

Dangerous Beauty, Beautiful Speech:
Gendered Eloquence in Medieval Preaching
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Medieval Christian preaching sought to convey a divine message by means of a human medium: the preacher's eloquence. Although Christian theorists of preaching, at least those following Augustine, recognized rhetoric as an inherent and necessary element of their activity, they were also heirs to a patristic suspicion of its pagan roots, its moral neutrality, and especially its potential to emphasize the letter over the spirit, medium over message. This essay explores the way such anxieties were worked out in preaching manuals, scholastic disputations, and hagiography of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. Drawing on the principles and the concerns expressed by such authorities as Tertullian and Augustine, later medieval preaching theorists like Alan of Lille and the Dominican Thomas Waleys struggled with and, to some extent, found ways for preaching to accommodate rhetoric's dangerous but effective power. Strikingly, many of their concerns and strategies are echoed in the disputation literature and hagiography that discuss women's preaching. In the work of Jacobus of Voragine and other hagiographers, we see that outstanding women could offer one possible solution to the problem of rhetoric in preaching.

Theoretical Backgrounds to Women's Preaching

As scholars including Jody Enders and Rita Copeland have noted, preaching theorists' anxiety tended to focus on what might be called the surface elements of rhetoric, such as style and delivery, expressing itself repeatedly as a concern with external beauty, ornateness, and superficiality.¹ The ascetic distaste for such external artifice was part of a larger suspicion of the literal and the physical, an attitude that, through the association of woman with the body (as of man with the spirit), came to link femininity with the superficial and with rhetoric itself. (The perceived affinity between verbal beauty and physical beauty, between rhetoric and the feminine, meant that concerns about rhetoric could be expressed in part as a gender problem.) The theory of preaching as it was worked out in the late-twelfth to fifteenth centuries displays a mistrust of ornate language, theatricality, and other potentially inappropriate sources of attraction, often discussing them in terms that echo the patristic mistrust of feminine allure. The association between feminine and rhetorical attractions leads us to examine the important role of physical beauty and eloquence in the legendary preaching of saints like Katherine of Alexandria and Mary Magdalene, the only women late-medieval orthodoxy could accept as preachers.² Their stories helped to neutralize the dangerous allure of the superficial by showing how physical and verbal beauty could be united to serve, rather than threaten, the greater good of preaching.

Howard Bloch, among others, has explored the associations patristic Christian thinkers made between femininity and the superficial, and between rhetoric and the feminine.³ The complex of associations that links femininity and artifice is most clearly expressed in the works of Tertullian. His writings on the theater, pagan spectacles, feminine cosmetics and adornment, and pagan literature associate and denigrate all forms of human artifice and artistry, which he regarded as the invention of the devil, introduced into the world by the fallen angels.⁴ The fundamental issue, for Tertullian, was that of idolatry: to focus on the surface was to miss or deny the underlying truth of Christianity, a truth which could manifest itself without the aid of the surface allurements he so despised. Speaking of women's appearance, he says, "The fullness of your modesty should be such that it shines forth from your soul in your dress, and cries out from your conscience in your appearance."⁵ Virtue and truth should speak for themselves. It is easy to see how such an attitude could lead to a distaste for the human artifice of rhetoric, though Tertullian, himself a master rhetorician, avoided directly addressing the issue of eloquence.⁶

Augustine, writing two centuries later, takes up the challenge of finding rhetoric's proper place in Christianity, making a sustained attempt to address the problem of eloquence in preaching, and his thoughts on the subject were enormously influential for later preaching theorists. Despite his less virulent tone, it is clear that he, like Tertullian, saw similarities between various kinds of worldliness, and that he included rhetoric--at least in its purely pagan form--among them. One brief chapter of his *Confessions* mentions, in quick succession and with no apparent sense of incongruity, his days as a teacher of secular rhetoric, the mistress he lived with before his conversion, and his refusal to use a pagan

soothsayer to help him win a poetic competition. Rhetoric, sexuality, and pagan religion all seem to be connected in his mind.⁷ Similarly, when he discusses his reprehensible attraction to pagan literature above Christian truth, the example that comes to his mind is how he wept over Dido's lament and death in the *Aeneid*, rather than the state of his own soul. Pagan literature is exemplified by the oratory of an adulterous female suicide (1.13).

