

ABSTRACT

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In the lives of the saints, it is clear that medieval hagiography reflects the statement, "Antiquity has a twofold life in the Middle Ages: reception and transformation." The vernacular poems of the virgin martyrs (Clemence of Barking's The Life of St. Catherine and the anonymous lives of St. Agnes and St. Barbara) as well as the prose biographies of the Beguines (Jacques de Vitry's The Life of Marie d'Oignies and Philippine de Porcellet's The Life of Saint Douceline) are testaments to this process as they reveal medieval perspectives on such topics as pagan learning and religion. Hagiography from the 12th to the 14th centuries presents a privileged view of a society defining itself against the past.

Medieval hagiography is a product of writers trained in or somehow familiar with the treatises of the Ciceronian rhetorical tradition that were the standard textbooks of the time. Although often dismissed for their similarities, these works should be carefully considered by students of French literature given their precise following of precepts that govern their structure and content. Simply put, rhetoric once represented the whole of literary criticism, and one cannot read these texts without an appreciation for this fact. A rhetorical analysis of these texts highlights their literary value and illustrates their role in the history of ideas.

CICERONIAN RHETORIC AND THE ART OF MEDIEVAL FRENCH
HAGIOGRAPHY

By

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Introduction

Suddenly I was caught up in the spirit and dragged before the Judge's judgment seat: and here the light was so dazzling, and the brightness shining from those who stood around so radiant, that I flung myself upon the ground and did not dare to look up. I was asked to state my condition and replied that I was a Christian. But He who presided said: "Thou liest; thou art a Ciceronian, not a Christian. For where thy treasure is there will thy heart be also."¹

In the citation above, St. Jerome illustrates the dilemma of the Church Fathers in the fourth century A.D. Should they reconcile Christian teaching with classical learning? St. Augustine, a teacher of rhetoric in Milan and a contemporary of St. Jerome, settled the question by advocating the use of rhetoric to spread the Christian message in his De doctrina christiana. The influence of St. Augustine's work was "out of all proportion to its size" for it "began rhetoric anew."²

In this dissertation, I will examine the influence of rhetoric, specifically the precepts of the Ciceronian rhetorical tradition, on the heirs of these Church Fathers, the hagiographers of the Middle Ages. I will

¹ St. Jerome, Select Letters, trans. F.A. Wright (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1933) 127.

² C.S. Baldwin, Ancient Rhetoric and Poetic (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1924) 51.

look at the way five medieval French hagiographers preserved and adapted ancient rhetoric in the lives of three different virgin martyrs (St. Catherine, St. Agnes, and St. Barbara) as well as in the lives of holy women known as the Beguines (Marie d'Oignies and Douceline de Digne). I will demonstrate that the structure of the classical oration is the organizing principle for these virgin martyr lives. Medieval hagiographers employed rhetorical devices to advance their arguments and revealed a preoccupation with the nature of rhetoric itself and the role of the orator in society. In addition, the relationship between wisdom and eloquence is dramatized within these texts, and thus theatricality will be addressed. As for the Beguine lives, I will assert that later hagiographers did not abandon the lessons of Ciceronian rhetoric, but rather continued within rhetorical tradition as it extended to the medieval arts of poetry. In so doing, Beguine hagiographers promoted a new ideal of sanctity that would appeal to Church authorities as well as an audience drawn to the ideal of the apostolic life.

The question of audience is of the utmost importance in the analysis of these texts. Rhetoric implies the art of persuasion: Whom were medieval hagiographers

persuading? Although the texts often appeared biased toward audiences of religious and noble laity,³ let us not forget that the lives of the saints were familiar to all. It is conventional to see the words "read and heard" together in these texts because they constituted a popular literature shared with many in the oral culture of the Middle Ages. To the medieval audience, the saints were heroes as well as intercessors, and the very texts which glorified them were viewed as relics providing actual contact with the saints. Authors often composed them as devotional exercises. Monastics generated hagiography for the edification and enjoyment of the members of their religious communities. The stories were often read aloud at mealtimes and on feast days and preachers incorporated them into sermons. Also, professional storytellers relayed these stories during important events at the court as well as in the streets

³ Joan M. Ferrante refers to "court as well as convent audiences" when referring to Clemence of Barking's audience. Joan Ferrante, To the Glory of Her Sex: Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997) 176. Amy Ogden also considers the targeted audience for hagiographic texts to be "both noble laypeople and religious." Amy V. Ogden, "The Centrality of Margins: Medieval French Genders and Genres Reconfigured," French Forum 30.1 (2005): 2.

