pen work.
is proof against such afflictions. In the Stanzaic Life, Margaret’s demon claims personal responsibility not only for harming children but also for accosting pregnant women during labor. Furthermore, the Stanzaic Life contains no allusions to the suffering of demons after Margaret’s death, suggesting that it is not demons as a general group that she is proof against but *her* demon, the demon responsible for harming women and children during labor.

Given the decidedly demonic focus of the vast majority of the Lives surveyed thus far, the South English Legendary (SEL)\(^{383}\) version represents a substantial shift in the tradition. In the SEL version, Margaret’s prayers begin:

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Louerd he[o] sede Iesu Crist þat boȝtest me on þe rode
Mid heorte and mouþ ich þonke þe & wel aȝte of all gode
And þi wille is to bringe me out of þis worles wrecchede
And wipoute wem of mi body to þe ioie of heuene lede
Grante me ich bidde þe for þin wonde viue
þat ȝif enimon háþ gode munde Louerd of mine liue
And of þe pine þat ich habbe iþoled for þine grace
Oþer writ in god entente and ret in eni place
ȝif hi biddeþ in god entente grante hom milce & ore
ȝif hi in eny anuy beoþ bring hom out of sore
ȝif enymon in onur of meeny chapel deþ rere
Oþer eni weued in churche oþer eni liȝt find þere
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\(^{383}\) The South English Legendary is a collection of Middle English hagiographic literature that is preserved in varying states in over sixty manuscripts and was likely composed somewhere between the 13th and 14th centuries. The most “complete” versions of these manuscripts are Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 145 and British Museum MS Harley 2277 (from which the critical edition of D’Evelyn and Mill (1956) was produced).
In onur of me up is coust Louerd bidde ich þe

3if hi biddeþ þing þat is to bidde grante hom for þe loue of me

And ȝif eny womman to me clupeþ in trauail of childe

Oþer biuore my life rede Louerd be[o] hure milde

Ne lete hure noȝt þerewiþ spille ac bring þat child to siȝte

And al sauf of is moder wombe wiþ al is li[m]es riȝte

Moder and child saue boþe Louerd for loue of me

Louerd for þi moder loue þat þeos bone igranted be[o]. 384

Although the SEL Margaret prays for the safety of mother and child in a similar fashion to the Margaret of the Caligula and Seinte Margarete versions, the SEL Margaret shows signs of a marked sympathy for her pregnant adherents. Margaret prays that God should deliver both mother and child safely from their labor “for the love of her” and “for your mother’s love.” This seems less of a prayer and more of a plea: in this scenario Margaret is not a petitioner to a distant, divine being but a sponsa Christi pleading for something from her future husband. The request could just as easily be rephrased as “If you love me, then you’ll…” This also changes the orientation of Margaret to the women reading her story, personalizing her plea and making Margaret more of a confidant than a source of virtus.

Margaret’s blessings to the sinful also continue to dwindle in this version of the Life. The author does not specifically address the category of sin, but it seems reasonable to assume that it may be included within the purview of the unspecified “mercy and grace” – milce & ore – that is offered to those who ask for it. Nevertheless, this is

384 D’Evelyn and Mill 1956, 301
confined to four lines of Margaret’s 19 line prayer, while her entreaties for pregnant women and their children make up six.

The content of the narrative outside of Margaret’s prayers also suggests that pregnant women were of significant concern to the redactor. In two portions of the narrative, the redactor of the SEL version breaks the “fourth wall” to speak directly to his audience. In the first instance, as Margaret emerges from the dragon, the author comments “Ac þis netelle ich noȝt to soþe for it nis noȝt to soþe iwrite/Ac weþer it is soþ oþer it nis inot noman þat wite/Ac aȝen kunde it were þat þe deuel were to deþe ibroȝt.”\(^{385}\) However, despite the doubt that the author claims to have over the truth of Margaret’s lethal escape from the dragon’s “sori wombe,” the end of the Life features another aside in which the author asserts “Wymmen þat wiþ oþer were wanne hi child bere/Hit wære god þat hi radde hure lyf þe sikerore ȝe seoþ it were.”\(^{386}\) As Larson has previously suggested, “the text claims to be concerned with ‘truth,’ even as it seems to struggle with what the truth is. The technical demonological issue forces a questioning of the tale’s veracity, yet the story must also be true for the women who hear the story as part of the ritual of childbirth.”\(^{387}\) Thus, the redactor of the SEL version, despite misgivings about the truth of the dragon scene that were serious enough to be included in the work itself, is willing to dismiss such doubts when the Life is used as an aid for parturient women. Since other authors have expressed misgivings about the draconic

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\(^{385}\) D’Evelyn and Mill 1956, 297. “But I cannot say if this is true for it is not writ as truth, but whether it is true or not no man knows, but it is contrary to nature that the devil be brought to death”

\(^{386}\) D’Evelyn and Mill 1956, 302. “When women bear children with other women, it is good that they read her Life for certainly it is the truth.”

\(^{387}\) Larson 2003, 99
swallowing,\textsuperscript{388} the redactor of the SEL version had a vested interest in the concerns of pregnant female audience members to allow such a dramatic reversal.

Moreover, there is a larger and more interesting issue at hand in this statement. While the text certainly appears to be struggling with the veracity of Margaret bursting from (and subsequently killing) the dragon, it also points to a practice that we have not yet seen in the texts surveyed: women reading the \textit{Life} together during parturition. More interesting is the fact that Margaret’s prayers in the SEL version \textit{do not even mention this practice as a way to call down her blessings}.\textsuperscript{389} This suggests that the author – no doubt an outsider with minimal contact to women’s birth rituals – is aware of a practice in which women read the Life of St. Margaret at the bedside of a laboring woman, a reading which none of the Lives I have encountered endorse in Margaret’s prayers. Thus, while Margaret’s prayers offered a means of acquiring her blessings, they must not be seen as the \textit{sole} means that was extent among her female adherents to acquire Margaret’s assistance during labor\textsuperscript{390} – an idea I will develop in greater depth in the next section.

Once more, the character of Margaret has undergone a significant shift. Like the Caligula version, the Margaret of the SEL version has no noticeable connection to demonology in her prayers. Rather, the interest with which she approaches pregnant women in her prayers seems “personal” in nature. This seems to suggest that the redactor (and for that matter, the readers) have made a logical leap of sorts (yet one which, we

\textsuperscript{388} Including Margaret’s 10\textsuperscript{th} century Greek hagiographer, Simeon Metaphrastes, who addresses the scene as a “malicious interpolation” and the author of the \textit{Golden Legend}, Jacobus de Voragine, who claims the scene is “apocryphal” (Larson 2003, 98).

\textsuperscript{389} Again, extra-textual blessings are not necessarily outside the realm of possibility given those found in the Cotton Nero manuscript detailed previously in fn. X and the dove’s statement in the Paris text that it will offer both the blessings which Margaret asked for and those she “forgot” to her adherents.

\textsuperscript{390} Larson notes a similar recommendation by the 15\textsuperscript{th} century physician Anthonius Guanerius of Pavia: “At the time of birth it is good that the legend of blessed Margaret be read, that she have relics of the saints on her, and that you carry out briefly some familiar ceremonies in order to please your patient and the old women” (Larson 2003, 94).
must assume, was anything but a leap for them). Whereas the Paris, *Seinte Margarete*, and Stanzaic Lives all rationalize Margaret’s connection to childbirth through her association with demons, by the time of the SEL version’s composition, Margaret’s connection with childbirth must have been ubiquitous enough to require no rationalization aside from her own interest, an interest that appears to be sympathy with the plight of pregnant women.

Finally, the version of the Life written by John Lydgate contains a set of prayers that is profoundly focused upon parturient women. This is perhaps not surprising since Lydgate, a prolific author and Benedictine monk at St. Edmund’s monastery located in Bury, was commissioned to redact the Life by Anne Mortimer, the Countess of March, “sometime between 1415 (the year of her marriage to Edmund Mortimer) and 1426 – that is, during the period of her life when she was likeliest to be concerned with childbearing and with Margaret’s special focus as an intercessor.”

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391 Reames 2003, 112-113. The audience of Durham University Library MS Cosin V.II.14 (which contains the copy of Lydgate’s *Lyfe* under consideration) is somewhat less certain, but the other works in the manuscript – Lydgate’s *The Sege of Thebes* (1-68v), the *Parvus and Magnus Cato* (69-70; 70-92), the Life of St. Alexius (92-97v, preceded by a small couplet), and a Life of St. Mary Magdalene translated from Jean de Vignay’s French Golden Legend (Retrieved from http://www.dur.ac.uk/library/asc/theme/medmss/apvii14/, 2012) – strongly suggest continued use for ease during pregnancy. The *Sege of Thebes* and the *Parvus and Magnus Cato* are didactic in nature. In the first case, the *Sege* is Lydgate’s moralizing interpretation of the famed battle, including an illustration of the virtues of a ruler as well as more commonplace pronouncements on behavior and values (Edwards 2001, 4). Similarly, the *Parvus and Magnus Cato* are collections of maxims that were frequently used as something of an elementary textbook. On the other hand, the Lives of St. Margaret and Mary Magdalene are related through childbirth: Margaret through her aid for parturient women and Mary for her aid in conception and birth. Given just these contents, I would assume that the connective tissue that united them would be women’s household use: that is, Mary’s Life would have assisted in conception, Margaret in delivery, and the *Sege* and *Cato* texts would have been used in educational pursuits for the resultant children.