In *De doctrina Christiana*, Augustine addresses, on a theoretical level, the problem with which he has struggled on a personal level: that the undeniable appeal and effectiveness of pagan oratory are precisely what make it both necessary and dangerous for a Christian, and particularly for a preacher. His concern, especially in Book 4, is to show how the beauties and the power of this oratory can be harnessed to serve Christian ends, without overwhelming the message they convey. In doing so he demonstrates his own ambivalence. The term he uses repeatedly to express the desirably attractive qualities of eloquence is *suavitas*, a word with both sensual and intellectual connotations of pleasure and attractiveness.⁸ Augustine stresses the importance of *suavitas* to effective speech, but he is careful to indicate that it is pleasurable, rather than wholesome. He warns that one must always avoid the "pernicious sweetness" of *suavitas* that carries no salubrious message (4.5.8), and deplores the use of eloquence to make wickedness attractive (4.14.30). At times he seems for a moment to imagine a world where unadorned truth could speak for itself—but he quickly turns from this utopian vision to admit that fastidious tastes make eloquence a necessity even for the preacher of divine truth (4.13-4.14.30). His willingness to accommodate eloquence is conveyed to later theorists of preaching—as are his continuing reservations about it.

De doctrina Christiana was finished around the year 427. After that, it was almost eight hundred years before further substantial work was done on the theory of Christian preaching.⁹ In the interval, of course, Christianity had thoroughly established itself and preaching had developed a substantial, if uncodified, tradition. Perhaps as a result, the preaching theorists of the later Middle Ages demonstrate much less anxiety about rhetoric than their forebears, for whom pagan rhetoric seemed to threaten the very substance of Christian doctrine.¹⁰ Alan of Lille, one of the earliest medieval theorists, still has Tertullianesque things to say about the undesirability of theatricality and ornateness in preaching:

Preaching should not contain jesting words, or childish remarks, or that melodiousness and harmony which result from the use of rhythm or metrical lines; these are better fitted to delight the ear than to edify the soul. Such preaching is theatrical and full of buffoonery, and in every way to be condemned. . . . Preaching should not glitter with verbal trappings, with purple patches.¹¹

He confines these strictures, however, to his prologue, devoting the majority of his text to suggestions about how to preach to various kinds of sinners (the worldly, the lazy, and so forth) and estates (soldiers, priests, widows). Later authors give rhetoric even less attention. The most common approach is a brief, almost ritualistic warning against eloquence for eloquence's sake or any other privileging of surface over content. "A sermon should be simple, and devoid of all the empty ornaments of rhetoric," as the Dominican Humbert of Romans put it in the thirteenth century.¹² "Overly ornate speech or eloquence is to be avoided in a sermon," echoes a treatise wrongly attributed to St Bonaventure.¹³ Though the warnings seem to be seriously meant, the sense of threat from such practices is greatly diminished.¹⁴

Other aspects of the superficiality or artifice of preaching, such as delivery or the use of exempla, often draw apologies from authors. Thomas Waleys, a fourteenth-century English Dominican, begins his elaborate treatise on the art of effective preaching with a warning that "it should by no means be believed that the word of God offered to the faithful through the office of preaching is bound by any foreign, humanly imposed custom or by any humanly invented rules that are introduced in this work, as though the preacher were not permitted to act against them."¹⁵ Another writer, beginning a section on how to draw the audience's attention, says that "Deo inoffenso" ("with God's permission"), he will suggest some ways to allure (*allicere*) the audience, as though such enticements could be suspect even in the best cause.¹⁶

The suspicion of ornament and allure increases dramatically when we turn to another area of the growing body of literature on preaching in the later Middle Ages: the debate about women preachers. Here the issue of decorative attractions, which the preaching manuals treat mainly in terms of ornate language or effective delivery, takes on a new aspect: the physical allure of female beauty. One common argument against women's preaching was that a woman preacher would distract her hearers with her beauty and eloquence, drawing them to lust rather than devotion.¹⁷

