

In vestibus virilibus: Female Transvestitism in Late Medieval English Culture

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Research

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Abstract

This thesis examines the sexual connotations of female to male cross-dressing in late medieval English culture, and how this perceived sexuality was interpreted within legal system and broader culture. It analyses the representation of the cross-dressing saints of antiquity in literary culture, considering how this may have popularised the concept of transvestitism, as well as revealing the unintended sexuality associated with the acts of these women. This thesis then examines five prosecuted cases of female to male cross-dressing in English courts between 1429 and 1520, analysing the basis of these prosecutions and building a comparison between the legal and literary cultures of the period. Finally, the thesis considers the best-known medieval cross-dresser, Joan of Arc, prosecuted for a variety of crimes by an ecclesiastical court in France under the control of the English military. Scholars have argued that this act of cross-dressing is about religious practice or aiming to improve their social status. I will argue instead that by taking dressing and acting as men, these women instead evoked sexual connotations.

Statement of Candidate

I certify that this thesis is entirely my own work and that I have given fully documented references to the work of others. This thesis has not previously, in part or in whole, been submitted for a higher degree at any other university or institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized, overlapping loops and strokes, positioned above a horizontal line.

7th November 2017

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Introduction

The act of cross-dressing and transvestitism in late medieval England was paradoxically both a subversion of religious authority and something that was encouraged by religious authorities. In a religious setting and in the literature of the time, women could transcend their gender, and indeed both genders, to serve Christ better. Once they achieved this cross-dressing state, the women became asexual.¹ The indifferent reaction of surrounding men shows that transvestitism could be sanctioned, or even lauded, as long as the women did not extend beyond the authorities granted to females.² However once removed from the religious and hypothetical setting, the practice of cross-dressing in medieval society received a different reception. Legal authorities accused women found *in vestibus virilibus* not of attempting to better themselves in order to be closer to Christ, but instead of sexual misconduct.³ While the Bible and canon law explicitly forbade female-to-male cross-dressing, this thesis will demonstrate that the practice of female-to-male cross-dressing was subject to complex and even contradictory currents in late medieval English society. Certain significant Christian thinkers, texts, and values encouraged and endorsed cross-dressing, in a limited range of circumstances, but in practice women found dressed in men's clothing received legal penalties similar to prostitutes. In all cases—literary, religious, actual—male authorities perceived female-to-male cross-dressing as an inherently sexual act and female-to-male cross dressers could never actually escape the sociocultural limitations imposed on their sex. I will argue that this occurred because these same authorities were attempting to

¹ Joyce Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins* (London: Verso, 1991), 103.

² Valerie Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 128.

³ Judith Bennett and Shannon McSheffrey, "Early, Erotic and Alien: Women Dressed as Men in Late Medieval London," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 77 (2014).

impose normative gender categories in a society and culture in which male and female did not necessarily exist as fixed, sealed categories.

This thesis will focus on three key ideas. The first chapter examines depictions of cross-dressing and transvestism in popular culture and religious thought, which laid the groundwork for the social acceptability of such acts. These depictions include hagiographies of transvestite saints. William Caxton's popular English-language translation of the *Legenda aurea* (1483) included the vitae of Marina, Pelagia, and Euphemia, who all dressed and lived as men with the aim of achieving religious perfection. Despite violating decrees of Scripture against women cutting their hair and dressing as men, these women were lauded for their sacrifice and humility. However, even while being depicted as transcending their genders, the women in these vitae were consistently depicted as feminine and operating within normative gender roles, demonstrating that even female saints were incapable of escaping their gender. The second chapter considers cases of English women charged with cross-dressing in civic courts between 1450 and 1519. Despite their cross-dressing being the only evidence presented against them, most of these women were charged with prostitution, demonstrating a link between cross-dressing as a perceived facet of sexual immorality and deviance. The third chapter focuses on the best-known late medieval cross-dresser, Joan of Arc. While she may seem like an anomaly due to her French origins, she was tried by an English-controlled ecclesiastical court, and thus her trial provides a detailed insight into how the English ecclesiastical legal system perceived cross-dressing as feminine and sexually deviant, in contrast to how it was depicted within contemporary literary culture.

The view of cross-dressing as a facet of sexual deviance, which underlay the experiences of these women, literary and actual, derived from the theological belief in female inferiority. This belief stemmed from the verse in *Genesis* (2.22), which describes God making Eve from Adam's rib, which contributed to a theological understanding of women as

being lesser than men. This, in turn, fit with Aristotelian thought about the superiority of men. However, the scholarship of medieval cross-dressing has rarely considered this gendered and sexualized context, with academics instead preferring to attribute cross-dressing to a variety of motives. Vern Bullough was the first scholar to examine medieval female-to-male cross-dressing in his 1975 article "Transvestites in the Middle Ages". In this study, he examined early Christian saints who cross-dressed, claiming that western medieval women cross-dressed in order to improve themselves by becoming more male, and thus bringing themselves closer to God.⁴ This view received further reinforcement from Caroline Walker-Bynum, who asserted that women dressed as men for religious motivations, and in order to make themselves closer to Jesus and God's image.⁵ I will build upon these interpretations but direct them in a different direction, looking instead at the way that women used cross-dressing to achieve other goals such as power or independence. I will focus in particular on how these cross-dressing women were received by their contemporaries

The two most comprehensive studies on female transvestitism in pre-modern Europe are Rudolph Dekker and Lotte van der Pol's study of early modern Dutch cross-dressers, and Valerie Hotchkiss' study of western European cross-dressers. Dekker and Pol argue that women cross-dressed for a variety of reasons, but largely claim that transvestitism was used as a way for women to stay chaste through disguise.⁶ As the only comprehensive study on European transvestites, Hotchkiss examines a wide variety of sources such as early church vitae, books, plays, and notable figures such as Joan of Arc. Across this evidence however, she comes to the conclusion that women dressed as men to either heighten their social status

⁴ Vern Bullough, "Transvestites in the Middle Ages," *American Journal of Sociology* 79, no. 6 (1974): 1381.

⁵ Caroline Walker-Bynum, "'... and Woman His Humanity': Female Imagery in the Religious Writings of the Later Middle Ages," in *Fragmentation and Redepemtion: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 155.

⁶ Rudolf Dekker and Lotte Van de Pol, *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Macmillon, 1989), 26.

or award themselves more freedom.⁷ Hotchkiss also argues that women who dressed as men were largely thought to be social acceptable in their goals of improving themselves, as long as they did not overstep the limits of female authority, as was the case with Joan of Arc.⁸

The view of cross-dressing and transvestitism as a sexually charged act is, however, most present in studies that concentrate on Joan of Arc. Susan Crane addressed this idea of cross-dressing and transvestitism as sexualized in the trial and treatment of Joan of Arc. Crane demonstrates that within Joan's trial, her cross-dressing and sexuality were inextricably linked; by labelling herself *la pucelle*, instead of *la vierge* she aligned herself with a secular life stage that hinted at the possibility of losing this status, rather than claiming it as a lifelong stage.⁹ Susan Schibanoff has furthered this notion of cross-dressing as a form of sexualizing the human body. In her article "True Lies", Schibanoff argues that rather than shielding her body, Joan's donning male clothes yet retaining her female spirit and features drew attention to her body and thus sexualized it.¹⁰

The most concentrated study on cross-dressing and sexual notions attached to the act was completed by Judith Bennett and Shannon McSheffrey.¹¹ In a 2014 article Bennett and McSheffrey closely study thirteen women who were convicted of cross-dressing in England between 1450-1550, and examine the charges laid against them by the civic courts, building on Ruth Mazo Karras' conclusions that such courts readily combined notions of prostitution

⁷ Hotchkiss, 11.

⁸ Ibid., 128.

⁹ Susan Crane, "Clothing and Gender Definition: Joan of Arc," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 26, no. 2 (1996): 305.

¹⁰ Susan Schibanoff, "True Lies: Transvestism and Idolatry in the Trial of Joan of Arc," in *Fresh Verdicts on Joan of Arc*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Charles Wood, The New Middle Ages (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 47.

¹¹ Bennett and McSheffrey.

and sexual misconduct.¹² This thesis builds upon the work of these scholars and the idea of cross-dressing being interpreted as a sexual act by the courts, however it will expand upon it to see how English society perceived cross-dressing as an act that affected both the body and personality of the woman, and then how this was enacted during Joan of Arc's trial.

It will do so through a qualitative textual analysis of several sources that are rarely examined in conjunction with one another. The first chapter will rely heavily on Caxton's translation and publication of *The Golden Legend*. It will also utilize other religious texts from the later middle ages, mainly the French miracle play of Theodora, and illustrations from illuminated manuscripts depicting Pelagia and Marina. The second chapter is based on in depth textual analysis of five case summaries tried in London ecclesiastical courts between 1450 and 1519, kindly shipped over on microfilm from Duke University. The third chapter examines Joan of Arc, and includes an examination of the language used by the inquisitors regarding cross-dressing throughout her trial, and the way that Joan defended and explains her transgressive behaviour.

While regarding the sexual connotations of the term transvestite and the plethora of queer terms that can be used to communicate various genders, their variants and experiences, within the thesis I will be using the terms transvestite and cross-dresser to address different people and situations.¹³ The term transvestite is applied to those who constitute radically new knowledge about the experience of being in a body that can be the basis for very different ways of seeing the world.¹⁴ When discussed in an historical context, Vern Bullough has defined transvestitism as 'the desire to dress in the clothes of and assume the role of the

¹² Ruth Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 10.

¹³ For a discussion on the use of the term transvestite in a medieval context and the modern sexual connotations associated with the word, see Stipe Odak, "Heroines in Strange Costumes: Female Transvestism/Cross-Dressing in Medieval Hagiographies," *Disputatio Philosophica* 13, no. 1 (2011).

¹⁴ J Halberstam, "Trans* - Gender Transitivity and New Configurations of Body, History, Memory, and Kinship," *Parallex* 22, no. 3 (2016): 370.

opposite sex', which crucially results in a change of status.¹⁵ This change of experience will be applied to women who lived as men, and experienced the world with male superiority including Joan of Arc and saints Marina, Pelagia, and Theodora. I have selected these women not only because they donned the clothes of the opposite sex, but they also transgressed social norms by taking on masculine gender roles and began to perceive the world as viewed by men, with all the authority this granted them. The term cross-dresser will be applied to women who dressed in male clothing and occasionally lived as men, yet continued to practice the subservience expected of women, such the women in Chapter Two.¹⁶ The use of the term cross-dresser will also be used as a category for the women of chapter two who continued to live as women, despite the occasional donning of male apparel. These two terms do not exist in medieval literature and texts; rather, they are modern constructions. While this may be construed as superimposing modern behaviour and vocabulary onto people who did not consider themselves in these terms, I have chosen the vocabulary as it defines the essence of what these people hoped to achieve, whether it was hoping to live undetected in a male community, or achieve the social status of men.

By adopting male dress, women in the late medieval era achieved a variety of goals, yet they were consistently perceived by their male contemporaries in a sexualised manner in order to categorise them into normative gender roles and to mitigate their social disruption.¹⁷ By examining the ways that women rebelled against these gender norms, and were viewed by those around them we can begin to understand the sexualised way in which women in late medieval English culture were perceived.

¹⁵ Bullough, 1381.