Regarding the Life of Alexius, the primary narrative element in Alexius’ Life is his odd marriage to his wife and his even odder relationship with his family: after completing the ceremony and retiring to the marriage bed, Alexius instructs his wife in his Christian faith, entrusts his marriage ring to her, and flees into the night leaving his wife a virgin. After some time, he returns home but his parents do not recognize him. Taking a place under the stairs, he lives as a beggar in his family’s house for years until such time as he dies and the truth is revealed. The last quarter or so of the Life is a vivid description of the agony that Alexius’ parents and wife go through in realizing that he was under their noses the whole time.
Lydgate’s prayers are unique among the versions surveyed, because Lydgate separates Margaret’s prayers into two distinct sections: on in indirect dialogue and another in direct dialogue. In the indirect dialogue that begins the prayers, Lydgate claims that Margaret prays for her persecutors and for the grace of her adherents. The direct speech is concerned with her blessings for parturient women:

”And Lorde,” quod she, “to alle be socoure
That for thi sake done to me honoure.
And specyally to thee I beseche
To alle wymmen whiche of childe travayle,
For my sake, oo Lorde, be thou her leche;
Lat my prayere unto hem availe.
Suffre no myschief tho wymmen, Lorde, assaile,
That calle to me for helpe in theire grevaunce,
But for my sake save hem fro myschaunce.
”Lat hem, Lorde, not perisssh in theire childynge;
Be thou her conforte and consolacyoun,
To be delivered thurgh grace of thyn helpynge;
Socoure hem, Lorde, in theire tribulacyoun.

On the surface, regardless of the character that a potential female reader may identify with – mother or wife – the results seem bleak: either a son that abandons her for God or a marriage bereft of a husband. However, St. Alexius’ birth was also precipitated by prayers to God, thereby possibly linking it with the Margaret and Mary narratives included in the work. It is also possible that the story may have been a reminder of fidelity in marriage, as Alexius’ wife remains faithful to him for the thirty-four years of the story that he is away, living with the mother as her constant companion. In this way, Alexius’ Life may have been an important – if slightly unorthodox – compliment to both marital fidelity and childbirth in such a book.

392 “First she praide of parfite charité /For hir enemys and hir tourmentours, /For hem that caused hir adversité /And had hir prusued with mony sharpe shours. /Of parfit love she gadríd out the flours, /Praying also for thoo folkes alle /That after helpe unto hir grace calle, /And for all thoo that have hir in memorie, /And swiche as truste in hir helpe at nede: /That God hem graunte, sittinge in His glorie, /Of His grace that thei may welle sped, /And ageyn right that no man hem myslede” (Reames 2003, 160).
This is my praier, this is myn orisoun,
And specially do alle folkes grace
That calle to me for helpe in any place!"
And fro that highe hevenly mansyoun
Was herde a voys in open audience
That God had herde hir peticion,
To be parfourmed withoute resistence. 393

Lydgate’s version of the Life is markedly different from the other lives. First, the division of Margaret’s prayers into indirect and direct speech suggests that her prayers for childbirth – the direct speech – were considered more important than her other prayers. In effect, Lydgate is saying to his readers “Margaret prayed many things, but let’s focus on the things you want to hear.” 394

Interestingly enough, this group of prayers also excludes any reference to Margaret’s blessings for newborn children. This seems surprisingly uncharacteristic for the Lives considered thus far, and one must assume that if Lydgate did indeed make a compilation of French and Latin Lives that he would have run across such prayers. This indicates that these blessings were likely omitted either intentionally or were deemed unnecessary. It may be reflective of the fact that a woman – concerned with her own safety during childbirth – commissioned the Life or a gradual shift in the focus of Margaret’s cult from the safety of the child to the exclusive safety of the mother.

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393 Reames 2003, 160–161
394 The singular exception to this appears to be the general two-line ending to Margaret’s prayer: “And specially do all folkes grace /That calle to me for help in any place!” Yet, this seems more of a “wrap-up” to the prayers than something that is individually relevant.
The Margaret of Lydgate’s Lyfe also shares the sympathy with her adherents displayed in the SEL version. Similar to the SEL version, Margaret prays that Margaret’s pregnant adherents be saved “for my sake.” Unlike the SEL version, these “for my sake” pleas are confined to Margaret’s blessings for parturient women and appear nowhere else in her prayers. Furthermore, Lydgate’s closing further asks “Noble princesses and ladyes of estate/And gentilwomen lower of degré/Lefte up your hertes, calle to your advocate/Seynt Margarete, gemme of chastité/And alle wymmen that have necessité/Praye this mayde ageyn sykenesse and disses/In trayvalynge for to do yow ese.”

By identifying Margaret as “your advocate” to his female readers and encouraging them to “lefte up your hertes” to Margaret when in need of comfort, Lydgate further strengthens this sympathetic connection between Margaret and her adherents.

Finally, to a greater extent than any other Life considered, the prayers of Lydgate’s Lyfe eschew any material associations with Margaret’s blessings. There is no mention of books, basilicas, votive candles, or any of the other various accoutrements that previous Lives associated with her favor. Rather, the prayers are focused entirely upon having Margaret “in memorie” and calling out to her in prayer.

Of course, the fact that no books are mentioned in Margaret’s prayers once more brings up the issue of the SEL version. It seems strange that Lady Marche would commission a work of the Life for the purposes of Margaret’s aid in childbirth when the very Life she commissioned makes no mention of a blessing for those who create such a work! Thus, we are left to assume that the Lady Marche requested that the work be created so that she and the women attending her labor could read it together.

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395 Reames 2003, 162
The character of Margaret in the Lydgate *Lyfe* is not terribly different from that in the SEL version. Both Lives devote significant space to Margaret’s blessing for pregnant women, suggest a sympathetic link between Margaret and her adherents, and both redactors show considerable interest in the needs of their pregnant audience members. Rather, the difference is one of degree. Lydgate’s *Lyfe* contains the Margaret that is perhaps the closest to what one might expect of a patron saint of childbirth: a “women’s advocate” who is concerned only with the safety of parturient mothers.

**Gleanings to This Point**

The texts under consideration suggest a significant shift in several elements of Margaret’s prayers over time. First and foremost, Margaret’s prayers gradually begin to lose their original focus of absolving petitioners from sin in favor of an increased focus on providing assistance for women in childbirth. The earliest version under consideration (the Paris text) focuses primarily upon the remission of sin to which Margaret’s blessings for childbirth appear to be a mere addendum. Beginning with the Stanzaic *Life*, these prayers gradually begin to supplant other concerns in the Lives until the Lydgate *Lyfe* completely excises any blessings other than those for childbirth from its direct speech.

These blessings for childbirth also change character as well. The Margaret of the Paris text prays for the birth of healthy children rather than the safety of the mother or the baby during the birthing process itself. The Caligula, on the other hand, contains blessings for the safety of both mother and baby during the birthing process. Interestingly, the majority of the vernacular Lives under consideration suggest a hybridization of the blessings of these two Lives, looking after the health of the mother
and ensuring children against disability and (occasionally) danger during the birthing process. Eventually, this concern over children is eclipsed in Lydgate’s *Lyfe* which only contains blessings for the welfare of the prospective mother.

The means change for the acquisition of these blessings as well. While the blessing provided by Paris and Caligula texts require significant expense and time, the vernacular versions tend to focus on calling out to Margaret and memorializing the events of her Life. This may be as simple as *Seinte Margarete*’s “remember my name and my suffering” to Lydgate’s more extensive reminder to women to “lefte up your hertes, call to your advocate, Seynt Margarete.”

Several conclusions can be drawn from these shifts. First, the movement away from the creation of codices, building of basilicas and offering votive candles within them suggests a greater concern over the immediate availability of Margaret’s blessings in childbirth. This shift is all the more striking considering that Margaret’s other blessings tend to preserve this focus. For instance, *Seinte Margarete* retains the Mombritius Margaret’s blessing for those who build a church in her name, and simply disconnects the blessing for parturient mothers and their children from it. Similarly, the Stanzaic *Life* promises honor to those who “settes churche or chapel, or geveth ony almysdede” but only requires mothers to “cale to me.” This is likely a result of women exerting the kind of informal power that Larson discusses in her article.

Accompanying this shift is a change in the very character of Margaret’s prayers themselves. While the Margaret of the Paris, Caligula, *Seinte Margarete* and Stanzaic *Life* treat all of their supplications equally, the SEL and Lydgate’s *Lyfe* respectively punctuate their prayers for mothers by asking Jesus to aid women “for loue of me… [and]
for þi moder loue” and “for my sake, oo Lorde, be though her leche...for my sake save hem fro myschaunce.” This serves to set apart the prayers that Margaret makes for her pregnant adherents from the rest, making it seem as if Margaret is pleading specifically for them, that her prayers for pregnancy are more important than her other prayers. These latter versions depict Margaret in her prayers, not as the champion of “everyman,” but, to paraphrase Lydgate, as a “women’s advocate.” In these latter versions, Margaret becomes “one of the girls.”