A thirteenth-century disputation by Henry of Ghent on women's preaching cites the Gloss on St Paul's injunction, "I do not permit a woman to teach," as saying that a woman who preaches will "arouse" (*irritare*) rather than edify her hearers because of her beauty.¹⁸ Interestingly, the same verb, *irritare*, is used by Guibert of Nogent in his eleventh-

century treatise on preaching to describe a preacher who overemphasizes ornate language and grandiose eloquence. Such a man, according to Guibert, is an irritant rather than a preacher, forfeiting the very name of preacher and the respect of his audience by his focus on rhetoric.¹⁹ In different ways, both the attractive woman and the over-eloquent man nullify their own preaching activity: the too-alluring medium undermines the message it carries.

A later document in the same vein, composed in the fourteenth century to combat the Lollard Walter Brut's contention that women could preach, takes the problem of women's beauty even more seriously. Saying that "although a woman's beauty, form, and every movement allure men to lust, still more do the sweetness of her voice and the pleasure of her words," the author transfers the locus of danger from physical beauty back to (feminine) eloquence.²⁰ As the editors of this text note, the conflated problems of female beauty and speech seem to be central for the author of the disputation, who claims at the end of his work that a beautiful woman (the ugly are apparently not in question) will surely inflame her hearers by the *suavitas* of her speech—*suavitas* being the very characteristic ambivalently promoted by Augustine as the preacher's necessary, if dangerous, tool.²¹ The association between female speech, female beauty, and sexual desire is strong enough to rule out the possibility of women preachers for this writer, and to sour the connotations of the allure and attractiveness that otherwise are part of good preaching.

The Preaching of Katherine of Alexandria

In another context, however, the interaction of physical beauty and eloquence that preaching theorists tended to see as threatening takes on an entirely different valence. In the legends of Katherine of Alexandria and Mary Magdalene, the saint's beauty stands in complex relationship to her speech, acting both to attract and to distract her listeners. The hagiographers' treatment of these powerful women preachers offers a new approach to allure in preaching that turns the feminized associations of rhetoric into an advantage rather than a danger.

The legend of Katherine of Alexandria, like those of many other virgin martyrs, makes the heroine's beauty central to the story, linking that beauty to her defining attributes as virgin and martyr. Katherine's legend also, more unusually, directly addresses the dangers of eloquence, depicting the saint as a learned rhetor who must debate other skilled rhetors to promote and defend her faith. In the eleventh-century Latin Life of St Katherine known as the Vulgate, Katherine's physical beauty attracts her audience's attention and goodwill in much the way the *captatio benevolentiae* does in classical rhetoric—and is then turned upon them, as it were, to show why such an attraction is to be shunned. Like the preacher's rhetoric, the virgin's beauty is the sweetness that lures a hearer to swallow the bitter medicine of her message, a sweetness that is dangerous only if the hearer does not realize he must move beyond it.²²

When Katherine goes to confront the pagan emperor Maxentius at sacrifice, she chides him for his idolatry. The emperor is as much struck by her beauty as by her arguments, if not more so: "with his gaze fixed on the virgin, he silently considered the beauty of her face and the constancy of her words."²³ Throughout the story, Maxentius proves himself unable to recognize Katherine's physical beauty for what it is: a sign of her virginal Christian perfection. This inability, a kind of misreading, is exemplified by his offer to make a statue of Katherine and set it in the city to be worshiped by all who pass. Katherine points out to Maxentius (without convincing him) the worthlessness of an idol that cannot see, hear, or speak, and the utter inferiority of human artistry to divine creation. She goes on to say that if the statue has no animate characteristics, it might as well have the ugly features of an ape as the appearance of a beautiful woman (175). Maxentius is unable to take her point about the relative worth of internal virtue and external beauty, and Katherine prepares to meet her martyrdom at his hands.

As she proceeds to that martyrdom, the point about earthly beauty is reinforced once more. The crowd, deploring the destruction of her beauty and youth, calls to her to give in to the emperor, but Katherine sets them straight. Her earthly beauty, she says, will return to dust and be eaten by worms; her martyrdom is not an ending but a *transitus ad uitam*. Like Christ on his way to the Crucifixion, she urges them to weep instead for themselves, for whom death will be eternal if they do not follow her message. The beauty that the pagans value and respond to takes on a new, inverted meaning in Katherine's teaching: having used it to attract their attention, she turns that very attraction into a lesson on their errors (190-91).²⁴ Far from invalidating her preaching and leading others astray, as the ascetic tradition and the opponents of women's preaching would suggest, Katherine's physical beauty supports and even enables her salvific message.

