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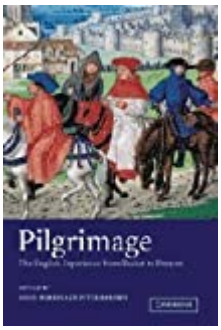

Colin Morris, Peter Roberts, eds. *Pilgrimage: The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan.* New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. xvi + 268 pp. $60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-80811-8.

Reviewed by Gayle Gaskill (Department of English, College of St. Catherine)

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Taking the High Road

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The erudite and eminently readable collection *Pilgrimage* comprises the published proceedings of a lively colloquium held at the University of Kent in 1999 on the subject of pilgrimage by the late medieval and early modern English. Imaginatively written and artfully fit into a developmental sequence, these nine complementary papers trace the evolution of English shrine-seeking from before the canonization of Thomas Becket in 1173, through the deconsecration and destruction of shrines and relics that accompanied the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII in 1536-40, to the Puritan Pilgrims of New England in 1620 and John Bunyan's Restoration allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress.* This is the work of distinguished British historians who have carefully perused oaths, songs, and poetry as well as wills, parish and cathedral records, travel narratives, and court proceedings, and who have visited the ruins of pilgrim sites in Britain as well as their replicas abroad. The resulting publication is first-rate writing: definitive statements illuminated by clear illustrations, wit, vivid literary and visual allusions, imaginative sympathy with the past, and a personal enthusiasm for the subject.

The collection bears the mark of Eamon Duffy's widely influential 1992 work, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1570*, and Duffy contributes a new chapter to this collection. Carefully contextualizing pilgrimage in the ordinary, seasonal worship of medieval England, Duffy leads his fellow writers in the charge against the theory of anthropologists Victor and Edith Turner, a generation ago, that pilgrimage was "liminal," that is, "a religious rite that temporarily liberates pilgrims from the constraints and boundaries of the familiar by removing them physically and socially from their normal environments, across geographical and social thresholds, and that thereby creates a new and wider *communitas* in which social class, wealth and a convention give way to a wider common identity and equality" (p. 165). Illustrating his argument largely with the fifteenth-century East Anglian St. Walstan, one of many saints locally venerated in late medieval England, Duffy describes a pilgrimage to Walstan's shrine as no more liminal than "going to a local market town to sell or buy geese or chickens" (p. 166). Clearly documented, memo-

rably illustrated, and phrased with good humor, Duffy's concept overwhelms the Turners' liminality theory with the easy appearance of graceful good sense.

To explore the evolution of the concept of pilgrimage, the editors arrange the papers in straightforward chronological order of the historical events described. Thus Nicholas Vincent, Professor of Medieval History at Christ Church University College, Canterbury, who joins Duffy in his attack on liminality, produces the first paper, an outline of the literal and highly political, royal pilgrimages of the Angevin kings from 1154 to 1272 to view and acquire holy relics. Henry II, for example, was as concerned with his own sacral nature, according to Vincent, as with that of the newly canonized Becket, whose shrine he approached in 1174, walking barefoot and wearing a hair shirt. To underscore his penitence, Henry forbade the eager Canterbury monks to escort their royal visitor to the church, but as Vincent wryly notes, "A king who has to command the observation of his own humility cannot be said to be truly humbled" (p. 16). The king's journey to the tomb of the archbishop, who had defied him and who was subsequently murdered in his cathedral, was a public gesture in part to represent the king as bearing the penitence of the sins of the nation. Constantly traveling to hunt, to make war, and to control their noblemen, the Angevin kings used monastic visits not simply to offer thanks and invoke divine aid but to signal changes of policy. Henry's visit to Becket's shrine altered the course of civil war. At the same time, the king's humility in approaching the saint modeled the way he preferred a courtier to approach him.

