Saint Faith's Scandalous Miracles: A Quest for Novelty

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The concept of a "new miracle" in medieval religious texts could be named among the most elusive. Although the notion of "miracle" and that of "novelty" seem to be merely synonymous (since the first implies something unusual, extraordinary, or wonderful), miracle accounts of the time strike modern scholars by their regular, predictable, repetitive, serial character[1] and leave the impression of a "rather dull enumeration of events."[2] These claims seem to be valid since it is well known that in the Middle Ages (especially in the early Middle Ages) "novelty" is usually perceived as something that could be dangerous, scandalous, disagreeable, and annoying.[3]

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[1] Jacques Le Goff, *The medieval imagination* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[2] Caroline Walker Bynum, "The wonder," *The American Historical Review* 102 (1997), p.17.

[3] See, e. g., *S. Cœlestini Epist. XXI: Praeter beatissimae et apostolicae sedis inviolabiles sanctiones, quibus nos piissimi patres,* ***pestiferae novitatis*** *elatione dejecta, et bonae voluntatis exordia, et incrementa probabilium studiorum, et in eis usque in finem perseverantiam ad Christi gratiam referre docuerunt, obsecrationum quoque sacerdotalium sacramenta respiciamus, quae ab apostolis tradita, in toto mundo atque in omni catholica Ecclesia uniformiter celebrantur, ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi.* (*PL* 130, col. 753) ["However, beyond these inviolable decrees of the blessed and apostolic Chair, by which our most pious Fathers, having staved off the conceit of baneful novelty both by commencing with good will and fostering commendable zeals, taught us to persevere unto the end in showing our gratitude to Christ, let us also look back upon the mystery of priestly supplications which were bequeathed to the whole world by the Apostles, and are celebrated in one manner by the whole Catholic Church, so that the law of prayer might constitute a law of belief." (my translation)]; Letaldus Miciacensis, *Vita S. Juliani*: *Is ergo vir Domini fide munitus, gadio Spiritus accinctus, ad destruendos errores, ad conculcandas daemonum vanitates, ad urbem supradictam accessit intrepidus. Sed dum* ***novitas sanctae praedicationis quibusdam incredulis in scandalum, nonnullis verteretur in derisum****, miraculorum potentia reddebat attonitos, quos ad audiendam veritatis viam veternus et innatus error effecerat fastidiosos* (*PL* 137, col. 785) ["This man of God, armed with his faith, girded with the sword of Spirit, went, intrepid, to this town in order to destroy misbelief and to tread down the demons' vainglory. But since the novelty of holy preaching was turned by some unbelievers to scandal and by many others to ridicule, he astonished with the power of miracles those whom the old and natural error had made repugnant to hear of a right way" (my translation)]; Osbertus de Clara, *Epistola ad Anselmum sancti*

At the same time, the notion of a "new miracle" could be used in a positive sense:[4] Ultimately, wasn't it Christ who renewed the world, who, himself, was wonderful and unusual? In medieval hagiography, however, a new, unheard-of miracle means rather "a contemporary, actual and noble miracle", a "miracle which was saved from oblivion". In fact, announcement of novelty in miracles does not imply extreme uncommonness. On the contrary, it could be considered as a *topos*.[5] Being under authority of the past, a medieval Saint does not perform something really new, he or she rather reproduces or renews glorious deeds of his or her authoritative predecessors, guided by the supreme

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Eadmundi abbatem: Unde in ecclesia Dei cum a nobis celebris ageretur illius diei festivitas, quidam post Sathan abeuntes dixerunt esse ***ridiculum quod usque ad hec tempora omnibus fuisset seculis inauditum.*** *Et in livore ac felle sue malicie perdurantes duos episcopos qui tunc in vicinio forte aderant Rogerum videlicet et Bernardum adeuntes convenerunt, ac* ***de novitiate*** *solennitatis exortae facta relatione* ***animos eorum in indignationem provocaverunt*** [Edmund Bishop, *Liturgica Historia* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1918, rpt. 1962), p.224}] ["… some followers of Satan, whilst we were keeping this feast, decried its observance as hitherto unheard-of and absurd, and with malicious intent they went to two bishops, Roger and Bernard, who happened then to be in the neighborhood, and representing its novelty they excited them to displeasure" (ibid, p.243)]. – The bold emphasis is mine.