¹⁶ Katherine Crawford, *European Sexualities 1400-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 145.

¹⁷ Jo Ann McNamara, *A New Song: Celibate Women in the First Three Christian Centuries* (New York: The Haworth Press, 1983), 2.

Chapter One: Meanings of Cross-Dressing in Anglo-French Religion and Literary Culture

The use of cross-dressing and transvestitism within vitae of the early church was designed to de-sexualise the female body. Within these vitae as they were transmitted throughout the medieval period, male disguise was thought to be emblematic of the renunciation of sexuality because it allowed the female body to be shielded from sexual activities from men.¹ However, as this chapter shows, this does not necessarily indicate a renunciation of sex; instead it opens the women up to accusations of sexual misconduct – a notoriously female sin. Even when these women are ‘sexless’, and have imitated men to renounce their sins such as prostitution and adultery, they cannot escape their gender and continue to occupy traditionally female roles, such as sexual misconduct and the nursing of children. The interpretation of these cross-dressing women as sexualised can be read as an attempt to locate transgressing women within their normative gender roles, rather than leaving them as outliers.

Gender transgression, variance, and inversion within medieval Europe did not occur in a vacuum but rather were influenced by cultural and religious ideas that impacted each other. This is because gender is a cultural production, and must be considered in the way in which it is defined in its societal and ideological context.² In the western medieval Europe, this ideological context was informed by Christianity, which permeated every aspect of medieval society including literary culture, the particular focus of this chapter. The two best-selling books in late medieval England were the Bible, and William Caxton’s 1483 English

¹ Hotchkiss, 22.

² Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis " *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1056.

translation of *The Golden Legend*, a hagiographical compilation which was so popular that forty-nine versions were printed in English between its publication and 1500.³ Due to changes and interpretations made by Caxton in his translation from the Latin and French into English, Caxton will hereafter be referred to as the author of *The Golden Legend*, as a way of differentiating between the vernacular text printed in England and the original Latin text by Jacobus de Voragine. De Voragine's original composition was used by the clergy as a teaching tool for masses and sermons- written in Latin, but paraphrased to churchgoers in English. As a way of making this text more accessible to a wider audience, Caxton took a combination of the original Latin and French translations of these texts and translated them into English so that they could be read outside of a church context. Jacques le Goff attributes the success of *The Golden Legend* in England to its publication at a time when literacy among lay-people was at an all-time high, resulting in a shift away from literary consumption by aural means to the written word.⁴ This allowed for the readers to consume the vitae at their own pace, and focus on specific morals and stories of interest to them.

This chapter will utilise texts from Anglo-French literary culture between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries to examine how cross-dressing was portrayed to readers, and will include *The Golden Legend*, illuminations from the *Legende Doree* and *Les Vies des Saints* (the French translation of the *Legenda Aurea* by Jean de Vignay), and a mid-fourteenth century Parisian play *Le Miracle de Theodore*. These texts offer a varied range of depictions of cross dressing, illustrating how this transgressive act could serve religious, sexual and social ambitions within Western medieval society. The texts have been chosen for their various depictions of cross dressing, whether it be for religious gain, sexual purposes, or

³ Sherry Rheames, *The Legenda Aurea: A Reexamination of Its Paradoxical History* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 8.; Jacques Le Goff, *In Search of Sacred Time: Jacobus De Voragine and the Golden Legend*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), ix.

⁴ Rheames, x.

social elevation within society. This chapter will argue that despite contradictory church teachings on the acceptability of cross-dressing and transvestism, there were consistently sexual connotations associated with this act in medieval Anglo-French culture. Namely, gender demonstrations that diverged from the socially acceptable were perceived as sexually deviant, and resulted in a consistently sexualised body by those who were committing the gender inversion.

The *Golden Legend* is a compilation of vitae which was used by the church during sermons, and was based on the work of Dominican friar Jacobus de Voragine, the author of the original Latin text *Legenda Aurea*. These vitae contain moralistic stories about good triumphing over evil, and faith in Christianity prevailing over the various challenges that the subject of the hagiographies faced. Caxton's translation of *The Golden Legend* into English in 1483, assisted by the presence of movable metal type printing presses made religious stories more accessible to a wider literate audience and helped to create a cultural institution through its popularity.⁵ This thesis will examine three vitae retrieved from both Jacobus Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* and William Caxton's translation of the lives of Marina, Pelagia, and Theodora.

The saints Pegalia, Theodora, and Marina are set apart from the rest of the saints due to their gender transgressions. These women's vitae follow the typical trope of the early Christian virgin martyr: a devout and high-born woman who suffers an eventual attack upon her sexual honour. As a result, each of these saints subverted social conventions by dressing as men and removing themselves from society in order to be closer to God and to worship him more purely without the disadvantages that their biological sex entailed.⁶ While most female saints were revered for their sanctity and virginity, the cross-dressing saints (who are commonly referred to as 'transvestite saints' by academics) all follow a specific path: a

⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁶ Bullough, 1383.

woman using male clothes to escape the dangers and restrictions of her physical sex and social gender.⁷ These three women's narratives follow a very similar structure. All three incorporate flight from the world, disguise and seclusion, and finally, discovery and recognition as integral parts of their vitae.⁸

The inclusion of cross-dressing saints in *The Golden Legend* provides a contradiction between acceptable religious practices and the teachings of church theologians. As mentioned above, *The Golden Legend* was originally used for teachings, yet illustrates an act that was explicitly forbidden within Scripture. Cross-dressing was forbidden in Deuteronomy 22:5, which states that "a woman shall not be clothed with man's apparel, neither shall a man use woman's apparel: for he that doeth these things is abominable before God."⁹ This decree was eventually incorporated into canon law by the Synod of Gangra in 340, where Canon XIII declared that "if any woman, under pretence of asceticism, shall change her apparel and, instead of a woman's accustomed clothing, shall put on that of a man, let her be anathema."¹⁰ However, cross-dressing was not the main concern of the council; instead, it aimed to restrain the conduct and influence of ascetics.¹¹ This canon on cross-dressing was later ratified by the Council of Chalcedon, and incorporated into Gratian's *Decretum*.¹²

The ban of cross-dressing was based upon Deuteronomy and canon law, but was nuanced by the teachings of contemporary influential figures within the church such as

⁷ Jonathan Walker, "The Transtextuality of Transvestite Sainthood: Or, How to Make the Gendered Form Fit the Generic Function," *Exemplaria* 15, no. 1 (2003): 74.

⁸ John Anson, "The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif," *Periodicals Archive Online* 5 (1974): 13.

⁹ All biblical references are taken from the Douay-Rheims Bible, retrieved from <http://www.drbo.org/index.htm>

¹⁰ John Fulton, *Index Canonum: The Greek Text, an English Translation, and a Complete Digest of the Entire Code of Canon Law of the Undivided Primitive Church* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 227.

¹¹ Mark Edwards, "Synods and Councils," in *Cambridge History of Christianity*, ed. Augustine Casiday and Frederick W. Norris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 372.

¹² James Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 251.

Hildegard of Bingen. A theologian, Benedictine abbess, and mystic who spoke the word of God, she ordained

A man should never put on feminine dress or a woman use male attire, so that their roles may remain distinct, the man displaying manly strength and the woman womanly weakness; for this was so ordered by Me when the human race began. Unless a man's life or a woman's chastity is in danger; in such an hour a man may change his dress or a woman for a man's, if they do it humbly in fear of death. And when they seek My mercy for this deed they shall find it, because they did it not in boldness but in danger of their safety. But as a woman should not wear a man's clothes, she should also not approach the office of My altar, for she should not take on a masculine role either in her hair or her attire.¹³

By Hildegard speaking with the voice of God and nuancing the situations in which cross-dressing was permitted, she lay the groundwork for Thomas Aquinas, providing the basis upon which his own arguments would expand. However, while Hildegard's voice permits the female use of male clothes, she also clearly stipulates the role that women are expected to perform while dressed as men. Power and independence were still very much a male domain, and in Hildegard's view, women should continue to be subservient and accept their place in society, an idea that is echoed in *The Golden Legend*.

However, by the thirteenth century this stance appears to have been relaxed slightly, with amendments made to allow cross-gendering in certain circumstances, indicating the nuances within the church regarding the previous ban on cross-dressing, as Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* demonstrates. Written as a teaching compendium of the New Testament,

¹³ Scivias 11.6.77, English translation printed in Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, Ca. 500-1100* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 165.

the *Summa* nuanced the complete ban on women dressing in male clothes, and permitted it under extenuating circumstances. Aquinas observed:

outward apparel should be consistent with the estate of the person, according to the general custom. Hence it is in itself sinful for a woman to wear man's clothes, or vice versa; especially since this may be a cause of sensuous pleasure; and it is expressly forbidden in the Law (Deuteronomy 22) because the Gentiles used to practice this change of attire for the purpose of idolatrous superstition. Nevertheless, this may be done sometimes without sin on account of some necessity, either in order to hide oneself from enemies, or through lack of other clothes, or for some similar motive.¹⁴

By allowing for cross-dressing as a matter of necessity, such as in cases of escape or disguise, Aquinas weakened the stigma surrounding the cross-dressing saints in *The Golden Legend*. By being the first work that expanded on the extenuating circumstances surrounding cross-dressing and possible implications that could arise, the *Summa* also acknowledged the sexual connotations that dressing in male clothes often inferred, which will be further discussed with reference to the legal cases included in the following chapters. This demonstrates a continuous theme in the prohibition of why cross-dressing, and how the relationship between sexuality and gender inversion originated. Aquinas often associated the notion of human perfection with masculinity, and equated femininity with imperfection. Thus, women would cross-dress to better themselves by appearing masculine.¹⁵

Considering this stance on the idea of cross-dressing, the inclusion of Marina, Pelagia, and Theodora within *The Golden Legend* makes manifest the complexity between the church stance on gender inversion and nuanced situations in which it could arise. *The Golden*

¹⁴ 'On the Adornment of Women', *Summa Theologica* II-CLXIX-II, retrieved from <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3169.htm>

¹⁵ Clare Monagle, *The Scholastic Project*, ed. Simon Forde, Past Imperfect (Kalamazoo: ARC Humanities Press, 2017), 19.

Legend was a text primarily used for personal edification, with saints exemplifying a vast range of virtues for women to imitate, from chastity to eloquence and reasoning.¹⁶ By promoting this practice as a method of demonstrating dedication to God, an inconsistency emerged between Church Scripture and the theology of Church Fathers, which allowed the act of cross-dressing to become a practice in pursuit of self-improvement. This self-improvement and blurring of gender lines was incorporated in other religious texts. St Jerome is recorded as stating “as long as woman devotes herself to birth and children, she is different from man as body is from soul. But when she wishes to devote herself to Christ more than to the world, then she will cease to be a woman and will be called man.”¹⁷

While Jerome does not explicitly state that women should dress like men to be closer to God, he does promote the idea of religious women transgressing their own physical gender and embodying their spirit, namely, becoming masculine in spirit to be closer to God. While readers should not assume that these authors were advocating that women should attempt to become male, these excerpts resemble beliefs about the sexes that were prevalent in medieval Anglo-French society. Based on Aristotelian teachings, women were perceived to be inferior to men. However, due to the cold and wet composition of their bodies, they could easily ‘warm up’ and become more masculine.¹⁸ This framework to become male to be closer to God is evident, however Hildegard offers a clear caveat- while it is acceptable for women to dress as men, it is absolutely forbidden for women to take on men’s roles. Such an

¹⁶ Emma Gatland, *Women from the Golden Legend: Female Authority in a Medieval Castilian Sanctoral* (Suffolk: Tamesis, 2001), 2.