Finally, it also suggests a more concrete timeline for the exercise of women’s informal power in England. As noted, the shift from physical expressions of piety (basilicas, codices, votive lights) towards a more memorializing trend suggests women exerting informal power over the narrative. The two Latin versions surveyed (Paris, c.900; Caligula, 11th century) both contain this focus on physical expressions of piety involving significant expense and time (for the Paris, building a basilica or furnishing a codex; for the Caligula, building a church or providing a votive candle in a church dedicated to Margaret). As I suggested in my “honorable mentions,” similar physical expressions of piety are required in the Old English versions as well, with the Tiberius version (c. 1050) requiring that a “book of my martyrdom” be kept to receive her blessings and the CCCC version (c. 1150) requesting that a Life be written, a church built in her name, or alms and candles dedicated at such a church. Conversely, Seinte Margarete (13th century) abruptly severs ties to books and buildings only in Margaret’s blessings for parturient women, a trend that is continued in the remaining vernacular Lives.
Dresvina notes that the 13th century witnessed a “rise and strengthening of the cult” of St. Margaret. Given the textual evidence considered in this chapter, it seems likely that this rise of Margaret’s cult precipitated greater feminine interest in the saint. This growing feminine component of Margaret’s cult would have placed increasing pressure upon redactors to address their needs (particularly during the dangerous process of childbirth) leading to the diachronic shifts in the Life seen in this chapter.

In particular, this seems to have had a marked effect upon the character of Margaret. In the Paris and Seinte Margarete versions – as well as the two Old English Lives briefly discussed – Margaret is a champion against demons first and an aid for pregnant women and their children a distant second. The Stanzaic Life retains this focus on the demonic, but changes its orientation: Margaret is no longer a patron of childbirth because she castigates demons, but specifically castigates a demon that harms women and children, making her the patron saint of childbirth. Finally, this emphasis on demonology fades completely in the SEL and Lydgate versions, leaving Margaret focused on the care and comfort of pregnant women, women that both authors sought to closely ally with Margaret. In short, the image of Margaret presented in her prayers undergoes a dramatic shift from a saint whose benefits could be enjoyed by everyone to a women’s advocate whose prayers narrowly focus on parturition, a shift that must be attributed to increasing pressure upon redactors to address feminine concerns in the Life.

At the same time, the effect of increasing literacy among women brought on by the Fourth Lateran Council is evident in the Lives through a growing interest in reading the Life at bedside. As previously pointed out, the SEL version (produced in the 13th-14th centuries) attests to the popularity of reading the Life at the bedside in a group of women

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396 Dresvina 2007, 44
for an expectant mother. Lady Marche commissioning Lydgate to create a redaction of the *Life* (1415-1426), MS Addit 4122’s likely use as a birth aid (mid-15th), and Anthonius Guainerius’ suggestion (15th century) that the *Life* be read in childbirth all suggest that this trend of reading the *Life* continued for quite some time. While it cannot be said distinctly when the practice developed/was imported to England, it certainly must have been popular enough at the time of the SEL’s composition that it was noticeable to a male observer of a process that was typically reserved only for women. This level of popularity suggests that literacy among women would have had to have been relatively widespread, a phenomenon that would coincide with the increase in literacy (particularly feminine literacy) in the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council.

The 13th century also seems to have seen an increasing interest in the association between Margaret and her dragon. The SEL version (13th-14th) attests to the importance of the scene when women read the *Life* together, and MS Addit – copied in the 15th century – contains a decorated rendering of Margaret emerging from the dragon’s side. Larson cites other physical evidence that contains Margaret and her dragon as well, including Margaret emerging from the dragon on a 14th century French parchment amulet with prayers for childbirth, a mid-14th century Northern European metal amulet holder in which Margaret is emerging from the dragon’s back, and Jan van Eyck’s “Arnolfini Betrothal” (1434) which features an image of Margaret emerging from the dragon in a bedroom scene.397

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397 Larson 2003, 100-101. Other examples include BL Harley 2974 (f. 165v), manuscript with image of Margaret emerging from dragon, c. 1460-70 north-east France; a statue at the Metropolitan Museum of Art of Margaret emerging from the body of the dragon (Accession Number: 2000.641), c. 1475 Tolouse; BL Burney 345 (f.85v) which contains a decorated capital of Margaret emerging from the dragon, late 13th century Netherlands; BL Harley 928 (f.30) decorated capital of Margaret emerging from the dragon, late 13th century England. Further examples of artistic renderings are considered below. Interestingly enough, all of these examples and future ones are dated to or after the 13th century. This is all the more interesting
Margaret at the Bedside

Yet, why was the image of Margaret bursting from the dragon so popular when none of the Lives surveyed address the episode’s association with childbirth? It is to this question that I now turn. While Margaret and her dragon are frequently identified as important to the labor process for women in the Middle Ages, references to her importance frequently suggest that Margaret’s escape from the dragon indicates that women will not die but instead “be delivered” in the same way Margaret herself was from the dragon. While most scholars seem content to assert that Margaret emerging intact from her experience with the dragon is sufficient reason for the popularity of the iconic image, this strikes me as ultimately unconvincing: In such an arrangement, the prospective mother is not the lucky Margaret but the dragon that is torn apart.

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398 Even the SEL version’s is quite oblique.
399 E.g. “Very often she holds the cross in an elegantly restrained manner while she tramples the dragon underfoot. Or, more dramatically, after Margaret has been swallowed by the dragon, the force of the cross causes him to eject her, and Margaret comes bursting out.” This miraculous delivery from the belly of the dragon, and her special prayers for women, explain Margaret's role as protector in childbirth, seen, for example, in the statuette of Margaret disgorged from the dragon at the head of the bed in Jan van Eyck’s Arnolfini Portrait” (Drewer 1993, 11); “The circumstances of her protracted martyrdom, during which she had emerged miraculously from the belly of a dragon upon making the sign of the cross, gave her considerable appeal to women who hoped that they, like her, would be speedily delivered” (Rawcliffe 2003, 100-101); “Margaret of Antioch was the most trusted of protectors for parturient women: the martyrdom story of this saint involved her escape from the belly of a dragon after she made the sign of the cross. She came to embody a mother’s hope that her child would be delivered whole from her own belly” (Gilchrist 138, 2012); “Through tales of her delivery from the dragon’s belly St. Margaret became associated with safe passage in childbirth; she is the patron saint of women in labour, and copies of the Anglo-Norman Life of St. Margaret were even placed on the breast of women in childbirth to act as a charm” (Scott-Stokes 2012, 118). “St. Margaret of Antioch, too, was considered the patron saint of childbirth based on the story of her painless escape from the dragon that had swallowed her” (Ashley 2013, 517);
Furthermore, several commentators on the life share my issue with this explanation: Jocelyn Wogan-Browne’s “The Apple’s Message,” Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski’s Not of Woman Born, and Jean-Pierre Albert’s “La légende de sainte Marguerite: un mythe maïeutique?” In this section, I will be further exploring the claims and evidence of each of the three arguments for Margaret and her dragon’s connection to childbirth. Once these have been evaluated, I will further argue that the dragon represents the lying-in chamber in which medieval women gave birth.

In “The Apple’s Message,” Wogan-Browne argues that there is a direct mimesis between Margaret bursting from the dragon and a child bursting from its mother:

The mimetic principle whereby Margaret's emergence from the dragon's body prefigures and eases that of the child from the woman in labour may be thought not to indicate much care or concern for women's bodies, except perhaps as the source of reproduction. If not actual hell-mouths, female bodies are consigned by this congruence to the role of expendable dragons. On the other hand, Margaret herself triumphs and redirects the meaning of her pain and suffering in her legend. Within culturally endemic depreciation of the female body, the promise Margaret's Life held for so many audiences must have been of significant comfort. In such need as often has attended European childbirth, prayers for wholeness and survival are not meaningless.  

Although Wogan-Browne articulates the problem I previously noted (namely that such an emergence shows little concern for the bodies of Margaret’s pregnant adherents), it is ultimately unsatisfying. While it is true that the meaning of Margaret’s suffering could be

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400 Wogan-Browne 1994, 53
redirected in some fashion, Wogan-Browne does not offer any explanation for the way in which the suffering in Margaret’s legend is transformed by her triumph.

Though similar in some ways to Wogan-Browne’s interpretation, Blumenfeld-Kosinski’s is supported with considerably more evidence to digest. In brief, she argues that the dragon has distinct sexual connotations and that there was a medieval belief that the “dragon-viper gives birth by splitting open.” In this way, Margaret’s Life (and, perhaps more pointedly, Margaret’s dragon) “evokes both sexual violence and the pains of childbirth.” For Blumenfeld-Kosinski, this explains why the Virgin Mary and St. Margaret were both popular protectors in labor: “One gave birth without encountering any of the physical suffering related to it; the other… had to undergo torments not unlike those experienced during childbirth. Through her ability to sympathize with tormented women she became their ideal intercessor.”