[4] See, e.g., Fulbert of Chartres, *Sermo IX de annuntiatione dominica*: *Causa igitur tanatae invalescentis laetitiae erat* ***miraculum novum****. Novus Mariae partus partum Evae evicit, et Evae planctum Mariae cantus exclusit* (*PL* 141, col. 337) ["The reason for such great joy was a new miracle. Mary's new childbirth overcame the childbirth of Eve; Mary's canticle has put an end to the lamentations of Eve (my translation)]; Wolfhardus Hasenrietanus, *De vita S.Walpurgis*: *Volueram huius opusculi breviloquio metam imponere dissolutam: verum concurrentium jugiter mirabilium rerum atque* ***signorum desiderabilis novitas*** *iterum iterumque ad scribendum impellit atque provocat, et ut perfecto opere ad finem usque perducam frequenter invitat.* (*PL* 129, Col.887) [I had wanted to put a disjointed end to this concise work: but the concourse of miraculous things and the desired novelty of signs constantly and repeatedly compel me to write, and often invite me to accomplish my work thoroughly (my translation)]; Letaldus Miciacensis, *Liber de miraculis S.Maximini*: *Cumque multi beneficia petituri convenirent, et pro voto res pluribus cederent, ut assolet,* ***novitas nimium grata benificiorum*** *coepit vilescere negligentia posterorum.* (*PL* 137. col. 801) [Because many people went here to ask for benefaction and, having made a vow, received what they wanted, as often happens, the graceful novelty of those benefactions was depreciated in a great measure by the neglect of posterity (my translation)]; Guitmundus Aversanus, *De corporis et sang. Domini veritate libri tres*: ***Satis tamen mihi placeret, ut quando aliqua negligentia vel certe miraculum novum de tantis mysteriis accidit,*** *id inde fieret, quod mihi magister meus; vir eximus sine dubitatione credendus, D. Lanfran., sepuero in Italia factum esse narravit.* (*PL* 149. coll. 1449-1450) [Nevertheless, I like very much that, in case of neglect of such grand mysteries, a new miracle occurs. For example, like that which I was told by my master, dom. Lanfranc, an outstanding and trustworthy man. It happened in Italy, when he was a child … (my translation)]. – The bold emphasis is mine.

[5] See Ernst Robert Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Bern: A. Francke Verlag, 1948), pp. 87-113.

example of Christ. An authoritative miracle could be considered as new, but its novelty must be interpreted in the sense of "freshness". By the example of medieval vernacular songs, Michel Zink argues that such texts could be considered as new not because they differ radically from all existing songs.[6] They are new since they are fresh like a flower and since they cause emotional outburst at the moment of performance. In that very way an approved miracle is new since it manifests *anew* God's omnipotence. The question is, "could the *topos* of a new miracle be created"? Could a medieval miracle be really new?

Being *a priori* an impossible transgression of Nature's laws that exceeds human understanding and imagination, miracles always balance at the edge of present experiences and expectations. It is also important to add that medieval hagiography was a highly polemic literature: miracles, especially those of new saints, were not accepted automatically. They could be rejected as something that had a natural cause, as a diabolic magic or as trickery. It is in this context of approval or disapproval that authors become very sensitive to the notion of a new miracle. From this standpoint two books of *Liber miraculorum sancte Fidis*,[7] written by the learned scholastic Bernard of Angers in the beginning of the eleventh century, could be considered as an interesting case. Bernard uses actively the notion of novelty, persistently describing miracles of Saint Faith of Conques as completely new, unprecedented and incredible. The cases in point include, firstly, miracles of replacing eradicated eyeballs (1.1, 1.2), secondly, resurrecting donkeys (1.3, 1.4), and thirdly, practical jokes of a teenage martyr (1.23, 1.26) (for example, the teasing of a sleeping monk).[8] What binds them together?

Bernard's of Angers miracles (1.1, 1.2) deal with conceptions of the possible and impossible, which could help us to consider the limits of medieval imagination. In fact, authors of early medieval miracle accounts do not use "fantastic" elements. They seem to use "real facts," which were interpreted as miracles. According to Pierre-André Sigal,[9] stories of regenerating destroyed parts of the body are extremely rare. Miracles (1.3, 1.4) are concerned with the rupture between learned and popular culture, or, more precisely, with the sense of embarrassment caused by its vile, brute subject matter. Chapters (1.23, 1.26)

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[6] Michel Zink, *Le Moyen Age et ses chansons ou un Passé en trompe-l'œil* (Paris: Fallois, 1996), pp. 161-75.