¹⁷ Jerome, *Commentary to the Ephesians*, 16, printed in Jacqueline Murray, "One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?," in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, ed. Lisa Bitel and Felice Lifshitz, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 42.

¹⁸ Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture*, Cambridge History of Medicine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 23.

embodiment of masculine dress with a feminine personality is provided by Saint Marina within the Golden Legend.

The tale of Saint Marina begins with the death of her mother, and her father's subsequent decision to enter a monastery. In order to be able go with him, he ordered Marina to cut off her hair, dress as a boy, and enter the monastery as his son named Marine. On his deathbed some years later, Marina's father convinces her to not reveal herself, but to continue living a pious life among the monks. One day she is required to go and attend to business on behalf of the monastery, and stays overnight at the local inn. Some months later, the innkeeper accuses her of fathering a child with his daughter. Although she is innocent, Marina accepts the punishment handed down by the abbot and lives with the innkeeper's grandchild at the gates of the monastery. Impressed by her humility, the abbot eventually permits her to re-enter the monastery at the request of other monks; however, she continues to be treated poorly. Eventually she dies, and upon her death and the dressing of her body the community discovers her biological sex, which is made more astounding by her tolerance of the punishment she was unjustly served.

Taken at face value, Marina dressing as a man goes against the church's teachings, however, her behaviour while dressed as a man seems to mitigate this transgression. Additionally, this late medieval retelling of the life of Marina paints her as completely passive in her own story. She has no voice within the text, follows the orders of her father and the abbot, and assumes a woman's subservient role, even while dressed as a male.¹⁹ Firstly, she did not choose to dress as a man. Instead, the onus is on her father, as he "entered into a monastery of religion, and changed the habit of his daughter so that she seemed and

¹⁹ Sandra Lowerre, "To Rise Beyond Their Sex: Female Cross-Dressing Saints in Caxton's *Vitas Patrum*," in *Riddles, Knights, and Cross-Dressing Saints: Essays on Medieval English Language and Literature*, ed. Thomas Honegger (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2004), 65.

was taken for his son and not a woman.”²⁰ Towards the time of his death when she could have revealed herself, he forbids it “to be known that she was a woman”.²¹ Given these circumstances, Marina presented herself as an obedient daughter who follows her father’s instructions and performs her feminine role of subservience, despite being dressed as a man. Towards the climax of the story when Marina is accused of fornication and fathering a child, she remains completely passive, chooses not to defend herself, and instead shoulders the responsibility by simply saying “Holy father, I ask of our Lord mercy, for I have sinned”. When the abbot becomes enraged “for the sorrow and the shame”, she is banished “out of the monastery, and dwelled at the gate three years, (where she) lived straightly with a morsel of bread a day.” This passive endurance of her punishment and isolation can be perceived as her feeling that she thinks herself too low to be one of them, and thus does not defend herself to be able to live with the other monks.²² This tale of Marina shows that women dressing as men and continuing to live as men in male communities is acceptable, but only when they do not take on the authoritative role of a man within their society. Even while dressed as a monk, by caring for the child and living in isolation she performs the womanly tasks to which she would have been destined had she not entered the monastery. In this sense, Marina embodies the principles of female subservience that Hildegard’s vision promotes, and the inevitability of the perceived natural order of women in nurturing, deferential roles.²³

Despite Marina’s apparently sexless existence in pursuit of a religious calling, elements of sexuality are introduced to her narrative when she is accused of fathering a child by the innkeeper, who asserts that “the monk Marine had lain by [his daughter] and gotten it”. While this is an unusually overt reference to sexual activity within the hagiographic genre, it draws

²⁰ Jacob De Voragine, *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints as Englished by William Caxton*, ed. F. S. Ellis, vol. III (London: Temple Classics, 1931), 122.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Lowerre, 66.

²³ Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 104.

the reader's attention to notions of Marina's sexuality and virginity, as well as underlining her gender, as the audience knows she cannot have fathered the child. It also supports the claim made by prominent scholars such as Simon Gaunt who asserts that allusions to sexuality, virginity and purity within vitae result in sexuality acting as a crucial element to the construction of sainthood, rather than a renunciation.²⁴ This emphasis on virginity as a form of sexualisation was common throughout the Middle Ages. A body that was praised for being devoted to God's service could not engage in sexual activities, so instead became a form of sexualised chastity by emphasising the constant struggle of the body against sexual desires and the power of the person who overcomes them.²⁵ By Marina continuing to deny her biological sex throughout this trial, scholars have claimed that her virginity is a direct result of the abandonment of her natural gender. However, this fails to account for her adherence to her natural gender and the roles she is culturally bound to embody, even while disguised as a man.²⁶ By dressing as a man and caring for the innkeeper's grandchild, cross-dressing allows Marina to redefine her gender in a way that troubles sexual categories, as well as keeping her firmly in the traditional roles of a woman.²⁷

This dependence on sexuality as an integral aspect of the hagiography is a key element of the vita of Pelagia, an anomaly within the category of cross-dressing saints, in that she did not come to the church a virgin. Instead she begins as an unspeakably beautiful prostitute going by the name of Margaret who converts to Christianity after hearing the priest Nonnun speak. She is baptised and reclaims her birth name, and by purifying herself and casting off

²⁴ Simon Gaunt, "Straight Minds/"Queer" Wishes in Old French Hagiography," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1 (1995): 439.

²⁵ Jennifer D. Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest: Clerical Celibacy, Masculinity, and Reform in England and Normandy, 1066-1300*, ed. Ruth Mazo Karras, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 2.

²⁶ Larissa Tracy, *Women of the Gilte Legende: A Selection of Middle English Saints Lives*, ed. Jane Chance, Library of Medieval Women (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), 18.

²⁷ Frédérique Villemur, "Saintes Et Travesties Du Moyen âGe," *Clio: Femmes, Genre, Histoire* 10 (2005): 14.

her sin, thus becomes a symbol of regeneration.²⁸ Following her baptism, she “fled away by night, without knowledge of any person, and took the habit of a hermit and set herself in a little cell, and there served our Lord in much great abstinence.”²⁹ After her flight, Pelagia took on a male identity, and lived an ascetic life upon the mountain, gaining fame for her convictions. Her biological identity was not discovered until her death, where the monks dressing her for burial “marvelled greatly, and gave thanks unto God, and buried the body much honourably”.³⁰

The legend of Pelagia provides an abundance of commentaries on the status of women, and engaging in transvestitism could benefit them. Prior to becoming a “man of God”, Pelagia is incredibly vulnerable and a notorious sinner. By not simply becoming a Christian woman and serving God in a traditionally feminine way, Caxton comments that the transvestite saints overcome their sexual vulnerability only through male impersonation.³¹ Joyce Salisbury reads into the potential motives of Pelagia by asserting that “she did not dress as a man to become a man, with a man’s frailties and desires. By dressing as a man, she not only transcended her own gender, she transcended both genders. She was an asexual eunuch for Christ.”³² With respect to Pelagia taking on male clothing, Caxton highlights the approval of the monks, and more widely, how it was perceived by society. He portrays female to male transvestism as something to be marvelled at through the reaction of the monks at the discovery of her biological sex, and presents her gender inversion as a sign of dedication to God in order to repent and be more likely to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.³³

²⁸ Salisbury, 102.

²⁹ Jacob De Voragine, *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints as Englished by William Caxton*, vol. IV & V (New York: AMS Press, 1900), 237.

³⁰ Ibid., 238.

³¹ Hotchkiss, 18.

³² Salisbury, 103.

³³ Bullough, 1382.

The presence of sexuality within the vita of Pelagia is undeniable; while sexuality is portrayed in the story of Marina through the accusations of rape and inferences to her purity, Pelagia comes to Nonnun as “vain and variable of courage, and not chaste of body” and spends the rest of her life atoning for this sin.³⁴ However, her overt sexuality renders the reader incapable of attributing gender neutrality to Pelagia’s narrative, which is easier to achieve in lives such as that of Marina.³⁵ The sexual connotations that are embodied in the life of Pelagia also assist in making the story acceptable to all readers; by portraying Pelagia as a sinner in both acts and appearance, she later exemplifies the Christian notion that salvation is possible for anyone.³⁶ This inclusion of sexuality within the text moves beyond the assumed binary of male/female through overcoming this sexual transgression and replacing it with another one- renouncing her sex and impersonating a eunuch.³⁷

The interpretation of Pelagia as a sexless eunuch is avoided in artistic depictions of her. As one of the more popular saints within the Golden Legend, images of her were incorporated into a French translation, *Vies des Saints*, by Jean de Vignay the mid-fourteenth century. Illuminated by Jeanne and Richard de Montbaston between 1338 and 1353, the vitae are accompanied by pictures depicting the saints through various stages of their lives. What sets the vita of Pelagia apart from the rest of the illuminations however, is the fact that she is not shown at the height of her piety; instead, she is depicted prior to her conversion (figure 1). In this image, she is shown clearly dressed as a courtesan with jewels, and wearing a long dress to differentiate her from Nonnus and the other priests that she meets.

³⁴ De Voragine, *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints as Englished by William Caxton*, IV & V, 235.

³⁵ Virginia Burrus, *The Sex Lives of the Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 130.

³⁶ Ibid., 129.

³⁷ Hotchkiss, 18.



Figure 1: Pelagia as a courtesan

Folio 264v in *Vies des Saints*, France, 14th century, Richard and Jeanne de Montbaston

Her luxurious dress and her status as a wealthy woman would have acted as one of the key signifiers in helping medieval audiences identify her.³⁸ This image fully embraces Pelagia's sexuality and bases itself on her sinful past- instead of being shown as the anchoress she became and therefore highlighting her holiness, she is shown as a sinful prostitute. The Montbastons refused to show her in male clothing as she lived out her ascetic life, which implies that they were more comfortable highlighting her sexuality and sin than risking the possibility of her being misidentified. By depicting her in this way the Montbastons showed the explicit link between her sexual nature and eventual cross-dressing, and refrain from showing her as a standard martyr.

The concept of committing the sin of cross-dressing to atone for another sin is continued throughout the vita of Theodora, who uses gender inversion as a form of self-punishment for committing adultery. The story of Saint Theodora opens in Alexandria, with

³⁸ Saisha Grayson, "Disruptive Disguises: The Problem of Transvestite Saints for Medieval Art, Identity, and Identification," *Medieval Feminist Forum* 45, no. 2 (2009): 139.

