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Susan Signe Morrison, *Women Pilgrims in Medieval England: Private Piety as Public Performance*. Routledge Research in Medieval Studies 3. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. Pp. xii, 194. \$85.00.

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Susan Signe Morrison opens her new book on women pilgrims by describing her frustration, as a scholar and teacher of Chaucer and *The Book of Margery Kempe*, at the dearth of scholarship on the subject of women and pilgrimage in the late Middle Ages. By deciding to fill the lacuna herself Morrison has done many scholars of late medieval history, literature, and culture a great favor. Historians of medieval pilgrimage like Jonathan Sumption and Ronald Finucane have tantalizingly speculated that women were active as pilgrims and may even have been preponderant among the clients of particular kinds of shrines, but up to this point no one has systematically examined pilgrimage using gender as the primary analytical lens. Morrison's book provides not only a thorough consideration of the late medieval woman pilgrim, both real and imagined, but also some new conceptual frameworks with which to look more broadly at how late medieval lay women practiced their religion.

Throughout the book, Morrison shows that pilgrimage was far from a straightforward act of piety; as a complex construct it contained within it many different and sometimes contested meanings. A pilgrimage was a demonstration of personal piety in a public place; Morrison usefully reviews a range of theoretical literature in order to examine the multifaceted relationship between pilgrimage and space. She rejects the easy profane/sacred binary for a more nuanced understanding of the pilgrimage route as a space in which sacred and profane continually interpenetrated (as seen, for instance, in stained glass representations of pilgrimage that juxtaposed standard imagery of the holy with lewd scenes). Contemporaries both revered and feared the figure of the pilgrim. While the pilgrimage was a standard element of late medieval religious writing, as Margery Kempe and St. Brigid exemplify, in secular literature in post-Black Death England the pilgrim, especially in female form, was customarily associated with deceit, disorder, and, above all, sexual impropriety. The most famous of late medieval fictional religious tourists, the Wife of Bath, fits squarely into this tradition of satire of women pilgrims. Morrison further examines how the author of the *Book of Margery Kempe* uses both secular and religious topoi regarding women pilgrims in her work. The incompatibility of these two representations of women pilgrims is a symptom of late medieval people's complex and ultimately unresolved understanding of the phenomenon of pilgrimage.

Morrison's study is based both on the full range of secondary scholarship (in many disciplines and across time periods) and on a wide variety of primary sources, almost all published. A particular strength of the book is the integration of evidence from the physical remains of the pilgrimage routes and sites themselves with secular and religious literary depictions of pilgrims and documentary records that touch on pilgrimage (many of the latter being gathered together from published records such as the Calendars of Close and Patent Rolls into an

appendix at the end of the book). I have one quibble about the use of published primary sources: Morrison tends to take material somewhat uncritically wherever it is found, which both results in some inconsistency in the form that quotations from the same work can take (sometimes in the original language, sometimes in translation) and raises questions about the use of standard editions. The Paston letters, for instance, are quoted both in Middle English and in modern translation (e.g. pp. 18, 48), in neither case from Norman Davis's standard edition of the letters (*The Paston Letters*, 2 vols. [Oxford, 1971]). Similarly two consecutive quotations (pp. 63-64) from a sermon of fifteenth-century Lollard William Thorpe are taken from two different sources, and each provides a different style of translation (one in late sixteenth-century English, the other in modern English). Apart from the anomaly of the two translations, especially when placed side by side, one might expect in any case that Morrison would use instead the modern edition of Thorpe's sermon (in Anne Hudson's *Two Wycliffite Texts*, Early English Text Society, 1993).

These small objections should not detract, however, from the overall success of Morrison's volume. No doubt each reader will find a different aspect of this interesting book most illuminating; for me, it was Morrison's discussion of the how pilgrimage fit into the lives of real (rather than fictional) medieval lay women. In a chapter entitled "The Milky Way: women pilgrims and visual art," Morrison examines the experience of women pilgrims on the road to the shrine of the Virgin at Walsingham, one of England's most popular shrines during the late Middle Ages and, as Morrison argues, one particularly patronized by women. The Walsingham route – known as the Milky Way – abounded with rood screens and other media depicting images associated with maternity and especially lactation; the shrine of the Virgin itself that was the pilgrims' goal had Mary's breast milk as one of its principal relics. Women's relationship to pilgrimage, as Morrison demonstrates, was dominated by their reproductive lives, their ability to conceive, nourish, and care for their offspring. In going on pilgrimage to pray for conception or the health of their sick children, women were not only practicing their own interiorized religious beliefs, but also representing their family's health and continuity. A woman's body, as Morrison puts it, was "a metonymy for a healthy functioning family;" her inability to conceive or lactate was "never the private business of the woman suffering it" but a larger familial problem (3). Morrison's discussion here provides us with tools not only to understand women's pilgrimages but also to understand more broadly the ways in which lay women – the overwhelming majority of whom married and had children – were able to use, and indeed arguably to shape, medieval religious categories and practices. As almost all of the scholarship on medieval women and religion has focused on nuns, beguines, and mystics, women who by definition lived extraordinary lives, Morrison's contribution is an especially useful one. It is unfortunate that a book that belongs on many scholars' shelves should have been published at such a prohibitive price; it is to be hoped that Routledge will soon issue an affordable paperback.

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