From my perspective, there is much to credit this interpretation. First, Blumenfeld-Kosinski identifies one way in which the meaning of Margaret’s suffering could be “redirected”: the dragon represents the pains of labor that wrap the mother round, rather than the mother herself. Thus, Margaret retains her identity as the mother rather than becoming the “child” that bursts from the dragon-mother’s body. This is overall a much more calming and comforting image – Margaret emerging from the process of labor safe and unharmed – than the mimetic, matricidal expulsion from the dragon presented earlier.

[401] Blumenfeld-Kosinski 1990, 10
[402] Blumenfeld-Kosinski 1990, 10
[403] Blumenfeld-Kosinski 1990, 11
While this may seem a small detail, such comfort and calm would have been enormously helpful to medieval women considering the dangers of labor. While the author of *Hali Meiðhad* can hardly be considered an impartial judge of the childbirth process, his description highlights many of the physical difficulties, fears, and pains that women would be expected to experience:

Let’s consider further and see what joy arises during your pregnancy, when the child within you awakens and grows, and how many miseries awaken with it that cause you such woe, assail your flesh and attack your own nature with many woes: your rosy face will become lean and as green as grass; your eyes will become dull and hollow; and because of your dizziness your head will sorely ache. Inside of your womb, a swelling in your uterus that bulges forth like a waterskin, pain in your bowels and stitches in your side … Concern over your labor pains keeps you awake at night. Then it happens: that intense, painful anguish, that strong and stabbing pain, that incessant agony, that greatest of anguishes, that wailing groan; while you are suffering from this and your fear of death you likewise suffer the shame of that contemptible practice of the midwives who know of that painful travail.

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404 And, as Dr. Ferdinand Lamaze and later physicians have noted, calm and comfort promote good labor!

405 Ga we nu forðre, ant loki we hwuch wunne ariseð þrefter i burþerne of bearn, hwen þet streon in þ awakened ant waxed, ant hu monie earmðen anan awakenð þerwið, þe wurcheð þe wa inoh, fehteð o þi seolue flesch, ant weorrið wið feole weanen o þin ahne cunde. Þi rudie neb schal leainin, ant ase grez grenin; þine ehnen schule doskin, ant underneoeð wonnin, and of þ breines turnunge þin heaud aken sare. Ìnwið i þi wobe, swel in þi butte þe bereð þe forð as a weater-bulge, þine þearmes þralunge ant stiches i þi lonke, ant i þi lendene sar eche riue… þe cares aþein þi pinunge þrahen bineomeð þe nahtes slepes. Hwen hit þenne þerto kimeð, þet sore sorhfule angoise, þet stronge ant stikinde stiche, þet unroles uel, þet pine ouer pine, þet wondrinde þeomerunge; hwil þu swenchest terwið, ant þine deaþes dute, scheome teke þet sar wið þe alde wifes scheome creft þe cunnen of þet wa-sið (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, 32).
While it is unlikely that parturient mothers looked on the craft of the midwife as shameful, the author does correctly highlight the various aches and pains of pregnancy and childbirth and the fear of death incumbent in the process, a fear that has not departed even into modernity. In the Middle Ages, death was not only a possible outcome, but a likely outcome: with conditions such as breach birth, hemorrhaging, vaginal tearing, and puerperal fever, childbirth was a minefield of potentially lethal possibilities for mother and child alike. That midwives were expected to be able to baptize a baby in the event that it might die is a clear indication of a high infant mortality rate,\footnote{Hellwarth 2002, 8. Additional examples of the bleak chances of child survival can be found in Rawcliffe (p.94) including a rate of infant mortality in 11th century Norwich of 60\%, the account of Gurwain the Tanner “who made a pilgrimage to the tomb of the boy martyr William of Norwich… in the hopes of saving the only one of his six sons to survive infancy,” and instructions in an Anglo-Saxon charm to induce labor that required women to take grave dirt from one of their other deceased children.} and the macabre image in MS Bodley 270b, fol. 215v of “a woman contemplating her own shrouded body after the birth of a child”\footnote{Rawcliffe 2003, 93} is a dark reminder of the likelihood of maternal mortality – which some scholars estimated to be as high as 15-20\%.\footnote{Hellwarth 2002, 46}

Second, this interpretation may inform certain depictions of Margaret and her dragon. In particular, it may serve to explain the presence of “dog-like” dragons\footnote{Cf. BL Harley 2974 f. 165v (1460-70, NE France) in which Margaret emerges from a dragon that appears to have furry dog-like ears; the “furry” dragon of BL Royal 19 B XVII f. 167v (1382, Paris); most especially the c.1500 image at the Magyar Nemzeti Galéria, Budapest of Margaret with small dragon on a leash.} in Margaret’s imagery: rather than depict the dragon (the perils of labor) as threatening and demonic, artists instead use a familiar image of a beloved and common household pet. Similarly, the sexual nature of the dragon – an interpretation of the dragon that I have
pointed out myself in this dissertation – would also explain the frequent appearance of dragons with unicorn horns, an animal traditionally associated with sexual lust.

Another perspective comes from Jean-Pierre Albert’s article “La légende de sainte Marguerite: un mythe maïeutique?” Albert argues that it is neither mother nor labor pains that the dragon represents but the womb, and he seeks to connect the image of the dragon with ex-voto offerings that take the form of reptiles and amphibians. In this hypothesis, Margaret’s defeat of the dragon is nothing less than the Virgin’s conquest of the curse of Eve writ once more.

This seems plausible to me as well. In particular, this interpretation could serve to explain why the redactors of St. Margaret tend to use “womb” related words to describe the area from which Margaret bursts. Moreover, if the dragon is the womb then it is – in essence – doing what it is “supposed to do” when it splits open to expel Margaret. Finally, this interpretation may suggest that images of Margaret astride her dragon are essentially images of the Virgin stamping out the snake, the curse of Eve. It may also suggest a reason for possible blendings between images of the Virgin and Margaret.

At this point, I would like to branch out and offer my own possible interpretation for the importance of this scene. To begin, I would like to briefly return to Blumenfeld-Kosinski’s assertion that Margaret “had to undergo torments not unlike those experienced during childbirth. Through her ability to sympathize with tormented women she became

410 Examples include the Burnet Psalter (AUL MS 25, 15th century) f. 26v and Walters Manuscript W.168 f.222r (1425-1450, Utrecht).
411 Margaret herself even makes this allusion when she prays that God should save her from “the horns of unicorns.”
412 Albert 1988, 25
413 Albert 1988, 26
414 Examples including the “sori wombe” of the SEL version and the “de utero” of Paris text.
415 Cf. the image of the Virgin and Christ child in BL Arundel 83 f. 131v (c. 1310, SE England) in which the Virgin is seated and resting her feet upon a dragon and a lion. Margaret appears astride a similar dragon in the lower right corner.
their ideal intercessor.” I would further attempt to finesse this suggestion by pointing out that Margaret not only underwent torments not unlike childbirth but in an environment that was not unlike that in which women gave birth.

In order to further articulate this point, I return to the description of the dragon in the Paris text and my analysis in the first chapter. As I previously wrote, Margaret’s experience with the dragon was a location of imitatio for pregnant women. Although the dragon appears at first to be the maternal figure in the equation, I argued that it was in fact Margaret that such women were imitating. Mothers were invited to look on St. Margaret not as a figure with whom to directly identify and imitate, but rather as an exemplar for their current “predicament.” Inasmuch as Margaret’s narrative uses tropes of swallowing as succumbing, Margaret is depicted as someone who experienced sexual temptation. As a result, she is frightened and fears for her life, not unlike women facing the always dangerous and frequently lethal process of childbirth in the Middle Ages. Yet, miraculously Margaret does not die, rather she emerges from the results of succumbing to her sexual temptation “without any injury.” In this way, Margaret served as an exemplar of a painless and productive birth process, experiencing metaphorically what the author imagined his feminine audience would hope to experience literally.

As previously noted, Margaret is locked away inside of a cell after Olibrius fails to torture her into acceptance. The presence of Theotimus at the cell window (a character who previously claimed in the introduction that he came to Margaret’s narrative only after her death), invites the reader to immerse themselves in what is arguably the most important part of Margaret’s narrative. Then:

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416 Blumenfeld-Kosinski 1990, 11
Behold: suddenly from the corner of the prison came a horrible dragon completely gilded with various colors of hair and with a golden beard. Its teeth were like the sharpest iron. Its eyes shone like a flame of fire, and it blew flame and smoke from its nostrils, and its tongue was panting over its neck, and it seemed as if a two-edged sword was in its hands. For it was terrible and made a stench in the prison from the same fire which issued from its mouth. And St Margaret became as pale as grass and the fear of death came upon her and all her bones were shattered… The dragon opened its mouth and placed it over the head of the blessed Margaret and extended its tongue over her heel and swallowed her into its stomach. But Christ’s Cross, which the blessed Margaret had made over herself, expanded in the mouth of the dragon and split it in two parts. Then, blessed Margaret came out of the dragon’s belly without any injury to her.417

Margaret and her dragon come alive in an eternal present, an eternal present in which the reader is invited to revel in the colors of the dragon’s hair, feel the heat of the flame, and smell the stench of its breath. As the audience watches, Margaret briefly succumbs to carnality and is ingested, resting soundly within the dragon’s uterus, but then emerges without injury by the virtue of the cross.