Even as Katherine rebukes the pagans for their interpretation of her beauty—as a worldly good to be preserved—the narrative suggests another meaning for it. Hers is no "mere" earthly beauty, no empty signifier, but instead serves as an external marker of her inner, spiritual beauty and worth. In various virgin martyr legends, the heroine's beauty is mentioned only to be immediately linked to her faith and virginity; as St Ambrose, echoing Tertullian, says of an ideal virgin, "the very appearance of her body [is] a reflection of her mind and a figure for her virtue."²⁵ For a Christian

audience, virginity and prospective martyrdom could neutralize the dangers implicit in the figure of a young and beautiful woman by demonstrating that her interior was consistent with her exterior. Katherine has the "singleness of heart" that Christian asceticism associated with virginity, a state that, as Peter Brown has said, required "total transparency to the will of God."²⁶ Since duplicity or, more accurately, a gap between surface and substance was one of the major anxieties raised by preaching, it makes sense that a woman whose surface "transparently" expressed her substance could be valuable in exploring the concept of ideal preaching.

Katherine's rhetorical skill functions in a way analogous to the use of her beauty in her story: both exist to attract and convince her audience, even as she herself ostentatiously despises these qualities. The Vulgate describes her as *decenter ornata*, appropriately graced with and indeed expert in pagan learning. As she tells the pagan philosophers whom Maxentius summons to dispute with her, she mastered then abandoned pagan studies, since they did not accord with Christianity; preparing to debate the philosophers, she calls only on God, not on her own learning. And yet her language throughout the Vulgate text demonstrates her mastery of rhetoric. The purity of her approach is that she places no reliance on that rhetoric. Her prayer to God, it seems, produces an effect identical to what her years of study could provide—indeed, a greater effect. She converts all fifty philosophers, thus disposing of, or rather subsuming, pagan eloquence into her Christian message.

The legend of Katherine thus presents her as an exemplar of the virgin martyr whose weaknesses become strengths, her vulnerabilities fortifications for herself and the faith. By embodying and then neutralizing the attributes that could have threatened her message—alluring beauty, feminine frailty, rhetorical skill—she offers an ideal of Christian preaching, "transparent" to the believing audience and to God.²⁷

The Case of Mary Magdalene

Katherine's unwavering virginity and martyrdom demonstrate the purity of her message and make her beauty a contributor to, rather than an enemy of, her preaching. But what do we make of Mary Magdalene, probably the most famous woman preacher during the Middle Ages and one who clearly does not follow the virgin-martyr model? The composite figure known to the Middle Ages—repentant harlot, lover of God, apostle to the apostles, contemplative—has an extremely complex identity. The place of her preaching in that complexity demonstrates another way of negotiating the role of beauty in Christian preaching.

The Magdalene's status as *apostola apostolorum*, the first to see and announce the risen Christ in the gospel account, led to later legends of her missionary activity. One of the earliest of these is the twelfth-century legend purporting to be by Rabanus Maurus.²⁸ It tells how Mary, Martha and Lazarus accompanied the bishop Maximian and others to Provence, where they all, including the sisters, became missionaries. Describing the preaching of Mary and Martha, the author says that the sisters had "admirable personal beauty, virtuous morals, and a most ready and persuasive gift with words," so that nearly every listener "was inflamed by their appearance with the love of God the Savior."²⁹ Their beauty, eloquence, and good morals ensure the effectiveness of their preaching.