The figure of Becket dominates *Pilgrimage*, as may be expected from a colloquium at Kent. Richard Gameson, Reader in Medieval History at the University of Kent, examines the evolving iconography that represented Becket to his first pilgrims. The characteristic Becket relic, water imbued with the martyr's blood, exhibited healing powers. And Gameson reports that phials of the blood worked miracles in France, where Becket had spent his exile, and where a large window in the Cathedral of Saint Etienne in Sens still details Becket's ministry. Becket's windows in Canterbury, on the other hand, depict the posthumously performed miracles at his shrine, and they include international royalty. In ecclesiastical embroidery, manuscript illumination, and reliquary cases as well as in humble pilgrim badges, Becket's iconography imitated that of Christ. French depictions particularly represented Henry's role in Becket's death with the same icon they gave Pontius Pilate, a devil on his shoulder. "Within such a context," Gameson explains, "Becket offered an object lesson in how the English monarchy had … got … relations between Church and State … spectacularly wrong" (p. 81). This iconography, which established Becket as the champion of ecclesiastical authority in defiance of political power, would lead to Thomas Cromwell's insistence on the destruction of Becket's relics at Canterbury in 1538.

The study of Becket iconography continues as Tim Tatton-Brown, formerly Director of the Canterbury Archeological Trust, imaginatively reconstructs the east arm of Canterbury Cathedral with a verbal tour of Trinity Chapel, where pilgrims came to behold miracles at Becket's tomb. Guided by Tatton-Brown's precise diagram and description of its choirs, side chapels, screens, and monuments, readers can follow the pilgrim's way to Becket's tomb-shrine, modeled on the tomb of Christ that had recently been rebuilt in Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Tatton-Brown enriches this clear description, the reflection of a long career in ecclesiastical archeology, with discreet sighs for what is lost. Though Tatton-Brown ruefully celebrates the few medieval fixtures that remain in Trinity chapel, he has rebuilt the whole structure in his mind's eye.

Carole Rawcliffe, Reader in the History of Medicine at the University of East Anglia, turns away from Canterbury to the shrines of her region as places of healing, including the international shrines at Walsingham and Bury St. Edmunds as well as smaller places of veneration for local saints. To the medieval sick and their physicians, Christ was the divine physician, so his saints might usefully intercede. Monks who were educated in medicine offered some practical remedies, but medieval shrines emphasized the miraculous as they competed with one another in tales of amazing cures. With deadpan common sense, Rawcliffe admits that "medieval pilgrims were quite prepared to 'shop around' in the saintly as well as the medical marketplace" (p. 117), as a touch of the relics or the tomb gave the sick access to the saint's power. Rawcliffe is kinder to the Turners' liminality thesis than are her fellow authors, for she points out that medical pilgrims perceived themselves to be traversing a *via crucis* with a pre-Cartesian mind set that linked woes of the flesh to sufferings of the spirit. In particular, she lists the characteristic motives of female pilgrims to healing shrines. Often the wealthy invoked the saints for fertility, while the poor prayed for relief from "diseases associated with hard manual labor, dietary deficiencies and squalid living conditions" (p. 134). Pilgrimage, or even access to the pilgrim badge of another's journey, offered the vulnerable women some desperate hope.

Like Rawcliffe, who describes the medical practice of Chaucer's pilgrim physician and the physical maladies of Margery Kempe, Colin Morris, who is both a contributor and an editor, takes *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Book of Margery Kempe* as familiar points of reference, for he points out that the Wife of Bath had gone three times to Jerusalem, the most impressive of international pilgrimages, and Margery's Jerusalem pilgrimage established "a strongly personal devotion to the humanity of the suffering Jesus" (p. 151). Morris also draws his subject into the early modern period, noting that Jerusalem pilgrimages became relatively safe after 1336, when a community of Franciscans established themselves on Mount Sion as guides to the holy sites and distributors of indulgences for pilgrims who arrived in package tours from Venice. Having pored over countless, repetitive diaries that betray no spiritual response to the journeys, Morris comments, "these solemn English travelers do make one think of the stiff upper lip of the imperial future" (p. 145) and turns with relief to the frankly lugubrious Margery Kempe, whose accounts bridge "the gap between outward pilgrimage and inner experience" (p. 150). The fifteenth century saw the development of stations of the cross in European shrines and churches, devotional aids that cavalierly overwrote Jerusalem geography as well as the gospels with apocryphal imagery intended for spiritual enrichment.