"before all classes of people,"⁴ and this practice met with the approval of the Church.

Although it is not a novel idea to point out that medieval hagiographic texts are eminently rhetorical, it is true that a study of the genre has not yet been done to evaluate the influence of the decidedly Ciceronian character of rhetoric in the Middle Ages on hagiographers of the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries. In fact, scholarship in the field of hagiography has taken various other forms in the past twenty years, including a defense of the genre's literary and historical value, an examination of the influence of secular romance on the *vitae*, an increased awareness of the representation of gender by female vs. male authors, and more recently, a focus on the exemplary role models provided in these texts.

Scholars of medieval hagiographic texts treated in this dissertation have deemed it necessary to defend the genre to students of both literature and history. It has become a *topos* to refer to the neglect that the genre has suffered in spite of the fact that hagiographic texts represent some of the earliest examples of French

⁴ Ruth Crosby, "Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages," Speculum 11.1 (1936): 88-110.

literature in the vernacular. As Cazelles has pointed out, there is "a general tendency to neglect these early hagiographic texts as documents of little literary merit."⁵ Although Cazelles' assessment concerns only the lives of the virgin martyrs, it has been applied equally to Jacques de Vitry's Life of Marie d'Oignies. Walter Simons criticizes the text for being "formally simple and lacking all literary sophistication."⁶

Modern criticism often dismisses hagiography because of its repetitions. It is true that it can be difficult to distinguish between the different texts because the lives of the saints bear striking similarities to each other. In Alison Elliott's view, these similarities, "for a medieval, if not for a modern audience, may have constituted part of the enjoyment of the text (*plaisir du texte*)."⁷ There is a systematic replication of patterns dictated by rhetorical precepts; therefore, hagiography has been criticized for being rhetorical. I would like to propose that the similarities that one can attribute

⁵ Brigitte Cazelles, The Lady as Saint: A Collection of French Hagiographic Romances of the Thirteenth Century (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1991) 7.

⁶ Walter Simons, "Jacques de Vitry," Literature of the French and Occitan Middle Ages: Eleventh to Fifteenth Centuries (Detroit: Gale Group, 1999) 158.

⁷ Alison Goddard Elliott, Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of the Early Saints (Hanover: Brown UP, 1987) 7.

to the rhetorical nature of these texts be viewed as strengths rather than weaknesses and are in fact points of interest. Despite the limited availability of Ciceronian treatises in the Middle Ages, there is widespread unity and conformity in the application of their rhetorical precepts.

Along with the dismissal of these literary works due to their structure and repetitive nature, another common criticism targets the dichotomy between hagiography and history. It is important to examine this dichotomy because the hagiographer in fact did not intend to write history as we know it. Rather than as a historian, one should view the hagiographer first and foremost as a poet. It was impossible to describe a life in detail that was removed by centuries. It was necessary to fill in the blanks, as it were: "For many martyrs, the only 'hard' facts that hagiographers had to go on were a name, the fact of martyrdom, and its date; for the rest he had to rely upon oral traditions and his imagination."⁸ The necessity of rhetorical "invention," this blending of fact and fiction, led the well-known Bollandist Hippolyte Delehaye to label these stories "legends." The hagiographer did wish to express truth, for his goal was

⁸ Elliott 9.

certainly not to deceive; however, it is a moral truth rather than a factual one. The hagiographer sought primarily to edify and instruct the audience. This said, however, Joan Tibbetts Schulenburg invites us to avoid dismissing the genre altogether as a source for understanding women's history:

Despite the negative evaluations of the past, this genre holds a remarkable potential for social historians and especially historians of medieval women, for unlike many other sources of the Middle Ages, saints' lives focus a great deal of attention on women: the *vitae* are directly concerned with female roles in the church and society as well as contemporary perceptions, ideals, and valuations of women.⁹

A traditional approach to this genre is best exemplified in numerous articles by William MacBain, the 1964 editor of the Anglo-Norman Life of Saint Catherine by Clemence of Barking. In his 1989 article, "Five Old French Renderings of the *Passio Sancte Katerine Virginis*," he compares and contrasts various versions of the legend and highlights the appearance of *courtoisie* in the Barking poem. Citing the example of the emperor's soliloquy in which he exclaims "Coment viveras tu sanz mei / Et ge coment viverai sanz tei?," MacBain analyzes