[7] *Liber miraculorum Sancte Fidis*, ed. Luca Robertini (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull' alto medioevo, 1994) (henceforth: *Liber miraculorum*).

[8] On these miracles see Amy G. Remensnyder, "Un problème de cultures ou de culture?: La statue-reliquaire et les *joca* de sainte Foy de Conques dans le *Liber miraculorum* de Bernard d'Angers," *Cahiers de la civilisation médiévale* 33 (1990), pp. 352-79 (henceforth : Remensnyder, "Un problème").

[9] Pierre-André Sigal, *L'homme et le miracle dans la France médiévale (XIe-XIIe siècle)* (Paris: Cerf, 1985), p. 312 (henceforth : Sigal, *L'homme*).

are about performing divine powers on trifle occasions. Thus, Bernard's of Angers sense of novelty implies transgression, which is acknowledged as such.

The idea of transgression is well expressed in the prologue to the *Liber miraculorum Sancte Fidis* representing a letter to Fulbert of Chartres, Bernard's teacher and one of the most educated people of his time. In it, Bernard confesses that at the beginning of his campaign to write Saint Faith's miracles, he was sure to deal with vulgar fables. He underlines both their novelty and common origin:

> *Que, quia partim vulgarium fama celebrari videbantur partimque inaudita habebantur, haut aliter quam inanis fabule commenta a fide reiciebantur.*[10]
>
> [Partly because it seemed to be common people who promulgated these miracles and partly because they were regarded as new and unusual, we put no faith in them and rejected them as so much worthless fiction.[11]]

Even being approved by Bernard Saint Faith's miracles could really disturb a reader. In the Prologue he writes:

> *... si rei prodogiose inusitata novitas vos perturbat, id super omnia a vestra fraternitate procumbens terratenus peto ...*[12]
>
> [Better yet, if the unusual novelty of the miraculous content disturbs you, I prostrate myself on the ground to beg this of your brotherhood.]

Some readers are indeed disturbed. In chapter 1.7 of the *Liber* Bernard describes the reaction of one of his erudite opponents: an Angers scholar accuses Bernard of writing implausible idle talk:

> *Est vobis notus quidam Barnardus – inquit – qui presenti anno, rediens Conchis, quot mendacia ibi de sancta Fide scripta reliquit? Nam quomodo de oculis eradicatis et postea restauratis animalibusque resuscitatis ulla ratione poterit iam credi ? Cetera signa, ut alios sanctos, et rara sanctam Fidem aliquando fecisse audivi. Iumenta vero qua ratione, qua necessitate Deus resuscitarit ? Nemo potest vel debet investigare, qui quidem mente consistat* (1.7).[13]
>
> [You must know that Bernard who came to Conques this year. Bah! How many lies about Saint Faith he wrote down there! For how could any reasonable person believe things about eyeballs torn out and afterwards restored, and animals brought back to life? I have heard of others kinds of miracles that other saints and – rarely – Saint Faith worked now and then. But mules! For what reason, for what necessity, would God bring them to life? No one who is mentally stable can or ought to expound such things.]

He also emphasizes the sense of embarrassment and shame that could be caused by some miracles of Saint Faith:

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[10] *Liber miraculorum,* p. 73.

[11] Hereafter Pamela Sheingorn's translation: Pamela Sheingorn, tr., *The Book of Sainte Foy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

[12] *Liber miraculorum,* p. 91.

[13] *Liber miraculorum,* p. 99.