Early in the English Reformation, the Pilgrimage of Grace redefined a pilgrim as a rebellious crusader who strove to recover English Catholicism and secure economic rights for the commonwealth. Michael Bush, Research Professor of History at Manchester Metropolitan University, shows the new definition was the invention of Robert Aske, London lawyer, Yorkshire gentleman, and commander of a rebel army. With his counterpart, William Stapulton, Aske swore his compatriots to "our pilgrimage of grace for the commonwealth" (p. 178). With their own show of military force, they proposed to defy recent royal injunctions against superstitious pilgrimages and to demand the king's grace to reverse the dissolution of religious houses. Supplemented by a materialist interpretation of William Langland's fourteenth-century satiric poem "Piers Plowman," the language of the Pilgrimage of Grace presented its users as led by Captain Poverty. They carried a relic and banner of St. Cuthbert. With vivid story-telling skill, Bush describes the pilgrims' songs, oaths, uniforms, weapons, and strategies. With irony, he notes that the eventual success of the pilgrims' political petitions in the 1536 Pilgrimage was matched by the failure of the 1537 Pilgrimage to achieve its religious objectives. Aske's linguistic genius in representing his rebellion as a pilgrimage merely hastened the banning of pilgrimages and the destruction of holy relics.

The most powerfully symbolic of English relics were, of course, those of Becket, and their desecration required the drama of high ritual, according to Peter Roberts, Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Kent and a co-editor of this collection. In 1538, well into the English Reformation, devotion to Becket marked entrenched faith in the superiority of spiritual power over temporal power. Henry VIII delayed Cromwell's persistent efforts to destroy the Becket shrine for nearly five years, as Thomas More's execution for non-compliance linked the new martyr–or traitor–to his namesake. At last in autumn of 1538 in Canterbury, in the King's presence and with the full co-operation of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, Cromwell stage-managed a denunciation of the relics. The ritual included, according to Roberts's careful speculation, a play by John Bales that portrayed Becket as a traitor and a proponent of idolatry, who provoked the loyal knights of Henry II in their fatal attack on him. Enacted to assuage the king's troubled conscience as much as to mark his power, the play offered a revisionist reading of the popular Becket pageants in Canterbury. Labeling Bales's lost work "the murder in the cathedral" (p. 226), Roberts evokes T. S. Eliot's further revisions of the ecclesiastical drama four centuries later.

With the annihilation of the most provocative relics and the effective elimination of all native opposition, the English Reformation had eliminated the idea of pilgrimage as a physical journey for spiritual benefit, whether penance, healing, thanksgiving, or policy-making; meanwhile, the idea of pilgrimage as an extended metaphor for the Christian life was growing in English literature. N. H. Keeble, Professor of English Studies and Deputy Principal at the University of Stirling, writes the concluding and most literary of the nine essays, tracing the growth of pilgrimage as a Protestant metaphor. Despite injunctions against pilgrimage in the Six Articles Act of 1539 and in the Elizabethan Book of Homilies, English sermons and devotional literature regularly borrowed imagery from the Epistle to the Hebrews in order to represent the virtuous life as an alien's journey toward his home in heaven. In a brief paragraph Keeble lists and annotates sixteen books of pilgrim devotion published from 1542 to 1678. He cites Sir Walter Ralegh, John Milton, Anne Bradstreet and Governor William Bradford in America, and the most famous self-styled pilgrim in English literature, John Bunyan. He even invokes a comic

literary pilgrim at the head of the parade: "Chaucer's Miller can be heard piping the pilgrims from the Tabard Inn at Southwark" (p. 243). Though Reformation iconoclasm destroyed the most visually impressive objects of the Miller's quest, the language of pilgrimage grew ever more powerful in English writings.