In the account of Mary that precedes this, the hagiographer has given a slightly different account of her preaching. At times, he says, she would set aside the joys of contemplation and preach to unbelievers or comfort believers with her "honeyed mind, dropping honeyed words."³⁰ This sweetness of speech is understood to derive directly from Mary's relationship to Jesus: she speaks *ex abundantia cordis* and convinces her hearers by showing them the eyes that wept for Christ and first saw him resurrected, the hair that dried his feet, the mouth that kissed them, and so on.³¹ As Susan Haskins has noted, commentators associated Mary's mouth, eyes, and especially hair with her dangerous sexual allure before her conversion.³² In her later life, however, her sinful female body becomes the visible sign of her love for Christ and, by extension, of his love and forgiveness of her. Thus Mary's preaching, which draws on her beauty and eloquence for its effect, is grounded in her personal and even physical knowledge of Jesus, a knowledge that is witnessed by her own body and that, according to the author of this life, Jesus himself linked to her apostolate.³³

Despite "Rabanus's" warmth in describing the preaching activity of Mary and Martha, that activity is far from central to his lengthy account. Jacobus of Voragine, writing a century or so later, makes her mission much more of a focus, although his discussion of it is in the same tradition. The description of her interaction with Jesus during his lifetime is remarkably brief; Jacobus's interest lies in the later parts of her vita. After arriving in Marseilles, Mary is distressed to see the people worshiping idols; she goes forward and "with a calm face and a serene appearance, she recalled them from the worship of idols with a discreet tongue and preached Christ to them with great constancy."³⁴ Jacobus may be noting her serenity and discretion as a way to indicate that she preached appropriately—without, it is clear, any unnecessary theatrics. The pagan mob is quite taken with her; Jacobus says that "everyone was amazed at her beauty, her fluency in speaking, and the sweetness of her eloquence."³⁵ He adds that it is hardly surprising that the mouth that

kissed the savior's feet should breathe forth the fragrance of the word better than others. The association of the preacher's eloquence with her physical beauty is by now familiar, but it is still striking that Jacobus mentions nothing about the actual substance of Mary's message or her hearers' response to that message. His greatest emphasis falls on her eloquence, whose effectiveness is once more linked to her physical contact with Jesus.

Transparent Rhetoric

We may note that these lives of Mary Magdalene do not focus as strongly on her sheer physical beauty as does the life of Katherine. The danger of beauty that Katherine overcomes and neutralizes, the danger of sexual allure, was seen as the Magdalene's downfall, and her body could not directly signify spiritual purity in the same way as Katherine's. Instead, Mary's physical beauty is transformed into a spiritual sign: the attributes that had exemplified worldly allurements become a focus for devotion. Her legends place more emphasis on the beauty of her speech and the meaning of her body than on the beauty of her body—or, indeed, the meaning of her speech.

In spite of this, however, the propriety and value of Mary's preaching are never questioned. Her unmediated knowledge of Jesus is the inspiration for and guarantee of her speech. Similarly, Katherine's pure and constant virginity marks her as the true mystical spouse of Christ, and this intimate relationship thoroughly informs her preaching. In both cases, a woman's preaching is enabled by the immediacy of her relationship to God, a peculiarly feminine relationship that yields an ideal neither masculine nor feminine: preaching that conveys the Word as transparently as the preacher has received it.

When the pagan philosophers confess to Maxentius that Katherine has converted them, their spokesman describes the effect of her speech: "as we heard her preach the name of Christ and the power of his divinity, as well as the service of his cross, our entrails were stirred, our hearts trembled and all the senses of our bodies fled in astonishment."[36](#) This passage, which seems to express the grace that works through the preacher, has a faint echo in the much later preaching manual of Thomas Waleys, one of the few theorists who give any sustained attention to delivery. He says,

[W]hen the preacher preaches fruitfully and usefully, as he should when he is in the fervor of his spirit, his heart is so immediately joined to the hearts of his hearers that he is aware neither that he has a tongue, nor that his hearers have ears, but it seems to him that his word flows forth from his heart and enters the hearts of his listeners, as it were, without any mediation.[37](#)

Thomas does away with the merely sensual organs, mouth and ears, that may be led astray by the sensual pleasures of rhetoric in preaching, looking beyond them to an immediate and purely internal communication between the hearts of the preacher and of his listeners, not unlike the purely internal reaction Katherine produces in the philosophers or the devotion ignited by Mary's appearance. In Thomas's imagination the potential gaps are closed: the message runs from God, through the preacher, directly to the listener's heart. The preacher, like the idealized women preacher saints, has become transparent to his message.