Est enim indecens, ut quod summum Creatorem non puduit facere, id rationabilis creatura erubescat dicere. Nec lectori sive auditori fiat absurdum de uno audire, cui ad subaudiendum etiam de alio necesse erit aures arrigere neque videatur inauditum, si misericors rerum Conditor sue multimode prospicit creature... (I.3).[14]

[It is unseemly that a rational creature should feel ashamed to tell about something that did not disgust the High Creator to make. Hearing about one miracle of this kind must not seem absurd to either reader or listener, for whom hearing also about another one makes it necessary to prick up the ears and [for whom] it should not seem unheard, if the merciful Creator of the physical world watches His manifold creature ...[15]]

I underline this realized transgression, since there are a lot of medieval miracle narratives, which seem strange to a modern reader, while their authors present them as something normal and by no means scandalous. I think, for example, of the stories of pugnacious Saints from Caesarius' of Heisterbach *Dialogus miraculorum*[16] that do not stand out against a background of other narratives from this account; or, which is more striking, some stories from the *Liber* of Bernard himself. Thus, the Saint who extorts jewelry from her worshippers doesn't scandalize the author, in contrast to a modern reader. The miracles, enumerated above, are quite another matter. Weird miracles of a weird saint (Saint Faith is famous for her transgressions of hagiographical norms and is considered a "trickster"[17]) are definitely described as such. I argue that it is the sense of transgression (and that of rupture) that could help us to approach the medieval sense of novelty, so often disguised by numerous rhetorical clichés.

Of course, the case of Saint Faith has already been examined by some modern scholars,[18] to whom I am heavily indebted for some of the ideas in this paper. Now I propose to look at Saint Faith's mischievous miracles not only from the point of the view of transgression, but from that of pleasure. The uncommonness of Saint Faith's miracles is not only transgressive and embarrassing but at the same time desired. Bernard repeatedly describes his wish to investigate and accept famous miracles of Saint Faith, despite their scandalous character. Transgressive novelty affects, fascinates, charms. Thus, it seems to me, that it is notions of pleasure and bliss that could help us to examine the case. Not to be mired in psychoanalysis I rest rather upon Roland Barthes' distinctions between the text of pleasure and the text of bliss.[19] Rather

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[14] *Liber miraculorum,* p. 91.

[15] Here I made some minor alternations in Pamela Sheingorn's translation.

[16] Caesarius of Heisterbach, Dialogus miraculorum, ed. Josephus Strange (Cologne, Bonn: J.M. Heberle, 1851). Look, for example, chapter 4.37.

[17] Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn, *Writing Faith: Text, Sign and History in the Miracles of Saint Foy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 32-6.

[18] *Ibidem*; Sigal, *L'homme*; Remensnyder, "Un problème," pp. 352-79.

[19] Roland Barthes, *Le plaisir du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1973).

simplifying Barthes' theory, the matter concerns an opposition between the comfort and discomfort of reading. The text of pleasure comforts the reader, respects his expectations and makes him feel content, without suffering fear or guilt that the censor may catch him unaware. It possesses authority that does not admit any suspicion of transgression. The text of bliss (rupture, enjoyment) extends and exceeds the pleasure to discomfort, embarrassment, loss, particularly by its transgressive novelty. Pleasure is always on the side of culture, bliss is rather non-cultural.

With all the precautions of applying modern theory to medieval texts, I argue that the perception of miracle accounts in that time was in general agreement with the aforementioned distinction. Some miracles please the reader by their authority and conformity, by their repetitive freshness. Others seduce by their scandalous, transgressive, inconvenient and non-cultural character. They make their readers cross the threshold between astonishment and incredulity.

Let us concentrate on the author's narrative strategies of writing the novelty and transgression. The questions are: How may a miracle narrative exceed the pleasure of renovation and arrive at the enjoyment of novelty? How does it reveal and conceal the new and transgressive?

I. Writing transgression

Transgression in the *Liber miraculorum* does not only take the form of an act committed in a story. It is also something to be performed in writing. But how may one apply a *topos* of novelty in a very traditionalist epoch and within the limits of one of the most conservative genres?

Writing doubt, writing desire

Above all, Bernard performs more than the usual perfunctory investigation of Saint Faith's miracles. Bernard continuously emphasizes both his skepticism toward rumors and his desire to learn more about Faith's miracles. He describes all circumstances of his journeys to Conques (Prologue, 2,1) and his method of work (1.7); he expresses his opinion (usually unfavorable) about native customs (1,13) etc. This way, he continuously creates a background on which novelty always seems to be open to questioning. Of course, Bernard denounces all doubts as insulting the Saint. But by repeatedly addressing the scandalous elements of Saint Faith's miracles – to clear them from such accusations – it is as though Bernard compulsively returns to his own embarrassments and fears with regard to transgressive novelty. So the reader always keeps in mind the tenuous status of Saint Faith's deeds and remains sensitive to the fact that these are unusual miracles. It is very interesting that Bernard does not use the *topos* of obedience, as other hagiographers, who claim to have started their investigations

at the instruction of their abbots, brothers or disciples. Bernard seems to be moved by his own affection and curiosity to Saint Faith (even if in his letter to the abbot and to the monks at Conques he reveals that they commissioned him):