Theodora committing adultery with a rich man, after being encouraged by the devil. After being enticed by this man, she atones for her sins by waiting until her husband is out of the house, at which point she “cut off her hair, clad her with the clothes of her husband, and went to a monastery of monks”.³⁹ Once living inside the monastery, she goes by the name of Theodorus, and lives peacefully for several years. However, her story begins to echo that of Marina, when Theodorus is accused of impregnating a wench while travelling, and the baby is given to her for her to raise. As readers, we are aware that Theodorus is incapable of impregnating a woman, but she is banished from the monastery for seven years. After “considering her patience”, the abbot took Theodorus in again, however within two years Theodorus died. At the time of her death the abbot had a vision, and “awoke, and astonished, went with his brethren to her cell, and found her there dead. And they entered in and uncovered her, and found that she was a woman.”⁴⁰

This vita begins by depicting females, in keeping with contemporary Christian attitudes, as the morally and biologically inferior sex.⁴¹ Theodora commits adultery as a result of the weakness of her sex, and finds that the only way she can atone for this transgression is to attempt to become a male and perform labour to gain forgiveness.⁴² She earns forgiveness by renouncing her gender while continuing to perform traditionally female duties. When she enters the monastery “she was received, and meekly did all the offices, and her services were acceptable to everyone.”⁴³ After she is accused of fathering a child, she raises said child in a traditional feminine role, mitigating the taboo of her gender inversion and rendering her

³⁹ De Voragine, *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints as Englished by William Caxton*, IV & V, 49.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 52.

⁴¹ Murray, 38.

⁴² De Voragine, *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints as Englished by William Caxton*, IV & V, 50.

⁴³ Ibid., 49.

palatable to a medieval Christian audience, not unlike Marina.⁴⁴ In fact, Theodora is arguably a combination of both Marina and Pelagia's characters. However, like Marina, Theodora functions as a female within a male environment, and her innocence is only ascertained after her death, when her identity as a woman is discovered.⁴⁵ Pelagia and Theodora represent the extremes of femininity through their carnal desires, and both are true transvestites according to the principles of John Anson, as their disguises achieve positive achievements in the face of adversity.⁴⁶

By examining all three of the vitae at once, these similarities can be compiled into a consistent message that *The Golden Legend* conveyed to its audience, namely, that gender is depicted by clothing and behaviour, not by features, thereby making gender a representation and performance rather than an innate part of an individual's nature.⁴⁷ All three saints work together within the text to demonstrate the fluidity of gender. There is always a moment of both gender concealment and later revelation, where the women transition between male and female by way of dress.⁴⁸ Most importantly, all three vitae demonstrate a woman either atoning for previous sins or aiming to achieve a higher holiness by performing a gender transgression, facing hardships such as false accusations, all while renouncing the sin and sexuality of their biological sex.⁴⁹ Rather than becoming eunuchs for the Lord and seeking a sexless existence, sexual transgressions occur that eventually force the women back into their biologically female roles, depicting them as consistently sexed characters, even as they try to discard their gender.

⁴⁴ Stephen Davis, "Crossed Texts, Crossed Sex: Intertextuality and Gender in Early Christian Legends of Holy Women Disguised as Men," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10, no. 1 (2002): 5.; Anson, 14.

⁴⁵ Davis, 26.

⁴⁶ Villemur, 4.

⁴⁷ Robert Clark and Claire Sponsler, "Queer Play: The Cultural Work of Crossdressing in Medieval Drama " *New Literary History* 28, no. 2 (1997): 327.

⁴⁸ Burrus, 13.

⁴⁹ Lowerre, 81.

The infiltration of hagiographies into the lives of lay folk was not only achieved through publications, sermons, and teachings, but also through dramatic interpretations and mystery plays. Miracle plays were performed as dramatic representations of saint's lives from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries throughout western Europe, particularly in England, France, and Italy. Performed in vernacular languages, these dramatizations were a way of making religious drama accessible to a wide audience, rather than the religious drama performed in Latin in the early Middle Ages.⁵⁰

I have not been able to locate any English miracle plays based on the lives of the three cross-dressing saints discussed here, but the existence of an extant French text indicates that their stories were considered appropriate for such performances in the later Middle Ages. *The Miracle Play of Theodora* is a dramatization of the life of Theodora, taken from literary influences such as the *Legenda Aurea* and the *Legende Dorée*.⁵¹ It was performed every year between 1354 and 1389 in Paris and surrounding towns as part of the production *Miracles de Nostre Dame par Personnages*.⁵² *The Miracle Play of Theodora* is one of thirty-six plays in the collection, and tells the audience of Saint Theodora of Alexandria, a woman who takes a lover while her husband is away at war. To prevent this from happening again and to stop the Devil from tempting her, Theodora takes the clothes of a man and runs away to hide and repent in a monastery, which she manages to justify as helping her "to better hear and serve God."⁵³ While working in the monastery she is sent away to run an errand, and during a stay at a local inn is accused of raping and impregnating the innkeeper's daughter. As in the *Legenda Aurea*, Theodora takes the blame for this, is exiled, and raises the child until the

⁵⁰ Diana Lucy Murphy, "Performing Saints' Lives: Medieval Miracle Plays and Popular Culture" (University of Massachusetts Amherst 1998), 2.

⁵¹ Graham Runnalls, "Medieval Trade Guilds and the "Miracles De Nostre Dame Par Personnages", " *Medium Ævum* 39, no. 3 (1970).

⁵² *Miracles De Nostre Dame Par Personnages*, 8 vols., vol. 3 (Paris: Firmin Didot 1876).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 87.

Virgin Mary intervenes and announces her imminent death and salvation to the abbot. Upon her death, her husband hears of the revealing of her biological sex, and takes her place at the monastery, where he stays until his eventual death.

Despite being a religious play and designed to highlight the intervention of the Virgin Mary, there are some allusions to women's sexuality made within the play.⁵⁴ On a smaller scale, the innkeeper's daughter features as what Lynette Muir has called "the scorned woman": she is taken over by the devil, rejected by Theodora so takes up with a stable boy, and then blames her pregnancy of Theodora as revenge for rejecting her.⁵⁵ However, her sexuality in this instance is punished, as the innkeeper promises to punish his daughter for her lies. However, the sexuality of Theodora and her cross-dressing is one of the main focuses of the play. Her original sexuality and sins prompts Theodora to pursue a life devoid of sexual aspects, yet also opened her up to further accusations. While the play takes great pains to avoid referencing her adultery, the audience is presumably aware of the circumstances from the vita being told in church and used in sermons, and given allusions to the nature of her relationship with a man who is not her husband while she says to him "your love dresses my heart."⁵⁶

While the language within the play is not overtly sexual, Theodora does manage to link her cross-dressing to her soul while exclaiming "my beauty, my honour, my body."⁵⁷ The acts of sexual violence which are contained within the play, such as rape and adultery were also viewed as providing an element of voyeurism for the audience, and providing an

⁵⁴ Carol Harvey, *Medieval French Miracle Plays: Seven Falsely Accused Women*, ed. John Scattergood, Dublin Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011), 22.

⁵⁵ Lynette Muir, *Love and Conflict in Medieval Drama: The Plays and Their Legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 108.

⁵⁶ *Miracles De Nostre Dame Par Personnages*, 3, 70.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

interlude for her spiritual perfection before concluding with a virtuous triumph.⁵⁸

In addition to her original marriage and adultery, the play alludes to a sexed body when questioning “for what this deviant monk becomes” in the event of her supposed sexual transgression.⁵⁹ While there is a distinct lack of explicitly sexual language within the play, the deep-rooted popularity of Theodore indicates that that audience was aware of the circumstances of her cross-dressing. Within miracle plays as an entire genre, sexual danger and the risk of promiscuity are one of the basic motifs, designed as a way to reconfirm male sexual dominance.⁶⁰ Instead, the events surrounding her adultery, transvestitism, and accusations of pregnancy and rape confirm that even in miracle plays designed to be performed on religious feast days, there are sexual aspects that assist in making up tropes of the genre.

This sexual misconduct as an association of female to male cross-dressing and transvestitism was consistently sexualised by those who opposed it. They achieved this by continually casting the saints who committed this deviancy in their normative gender roles and leaving them unable to break free of traditionally female duties, such as caring for children and being sexually promiscuous. This view of cross-dressing as a facet of sexual deviancy is made more explicit in real life situations as the next chapter will demonstrate, and shows that no matter the intention of the women, there is always an inherently sexual aspect to the changing of genders in the later medieval western context.

⁵⁸ Harvey, 152.

⁵⁹ *Miracles De Nostre Dame Par Personnages*, 3, 128.

⁶⁰ Harvey, 14.

Chapter Two: Cases of Cross-Dressing in English Courts

This chapter will provide evidence of women who were accused of gender inversion within English civic courts, and the sexual influences upon their punishments. By examining five criminal cases between 1450 and 1519, it is possible to analyse the ways in which English courts perceived the act of cross-dressing, and assess how late medieval English law and society viewed and responded to such behaviour.¹ This chapter will show that the perception of transvestism as laudable, or as a method for improving social status, that existed in the hagiographies discussed in the previous chapter did not transfer to real life instances. Instead English courts saw this act axiomatically as a sexual activity, and consistently prosecuted it as prostitution. This is clearly demonstrated through the language used by the court in the cases of transvestitism, and the punishments handed down to perceived offenders. By examining the following cases between 1450 and 1520, we can analyse the ways in which cross-dressing was received as an inherently sexual activity and a facet of sexual misconduct that was punishable under late medieval English law in order to reinforce normative gender identity.

The motivations of women who donned the clothes of men varied across regions of premodern Europe. Dekker and Pol's extensive survey of eighteenth century cross-dressing in Holland found that cross-dressing was the result of material pressures such as poverty, or emotional influences such as patriotic fervour or even love for another woman.² Their study found that cross-dressing and transvestism was not motivated by erotic activity as seen in England, but rather becoming a man was the only way to stay a pure and chaste virgin.³ French transvestism is best documented in the case of Joan of Arc (discussed in the next

¹ David Cressy, "Gender Trouble and Cross-Dressing in Early Modern England," *Journal of British Studies* 35, no. 4 (1996): 446.

² Dekker and Van de Pol, 2.

³ *Ibid.*, 26.

chapter), and also through the work of scholars such as Natalie Zemon Davis. Rather than women living as men in the form of transvestites however, Davis shows that sexual and gender inversion was a form of cultural play throughout literature, art, and festivals that clarified the natural societal order through the process of reversing it.⁴ In Italy and England, however, the most documented cross-dressers were women who donned male clothing only temporarily are recorded as prostitutes who experienced motivations that were more erotic than practical.⁵ Despite these apparent erotic motivations, Michael Shapiro's survey of early modern English cross-dressers noted that women who cross-dressed were often mistakenly labelled as prostitutes for a different type of sexual transgression: the transgression of using sartorial gender markers to accomplish an objective.⁶

The social history of those motivations are exemplified by the legal records of each case, and in this chapter will be used in conjunction with the literary texts from Chapter One to better understand the phenomenon of cross-dressing outside of a biblical context. The use of legal records to provide an insight into the act of gender inversion is a deeply useful yet slightly flawed exercise. The sources, while invaluable in demonstrating how women who dressed as men were perceived, did not allow the women to present their motives for doing so, and instead act as a commentary on societies views of them. The records give a voice to the people who are generally silenced within medieval records and unrecorded within the medieval record, however within these court records, sex is often discussed in euphemistic and vague ways.⁷ The cases I will be relying on to elucidate the ways in which legal authorities understood and gave meaning to medieval acts of cross-dressing and transvestism unfortunately share this issue of elusive language. While the records show that these women

⁴ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1975), 129-30.

⁵ Bennett and McSheffrey, 15.

⁶ Ruth Mazo Karras, "Telling the Truth About Sex in Late Medieval Paris," *Reading Medieval Studies* 40 (2014): 65.