This lyrical vision of artless transparency and immediacy, we should note, follows Thomas's lengthy and detailed exposition of the human artifice of preaching. The preacher's art must be subsumed in his message, as Katherine's rhetorical skill is subsumed in her inspired speech or Mary Magdalene's earthly beauty in her body's spiritual significance. By embodying the dangerously alluring attributes of physical beauty and eloquence, but also the semi-physical relationship to Christ that expresses the ideal of unmediated communication with the divine, these saints help to explore medieval Christianity's anxiety about a physical human being conveying a divine message. Displaying beauty embodied as a pure transparency, rhetoric as the truest expression of divine grace, the female preacher saint imbues these qualities with a fully Christian meaning and becomes the ideal vessel for Christian doctrine, by containing within herself the threats of dangerous beauty and beautiful speech, already castigated, neutralized, and ready for Christian use.

Notes

1. Jody Enders, *Rhetoric and the Origins of Medieval Drama* (Ithaca, 1992), p. 30, says that "Christian rhetoricians deplored the dependence of ethical content on a dramatic delivery that had no intrinsic moral identity." And in an article on the Pardoner as a figure for rhetoric's dangerously permeable boundaries, Rita Copeland notes that *elocutio*, the "most visible aspect" of rhetoric, could easily be seen as "merely deceptive surface" but is nonetheless necessary: "style . . . is a function inherent to rhetoric": Copeland, "The Pardoner's Body and the Disciplining of Rhetoric," in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester, 1994), pp. 139-59, at 146.
2. Although this paper will look particularly at these two saints, there are other women saints of the early Church whose legends depict them as preachers. Jacobus of Voragine's *Golden Legend* is fairly sparing of the actual term *praedicare* (though see the legends of St Felicity [*The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1993), 1:364] and St Euphemia [2:180]), but a number of the virgin martyrs are shown publicly disputing with and instructing their opponents in a manner very similar to that of St Katherine. See, for example, St Lucy (1:28-29), St Margaret of Antioch (1:368-70), and St Christina (1:385-87), all of whose legends emphasize the saint's speech. In addition, St Martha, according to medieval belief the sister of Mary Magdalene, shared her preaching mission (2:23-26).
3. R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago, 1991), esp. ch. 2, "Early Christianity and the Estheticization of Gender" (pp. 37-63). See also Marsha Colish, "Cosmetic Theology: The Transformation of a Stoic Theme," *Assays* 1 (1981), 3-14.
4. See Tertullian, *La Toilette des femmes (De cultu feminarum)* 1.2.1, introd., ed., and trans. Marie Turcan, *Sources chrétiennes* 173 (Paris, 1971), pp. 46-48: "illi scilicet angeli qui ad filias hominum de caelo ruerunt . . . et cum materias quasdam bene occultas et artes plerasque non bene reuelatas saeculo multo magis imperito prodidissent, si quidem et metallorum opera nudauerant . . . et omnem curiositatem usque ad stellarum interpretationem designauerant, proprie et quasi peculiariter feminis instrumentum istud muliebris gloriae contulerunt. "
5. Tertullian, *La Toilette* 2.13.3, ed. Turcan, p. 164: "Tanta enim debet esse plenitudo eius [i.e., pudicitiae] ut emanet ab animo in habitum et eructet a conscientia in superficiem." Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
6. Timothy Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford, 1985), p. 210, goes so far as to say that in Tertullian's writings "[p]hilosophy and theology . . . are subordinate to oratory—which accounts for [his writings'] effectiveness."
7. Augustine, *Confessions* 4.2, trans. William Watts, Loeb Classical Library 26-27 (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), pp. 148-

50. Further references to this work are given by book and section number in the text.

8. Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana; De vera religione*, ed. Joseph Martin, CCSL 32 (Turnholt, 1962); see, for example, 4.12-14.28-30 (pp. 135-37). Further references are by book, section, and paragraph number in the text.

9. James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from St Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley, 1974), pp. 284-85.

10. To use Rita Copeland's formulation, we might say that having developed a substantial and coherent body of its own, Christian preaching was less threatened by the permeable boundaries that rhetoric implied.