With these details fresh in mind, I will now turn to a discussion of the birthing process in the medieval period. In particular, Jennifer Wynne Hellwarth’s book *The Reproductive Unconscious in Medieval and Early Modern England* has a very interesting reading of medieval birth as ritual, which I will here pull into juxtaposition with some thoughts about Margaret and the dragon. Before I begin, it bears mention that the medieval lying-in chamber is notoriously mysterious for several reasons. First, the birth process was largely a time of sexual segregation: women (the mother-to-be, her attendants, or the midwife) were the primary occupants of the lying-in room in the medieval period. While the relative absence of men in the lying-in room does not eliminate the possibility of a written account of birth, since women were less frequently taught to write it significantly diminishes the amount of information available upon which to draw prior to the 17th century. Moreover, based upon later accounts, the childbirth ritual that Hellwarth identifies was something that was intentionally kept secret from men. Given these difficulties, sources penned by male religious such as *Books of Hours* and accounts of the *Life of St. Margaret* such as the SEL version, provide a glimpse of childbirth rituals as seen from the “outside.”

Hellwarth separates the birthing process into three phases: separation, transition, and reincorporation. I will be following the same pattern as I describe the associations that medieval women might have seen between Margaret’s *Life* and their own travail. When the time for separation/parturition came, the pregnant woman’s gossips (women

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418 Nevertheless, men were never entirely excluded from the process. Cf. Monica Green’s *Making Women’s Medicine Masculine: The Rise of Male Authority in Pre-Modern Gynaecology*.
419 Even these few accounts are rather sparse, cf. Wilson’s “The Ceremony of Childbirth and Its Interpretation.”
420 Hellwarth 2002, 5
421 Hellwarth 2002, 6
who were selected by the future mother to participate in her birth process) would assist in creating a physical space – and a social one – called the “lying-in chamber.” Hellwarth describes the lying-in chamber as:

a kind of womb itself, fully enclosed, and, to some extent, even more impenetrable than the womb it resembled – literally and symbolically. All openings were sealed; windows were closed and covered in order to keep out as much light as possible, and keyholes were also blocked to keep out light. The only source of illumination came from candles. This physical enclosure closely mimicked the enclosed space of anchoresses and anchorites (or vice versa), who lived in a rather small, presumably darkened, room in which their only access to the world was through a small window where they received guests. The special lighting of the candles, and the use of specially made wine (caudle), is also reminiscent of images of church ceremonies.\(^{422}\)

Immediately, associations between the lying-in chamber and the *Life of St. Margaret* become apparent. First, the lying-in chamber was a kind of cell, not unlike that which anchoresses occupied. As I noted in chapter two, Karolyn Kinane has suggested that the state of enclosure that Margaret finds herself in is not unlike that of the anchoress, an association that would have made it easier to assimilate portions of her *Life* into their

\(^{422}\) Hellwarth 2002, 8. Hellwarth largely derives this ritual from such sources as the medieval *Trotula* texts (a collection of writings attributed to an 11\(^{th}\) century woman of the same name, including *De passionibus mulierum curandarum*, *De ornat*, *Trotula major*, *Trotula minor*, and the *Practica secundum Trotum*), the “Sekeness of Wymmen” (a common gynecological text in Middle English), Eucharius Rösslin’s *Der Swangern frawen und he bammen roszgarten* (The Rose Garden for Pregnant Women and Midwives (1513) including Thomas Raynald’s English translation of the text, *The Byrth of Mankynde* (1540)), Percival Willughby’s 1660 edition of *Observations in Midwifery*, William Sermon’s *The Ladies Companion* (1671), and Jane Sharp’s *The Midwives Book, or the whole art of Midwifery discovered; directing child-bearing women how to behave themselves* (1671).
religious practice. Thus, the future mother, aching from the pains of extended pregnancy, enters into a cell to start the birthing process, one that is not unlike the cell that Margaret, aching from the pains of extended torture, was locked away in.

At the same time, the chamber is “a kind of womb itself.” This womb encloses the future mother entirely, reminding the parturient woman of Margaret being swallowed up into the “womb”\(^\text{423}\) of the dragon. The impending threat of this swallowing is clearly fearful to both the woman undergoing labor (as suggested by the author of *Hali Meidhad*\(^\text{424}\)) and Margaret herself.\(^\text{425}\)

As Margaret and the parturient mother rest inside the womb, they undergo a period of symbolic gestation. For Margaret, this gestation is immediate as she bursts from the dragon unharmed. For the parturient woman, this gestation took longer and was represented by the stage of transition.

Transition occurred after the mother had given birth to her child. This period of time was “divided into three stages, the first of which was confinement in bed (from three days to two weeks in the darkened, womb-like room)… After this confinement, there was the ‘upsitting’ when linens were changed, and the woman could move around the house, but did not go outside for another week or so.”\(^\text{426}\)

The stages of transition are similar to pregnancy, with the mother gestating until she has regained enough strength in the womb-like lying-in chamber to “burst forth” into

\(^{423}\) Once more, in the Paris text, “degluttiuit eam in uentrem suum” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 204); in *Seinte Margarete*, “forswelh into his wide wombe” (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, 60); and in the SEL version “He[o] wende into a sori wombe” (D’Evelyn and Mill 1956, 297).

\(^{424}\) Rawcliffe cites a similar picture of the suffering of pregnant women by Osbert of Clare (Rawcliffe 2003, 92).

\(^{425}\) This terror is attested to in the Paris text when the narrator declares “Now she had forgotten because of her terror that God had heard her prayer and that she had said ‘Show me who fights against me.’” “Oblita enim erat propter pauorem quod Deus exaudiiuit orationem eius et quod dixerat, ‘Demonstra mihi qui mecum pugnat’” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 204).

\(^{426}\) Hellwarth 2002, 9
the world once more. To begin with, the new mother is confined to the bed, her movement restricted. After a period of three days to two weeks, the new mother would then enjoy a period of limited mobility in which she was allowed to move about the “womb” of her environment, like the “quickening” of the child during (most typically) the second trimester. Finally, the third stage marks a period of significant movement (much like the increased fetal movement during the third trimester), after which the mother is ready to emerge from her “womb” into the world once more, just as Margaret burst forth from the womb of the dragon.\textsuperscript{427}

After emerging from the “womb,” both mother and child would re/join the Christian community. For the child, this was baptism. For the mother, a process called chur\textit{ching}, meant to purify her after her carnal experience.\textsuperscript{428} Once more, there is a parallel to Margaret’s experience: Whereas prior to her carnal experience Margaret is frequently depicted as suffering and terrified,\textsuperscript{429} when she emerges from the dragon, Margaret often encounters a dove, her first contact with God. After this contact with the Almighty, Margaret is able to wrestle a demon to the ground and banish him into the earth, cause earthquakes and survive boiling hot water. Thus, it is her contact with the dragon that galvanizes her saintly \textit{virtus}.

\textsuperscript{427} The time over which these three periods were stretched likely had much to do with the socio-economic class of the women undergoing birth: upper-class women likely enjoyed extended periods of time away from household duties, while lower-class women were no doubt called back sooner by virtue of necessity. Of course, some period of recovery would have been necessary even in the absence of the birthing ritual described by Hellwarth; it may be that the birthing ritual she describes makes a virtue out of the necessity of recovery.

\textsuperscript{428} Rawcliffe notes the spiritual risks to childbirth: “Because of her uncleanness, a woman who died in childbirth could not expect burial inside a church, while one whose body retained an unbaptized infant might well be interred \textit{outside} the churchyard and the Christian community. Significantly… the prayers written on medieval birth girdles invariable promised the mother that she would survive long enough to receive the sacrament and see her child christened” (Rawcliffe 2003, 95).

\textsuperscript{429} Cf. Margaret’s prayers for surcease from her suffering and the strength to confront her opponents spoken during her tortures prior to the prison interlude.
Although women were guaranteed no such miraculous powers, the salvific implications of childbearing were long established by Paul in 1 Timothy 2:13-15: “For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.” No doubt it is a later medieval reflection of this same concept of grace through childbearing that is reflected in the East Anglian N-Town play when one of two midwives at Mary’s birth declares “Whan women travayl grace doth growe.”

This mimesis may also explain the frequent call for memorialization found in many of the vernacular Lives. In Seinte Margarete, Margaret prays that “In that house where a woman is in labor, as soon as she remembers my name and my suffering, Lord, be quick to help her and answer her prayer, and let no deformed child be born in the house nor lame nor hunchbacked, nor dumb or deaf or afflicted by the Devil.” The stress of Margaret’s prayer is on remembering the events of her passion and recalling them during the process of birth, an activity that would have been made immeasurably easier – given the pain and exhaustion of childbirth – had another individual been present to read the Life for the laboring woman during her birthing process (as the SEL version suggests).