⁹ Joan Tibbetts Schulenburg, "Saints Lives as a Source for the History of Women, 500-1100," Medieval Women and the Sources of Medieval History, ed. Joel T. Rosenthal (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1990) 285.

the courtly rhetoric employed to describe "the despair of the abandoned lover."¹⁰ Duncan Robertson continues along these lines in 1995 by drawing attention to how hagiographers borrowed form and substance from the romances as they "co-opted their literary idiom for edifying purposes."¹¹

In the 1990s, feminist scholars revitalized the field when they drew attention to the gendered nature of hagiographic texts. Catherine Mooney edited a collection of studies in which she outlines a shared approach to finding "new ways of interpreting these documents to understand better how the gender of medieval authors influences the ways in which they either self-represent or represent others."¹² Brigitte Cazelles applies such an approach in her analysis of various thirteenth-century hagiographic texts when she notes that "medieval women writers showed a profound awareness of the victimizing aspects implicit in the vernacular literary production"

¹⁰ William MacBain, "Five Old French Renderings of the *Passio Sancte Katerine Virginis*," Medieval Translators and their Craft, ed. Jeannette Beer (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989) 57.

¹¹ Duncan Robertson, The Medieval Saints Lives: Spiritual Renewal and Old French Literature (Lexington, KY: French Forum Publishers, 1995) 12.

¹² Catherine Mooney, ed., Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and their Interpreters (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1999) 3.

and views their task as "an attempt to rewrite woman."¹³ As for male-authored lives of holy women, Bernard McGinn advises us to keep in mind that they "tell us how men wanted to present the message contained in the lives of these *mulieres sanctae*, something that was often not quite the same as what the women thought about themselves."¹⁴ An analysis of both perspectives provides material for discussion within this dissertation.

In recent years, the continued interest in the genre by those in the field of women's studies has necessitated critical editions of medieval hagiographic texts and encouraged new approaches to these works.¹⁵ Scholarship

¹³ Cazelles 84.

¹⁴ Bernard McGinn, introduction, The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism - 1200-1350 (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998) xiii. A clear example of McGinn's assertion can be found in Jacques de Vitry's The Life of Marie d'Oignies as the author draws attention to those aspect of his subject's mysticism that confirm the church's authority and the necessity of its sacraments. Grace Jantzen explains, "It was crucial to the ecclesiastical establishment that those who claimed knowledge of the mysteries of God should be contained within the structures of the church, since the power of the church would be severely threatened if it should be acknowledged that access to divine authority was possible outside its confines." Grace Jantzen, Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism (New York: Cambridge UP, 1995) 2.

¹⁵ William MacBain's Anglo-Norman edition of Clemence of Barking's The Life of Saint Catherine has been translated into English by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Glyn S. Burgess. Brigitte Cazelles has made available English versions of the lives of St. Agnes and St. Barbara in her anthology of thirteenth-century hagiography, The Lady as Saint, although these versions do not reproduce the poems in their entirety. In addition, Peregrina has published The Life of Marie d'Oignies by Jacques de Vitry, and D.S. Brewer has published Kathleen Garay and Madeleine Jeay's edition of The Life of Saint Douceline.

by Elizabeth Weber, Joan Ferrante, and Tara Foster has shifted our attention away from the victimization of virgin martyrs by patriarchal tyrants in favor of the representation of the martyr as a positive speech model. For example, Weber employs strong descriptions for these orator-martyrs, such as: "Politically powerful women who publicly declared their convictions and confronted powerful males"¹⁶ and "powerful, independent, authoritative speakers."¹⁷ Ferrante refers to these characters as "articulate, active figures who accomplish something the audience, male and female, can admire."¹⁸ Foster's analysis of the relationship between Clemence of Barking and her female subject has led her to the conclusion that "Clemence draws a parallel between herself and her heroine that lends authority to her own use of words and situates her as the legitimate inheritor of Catherine's discursive prowess."¹⁹ The creation of the martyr as master of eloquence thus invites an analysis of the author's attitude toward women and discourse.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Weber, "The power of speech: Models of female martyrdom in medieval and early modern French literature," diss., U of Wisconsin, 1994, 3.