⁷ Ibid.

were in fact dressing as men, and detail exactly what they were wearing when masquerading as the opposite sex, the court records become vague when they turn to attributing a specific criminal charge to the accused. The cases fail to mention specific crimes beyond examples such as “being a strumpette” or “harlotry”, and many of the women were punished with the same penalties often applied to prostitutes. In her work *Oedipus and the Devil*, Lyndal Roper attributes this categorisation to the reformation of religion, after which there was no category of prostitute, but rather there were only sexually immoral women and women who engaged in illicit sexual relations.⁸ However, in the fifteenth century we can see the reverse of this happening: all women who engaged in sexually immoral behaviour were collectively labelled as prostitutes, despite little evidence of monetary exchange. Roper sums up the underlying mentality behind this labelling succinctly by observing that, “prostitution is a moral state, not a designation of work.”⁹

The only extensive study of these women is Judith Bennett and Shannon McSheffrey’s article “Early, Alien, and Erotic”. The article notes the perceived sexual nature of the prosecutions and the links to prostitution, but because it focuses on providing an overview of cross-dressing in early modern England and the different contexts in which it occurred, it does not examine the cause of this in great detail. While Bennet and McSheffrey attribute the legal prosecutions to “moral oversight of sexual misbehaviour” and note that cross-dressed women who were brought before the courts were also accused as concubines or whores, but they do not explore the relationship between whoredom, prostitution, and sexual misbehaviour in depth.¹⁰

⁸ Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witcraft, Sexuality, and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994), 41.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁰ Bennett and McSheffrey, 2.

Margaret Cotton was arrested at 11 pm outside the district of St Martin le Grand on 5 July 1454, and appeared before a city court the next day. At the time of her arrest she was dressed “in a man’s robe”.¹¹ She had hired the gown from a tailor named Pycard in St Martin, and had borrowed her hat from a servant of her late husband. No punishment for Margaret was recorded, which renders the charge unclear; however this could be due to the deteriorating quality of the document. The relatively early appearance of this case within the chronology suggests that it was not part of a targeted sweep for vagrants and prostitutes. It is possible, therefore, that she was not arrested for prostitution, but for simple gender inversion. However, the fact that she was described as a widow gives some clues as to her perceived sexual disobedience. The gender hierarchy of late medieval society mandated that without the influence of a man, women were wont to behave in sexually deviant ways. Authorities preferred women to be under the control of a master, whether it be husband, father, employer, or failing these, a confessor or brothel-keeper.¹² By noting that she was a widow, and had borrowed her inappropriate apparel from men, the clerk provides an explanation of her behaviour by noting that she has no current master to control her behaviour. The area where she was picked up and associated with, St Martin le Grand, was a district in London adjacent to Westminster Abbey, and as such provided sanctuary to artisans, foreigners (or ‘aliens’), and people who were wanted for breaking the law.¹³

By providing sanctuary and asylum, St Martin le Grand exempted itself from the laws applicable to the rest of the city, including the prohibitions against cross-dressing. In this

¹¹ The London Metropolitan Archives, COC/CC/01/01, *Journal of the Court of the Common Council*, Journal 5, f. 173v.

¹² Ruth Mazo Karras, "Prostitution and the Question of Sexual Identity in Medieval Europe," *Journal of Women's History* 11, no. 2 (1999): 170.; Lyndal Roper, "Discipline and Respectability: Prostitution and the Reformation in Augsburg " *History Workshop Journal* 19 (1985): 7.

¹³ As described in Shannon McSheffrey, "Stranger Artisans and the London Sanctuary of St. Martin Le Grand in the Reign of Henry VIII," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 43, no. 3 (2013).

space, Margaret's cross-dressing could have performed a variety of purposes. Her masculine clothing and men's hat both hid her hair, possibly providing disguise, and suggesting masculinity.¹⁴ By being single, partaking in illicit behaviour and wearing clothing obtained in a notoriously immoral neighbourhood, we can deduce that the courts probably saw Margaret's cross-dressing as sexually disobedient.

The notion of cross-dressing as a form of sexual disobedience instead of being for spiritual or noble reasons can further explored in the case of Trude Garard. On 5 May 1473, Trude was arrested in London for vagrancy and walking through the streets in a "man's array and clothing".¹⁵ Once before the court, she admitted that she was a "bawd and also a common strumpet" and was penalised for being a prostitute.¹⁶ While the clerk did not record whether she was charged with prostitution before the court, the punishment handed down to her was typical with those given to prostitutes. Trude was ordered to go through the city with a "hood on her head and a white rod in her hands from prison to Algate, and from Algate to the pillory in Cornhill."¹⁷ From there, she was to be marched "through to Newgate and to be bounded out of the city" with minstrelsy.¹⁸ This route would take her through the main roads across the city, ensuring that she would be seen and humiliated by a broad community, as the minstrelsy would let citizens know that someone was being paraded through for punishment, while the striped hood identified women as prostitutes and prevented them from being mistaken for respectable women. Sumptuary proscriptions like this were standard practice across late medieval Europe, with aprons used in France, yellow veils in Florence, and striped

¹⁴ Bennett and McSheffrey, 1.

¹⁵ The London Metropolitan Archives, COC/CC/01/01, *Journal of the Court of the Common Council, Journal of the Court of the Common Council*, Journal 8, f. 50r.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Bennett and McSheffrey, 21.

¹⁸ The London Metropolitan Archives, COC/CC/01/01, *Journal of the Court of the Common Council, Journal of the Court of the Common Council*, Journal 8, f. 50r.

armbands in Germany.¹⁹ In the case of her eventual return to London, she was to be sentenced “to the pillory... for the space of an hour and also to have imprisonment for a year and a day”. After this sentence, she was to be expelled from the city, and anyone who could “bring her afore the mayor and aldermen of the said city for the time being have a noble for his labour”, and would be awarded six shillings and nine pence as a reward.²⁰

This punishment testifies to the fact that her judges identified her principal crime as prostitution, with cross-dressing as merely an accessory to this felony. The attitude to cross-dressing within the court is exemplified by that it barely warranting a mention, instead Trude’s crime was described as “being a bawd and also a common strumpet”, rendering her cross-dressing a physical manifestation of her sexual deviance. Notably, there is no actual evidence of her prostitution. No clients are mentioned, no men were picked up with her, her prices and preferred customers were not discussed. The lack of evidence of actual prostitution and the reference to male clothing then suggests that gender inversion, or the wearing of “men’s array and clothing” was a sexual matter that should be treated as such, and a factor in wider sexual deviance. This punishment became typical for women who were found to have cross-dressed in later years; by 1489 it had been copied into the *Liber Albus*, and was used as a precedent in the case of Agnes Hopton in 1537.²¹

In the early 1490s Herman Ryng, a Hansa merchant from Cologne who lived in London was brought before the Court of Chancery. In his petition to the Lord Chancellor he complained that Joan White, a “singlewoman” by his understanding had offered herself to

¹⁹ Nicholas Terpstra, "Locating the Sex Trade in the Early Modern City: Space, Sense, and Regulation in Sixteenth Century Florence," in *Mapping Space, Sense, and Movement in Florence : Historical Gis and the Early Modern City*, ed. Nicholas Terpstra and Colin Rose (Oxford: Taylor and Francis 2016), 108. ; Roper, "Discipline and Respectability: Prostitution and the Reformation in Augsburg " 9.

²⁰ The London Metropolitan Archives, COC/CC/01/01, *Journal of the Court of the Common Council*, Journal 8, f. 50r.

²¹ Bennett and McSheffrey, 23.

The *Liber Albus* was fifteenth century compilation of customary law, and set out the standard punishments for prostitution, whoredom, and bawdry.

him while he was camped in the steelyard.²² Herman complained that she was “offering herself unto your paid orator to be at his commandment”, and noted her unusual boldness. He also complained that her master, Stephen Reygate, had also harassed Herman and that he knew that Joan was “wont to dance and make revels in her master’s house, sometimes in men’s clothing and sometimes naked”. Unlike the other cases in this chapter, Herman and Joan did not appear before the Court of the Common Council, but instead. Instead they appeared in front of the Lord Chancellor of the Court of Chancery in London, where Herman was defending himself for his actions against Joan. This meant that the authorities had not arrested Joan, but rather Stephen brought the case against Herman, who was given the opportunity to defend his actions. In response to finding himself propositioned by Joan, Herman rejected her. Nevertheless, she persisted, and Herman had her whipped for insubordination. When her injuries resulted in her being unable to work for her master, Stephen sued Herman for trespass.

Both Stephen and Herman were known to the London courts at the time of this petition. Herman appeared in a number of legal records between 1490-1499, and was accused of sexual misconduct with four different women in the London Commissary Courts, and this incident with Joan White was the first.²³ However, Herman recovered from these scandals and went on to become a diplomat at the court of Henry VIII.²⁴ Stephen lived in St Martin le Grand which added to his shady character, worked as a ship-wright and wine-drawer, and was notorious from the 1460s onwards for fixing juries and working as a forger.²⁵

Petitions before civic courts, where each person was permitted to make his or her case, were often resolved in favour of the person who was most credible and provided the most

²² The National Archives, London, C1/158/47, The Court of Chancery, http://aalt.law.uh.edu/AALT7/ChP/C1no158/IMG_0084.htm

²³ Bennett and McSheffrey, 21.

²⁴ J.S. Brewer, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 110.

²⁵ Bennett and McSheffrey, 9.

objectively truthful and believable story.²⁶ By labelling Joan a singlewoman, Herman immediately denounced as a prostitute, whose cross-dressing was simply a symptom of sexual misbehaviour. In the late fifteenth century *singlewoman* was commonly used as a euphemism for prostitution, and the concept of ‘singleness’ was also linked to prostitution. This was due to two key reasons. Extramarital sexual activity was easily linked with whoredom. When a woman was perceived as sexually corrupt in moral terms, it was very easy for her to be seen as sexually immoral in commercial terms. This is because a prostitute is a certain type of person and not just someone who commits a certain type of act. Prostitution was also linked to singleness and singlewomen because so many singlewoman used this method to support themselves.²⁷

Joan’s credibility was immediately put in doubt by Herman outing her as a prostitute. The more probable and plausible a story was, the more instructive it was for the courts.²⁸ As Joan had admitted that she had “the intent to find a man ... for to make him lose money”, it is possible to deduce that the prime motivation for her cross-dressing to was provoke male sexual desire.²⁹ This sexual corruption (in the eyes of the court at least, who used the tales of depravity within the court for social reconciliation) would indicate that if she was corrupt enough to be a “singlewoman”, then she was corrupt enough to cross-dress.³⁰ This shows a strong link between cross-dressing and sexual corruption, by which it was commonly

²⁶ David Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England: Tales of Discord and Dissension* (New: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1.

²⁷ Judith Bennett and Amy Froide, "A Singular Past," in *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800*, ed. Judith Bennett and Amy Froide (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 16.

²⁸ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 113.

²⁹ Bennett and McSheffrey, 9.