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430 Rawcliffe 2003, 97
431 I þet hus þer wummon pineð o childe, sone se ha munneð mi nome ant mi pine, Lauerd, hihenliche help hire ant her hire bene; ne I þe hus ne beo iboren na mislimet bearn, nowðer halt ne houveret, nowðer dumbe ne deaf ne ideruet of deofle.” (Millett and Wogan-Browne 1990, 78).
432 It strikes me that this may be the very reason that the author chooses to leave Margaret’s swallowing – so replete with dangerous overtones of carnality and sexual succumbing – in the Seinte Margarete narrative. Certainly, other authors such as Jacobus de Voragine and the author of the Rebdorf version had no problem rejecting the account when it suited them. Contrary to this, the author of Seinte Margarete, despite the importance he places on the virgins in his audience, is willing to leave this damning scene relatively unaltered.
Similarly, Lydgate’s *Lyfe* exhorts “Noble princesses and ladyes of estate./And gentilwomen lower of degre./Lefte up your hertes, calle to your advocate/Seynt Margarete, gemme of chastite./And aile wymmen that have necessite./Praye this mayde ageyn sykenesse and dissese./In trayvalynge for to do yow ese.”\(^{433}\) The audience in this version is encouraged to “lift up their hearts” to Margaret and to call to their advocate.” While this language of advocacy seems to evoke Margaret’s more judicial function as an intercessor for sin, the fact that the audience of this advocacy is explicitly composed of women – women who were “noble princesses and ladyes of estate,/And gentilwomen lower of degre,” that is, women who were like Lady Marche and her associates – suggests that Margaret is functioning as an advocate in a specifically feminine context, that of birth. Thus, the text exhorts its readers to place their thoughts with Saint Margaret and to think upon her as they undergo the birthing process, again a process that would have been made significantly easier by the presence of someone reading the Life.\(^{434}\)

In summation, I am proposing that, as labor begins, women would retreat to the “cell” of the lying-in chamber to read the *Life of St. Margaret* to the woman in labor, either specifically focusing on Margaret’s encounter with the dragon or more generally reading the entirety of the *Life*. The woman in labor would ruminate upon Margaret’s

\(^{433}\) Reames 2003, 162

\(^{434}\) The presence of such a book in the lying-in chamber would also be another boon for Margaret’s pregnant adherents. As I noted previously, shortly before birth, women would select female friends and family members who would participate in the birth, individuals known as “gossips.” These women would aid their laboring associate, performing necessary functions as dictated by the midwife and providing much needed comfort to their companion. It is among this gossip that Margaret likely found herself. As Patrick Geary has noted, saints occupied a peculiar position between living and dead. While they had passed from this world, their presence abided in the physical remains of their life, be it the actual relics of their body that they left behind or a church that had been dedicated to the saint. In effect, the saint was a part of whatever community held his or her remains and was expected to act on behalf of the community to which it was introduced. The codex of Margaret’s Life – or the recitation of her Life in the case of those found in verses – was no different. By having a copy of the Life read during labor, the gossip was not only reminding the parturient mother of Margaret’s success in her “labors,” but also introducing a new member to the circle of women participating in the birth: St. Margaret herself.
experience with the dragon, but it was not a rumination that made the woman’s birthing body a hellish “Hammer horror creature.”\textsuperscript{435} Rather, the woman in travail became Margaret in travail: stuck in the womb from which she hoped to eventually emerge, the woman sought to identify with Saint Margaret and thus to secure her safe return to the world outside of the lying-in chamber, a task that Margaret had done before.

Returning to the larger context of Margaret and her dragon’s association with childbirth, it is distinctly possible that all of these associations were present in the birthing room. As I have endeavored to show in this dissertation, Margaret’s story is multivalent and complex and lends itself well to shifting categories of interpretation. It may be that women in labor drew comfort from the mimesis of Margaret bursting from the dragon in a variety of different ways, and the associations of the Life would have allowed them to do so by viewing the dragon as their own bodies, the onset of labor, the womb, and a womb-like lying-in chamber.

\textbf{The Life of the Life}

From the perspective of the Mombritius tradition, Margaret did not begin her existence in England as a patron saint of childbirth. Rather, Margaret was a warrior who battled demons, not unlike popular images of her Eastern Orthodox “twin” Marina.\textsuperscript{436} It was precisely because she was proof against demons that the earliest \textit{Life} in England attributes her with the powers of an intercessor in childbirth, specifically against maladies thought to befall children as the result of demonic intervention. This perspective on the \textit{Life} would persist over several different versions in the Mombritius tradition – including

\textsuperscript{435} Wogan-Browne 2001, 126
\textsuperscript{436} Cf. Larson 2002, 25
the Tiberius, CCCC, and Seinte Margarete version – suggesting that both religious and lay adherents to the Life accepted and benefited from this warrior image of Margaret.

However, approximately a century after the advent of the Mombritius version in England, a new version of the Life emerged onto the scene: the Caligula version. The prayers of this Life depicted Margaret as an intercessor in legal matters, but also contained the seeds for Margaret’s blessings for parturient women.

As the two Lives proliferated in England, some degree of cross-pollination would naturally occur: Those familiar with the Mombritius Life would have been exposed to the details of the Caligula and vice versa.\(^{437}\) This cross-pollination led to the introduction of Margaret’s prayers for parturient women from the Caligula version into the Mombritius tradition, an element of the Life that would be relatively static in vernacular versions composed from the 13\(^{th}\) century onward. This persistence suggests the profound importance that women in Margaret’s cult placed upon these prayers, as well as a growing influence that women had over the cult beginning in the 13\(^{th}\) century.

This influence gradually caused a shift in the character of Margaret in the Mombritius tradition. Gone was the fierce warrior who opposed demonic influences; instead Margaret became a figure concerned with the well-being of her pregnant adherents and (often) their children. As this change occurred, Margaret shifted from a saint for everyman to a women’s advocate in parturiency.

One notable effect of this shift was the growing importance of the image of Margaret being swallowed and expelled from the dragon. While textual evidence as to the reason for this importance is slim, I have endeavored to lay out the prevailing opinions in

\(^{437}\) Although whether this was via an actual version of the Caligula text, a precursor to it (a “Pre-Caligula” to mirror Clayton and Magennis’ Pre-Mombritius), or a hybridization of both Lives as the Wace likely was.
the field as to the reason behind this association, those of Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (dragon as mother), Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski (dragon as labor), and Jean-Pierre Albert (dragon as womb). To these interpretations, I also humbly added my own (dragon as lying-in room).

Regardless of which of these associations would have been the most comforting to women, such techniques would have provided significant comfort (and thus significant aid) to labor. The presence of books or verbal accounts of the Life in the lying-in room would have offered an eye of calm in the hurricane of trauma that constituted medieval birth, not unlike a medieval “Lamaze” technique. The presence of Margaret would have been tangible to such women, and their informal power clearly did much to solidify an image of St. Margaret with which they could identify and sympathize.
Conclusion: The Metamorphosis of Monsters

In the Paris text, Theotimus begins his narration by describing the state of the world in which he resides. In those days, the followers of Christ suffered in His name and were martyred, while the people that surrounded them worshipped deaf and dumb idols possessed by demons. Believing in Christ, Theotimus sets himself to learning the tale of the “most blessed Margaret,” how she fought demons and overcame the world. Before diving into the narrative of Margaret’s martyrdom, he offers simple words of advice to his audience: “All who have ears, listen with your hearts and understand. Men, women, and virgins, imagine yourselves as tender girls in your hearts, and in this manner strive so that you may receive the salvation of your soul and eternal rest with the just who have been crowned by the Lord.”

Theotimus first pleads for attention, calling his readers to consider his words, the story of Margaret. That he asks them to listen with their hearts is an indication that there is a deeper meaning in the story than mere events: his audience is meant to understand something greater than the narration. Following this injunction, Theotimus instructs his readers as to how they might realize this greater truth: imagine yourselves as tender girls, as tender a girl as the fifteen year old Margaret herself. This is not a gendered message, *per se*, rather it is a message to any who might occupy the three accepted genders of Christianity: men, women, and virgins. It is a message to everyone in the audience, a message that transcends gender and offers meaning to all Christians. This message is

438 “Omnes aures habentes audite corde, et intelligite uiri; mulieres, uirgines, <uelut> tenere puelle proponite <uos> in cordibus uestrís, et ita laborate, ut accipiatis salutem anime uestræ et requiem sempiternam cum iustis a Domino coronatis” (Clayton and Magennis 1994, 194).
simple, but profoundly hopeful: by imagining yourself as Margaret, by imitating her, you are given a way to strive for salvation and eternal rest.

On another discursive level, what Theotimus is offering is not unique to Margaret’s Life. Imitation of Christ and other figures reaches back into the writings of Paul when he declares in 1 Thess 1: 5-7: “For our Gospel came unto you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance, as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers [imitatores, in the Vulgate] of us and of the Lord, having received the Word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Ghost, so that ye were examples to all who believe in Macedonia and Achaia.” The spiritual imitation of Christ and the saints continued through the early church where it found some of its most sublime expressions in the Middle Ages. In Margaret, Theotimus’ readers would have found a seemingly unchanging figure: the very fact that Margaret’s Life is Christ’s life displays the radical singularity of the sacred.