¹⁷ Weber, "The power of speech" 7.

¹⁸ Ferrante 176.

¹⁹ Tara Foster, "Clemence of Barking: Reshaping the Legend of Saint Catherine of Alexandria," Women's Writing 12.1 (2005): 15.

Building upon existing research in the field, I will contend that when a virgin martyr is presented as a powerful, public speaker, the martyr assumes the role of the epideictic orator presented in classical rhetorical treatises such as the two books of Cicero's De inventione and the four books of the Rhetorica Ad Herennium.²⁰ The De inventione was a widely used and influential text during this time. As for the Rhetorica Ad Herennium, it was once ascribed to Cicero but is now considered to be the work of an anonymous author. The popularity of the De inventione and the Rhetorica Ad Herennium is evident by the fact that they are both found "in their original forms copied into medieval books, and also in the form of commentaries written up to about the end of the thirteenth century."²¹ The most notable medieval commentary on the De inventione was done by Thierry of Chartres. As for the Ars Poetica (c. 68-65 B.C.), another rhetorical treatise available in the Middle Ages, it is a significant text because it "laid down precepts

²⁰ Edmond Faral, Les Arts Poétiques du XII^e et du XIII^e siècle (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1962) 99.

²¹ James J. Murphy, introduction, Rhetoric in the Middle Ages (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1974) xiv.

for writers, just as the rhetorical texts of the time laid down precepts for speakers."²²

Another well-known rhetorical treatise, Quintilian's Institutio Oratoria, is also included in the Ciceronian tradition due to what it shares with Cicero's later, more mature rhetorical dialogue, the De oratore: both works present an emphasis on the person of the rhetorician. The ideal orator would be both a statesman and a philosopher, essentially "a good man skilled in speaking." Although the complete text of Quintilian's Institutio Oratoria, twelve books in all, was not discovered until the fifteenth century, parts of it were available in the high Middle Ages in a "mutilated" form.²³ It must be noted that Aristotle's Rhetoric, although available in the Middle Ages, was consulted only as a book of moral philosophy and not specifically for its value as a rhetorical treatise.

By the time of the High Middle Ages, the rhetoric taught in Ciceronian treatises had become more "artifice" than "art," reduced to school exercises rather than

²² James J. Murphy, Rhetoric xi.

²³ Murphy has noted the significance of the discovery of the complete text: "...as a matter of fact, it was the reappearance of the complete text of Quintilian's Institutio in 1416, found by Poggio Bracciolini at St. Gall that marked the end of the 'medieval' phase of this subject and pointed the way to the classical rhetorical revival of the Renaissance"(xv).

techniques with which to arm a public person. Hagiographers in effect transformed rhetoric for a Christian purpose within their texts, restoring rhetoric to its status as an art. So why did medieval hagiographers return to this model when presenting an example of a Christian witness? What does it mean, and what happens when hagiographers cast women as orators? The "good man skilled in speaking" offered as an ideal by Cato, Quintilian and others becomes the good *woman* in the virgin lives under consideration. Indeed, when the anonymous poet of the Life of Saint Barbara refers in the prologue to a new kind of hero, "une sainte damoiselle," this is most certainly what he means.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I will assert that Clemence of Barking portrays St. Catherine as an orator to great effect when she presents her as an expert dialectician. In the age of Scholasticism, dialectic was the branch of the trivium whose popularity was increasing at the expense of rhetoric. Reason was becoming a more acceptable filter than rhetoric through which points of faith could be discussed and analyzed. In my view, Clemence, through the character of St. Catherine, inserts herself into the rhetorical tradition by weighing in on such issues as the value of rhetoric as

well as the relationship between wisdom and eloquence. The importance of Clemence's contribution to literature has not yet been fully appreciated because she, like Cicero, served to continue the discussion of these issues. Clemence is transmitting the precepts of classical rhetoric to a non-Latin speaking public. Let us not forget that the mere act of translating the Latin source into the vernacular also mimics Cicero's enterprise. Ciceronian rhetoric has been characterized as "Greek art in Latin dress."²⁴ One can say that Clemence presents "Latin art in Anglo-Norman dress."