> *... paulatim subiit mihi in corde tacita et oblivionis impatiens cogitatio, uti ipsum sancte martyris habitaculum eadem studio discendi adirem*[20]).
>
> [Little by little a plan took root in my heart, and although I kept it secret I couldn't forget it; it was a plan to go to the holy martyr's dwelling-place to fulfill my desire to learn about her.]

His quest was, as he insists, very difficult: his personal circumstances were really unfavorable. Bernard remarks later, in the letter to the Abbot and monks at Conques:

> *Facta est sicut petistis sancta Fidis miraculorum novella editio, atque inter tot adverse fortune turbines, que iam diu fractum merore animum vix aliqando postea respirare permisit, divina, ut confido, pusillanimitati mee gratia succedente, ad finem usque deducta.* (*Epistola ad Adalgerium*[21])
>
> [A new edition of the miracles of Saint Faith has been made, just as you asked. In the midst of so many gyrations of adverse fortune that scarcely allowed my grief-stricken mind to breathe again for quite some time, it was due to the way that divine grace relieved my discouragement.]

Thus, the skepticism that Bernard repeatedly confronts becomes a discourse that melts with the discourse of desire, which then overcomes internal and external obstacles.

And more than that: Bernard's book itself is perceived as an object of desire. In the cited letter to the monks at Conques, he describes his own parental affection for the book, as well as the very positive reaction of his readers. Their approbation was so strong that two of Bernard's friends nearly took away the manuscript by force!

Creating discomfort

After being strengthened by both scandal and desire, novelty is further reinvigorated since it was not only Saint Faith who transgressed hagiographical norms. Bernard himself explores new, unusual modes of writing, testing the scopes of the hagiographical genre:

> Bernard does more than just appropriate hagiographical traditions; he deliberately expands the boundaries of the genre manipulating conventions for a variety of unexpected effects.[22]

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[20] *Liber miraculorum,* pp. 73-4.
[21] *Liber miraculorum,* p. 144.
[22] Ashley and Sheingorn, *Writing Faith,* p. 27.

I propose to examine, first of all, the composition of the *Liber miraculorum*, since it is marked as scandalous by the author himself:

> *De cetero qui hoc lecturi estis, moneo ne in huius scripture concordia scandalizemini, consequentiam temporum querentes* […]. *Unde non hic, in hac scriptura libri, quem de virtutibus sancte Fidis Deo cooperante exordior componere, annorum ordo, sed miraculorum concordabit similitudo*[23]...
>
> [And future readers, I warn you not to be thrown into confusion by the way this work is organized and not to look for a chronological sequence of events […]. Therefore here in the writing of this book about Saint Faith's miracles, which I begin to put together with God as my fellow-worker, the miracles will be grouped not in chronological sequence but by the similarity of their subject matter.]

The composition of Bernard's *Liber* is presented as explicitly unusual, so it could be perceived as difficult to follow. I argue that Bernard tends to highlight the novelty, by enabling special textual mechanisms. Breaking the scheme of *annorum ordo* he places an emphasis on the miracles themselves and underlines their unusual character.

In addition, Bernard tries to resist the temptation of enumerating similar miracles (a common way of composing a miracle account), insisting on his decision to write only a small number of miracles: for different reasons. It could be lack of time, the abundance of miracles, but also a desire to write something special or rare:

> *Iam vero quanta per sanctam Fidem huiusmodi miracula Dominus operari dignatus est, nemo potuit omnia retinere neque ea que retenta sunt, ulli vacat scribere. Pauca tamen de his que audivi prefatis volo subnectere, ita quidem ut nec nimio silentio tacturnus, nec nimia verbositate odiosus videar. Scio ante nos dictum: " Omne rarum pretiosum. Et ideo ad comprobationem relique universitatis scribo rara, ut sint pretiosa* (I.19).[24]
>
> [The Lord has already deigned to work so many miracles of this kind through Saint Faith that no one could have preserved all of them, and there isn't enough time for anyone to write out those that have been preserved. Nonetheless, I want to add a few miracles from those that I noted down as they were told to me, because I don't want to appear too taciturn by remaining silent, or too annoying by being wordy. I know the proverb before our time that says everything uncommon is precious. And this is why, in comparison to all the remaining miracles, I write the uncommon miracles, because they are precious. Therefore Christ will pardon me for knowingly omitting a great many miracles.]