While Margaret shares in the sacrality of Christ, her sacred nature is inherently different than His. As God-made-flesh, Christ’s sacrality is present from birth, later to be threatened by the Devil. It is a sacrality that need only be maintained. Like all saints, Margaret’s purity is not a given, it must be claimed through her labors and travails. The path to claiming this sacrality is paved with the temptations of erotic fulfillment, wealth, life and an end to suffering and pain, temptations not unlike Margaret’s religious and lay adherents would have faced.

In many ways, it is simply a degree of difference that separates Margaret from her adherents, a degree of difference that renders her opponents more familiar than alien and

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439 Cf. Bynum’s Jesus as Mother; McNamer’s Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion
makes her *imitatio* more appealing. At the beginning of the Mombritius narrative, all Margaret’s adherents would have been familiar with the scene in which Margaret tended her sheep, a scene that would have placed Margaret in a pastoral context in both senses of the word. As Olibrius approached, the audience would have recognized the approach of the un-Christian, an assumption later confirmed by the blending of pagan and Jewish indicators for Olibrius’ religious identity. These indicators of identity would have been instantly recognizable from their biblical contexts. Olibrius’ un-Christian associations would have deepened further as the redactors of the *Life* wove demonic elements into his identity, blending them with the pagan and Jewish stereotypes, until he became everything that Margaret’s audience was meant to despise.

This blending was also subject to significant change, with redactors periodically “updating” the character of Olibrius, thereby foregrounding the relevance of Margaret’s struggle for her readers. As the *Life* enters England, the pagan-Jewish nature of Olibrius would have been familiar as un-Christian due to the depiction of pagan and Jewish figures as biblical adversaries. Those manuscripts that feature Olibrius as “more” Jewish would have allowed their contemporary readers to contextualize rising violence against Jews (such as that in the First Crusade) as well as antipathy towards Jews brought into their midst by the Norman Conquest. Similarly, as crusading interests became a source of national identity for the English and romantic literature introduced the trope of the “defeated Sultan,” redactors realigned the character of Olibrius so that Margaret could defeat the looming Saracen threat. In each case, Margaret’s opponent is a familiar

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opponent, one that her readers would have encountered on the street, on crusade, or taught to fear.

At the same time, the sexual threat to Margaret from Olibrius is writ large as the sexual threat that Jews, Saracens, and pagans posed to Christians. In the same way that Margaret herself was “sealed” in her virginity, her example served to seal the boundaries of Christian sexual identity against the transgression of foreign religious influences.\(^{441}\)

As Margaret entered her prison cell, the dragon would have been a familiar figure as well. As Margaret quaked in fear before the creature, her readers would have recognized the tropes of swallowing and succumbing written into the story. For virgins reading the story, the dragon would have stood as a warning: the man-like dragon of the Paris text grasping its phallic sword would have reminded them to distance themselves from their sexual desire and beware temptation, and the fear invoked in *Seinte Margarete* encouraged them to think on the horrors that would result from the loss of their own virginity.

At the same time, the image was one of hope. Gathered with the women at the window into Margaret’s cell, her virginal readers watched her battle with the dragon. In this battle, Margaret comes close to succumbing to the pleasures of this world but emerges unscathed from her close encounter. Moreover, she does not emerge from her ordeal diminished but strengthened from her defeat of the Devil, her mouth filled with praise for God.

\(^{441}\) Regarding the possibility of further research, although questions of ethnicity/religious diversity were addressed in this work, they were primarily tied to issues of sexual boundaries within the Christian community. The Old English Lives offer a distinctly more “Jewish” Olibrius than the Paris text. Considering that these Lives both predate William of Norwich’s more direct condemnation of Jewish communities in England, these Lives (and others produced within a similar time frame) may be an important link in the changing conceptions of Judaism in England that led to the beginning of the blood libel.
The dragon was a hopeful image for mothers as well. Invited by Theotimus to be present in Margaret’s narrative, the maternal readers of the Paris text witnessed a scene that would have been all-too-familiar to them: Margaret succumbing to the sexual temptation that the dragon represented. The dragon, sexed as male, then undergoes a remarkable transformation, giving birth to Margaret *de utero* in a maternal fashion. As Margaret emerges from the dragon, she is once again bolstered by her grisly *faux* birth, conquering both the dragon and maternal fears of labor, fears with which every future mother would have been intimately familiar.

Furthermore, this image was full of possible maternal interpretations. Reading the image as a direct mimesis, women may have seen themselves as mimetically giving birth like the dragon. Unlike the dragon, they are saved from a gruesome fate by the *virtus* that Margaret engenders. By considering the dragon as a manifestation of the womb, women instead would have seen Margaret’s “birth” as the outcome of a natural process: just as Margaret emerges from the dragon, so too does the child emerge from the womb, a structure which is meant to “split open.” As Margaret stood astride the dragon, the image of Mary treading upon the serpent would also be present, invoking connotations of safe and painless childbirth. If the dragon is the process of birth, then Margaret underwent torments not unlike those that pregnant women themselves would experience, creating a sympathetic link between Margaret and her adherents. Finally, the image of the dragon may also have been the image of the lying-in room: a womb-like atmosphere in which women underwent a symbolic gestation. In each case, the dragon represented a familiar biological or social reality of childbirth with which women would have been familiar.
Through identification with Margaret, these women sought to emerge from their place of labor whole and sound, just as Margaret burst from the dragon without any injury.

As Margaret emerges from the dragon, she encounters the black demon, a loquacious creature. Frequently claiming credit for Margaret’s attack, the creature explains that the assault was really an attempt on Margaret’s virginity. After a sound beating from Margaret, the black demon elaborates on all the woes that it inflicts upon unsuspecting Christians, focusing especially upon sexual sins for which it claims credit. For Margaret’s adherents, such a speech had significant didactic impact. The voice of the demon, imbued with supernatural authority, was an inverted guide to a proper Christian life: that which the demon claimed authority over should be avoided at all costs.

Two Lives in particular, Seinte Margarete and the CCCC version, are significant to this dissertation due to their marked departure from the Mombritius narrative. In Seinte Margarete, the demon spins a tale about the fall of a chaste man and a chaste woman. It tells Margaret that it often permits the couple to abide without lashing out at them, allowing them to discuss God and goodness and for them to gain trust in their feelings towards one another. However, when they do, its trap closes: it lashes out with lustful thoughts, and unless one of the pair is willing to place the relationship aside, these thoughts fester until their chastity is compromised. The CCCC version, on the other hand, contains a unique addition by the redactor. In the midst of its speech, the demon claims that because of its wiles its victims “did ‘it’ with four-footed beasts.” This inclusion is a clear indication that the intended audience of the text was not composed only of those who practiced a “monastic and ascetic” lifestyle, but also to the rural, lay audience that was placed under their pastoral care. Both narratives show that the black
demon’s speech was used by redactors to target specific audiences in order to promote desirable sexual behavior, either by reinforcing the need for familiar behaviors with the authority of the supernatural or by vilifying practices with which the audience had become too familiar.

Finally, at the close of Margaret’s narrative she is brought to the place of her execution. Pleading with her executioner for a moment to pray, he exclaims that he cannot possibly kill her due to the presence of Christ at her side. This signals the immanence of the divine at Margaret’s execution and the weight of her prayers. Kneeling on the spot, Margaret asks for several boons on behalf of her future adherents, thereby anticipating the formation of a cult around the supernatural benefits that she can provide.

These requests offer one of the clearest textual indicators of the diachronic shifts in Margaret’s cult as they sought to channel the virtus engendered by her martyrdom. As late as the 10th century, the Mombritius tradition of Margaret finds its way into England. The Margaret of the Paris text is a warrior who confronts demons – as Larson has noted, not unlike her Byzantine “twin” Marina. Her blessings for childbirth are minimal, require significant economic reserves, and reflect her established role: Margaret does not so much aid women and children in labor as drive away demons in general, demons that might cause an infant to “be born deaf or blind or mute.” Margaret persists in this role with very little change for several centuries, indicating that this image of Margaret as a champion against demons was largely accepted and made use of in her cult. The Tiberius and CCCC versions indicate a gradual shift towards more economically

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442 A more thorough study of the various speeches of the black demon might indicate a greater variance of sexual proscriptions, offering more insight into the varied sexual landscape of medieval England (or Europe as a whole). This would likely require considerable archival work in order to note variations between different Mombritius-style versions that have not been transcribed.

443 Of particular interest to this study were the benefits she provided to parturient women and their children.
reasonable requirements, but Margaret continues to be a champion against demons and offers little in the way of protection during childbirth save for the guarantee that she will ward away demonic disabilities that might afflict the children of her adherents.

Rather than the Mombritius tradition, it is the Caligula tradition (which emerges in England at most a century after the Paris text) which contains the first instance of Margaret’s blessings for parturient women. While the Margaret of the Caligula version is hardly focused on childbirth (significantly more of her prayers are devoted to legal issues, both supernatural and mundane), her prayers do include blessings for both mother and child to be safely delivered, requiring only that a candle be placed in a church dedicated to her.

The 13th century marked a turning point for the Mombritius tradition in England. First, a surge of interest in Margaret’s cult and the growing effects of the Fourth Lateran Council upon literacy (particularly feminine literacy) precipitated greater feminine involvement in the cult. At the same time, the incorporation of the Caligula version’s blessings for pregnant women into the Mombritius tradition of the Life made Margaret a more appealing patron for her growing body of lay adherents.