11. Alan of Lille, *The Art of Preaching*, trans. Gillian R. Evans (Kalamazoo, 1981), pp. 18-19. "Praedicatio enim in se, non debet habere verba scurrilia, vel puerilia, vel rhythmorum melodias et consonantias metrorum, que potius fiunt ad aures demulcendas, quam ad animum instruendum, quae praedicatio theatralis est et mimica et omnifarie contemnenda . . . praedicatio enim non debet splendere phaleris verborum, purpuramentis colorum": *Summa de arte praedicatoria* (PL 210:111-98, at col. 112).

12. Humbert of Romans, *Treatise on Preaching*, ed. Walter M. Conlon, trans. the Dominican students, Province of St Joseph (London, 1955), p. 43.

13. "Cavenda sunt in sermone nimis ornata eloquia vel eloquentia": Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Ars concionandi*, in *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae Opera Omnia*, ed. Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 10 vols. in 11 (Rome, 1882-1902), 9:8-21, at col. 15.

14. Harry Caplan notes that anxiety about rhetoric was by this time primarily "distrust for embellished style, because rhetoric was an art of adornment," and that the attitude toward rhetoric had become much more balanced, as ready to admit its usefulness as to rebuke its drawbacks: "Classical Rhetoric and the Mediaeval Theory of Preaching," in *Historical Studies of Rhetoric and Rhetoricians*, ed. Raymond F. Howes (Ithaca, 1961), pp. 71-89, at 79.

15. "Nullatenus est credendum quod verbum Dei praedicationis officio fidelibus ministrandum alligetur consuetudini alieni humanitus introductae seu regulis humano ingenio adinventis quae in hoc opere inseruntur, quasi contra eas praedicatori agere non liceat": Thomas Waleys, *De modo componendi sermones*, in *Artes Praedicandi: Contribution à l'histoire de la rhétorique au moyen âge*, ed. Th.-M. Charland (Paris, 1936), pp. 328-403, at 329.

16. Ranulph Higden, *The Ars componendi sermones of Ranulph Higden, O.S.B.*, ed. and introd. Margaret Jennings (Leiden, 1991), p. 32. This section, "De auditorum alleccione," is, like other sections of Ranulph's text, taken almost verbatim from Robert of Basevorn (like Thomas Waleys and Ranulph Higden, a fourteenth-century preaching theorist), who says, "Debet enim praedicator, quantum secundum Deum potest, allicere animos auditorum ut reddat eos benevolos ad audiendum et retinendum": Robert of Basevorn, *Forma praedicandi*, in Charland, *Artes Praedicandi*, pp. 233-323, at 260. This section treats the use of exempla and other means of enlivening a sermon, encouraging the preacher to find something subtile et curiosum to get the audience's attention.

17. This argument, as old as Ecclesiasticus (9.11), was used by numerous opponents of women's preaching, including Thomas Aquinas. See Alcuin Blamires and C. W. Marx, "Woman Not to Preach: A Disputation in British Library MS Harley 31," *Journal of Medieval Latin* 3 (1993), 34-63, at 41.

18. Blamires and Marx, "Woman Not to Preach," p. 52: "Mulier . . . vivacitatem sermonis non habet ad mortificandum, sed magis provocandum peccata, et ideo super illud, Docere mulierem non permitto,' dicit Glos[sa ordinaria]. Si enim loquitur magis incitat ad luxuriam, et irritatur,' et ideo dicitur Ecclesiastici 9, Colloquium illius quasi ignis ardescit,' Glos[sa ordinaria] In cordibus auditorum.'" The verb *irritare* has many meanings: to incite, excite, provoke, stimulate, and so forth. In this instance, the context strongly suggests that the specific effect of a woman's preaching will be to arouse the men who hear her.

19. "Irritat qui talis [a preacher for glory or gain] agnoscitur, non praedicat, quia quo dicta sua venustiore ornare conatur eloquio, tanto acriore astantium pectora ad contemptum (proh dolor!) etiam eorum quae bene ab eo dicuntur, et maxime sui ipsius vexat fastidio": Guibert de Nogent, *Liber quo ordine sermo fieri debeat* (PL 156:22-32, at col. 30).