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[23] *Liber miraculorum,* p. 75.
[24] *Liber miraculorum,* pp. 119-120.

This repetitive non-disclosure that breaks the reader's expectations also puts into place a mechanism for novelty. But could it be considered as Barthesian *tmesis*: a quality of text that makes the reader skip certain passages when he reads? It is impossible to say if *tmesis* is appropriate to medieval reading. But it may be appropriate for the medieval perception of miracle series and, thus, to something which produces pleasure or enjoyment.

II. Writing authority

Nevertheless, Bernard accepts Saint Faith's miracles as true and authentic. Hence, each explicit doubt is accompanied by detailed justification. In that way Bernard tries to tame novelty and to alter the possible rupture into the pleasure of comfort reading.

Finding precedent

Bernard masterfully uses the discourse of authority, finding famous precedents to scandalous miracles of Saint Faith and in that way imparting to them authority and authenticity. It is striking that unprecedented miracles of Saint Faith have a lot of glorious prototypes. For example the miracle of the resurrection of a donkey is compared to miracles of Saint Sylvester and Saint Martin of Tours. The Miracle of the restoration of the eyeballs is similar to the miracle of Christ, who cured a blind man. And even the unprecedented character of saint Faith's miracles is not really something new:

> *Neque Moyseus mare dividendum Domino predicente credidisset, si ex collatione paris signi fidem adhibuisset. Non enim Deus eatenus ita mare diviserat. Tamen credidit Moyses, priusquam factum esset mare Rubrum dividendum. Et nos nunc credumus divisum quamvis nullis antiquioribus seculis simile quid fuerit actum. Quid igitur calumniam patiatur, si usus iure voluntatis sue Deus per merita sanctorim suorum quiddam facit inusitatum...* (I.7).[25]
>
> [Moses wouldn't have believed that the sea was going to be divided, as God foretold, if he had been looking to compare it to a similar miracle, for God hadn't parted the sea that way before. Nevertheless Moses believed that the Red Sea was going to be divided, although nothing similar had been done at any earlier time. Therefore, why should a false accusation be tolerated when God brings about something so unfamiliar in accordance with His rightful use of his own will through the goodness of His own saints?]

In this passage Bernard seems to question the very concept of the miracle, to reveal its impossible, transgressive character: miracle by default is performed by

[25] *Liber miraculorum*, p. 102.

God *contra solitus cursum naturae.* But this exposure, curiously enough, leads to the disappearance of novelty. A new, unprecedented miracle comes from the will of God and is by no means new and scandalous.

Establishing a series

Despite his temptation to write something rare and precious, Bernard simply composes a series of miracles. The Miracle of Guilbert is doubled, as is the one of the donkey's resurrection, and many other miracles. For example, having claimed *Omne rarum pretiosum*, Bernard narrates six similar miracles of Saint Faith who extorts jewelry. These mini-series (or clusters) reduce the displeasure of irregularity *and* help the reader not to be lost in enjoyment. The mechanism of pleasure is turned on: each consequent miracle confirms the preceding one and receives itself a kind of authority of the past. At the same time this repetition makes each subsequent miracle 'fresh' and new in a positive sense. Thus, being announced, the scandalous novelty escapes again, turning into a *topos*, into a comfort of proved sanctity, into well-grounded authority. Bernard's text moves between pleasure and bliss (enjoyment), as, I think, the very idea of novelty does.

To complete my analysis I would like to compare Bernard's work, firstly, to the third and forth books of the same *Liber miraculorum*, written some years later by an anonymous monk (or some monks) of Conques and, secondly, to Odo's of Cluny life of Gerald of Aurillac,[26] written in the tenth century.