As for the other two virgin martyr lives under consideration, The Life of St. Agnes and The Life of St. Barbara, it is of interest to compare and contrast these male-authored texts to the Barking poem when considering them through the filter of rhetoric and the presentation of the virgin martyrs as orators in the ancient mold. In so doing, I will test the following assertion made by Brigitte Cazelles: "Male-authored Lives tend to reinforce traditional Christian (misogynist) views of women, while the Life of Clemence rejects the view of

²⁴ Rhetorica Ad Herennium, trans. Harry Caplan (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1954) vii.

women as lacking intellect (and thus the ability to speak well)."²⁵

In these first three chapters, I will also address the virgin martyrs from a complementary perspective, that of iconography. Christian rhetoric was by no means confined to the realm of literature in the Middle Ages. Like the medieval hagiographers, Christian artists of the period could not escape the influences of Antiquity. Early painters and sculptors appropriated pagan symbols and themes and transformed them for their own purposes. As Grabar tells us, medieval religious art was not "art for art's sake" - it had its own precepts, motifs and aims. There is a rhetoric of iconography.²⁶

St. Augustine, who argued for the use of rhetoric to promote Christianity, referred to artistic representations of the saints as "libri idiotorum," or "books of the simple," designed to educate the laity in traditional dogma and to provide good examples for the faithful. Christian art and hagiographic literature thus shared the same goals. In our day, these images, once destined for the appreciation and understanding of the common person, are virtually unintelligible. The

²⁵ Cazelles 15.

²⁶ André Grabar, introduction, Christian Iconography: A Study of its Origins (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1968) xlix.

language is foreign to us, and must be studied if we are to understand who and what is being represented in these works. Today it is a language for scholars. In learning this language, we realize that every detail is significant, including color, dress, imagery and placement of the saints in relation to each other and often in relation to the Madonna and Child. These details were dictated by the Church and not up to the discretion of the individual artist.

For the artist, it was necessary to distinguish the saints from each other - a difficult task especially when saints were of the same type, such as martyrs. The problem was often resolved by the inclusion of an emblem from the saint's life as well as the depiction of the saint holding the instrument of his or her martyrdom. According to Mâle, the solution was effective: "the entire life of the saint was concentrated into one detail - the people never made a mistake, so familiar were these emblems to them."²⁷

Hagiographers and artists often chose the fourth-century virgin martyrs St. Catherine of Alexandria, St. Agnes, and St. Barbara as subjects because their legends

²⁷ Emile Mâle, Religious Art in France, the Thirteenth Century: a study of medieval iconography and its sources, trans. Marthiel Mathews (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1984) 286.

were well-known. These martyrs were venerated throughout Christianity, not merely as local saints. St. Catherine and St. Barbara were included among the fourteen most helpful saints in heaven. St. Agnes was one of the four virgins of the Latin Church. All three were of royal or noble birth and two were learned. The audience's familiarity with their legends allowed the hagiographer and the artist to emphasize or de-emphasize certain aspects to suit their goals. A comparison of the literary and artistic representations of the virgin martyrs will enhance our understanding of specific scenes within the vernacular poems under consideration in this dissertation.

Two other hagiographic texts will be considered from the fourteenth century. These texts promote "contemporary" holy women - lay women known as Beguines - and defend their way of life as exemplary to their detractors. These texts, Jacques de Vitry's Life of Marie d'Oignies and Philippine de Porcellet's Life of Saint Douceline, reveal that the hagiographic genre evolved during this period from the 12th to the 14th century from the translation and reworking of Latin sources in verse to the creation of original prose "sacred biographies," to use the term coined by Thomas

Heffernan. The authors of the lives of these holy women tailored their works to a changing audience interested in a more active piety and spirituality. As they set about their task, it will be shown that these authors did not abandon the lessons of classical rhetoric but rather continued to adapt them to their needs. These texts will be probed for their similarities and differences with the vernacular lives of the virgin martyr texts to provide a more complete picture of the relationship between rhetoric and hagiography in the High Middle Ages. Two important questions will be asked: What role does Ciceronian rhetoric play in these texts? Do Jacques de Vitry and Philippine de Porcellet cast these new saints as orators, or is another form of sanctity promoted?

In each text, I will show that the authors have a variety of audiences, messages and ends in mind, and that by carefully following the precepts of classical and medieval rhetoric, an art of hagiography emerges. I will first begin with the most overt treatment of the question as it appears in Clemence of Barking's The Life of Saint Catherine.