At the same time, this has little noticeable effect upon the perception of Margaret in the Mombritius tradition. Seinte Margarete slips the Caligula blessings for parturient women into Margaret’s prayers (somewhat abruptly), but never deviates from the image of Margaret as a champion against demons. The Stanzaic Life, rather than include such blessings with no explanation as Seinte Margarete did, attempts to rationalize this new addition to the Mombritius tradition by incorporating it under Margaret’s demonic purview: The black demon that accosts Margaret in her cell is no longer a purveyor of
sexual sin, but a creature that brutally attacks mothers and infants. By defeating such a
demon, the text ties Margaret’s role as a champion over the demonic to her blessings for
parturiency.

These blessings must have seen significant use by her adherents. By the time of
the SEL version’s redaction, these blessings were so clearly associated with Margaret that
the redactor felt no need to rationalize her association with parturiency. Moreover, there
was a shift in the character of Margaret herself to reflect this new focus: an identity in
which she becomes a women’s advocate and a saint with a personal interest in the
survival of her pregnant adherents. This trend continues until the Lydgate Lyfe at which
point Margaret’s blessings for parturiency eclipse all others, even her blessings for
healthy infants.444

Through these analyses, I have also shown that there is a profound immediacy to
the Lives of St. Margaret. While Margaret’s Life may be staged in 4th century Antioch,
the action of the narrative is not localized to this time or place. Rather, the narrative
occurs in a perpetual present that was profoundly intimate and well-known to both
redactor and audience.

In the first chapter, I showed that the Paris text and Seinte Margarete contain
scenes in which the audience is invited to participate in the narrative. In the former, the
presence of Theotimus – a figure who previously claimed that he, like the audience, only
knew Margaret through reading her Life – at the prison window, beckons the audience to

444 At this time, the dragon as a symbol of parturiency also became popular enough to have gained notice
by the author of the SEL version. Unfortunately, the question of when the dragon’s consumption of
Margaret arose as a symbol for parturiency has been left dangling by this dissertation. As noted previously,
a more detailed study of the art historical and non-Life text remnants (e.g. Skemer’s birthing amulets)
would be required to further inform this question. Moreover, there is a strong possibility that such a study
would not offer any conclusive evidence: as Larson has pointed out, the unofficial power that women
exerted upon the Life is notoriously difficult to trace.
watch as Margaret is consumed by the dragon and battles with the black demon. At arguably the most important part in Margaret’s *Life*, the audience is encouraged to feel the heat of the dragon’s flame and see the colors of its hair. In *Seinte Margarete*, the sudden presence of a group of women at the prison window invites Margaret’s female readers, particularly her virginal female readers, to imagine themselves in Margaret’s cell and feel the fear that the dragon invokes. In both cases, the time is not *then* but *now* and the location is wherever the *Life* was read.

The speech of the black demon and Olibrius’ identity suggest a similar fluidity of time and space. In each of the black demon’s speeches analyzed in the second chapter, the redactor places sexual prescriptions and proscriptions into the demon’s dialogue. While this certainly served a didactic purpose, it also added to the intimate sense of the present in the narrative: the demon was not only speaking with Margaret but also directly to the intended audience. Thus, the demon’s speech was not something recorded at an earlier date for later consumption, but a missive delivered to the reader or listener that targeted their actions in the present, as if the demon was simply relating the things that it had seen the audience do as it stood invisibly by their sides.

Olibrius’ identity further suggests this fluidity. While a Roman pagan prefect could theoretically be tied down to one specific place and one specific time, Olibrius is not simply a Roman pagan prefect. Rather, he is a figure whose religious identity is constantly subject to revision and contains a shifting admixture of potential identity markers. This shifting admixture of religious identities maintains the character in a state of the eternal present, reflecting the current concerns and opponents of Margaret’s
readers. In each version, Olibrius is not a long dead figure from a bygone age, but a very real, contemporary opponent that Margaret (and her Christian readers) strove against.

Moreover, while the sacred may be radically singular, Margaret has had multiple identities in her cult through the centuries. Beginning her life in the Life as a champion over demons, Margaret shows herself to be capable of significant change. As the interests of her cult turn towards safety during parturiency, Margaret transfigures from a warrior figure to a maternal women’s advocate.

The monsters of the Life were also a powerful means of influencing the sexual attitudes, behaviors, and identities of Margaret’s adherents. The polysemous nature of the dragon allowed it to be read as both an imitatio for mothers and virgins. For mothers, the dragon was a symbol of labor and birth, the end result of succumbing to sexual temptation. By imitating Margaret’s battle with the dragon, mothers hoped to emerge from their own battle with labor and birth whole and unharmed, just as Margaret herself did. This mimetic promise of safety (regardless of how it was interpreted) offered hope and comfort to women, and Margaret’s presence in the birthing room through the presence of her relics and Life were a source of community for women involved in the labor process. For virgins, the dragon was a source of fear rather than hope. The dragon represented everything that they strove to overcome: the threat of sexual temptation. In their daily lives, such men and women would have struggled against such temptation and like Margaret, hoped to face such an encounter and emerge “unstained.”

While the image of the dragon guided mothers and virgins in their imitatio Margaretae, the black demon’s speech is more heavy-handed. In Seinte Margarete, the demon’s speech offers advice to guide Margaret’s anchoritic adherents. By reading the
demon’s monologue, anchoresses caught a glimpse of the trials and tribulations of a woman much like themselves: a woman who innocently placed herself in a position where she might be tempted by the demon of sexual lust. However, this was not a triumphant dialogue on the part of the demon. Instead, it reveals the means to modify the anchoress’ behavior so that she does not fall into the same trap, detailing ideal practices for an anchoress that prevent her from succumbing to sexual temptation. In effect, the narrative offers such women an anchoritic identity to be imitated (Margaret), supplemented by an anchoritic identity to avoid (the unfortunate chaste woman), and a model of behavior that can be used to shore up the difference between the two. On the other hand, the black demon of the CCCC version attempts to discourage its lay audience not from sexual practice in general but specific sexual practices. In so doing, the redactor sought to guide his audience back to an appropriate lay Christian sexual identity, one that did not include adultery or sex with animals.

This lay Christian sexual identity is further complimented by the mutable religious identity of Olibrius. The encounters between Olibrius and Margaret in the various Lives cannot be read as simply a singular encounter within the narrative itself. Rather it stands as a model for the interaction between the Christian and the un-Christian. In this sense, Margaret does not reject the possibility of sexual intercourse with Olibrius, rather the Christian rejects the possibility of sexual intercourse with the un-Christian. This solidified sexual boundaries between Christians and the proximal religious Other, mirroring similar proscriptions in law codes (such as the 13th century law code Fleta, which demanded that “those cohabiting with Jews or Jewesses, those engaged in bestiality and sodomy are to be burned alive”) and popular literature (such as the
rejection of Saracen men and women by Christians in romantic literature pertaining to the crusades). This image of Margaret and Olibrius would have provided an imitatio that effectively channeled sexual energy and endeavors back into the Christian community.

More broadly still, this dissertation has also suggested the unity of the Saint and her/his opponents. As noted in the introduction, analyses of the saints in Saints’ Lives literature have offered valuable socio-cultural data regarding adherents in the Middle Ages. In the saint’s actions, the saint’s adherents found a model for everything from efficacious speech to constructing a virginal identity “from scratch.” Nevertheless, this picture is incomplete if the saint’s antagonists, monstrous or otherwise, are not taken into account. After all, it is by contending against these antagonists that the saint becomes who and what they are: Margaret would have lived out her life/Life tending her sheep if it weren’t for Olibrius, received no sign of support from God had she not burst from the dragon, and could not have been a champion over the demonic had she never trod upon the body of the black demon and wrung its secrets from its neck.

This relationship between the saint and the antagonists of the Life create a contrast that forms the identity of the saint, the same identity that the saint’s adherents imitate. While the saint carries positive indicators of identity such as “remain a virgin,” “trust in God,” and “speak against your persecutors,” the antagonists carry negative indicators of identity such as “do not copulate with the un-Christian,” “do not have sex with animals,” and “do not worship idols.” Both positive and negative indicators of identity combine in the saint’s Life to produce the saint’s imitatio: an imitation that not only encourages desired behaviors but wards away undesirable ones as well. In contemplating this
identity, the practitioner of saintly *imitatio* incorporates both the message of the saint and that of the saint’s antagonist into their identity as a Christian.

In this way, the monstrous antagonists of Margaret’s *Life* shape the Christian identity of Margaret’s adherents just as surely as Margaret herself. Under this monstrous influence, Margaret’s singularity – and thus, her *imitatio* – takes on a radical multiplicity that allowed her to meet the needs of multiple audiences stretched over a span of several centuries. Through these monsters, virgins were instructed, mothers were consoled, and the medieval laity – men and women alike – was guided to a “proper” Christian sexual identity. Truly, Margaret had something to offer “all who had ears to listen,” but often, it was the monsters who were really speaking.
Bibliography