³⁰ Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France*, 113.

assumed, and correct, in this case at least, that women donned men's clothes to titillate men and provide erotic pleasure.³¹

Elizabeth Chekyn was the most scandalous woman included in this series. She was “by her own confession lawfully attainted before my lord the mayor of this city” and “his aldermen of the same that she is a common harlot and strumpet and also was now lately taken vagrant and walking by the streets of this city in a priest's array and clothing, in rebuke and reproach of the order of the priesthood”.³² By her own confession Elizabeth was a prostitute, and at the time of her arrest was found in bed having “committed the horrible and detestable sin” with a young priest by the name of William Lewes, as well as another unnamed priest, leaving no doubt as to the sexual nature of her activities.³³ The nature of her arrest, as well as her relationship with the men whose clothes she borrowed immediately lends a sexual undertone to any possible interpretation of her cross-dressing. As a punishment for her crimes, Elizabeth received the same punishment as Trude Garard, the traditional penalty for prostitution. She was sentenced to parade through the city wearing a striped hood carrying a white rod. Due to the particularly heinous nature of her crime and violating class as well as gender barriers, Elizabeth additionally wore “on her breast a letter of H of yellow woollen cloth in sign and token of a harlot and on her left shoulder a picture of a woman in a priest gown”.³⁴ However, the public commentary of priest's sexuality was unwelcome; after 1521 all punishments of this type were stopped, and civic officials were persuaded to cover up crimes that involved sexual misconduct of the clergy.³⁵ The close link between Elizabeth's sexual misconduct with members of the clergy and her cross-dressing in their clothes seem

³¹ Bennett and McSheffrey, 13.

³² The London Metropolitan Archives, COC/CC/01/01, *Journal of the Court of the Common Council, Council*, Journal 11, f. 264r.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Bennett and McSheffrey, 1.

³⁵ Martin Ingram, *Carnal Knowledge: Regulating Sex in England, 1470–1600* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 261.

inextricably linked. While the clerks of the court recorded that she intended to disgrace the priesthood, her method of achieving this was through her own sexual misbehaviour.³⁶

The final case within this series is the case details the transgressions of four women: Margery Brett, Margery Smyth, Margery Tyler, and Elizabeth Thomson. These women were arrested as part of a wider cleansing of idle, vagrant, and suspicious people ordered by the crown in June and July of 1519.³⁷ The four women were all accused of being “strumpets” and “common harlots of their bodies”, thus associating their gender inversion with sexual misconduct and immorality.³⁸ They were brought before “the aldermen of this city” but were not charged with breaking a specific law. Rather, the officials stated that they had “cut their hair like unto men’s heads with the intent to go in men’s clothing at times when their lewd pleasure is, to the great displeasure of god and abomination to the world”. This accusation clearly demonstrates that the motives of the women were perceived to be sexual. The invocation of divine displeasure further indicates a perception that the women had broken the wishes of God that were put forth in the Scripture. However, the four were not punished for violating canon law and the standards set out in Deuteronomy, rather they received the same penalty awarded to prostitutes charged with plying their trade. This punishment is consistent with the previous cases taken from the *Journal of the Court of the Common Council*.

The three Margerys were to be led with minstrelsy from prison to Aldgate and then to the pillory at Cornhill, dressed in men’s bonnets and without a kerchief, with a striped hood about their shoulders, and with white rods in their hands; at Cornhill, the cause of their punishment to be proclaimed; then, they were to be led through Cheapside to Newgate and expelled forever from London. If they returned to London, they were to be put on the pillory

³⁶ Karras, 78.

³⁷ Bennett and McSheffrey, 22.

³⁸ The London Metropolitan Archives, COC/CC/01/01, *Journal of the Court of the Common Council*, Journal 12, f. 10r.

for an hour on three market days, and imprisoned for a year and a day. Elizabeth, who was convicted of being a common harlot, was given the same punishment but without the wearing of the men's bonnet. This shows that the punishment was standard across the board, for all women accused of prostitution.³⁹ Despite this penalty and the label of harlotry, the records make no reference to any type of prostitution. Unlike previous cross-dressers like Trude and Joan there was no listing of any clients or people whom the four may have corrupted. While Elizabeth and the three Margerys may have borne the label of prostitutes for their cross-dressing behaviour and sexual transgressions in this manner, there is no other evidence of them actually accepting clients or performing sexual favours for money.

However, this case provides an invaluable source for discussing the motives of the women, or rather, the motives of the women as determined by the court clerks. The manuscript shows that the four women did not simply dress as men. Nor did they dress as men with the intention of achieving a higher moral goal, such as becoming closer to God or donning male clothes as a disguise as commonly depicted within contemporary literature. According to the courts, these women dressed as men to satisfy their "lewd pleasure". Despite this being the court's assumption, there are numerous possible motivations for women such as these for cutting their hair. While it is true that the women may have cut their hair in this masculine style to attract more clients, it is also possible that they might have hoped to move more easily around the streets, effectively donning the clothes as a disguise. Bennett and McSheffrey also hypothesise that it could be a combination of the two, or the women may have simply enjoyed what Halberstam has labelled "female masculinity".⁴⁰ Their condemnation by the courts simply reiterates that when not confined to literary culture, cross-dressing and gender inversion was perceived as a sexually transgressive act tantamount

³⁹ Bennett and McSheffrey, 2.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 17.

to prostitution.

In combination, these cases tell us that cross-dressed women, who were brought before late medieval English courts, were primarily accused of being either harlots, singlewomen, strumpets, or bawds.⁴¹ However, while the court documents do not record the exact details of the clothes they wore, these articles of clothing were usually the main indication of their profession. Even when there was no evidence of prostitution such as their customers, the punishments handed down to these women indicate that in the eyes of the church and courts, they were equal to prostitutes. All five cases demonstrate that cross-dressing was an inherently sexual act. Even when there is no evidence of sexual misconduct or monetary exchange taking place, the sentence handed down was congruous with a prostitution charge. While Bennett and McSheffrey, the main authors on these women recognise that prostitution was sometimes seen as sexual, they do not examine the relationship between cross-dressing, prostitution, and sexual misconduct. They claim that the main issue the women were arrested and brought before the courts was that they were “common strumpets”, and that the cross-dressing was a mere side issue.⁴² However, there is very little evidence of actual money changing hands in the modern sense of prostitution with the exception of Elizabeth Chekyn. In premodern Europe, prostitution was not an occupation. Rather it was the state of a woman and her soul. Or, more precisely, any woman perceived as transgressing her sex and gender could be labelled a prostitute.⁴³

These five cases indicate two main concepts about cross-dressing within medieval England. First, they show that despite the prohibitions set out against gender inversion in scripture, cross-dressing was not a crime but instead was a facet of sexual misconduct, as

⁴¹ Ibid., 2.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Karras, "Prostitution and the Question of Sexual Identity in Medieval Europe," 163.

demonstrated by the charges against the women being prostitution. Second, they demonstrate that while women cross-dressed for a variety of reasons—such as gaining sexual attention or mocking the church and clergy—none practised gender inversion for the reasons set out by scholars and within modern literature on medieval gender inversion. Instead, the charges indicate the prosecution believed that there was a sexual element at play in all cases, which complicates existing scholarship on the subject.

Chapter Three: Joan of Arc, *la Pucelle*

In 1426, a young girl was presented to the military commanders and French royal court at Orleans. She claimed that she could help lead them to victory against the Burgundians and the English. This girl, who was so unusual that she had originally been turned away from Vaucouleurs one year earlier, was dressed in male clothes. These garments, which helped bring about her fame and contributed to her eventual execution, make Joan of Arc as the best-documented transvestite of the late Middle Ages.¹ Despite this unusual privilege, which has resulted in a rich historiography, modern scholars have largely considered her transvestitism as a symbol of her religious fervour, and have not often considered the implications for her sexuality.²

Rather than covering well-known terrain, such as the reasons for her execution, in this chapter I will examine Joan's experiences and the meanings that she and others gave to them, through the lens of the argument presented in the first two chapters, which demonstrated how cross-dressing was sexualised as a way to fit the behaviour in normative gender roles in the late Middle Ages. By doing so we can view the trial of Joan of Arc through a lens that establishes that her cross-dressing was perceived by the English as an inherently sexual activity focused on her femininity, and consequently, her sexual immorality/transgressive sexuality.

The structure of the inquisitorial trial allows two sets of medieval opinions on female-to-male transvestitism to be presented. On one hand, the opinions of Joan's English captors are presented through the framing of questions put to her. On the other, Joan's beliefs appear in her answers to these questions, although our knowledge of them is constrained by the

¹ Susan Crane, "Clothing and Gender Definition: Joan of Arc," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 26, no. 2 (1996): 297.

² Ibid.

inquisitorial format itself. Joan began wearing male clothing quite early in her mission, on her departure from Vaucouleurs in 1428. In her trial of condemnation, “she confessed that on her departure from the town of Vaucouleurs, she was dressed in the clothing of a man, carrying a sword that Robert de Baudricourt had given to her, without any other arms.”³ From this point until her death, Joan refused all female clothing, thus providing the basis for the charge of relapsed heresy. When questioned about her cross-dressing during her condemnation trial, Joan initially deflected the issue during the second public examination, merely stating that “it was necessary that she changed her clothing for that of a man”, and that her counsellor had advised her well.⁴ However, by the third public examination two days later, she asserted that she would not take female clothes, and that she was “content with this (her male clothes) since it pleases God that I wear it.”⁵

Within the context of the trial, Joan veers between two mentalities. She initially stated that her dressing as a man was more practical, as “it was more lawful and convenient to wear male clothing when she was among men, than to wear the clothing of a woman.”⁶ Following this train of thought, she trivialised her cross-dressing, claiming, “that the clothing was such a small matter, the least thing” and should not be paid attention to.⁷ Yet at the same time as trivialising her transvestitism she drew a great deal of attention to it by claiming that she cross-dressed as a result of divine intervention. When “asked if she believed that she had done well in taking male clothing, she replied that everything that she had done, by the command of the Lord, she believed had been done well and she expected a good guarantor

³ Pierre Tisset, *Procès De Condemnation De Jeanne D’arc*, vol. II (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1970), 52.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁶ Tisset (ed.), *Procès de condamnation*, I, p. 395. Translation printed in Craig Taylor, *Joan of Arc, La Pucelle: Selected Sources Translated and Annotated*, Medieval Sources Online (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 220.

⁷ Tisset, II, 74.

and aid for it.”⁸ By attributing something generally seen as unlawful to the command of God, Joan places her cross-dressing at the heart of the trial and allowed for English judgements surrounding her spirituality and sexuality to be debated.

Joan fully embraced her status as a virgin by labelling herself *la Pucelle*, creating an identity for herself around her sexed and decidedly female body. By labelling herself *la pucelle* (the maid) and not *la vierge* (the virgin) Joan framed her virginity as a secular life stage that could change, and not a dedicated lifelong status.⁹ This status as *la Pucelle* was the key to her cross-dressing being acceptable. The virginity of Joan of Arc was consistently referred to throughout the duration of the trial: indeed, her ability to cross-dress in an acceptable way depended on her perceived chastity. In fifteenth-century Anglo-French culture the only reason women had to be on the battlefield was as a camp follower, or prostitute.¹⁰ The chastity that Joan maintained, ordained by God, clearly identified her as neither and lent her the authority to lead the French into battle. Joan’s virginity and chastity were linked culturally to her visions through hagiographic traditions, which allowed the soldiers to follow her lead and submit to her authority without their masculinity being compromised.¹¹ Joan’s chastity and relationship with God provided the basis for her cross-dressing, something that was repeatedly disputed by the English.