20. Blamires and Marx, "Woman Not to Preach," p. 58: "Licet pulcritudo, forma, et omnis gestus mulieris alliceant hominem ad libidinem, maxime tamen dulcedo vocis et complacencia verborum."

21. Blamires and Marx, "Woman Not to Preach," p. 63.

22. Cf. Augustine, *De doctrina* 4.5.8: "Sicut autem saepe sumenda sunt et amara salubria, ita semper uitanda est pernicioosa dulcedo. Sed salubri suavitate uel suavi salubritate quid melius? Quanto enim magis illic appetitur suavitas, tanto facilius salubritas prodest." The genre of hagiography itself, like rhetoric, aims "to offer something that is moral and edifying but at the same time pleasant and entertaining" (Copeland, "Pardoner's Body," p. 150); the lives of the women preachers offer a lesson on balancing these two aims, both in their form and in their content.

23. "[I]mperator . . . uisu in uirginem defixo, uultus ipsius claritatem et uerborum constantiam tacitus considerabat." Quotations from the Vulgate text are taken from *Seinte Katerine, Re-edited from MS Bodley 34 and the other*

Manuscripts, ed. S. R. T. O. D'Ardenne and E. J. Dobson (Oxford, 1981). The above passage is at p. 151; further references to this edition will be by page number in the text.

24. In a very similar scene in the legend of St Margaret of Antioch, the citizens lament, "Oh, what beauty you have lost by not believing in the gods!" Margaret replies, "This torture of the flesh is the salvation of the soul!" See Jacobus of Voragine, *Golden Legend*, 1:369.

25. "ipsa corporis species simulacrum fuerit mentis, figura probitatis": Ambrose, *De uirginibus* 2.2.7, in *Opere morali II: Verginità e vedovanza*, introd. and trans. Franco Gori, ed. Egnatius Cazzaniga and Franco Gori, 2 vols., *Opera omnia di Sant'Ambrogio* 14 (Milan, 1989), 1:170; quoted in Augustine, *De doctrina* 4.21.48, p. 155. Among the virgin martyrs whose beauty is more than physical is St Agnes, of whom Jacobus of Voragine says that "[h]er face was beautiful, her faith more beautiful"; in another instance, having said that Lucy means light and that light is beautiful, he clarifies that "the blessed virgin Lucy possessed the beauty of virginity without trace of corruption": Jacobus, *Golden Legend*, 1:102, 27.

26. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988), p. 37. This passage refers specifically to a characteristic of the Jewish communities around the time of Jesus's life, but the idea of transparency carried over into Christian thought.

27. Similarly, Jacobus of Voragine notes that one of Katherine's outstanding qualities was the "cleanness of chastity" (*munditia castitatis*) that she preserved in the midst of things that are usually inimical to chastity, namely "affluentia resolvens, opportunitas inducens, iuventus lasciviens, libertas effrenans, pulchritudo alliciens": Jacobus of Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, ed. Th. Graesse (Dresden, 1846), p. 796. By preserving her virginity, that is, Katherine has overcome her own dangerous characteristics.

28. "Rabanus," *De vita beatae Mariae Magdalene et sororis ejus sanctae Marthae*, in *Monuments inédits sur l'apostolat de sainte Marie-Madeleine en Provence*, ed. Etienne de Faillon, 2 vols. (Paris, 1848), 2:453-558. Further references are by Volume and column number.

29. *Monuments inédits*, ed. Faillon, 2:543: "Erat autem in utriusque earum vultu veneranda venustas, honestas in moribus, in verbis promptissima gratia ad suadendum. Vix, vel nunquam, inueniebatur aliquis, qui ab earum praedicatione incredulus recederet, vel sine fletu; qui non ab earum facie inflammaretur Domini Salvatoris amore, vel propriae miseriae consideratione lacrymaretur."

30. *Monuments inédits*, ed. Faillon, 2:541: "melliflua mente, mellita verba . . . instillans."

31. *Monuments inédits*, ed. Faillon, 2:541. Cf. Matt. 12.34: "Progenies viperarum, quomodo potestis bona loqui, cum sitis mali? ex abundantia enim cordis os loquitur."