In the continuation of the *Liber miraculorum* the miracles of Saint Faith are depicted as by no means scandalous and their novelty once again turns into the mere *topos* that could not disturb anyone:

> *De oculo equi, per virtutem sancte Fidis restitutato. Inter has virtutum copias, res mira contigit, quam ne indoctorum obtrectationibus aliquatenus improbari liceat, sanctorum patrum irrefragabilibus exemplis rite ducimus approbandum. Sanctissimi Gregorii tam fallere quam falli nescii relatione didicimus, quod Tudertine ecclesie quidam extitit episcopus, Fortunatus nomine...* (III, 11).[27]
>
> [Among the plenitude of all these miracles, one is especially marvelous. I think it should not be viewed as suspect because ignorant people disparage it. Indeed, rather than being condemned this miracle should be commended, as indisputable examples from the holy fathers show. We have learned from Saint Gregory – a man as reluctant to deceive as to be deceived – about Fortunatus, bishop of the church at Todi.]

Once again, the miracle involving an animal could be considered as something transgressive, but this possibility is eliminated right away, before, and not after

[26] PL 133, cols. 639-710.
[27] *Liber miraculorum*, p. 199.

the narrative. That way, it seems to me, the pleasure of reading does not turn to bliss.

In the Life of Gerald, on the contrary, the miracles, described as new and incredible, were written down by a rich count and were promulgated by vulgar fame. Of course, Gerald's miracles were approved by the virtue of his truly religious way of life. But the liminal, if not transgressive character of Gerald's sanctity always seems to have been in the author's mind. This, I argue, actualizes the *topos* of the saint's modesty. Gerald himself was embarrassed by the novelty of his miracles, though very traditional in their essence, and tried to conceal them. This desire (of both the hero and the author) to conceal and to reveal problematic miracles could indicate a possible rupture that turns a pleasure to bliss.

III. Writing authority in transgression and transgression in authority

Writing on novelty and transgression in Bernard's accounts paradoxically means writing authority and tradition. Bernard incorporates transgression into his narrative by continually and explicitly normalizing it. If the sanctity of the teenage martyr were denied, it would be easy to simply condemn novelty and reinforce an anti-innovatory mindset. But at the same time, Bernard actualizes the norm by showing the possibility of its transgression. Thus, I think that Bernard not only uses the outrageousness of Faith's characteristic miracles as an "opportunity to logically demonstrate the saint's powers".[28] He also utilizes the saint's powers to write down and question the outrageousness of miracles. In some sense, the *Liber* miraculorum could be considered as a tool that helps a curious cleric to master novelty-seeking behavior.

Let me return to the quest for novelty. What are the sources of novelty for a learned cleric in the beginning of the eleventh century? Perhaps it is the popular culture with its ambiguous mythism and strange saints. A learned author transgresses the frontier of another culture (non-culture) anytime he could be caught by a censor, so he tries to remain on the territory of approved sanctity that implies an authority and tradition. Thus, the figure of a popular Saint becomes a kind of toggle that permits to switch learned hagiographical discourse between the safe tradition and the scandalous and desired novelty, between pleasure and enjoyment.

[28] Ashley and Sheingorn. *Writing Faith,* p. 26.

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Preface

At the 43rd International Congress of Medieval Studies which met in May 2008 at Western Michigan University I organized a session on "The Meaning, Role and Construction of *Scandalum.*" This volume contains the revised papers from among those that were read there, those of Lindsay Bryan, Elena Lemeneva, and myself. We also convinced Victoria Smirnova to contribute to this 'Sonderband' of *Medium Aevum Quotidianum.*

The use of the term *scandalum* in medieval written evidence can be found regularly in different contexts following various patterns and representing differing meanings: as capital sin, incitement to sin, slander and defamation, public offence, and so on. Recent studies have not paid much attention to this phenomenon. Only a comprehensive analysis by Lindsay Bryan has contributed to this exciting field of research.[1] For this reason we were particularly happy that Lindsay was also willing to contribute to the session at Kalamazoo and to the present volume.

The four papers here will not provide substantial new findings concerning the occurrence, application and function of *scandala* in medieval society. What they are intended for, however, is to animate scholars to devote themselves more to researching phenomena which, as individual cases, represented exceptional circumstances of life in the Middle Ages; taken as a group, though, they can be seen as having been part of medieval quotidianity.

Gerhard Jaritz

[1] "'Vae Mundo a Scandalis': The Sin of Scandal in Medieval England" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1998).