The English response to Joan’s cross-dressing was one of hostility, and they considered her transgression to be unlawful following the opinions of some theologians presented in Chapter One, despite theologians such as Jerome being far more tolerant.¹² This is evident through her inquisitors questioning whether she perceived her act as lawful, and the court

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Crane, 305.

¹⁰ Deborah Fraioli, *Joan of Arc: The Early Debate* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000), 76.

¹¹ Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages*, Routledge Research in Medieval Studies (London: Routledge, 2000), 39.

¹² Bonnie Bullough and Vern Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 45.

“asked if she believed that she would have been delinquent or in mortal sin for taking a woman’s dress”.¹³ French opinions on her transvestitism were exemplified by scholars such as Jean Gerson. In his defence of Joan, in *De mirabilia Victoria*, he claimed that Joan was not breaking the law set out in scripture, but instead it was only prohibited “to wear indecent clothes which do not comply with conditions required to keep one’s virtue, which command us to weigh all circumstances and to consider what time, necessity and purpose ... which are taken into consideration of the judgement.”¹⁴ In sharp contrast to this, the inquisitors in her trial consistently asked whether she perceived her act of cross-dressing to be lawful, and continually asked whether she had been asked by others to resume her female dress.¹⁵

Rather than accepting mentalities such as Jean Gerson’s and attributing her cross-dressing to matters of practicality, the English believed her cross-dressing was attached to her gender. During the fourth public examination on 27 February, she was asked “if she had greatly wanted to be a man when she had to come to France, she replied that she had answered this elsewhere.”¹⁶ However, once we revisit the previous interrogations, it becomes evident that if she did indeed answer previously like she claimed it was not documented. This exemplifies the problematic nature of inquisitorial trials; only the answers to specific questions asked are retained, and not all comments are recorded.

When examining the specific questions asked throughout Joan’s trials, certain patterns appear. The language used when discussing her transvestitism contrasts to the language surrounding the voices she claimed to hear. For example, in the second public examination the examiners use the phrase “she said” when talking about her voices, yet use “she confessed” that she wore the clothing of a man when departing from Vaucouleurs.¹⁷ Despite

¹³ Tisset, II, 93.

¹⁴ *De mirabilia Victoria* (May 14, 1429), printed in Fraioli, 211.

¹⁵ Tisset, II, 93.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

her voices comprising a large element of the reasons behind her execution, her voices and her male clothing are mentioned in equal measure in the second and third public examination, despite their focus on her voices and visions. Throughout the course of the trial Joan's transvestitism was the second most mentioned topic. Throughout the fifth and sixth public examination, her cross-dressing is questioned fourteen times, when the inquisitors were meant to be questioning her visions of the saints. The third examination mentions her cross-dressing three times and equates her 'wishing to be a man' with the voices she hears through its inclusion. The relationship between her voices and transvestitism was further reinforced throughout the fourth examination, when Joan was asked whether God gave the command for her to take men's clothing.¹⁸

This preoccupation with her cross-dressing as seen in the trial was also demonstrated in English correspondence. Contextually, the issue of gender featured prominently throughout the Hundred Years War, as displayed through the interwoven histories of Anglo- French relations and English royal succession through the later Middle Ages.¹⁹ This issue of gender was displayed in the writings of the English throughout her trial, where her preparatory hearing was prefaced with the statement that "report has now reached many places that this woman, utterly disregarding the honour due the female sex, throwing off the bridle of modesty, and forgetting all feminine decency, wore the disgraceful clothing of men, a shocking and vile monstrosity."²⁰ This report shows that cross-dressing was perceived by her interrogators as being unfeminine and immodest, which allows for links to be made between her cross-dressing and the perception of this as behaviour engaged in by sexually immodest women, as seen in the second chapter.

Despite the title of *la Pucelle* granting her authority and defending her against English

¹⁸ Ibid., 68.

¹⁹ Nancy Warren, "French Women and English Men: Joan of Arc, Margaret of Anjou, and Christine De Pizan in England, 1445-1540," *Exemplaria* 16, no. 2 (2004).

²⁰ Daniel Hobbins, *The Trial of Joan of Arc* (USA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 33.

claims of sexual misconduct, Joan's claims to virginity also resulted in her being consistently sexualised as seen in the vitae of Chapter One. Late medieval theology considered chastity a sexualised act. In order to renounce sexual acts and desire successfully, one first needed to have experienced the sexualised body.²¹ This mentality was established while mandating clerical chastity, as it was believed that those who constantly fought against sexual temptation, which made them stronger and more masculine than those who had never experienced sexual desire.²² This relationship between masculinity and virginity partially excused Joan's cross-dressing. By embracing her chastity through the identity of la Pucelle, she could achieve gender parity by transforming spiritually into a man as Jerome suggested, rendering her cross-dressing acceptable.²³ However, the masculinity that Joan's virginity allowed her to adopt had its limits. She walked a fine line between cross-dressing and transvestitism. Despite changing her clothes and taking an assertive and authoritative—that is, a masculine—role in society, Joan had no interest in changing her gender or passing as a man.²⁴ Instead, she maintained traits of her traditional femininity as demonstrated in the only extant, contemporary artwork of her.

Clement de Fauquembergue, the secretary of the Parlement of Paris drew this image on 10 May 1429, after the victory at Orléans. The sketch depicts a distinctly feminine Joan. She wears a dress that accentuates her breasts, and is pictured with long hair that detracts from her masculine characteristics of carrying a sword and a banner. This image idealises Joan's femininity, in way that did not accord with actuality. De Fauquembergue had never seen Joan,

²¹ Jennifer D. Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest: Clerical Celibacy, Masculinity, and Reform in England and Normandy, 1066-1300*, ed. Ruth Mazo Karras, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 33.

²² Ibid.

²³ Dyan Elliott, "Tertullian, the Angelic Life, and the Bride of Christ," in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, ed. Lisa Bitel and Felice Lifshitz, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 16.

²⁴ Patricia Nell Warren, "Was Joan of Arc Genetically Male?," *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* 16, no. 1 (2009): 24.

but reports had circulated surrounding her notoriety as a cross-dresser who had cut her hair above her ears in contradiction of Scripture.



The first surviving picture of Joan of Arc is a sketch by the secretary of the Parliament of Paris, Clement de Fauquembergue, in the margin of the official register he kept for daily events on May 10, 1429, after Paris received word of [Joan's great victory at Orleans](#).

This sketch and idealisation of Joan's femininity is endemic of perceptions of women who took on masculine roles within society. Bullough claims that women were encouraged by the church to adopt masculine ways of life such as clothes and thinking, and that this was a sign of strength. He also argues that women could use these methods to raise their status without any threat to society.²⁵ However, Joan of Arc contradicts this theory. By adopting masculine clothing and a role in conflict, she was forced back into femininity with her sex and sexuality constantly called into question. The long, feminine hair that features in the above sketch, was also imagined by the English and her inquisitors as appropriate to a woman and so Joan's shearing of her own hair was seen as contradicting biblical injunctions. 1 Corinthians states that women should "nourish her hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is

²⁵ Vern Bullough, "On Being a Male in the Middle Ages," in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare Lees (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 33.

given to her for a covering”, and to go against this is to go against nature.²⁶ The charges against Joan made specific mention of her cutting off her hair, connecting it to her male dress:

Item, that this woman is also apostate, both because she has had the hair that God gave her for a veil cut off for an evil purpose, and also because, to the same end, she has abandoned the clothing of a woman and is dressed like a man.²⁷

By attributing her shorn hair and male dress to an immoral purpose, the relationship between appearance and morality is strengthened. Certain similarities appear between Joan and the women who were accused of prostitution in Chapter Two, in that medieval women who cast off their gender signifiers were accused of sexual immorality. This was because late medieval thought believed that the exterior mimicked the interior, and that subversion of this relationship was unnatural.²⁸ This link between the internal soul and the external body provided the courts with the justification that they needed for Joan’s execution. Joan was executed on a charge of relapsed heresy, for refusing to renege on her visions and relinquish her male dress. Marina Warner and Susan Crane both identify her male dress as a visible symbol of these visions.²⁹ Throughout the transcript of her trial Joan’s male attire and voices were inextricably linked. Questions surrounding her visions of the saints consistently come back to what both they and she were wearing, as well as their commands for her to dress as a man.

²⁶ Douay Rhiems 11:14-15

²⁷ Tisset, II, 363.

²⁸ Caroline Walker-Bynum, "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 31, no. 1 (1980).

²⁹ Crane, 300.; Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism* (California University of California Press, 1999).

Dressing as a man was prosecuted as a sexual crime as a way of the English reinforcing the natural order as demonstrated in Chapter Two. By violating not only canon law but also sumptuary laws, Joan had upset the social hierarchy that was crucial to societal cohesion in the English-ruled regions of late medieval France. Sumptuary laws emphasized the symbolic significance of clothing, which maintained and reinforced both individual and collective identities, as well as differentiating between social groups.³⁰ By using clothing to distinguish herself, Joan both created her identity as la Pucelle and flouted the rules set by the English about how women should dress. She explained her dress without any moral or gendered implications, by simply stating that “it was necessary for me to change my clothes”³¹. However, the English perceived this as a moral slight, declaring her clothes a “shameful and immodest outfit, against natural decency, and hair cut in a circle in a masculine fashion, against all decency of womankind” which was in turn prosecuted against as a form of sexual immorality.³² However, Joan’s gender violations, her casting off of “womankind,” did not only occur through her transvestitism. Her quest to be pure and virtuous was an entirely masculine one: an action which she used to disrupt the social order by performing it better than other males.³³ Christine de Pizan, writing in Burgundian territory, commented upon this. In her work *Dite de Jehanne D’arc*, Pizan supported Joan’s claims to divine intervention, and asserting that, “it is He who guides her and who has given her a heart greater than that of any man.”³⁴

Joan’s status as a virgin was consistently questioned and sexualised by the English. The notion of virginity as a gender and form of sexuality has been well examined by a variety of

³⁰ Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, "Reconciling the Privilege of a Few with the Common Good: Sumptuary Laws in Medieval and Early Modern Europe," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 39, no. 3 (2009): 599.

³¹ Susan Crane, "Clothing and Gender Definition: Joan of Arc," *ibid.* 26, no. 2 (1996): 301.

³² Tisset, II, 342.

³³ Warner, 133.

³⁴ Christine de Pizan, *Ditié De Jehanne D’arc* (Oxford: Society for the Study of Mediaeval Languages and Literature Oxford, 1977), 33.

scholars. Supporting the argument presented in Chapter One that virginity was a method of sexualising the body, Maud Burnett McInerney has suggest that virginity is a trait that feminises the body.³⁵ This is consistent with the way that Joan's cross-dressing was presented. Rather than attempting to abandon her sex and achieve greatness through the adoption of a masculine identity, Joan never posed as a man. Instead, Joan subverted gender roles while continuing to identify as a female, la Pucelle, which resulted in her body continually being sexualised in two main ways: her consistent presentation of a masculine form, and through her use of cross-dressing as a way of protecting her virginity. Both of these factors are evident in the transcript of her condemnation and nullification trials. The emphasis on virginity, femininity, and Joan's carnal nature was central to the trial of condemnation, echoing the prosecutions seen in Chapter Two. Joan's womanhood was consistently in question throughout the proceedings. For example, her squire was requested to testify on the frequency of her menstruation. This concept of womanhood and chastity was also explored through the testing of Joan's virginity and sex. Joan would be examined twice by midwives to attempt to dispute her claims to chastity: once by the French ladies of Gaucourt and Trèves, and once by the English. The English examination was carried out in Rouen, in the January of 1432 by the Duchess of Bedford. All declared that her virginity was intact and that she was indeed a woman.³⁶ However, in both cases, evidence was not given until her trial of rehabilitation, demonstrating that her virginity was a redeeming feature.³⁷ Despite the level of interest that Joan's clothing has received as a protective measure, male dress as a safeguard against rape was not mentioned until her rehabilitation trial. Her cross-dressing was used to

³⁵ Maud Burnett McInerney, *Hildegard of Bingen: A Book of Essays* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 2014), 147.

³⁶ Anke Bernau, "Saint, Witch, Maid or Whore?": Joan of Arc and History Writing," in *Medieval Virginites*, ed. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, and Sarah Salih (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 213.

³⁷ Régine Pernoud, *Joan of Arc: By Herself and Her Witnesses*, trans. Edward Hyams (New York: Scarborough House, 1982), 168-69.

protect her virginity, and recent scholarship has suggested virginity as her possible gender, thus intertwining the two. A third gender is often used to describe people who have deviated from the common gender roles.³⁸ Joan's cross-dressing also served similar goals to the transvestite saints examined in the first chapter. Yet, in this case there was a crucial difference, because Joan never denied being a woman, but was able to enjoy the liberties and safety of a man. In this way, Joan both transcended her sex, and made it inherent to her persona.³⁹

Joan used her virginity, encapsulated in her identity as la Pucelle, as a point of command to the English. However, the English in turn read her behaviour as sexually deviant. In her first letter to the English, in March 1429, Joan linked her cross-dressing and virginity to divine intervention, and ordered the English to "surrender to the Pucelle, who has been sent here by God."⁴⁰ By claiming that she had been sent by God, Joan immediately took the offensive and defended herself and her typically masculine actions, thus providing an excuse for her cross-dressing. This title of la Pucelle both granted her the authority to lead an army through her masculinity, and indemnified her against claims of misconduct in a letter to Nicole de Giresme.⁴¹ This letter strengthened the relationship between her masculine role and sexualised virginity by attributing it to God. The author claimed, "Joan, I say, the Pucelle, clothed in the dress of a shepherdess, and yet manlike, has come by the command of Almighty God to the King."⁴² By attributing her cross-dressing to her virginity and divine intervention, the author initiated Joan in the sexualised sanctity expressed in the first chapter

³⁸ Jacqueline Murray, "One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?," in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, ed. Lisa Bitel and Felice Lifshitz, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 35.

³⁹ Warner, 131

⁴⁰ Joan of Arc's letter to the English (22 March 1429). Tisset (ed.), *Procès de condamnation*, I, pp. 221–2. Printed in Taylor, 74.

⁴¹ The conclusions of the Poitiers investigation (March–April 1429). Quicherat (ed.), *Procès de condamnation*, III, pp. 391–2.

⁴² Fragment of a letter to Nicole de Giresme (April 1429?). Quicherat (ed.), *Procès de condamnation*, V, pp. 98–100.

regarding the transvestite saints, which was crucial to the construction of holiness within the later Middle Ages.⁴³

However, the English characterized Joan's cross dressing as sexually deviant. This is examined in Deborah Fraioli's book *Joan of Arc: The Early Debate*. Rather than following the trend of focusing on the condemnation and nullification trials to discuss Joan, Fraioli concentrates on letters from the English and works by scholars such as Jean Gerson to examine the contemporary attitudes towards Joan. *The English Reply to Virgo Puellares* encapsulated the English attitudes towards cross-dressing displayed in Chapter Two. The English described Joan with terms such as "insolent whore" and "pythoness," and her claims to chastity and virginity are rebuked with her being labelled as a "prostitute disguised as a virgin."⁴⁴

On the occasion of the delivery of a letter to the English, Regine Pernoud documented the insults thrown at Joan as all pertaining to her sexuality, such as "trollop", "cowherd", and "the Armagnac's whore".⁴⁵ Despite her distinct lack of sexual impropriety and evidence of her physical intactness, this demonstrates that the English perceived the cross dressing as a manifestation of sexual misconduct, despite a distinct lack of evidence. These insults strongly echo the language used in the court transcripts of Chapter Two, using words such as 'trollop' and 'whore' when the only evidence of sexual disobedience was cross-dressing. The use of these phrases to describe Joan's behaviour demonstrates that even when no evidence of sexual impropriety existed, the English chose language that assigned sexual immortality to her.

⁴³ Simon Gaunt, "Straight Minds/"Queer" Wishes in Old French Hagiography," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1 (1995): 439.

⁴⁴ Fraioli, 67.

⁴⁵ Régine Pernoud, *The Retrial of Joan of Arc: The Evidence for Her Vindication*, trans. J. M. Cohen (Colorado: Ignatius Press, 2007), 165.

Despite Joan's masculine actions and clothing being attributed to necessity, she was still perceived by the English soldiers as being sexually available.⁴⁶ Her clothing sexualised her, due to its purpose being to protect her from sexual advances. By wearing male clothes outside of areas where it was deemed practical, such as in the courtrooms, Joan sexualised her cross-dressing.⁴⁷ However, her nullification trial provides another defence for her cross-dressing, by instead attributing her cross-dressing as a method of protecting her virginity.⁴⁸

There is oft-documented evidence that Joan slept in her armour in the field to discourage sexual assault while she was camped with her army. This method was attributed to the saints in her vision, who promised her that she would be led into heaven if she protected her virginity.⁴⁹ Continually sleeping in her armour allowed Joan to make cross-dressing a statement of her virginity, as the armour prevented sexual assault.⁵⁰ The trial itself was also a threat to her virginity through potential rape by her English captors. The standard procedure for inquisitorial trials was for women to be guarded by nuns in order to prevent threats of rape and abuse, however this was purportedly violated during Joan's case; there as frequent accusations of sexual assault by her guards.⁵¹

This attitude of cross-dressing as a facet of sexual immorality by the English would be continued for at least another hundred years. In Shakespeare's *Henry VI*, Joan was depicted as a mistress of the Bastard of Orleans, and claimed to be pregnant in order to avoid her death sentence.⁵² This association of sex with Joan's cross-dressed body was not something only

⁴⁶ Régine Pernoud and Marie-Véronique Clin, *Joan of Arc: Her Story*, trans. Jeremy duQuesnay Adams (London: Phoenix Press, 1998), 20.

⁴⁷ Crane, 302.

⁴⁸ Helmut Puff, "Cross-Dressing," in *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Margaret Schaus (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2006).

⁴⁹ Article 9, the condemnation trial

⁵⁰ Allen Williamson, "Primary Sources and Context Concerning Joan of Arc's Male Clothing," *Historical Association for Joan of Arc Studies* (2006): 2.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵² Peggy McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 37.

done by the English; while attempting to use her virginity as a way to make her cross-dressing acceptable, Joan instead sexualised her body and cross-dressing. Instead of inhabiting a third gender as a woman dressed as a man, Joan's innate femininity and refusal to hide her gendered body threatened the masculinity of the men around her.⁵³ The trial of Joan of Arc exemplifies English attitudes towards cross-dressing and transvestitism. Such practices were acceptable as long as women remembered their inferior place within society, as demonstrated by the transvestite saints of the first chapter. However, when they moved into a typically male sphere, or began to extend the authority given to them by their biological sex, they were instead relegated into a sexualized position where their cross-dressing instead portrayed them as sexually immoral.

⁵³ Daisy Delogu, *Allegorical Bodies: Power and Gender in Late Medieval France* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 174.

Conclusion

After examining the trial of Joan of Arc it is easy to see how the English attitudes examined in Chapters One and Two manifested in her trial. The beliefs surrounding female-to-male cross-dressing and transvestitism, which were so nuanced when only theoretically applicable, became a statement of a woman's sexual deviancy when converted to real life examples. The lives of Pelagia, Marina, and Theodora, while technically contradicting teachings from Scripture, were nevertheless made palatable for the people who interacted with these vitae. The element of cross-dressing was mitigated by the facts that theologians had made cross-dressing acceptable in some situations and the women within the vitae were sexualised and reverted to their normative gender roles.¹ The five cases of Chapter Two demonstrated how even when there was very little evidence that indicated monetary prostitution, women who were found in male clothing were automatically assumed to have taken it for sexual purposes, whether it be to attract male clientele, or to demonstrate their own corruption.²

This belief of cross-dressing being a symbol of sexual corruption culminated in the trial of Joan of Arc, in which her cross-dressing was interpreted as a physical manifestation of the state of her soul. By dressing and acting as a man, Joan managed both to implicate herself as a sexualised being and simultaneously to emasculate the English soldiers through her warfare and subversion of gender roles.³ Despite scholars such as Bullough claiming there was only a reaction to cross-dressing when women took on an overtly masculine role, this thesis has demonstrated that women who dressed as men were consistently sexualised, even when there

¹ Valerie Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 3.

² Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginty and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages*, Routledge Research in Medieval Studies (London: Routledge, 2000), 3.

³ Nancy Warren, "French Women and English Men: Joan of Arc, Margaret of Anjou, and Christine De Pizan in England, 1445-1540," *Exemplaria* 16, no. 2 (2004): 412.

was no evidence of them taking on male roles.⁴ Women such as Margaret Cotton and Joan of Arc were both labelled as sexually promiscuous, despite there being no evidence of sexual impropriety other than their clothes.

By studying Joan of Arc and women like Margaret Cotton and Trude Garard in conjunction with each other, new conclusions can be drawn about the relationship between female-to-male transvestitism and sexualised acts. The cross-dressing women examined in Chapter Two have previously only been studied either in isolation, specifically with reference to either their motivations, or in concentrated works on English prostitutes. By using these women as a cultural lens to study the way that cross-dressing was interpreted by English legal authorities, they become part of a wider picture. Such an examination also brings them greater prominence by presenting them alongside well known figures such as Joan of Arc. The thesis has lined up a variety of different sources, ranging from religious texts, literary sources that reflect popular interests, and legal documents. Some of these texts are relatively well known, such as the work of Aquinas and the trial of Joan, while the women of Chapter Two are remain less studied.

Studying such a wide variety of sources has revealed the crucial differences between idealised religious writings and practical reactions to cross-dressing in courts. The theological writings of Chapter One allowed a wide variety of nuances in the interpretation of cross-dressing.⁵ However, once these cross-dressing women entered the realm of legal practice, they were labelled as sexually deviant in order to force them back into normative gender categories. The discrepancies between these two ideals clashed most visibly throughout the trial of Joan of Arc, as her own as her own self-presentation and identity clashed with the expectations and values of the Anglo male viewpoint.

⁴ Bonnie Bullough and Vern Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 68.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

By studying this variety of sources together it is possible to see how cross-dressing women were perceived in late medieval Anglo-French culture. The study reveals that there is contestation over normative gender roles and how these gender roles were implemented by the courts, even when it did not necessarily align with what theology promoted. It shows that within Anglo-French culture there was no fixed category of male and female, but rather that theology permitted these categories to be interchangeable, but the legal system did not. These categories of female and male instead were socially constructed, and not dictated by simple biology.

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