Chapter 1: Clemence of Barking's The Life of Saint Catherine

In The Life of Saint Catherine, Clemence of Barking creates a version of St. Catherine's legend that focuses on the character as an orator. The choice of this martyr as the subject should not be surprising given that St. Catherine was the patroness of young maidens and female students.²⁸ Clemence presents St. Catherine as an ideal of female learning much like herself and one which would inspire her fellow nuns and noble lay women (and perhaps men as well) to reject worldly, courtly love in favor of the superior love of Christ. Drawing upon her extensive knowledge of Ciceronian rhetoric, obtained from the privileged milieu of Barking Abbey, Clemence employs this character as a vehicle by which to inscribe herself in rhetoric's patriarchal tradition. Clemence shows herself adept at not only the technical aspects of rhetoric but also conversant in the philosophical questions that concerned Cicero himself - specifically, the relationship between wisdom and eloquence - which she dramatizes in

²⁸ "Looked upon as the holiest and most illustrious of the virgins of Christ, it was but natural that she, of all others, should be worthy to watch over the virgins of the cloister and the young women of the world." "St. Catherine of Alexandria," Catholic Encyclopedia, ed. Leon Clugnet, 1908 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03445a.htm>>

the poem. The poem has been praised, and rightly so, by Wogan-Browne and others as deserving a place alongside the Lais of Marie de France.²⁹ Clemence's knowledge of the philosophical aspects of rhetoric, and her transmission of these ideas, help demonstrate the high literary value of this work. In my view, it is in our interest to attend to this text given that it presents the parallel events occurring in the Middle Ages: the preservation and adaptation of Ciceronian rhetoric and the creation of a Christian rhetoric. It will also enhance our understanding of Clemence's vernacular account to view it in relation to artistic representations of the legend of St. Catherine, given that a similar process takes place within them.

Clemence's technical expertise is revealed in the structure of the poem which conforms to the six parts of a classical oration as outlined by Cicero in De Inventione: *exordium, narratio, partitio, confirmatio, refutatio* and *peroratio*.³⁰ As we examine each section of Clemence's poem, it will be shown that Clemence aligns

²⁹ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "Clerc u lai, muine u dame: Women and Anglo-Norman Hagiography in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries" Women and Literature in Britan, 1150-1500 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) 61.

³⁰ According to Edmund Faral, Cicero's youthful work may have been available to Clemence and her teachers of rhetoric as it was the standard textbook of the time (99).

her presentation of St. Catherine's *vita* according to the practical guidelines provided by Ciceronian rhetoric.

The Life of Saint Catherine begins with a prologue which corresponds to the classical *exordium*.³¹ Clemence seeks to render her listeners "well-disposed, attentive, and receptive," according to the rules expressed in De Inventione. Just as Cicero advises that an *exordium* should be "sententious to a marked degree and of high seriousness,"³² Clemence refers to her obligation to write in an appropriately moralizing fashion in the opening verses to the poem:

Cil ki le bien seit e entent
Demustrer le deit sagement³³
Que par le fruit de sa bunté
Seient li altre amonesté
De bien faire e de bien voleir
Sulunc ço qu'en unt le poeir.³⁴ (lines 1-6)

³¹ MacBain notes that "we are indeed fortunate" (45) that the prologue has been preserved because it provides an insight into how "different medieval translators approached their task and to what extent they perceived the need to reinterpret the message - or perhaps the medium - of the eleventh-century Latin version geared to learned clerks, for the society of a different period and for a different kind of audience" (41).

³² Cicero, De Inventione De Optimo Genere Oratorum Topica, trans. H.M. Hubbell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1949) 51. See also Aristotle's Rhetoric (II, 21) and Quintilian's Institutio Oratio (VIII, 5, 3). "Sententiae" are statements reflecting worldly wisdom and general philosophy.

³³ Gaunt remarks that the use of the term "sage," applied equally to St. Catherine later in the text (line 1080), creates a link between the female author and her subject.

³⁴ For comparison, Clemence's contemporary, Marie de France, makes a similar declaration in the prologue to the *Lais*, a secular work: "Qui Deus a duné esciënce / e de parler bone eloquence / ne s'en deit taisir ne celer / ainz se deit voluntiers mustrer" (lines 1-4). Both examples are examples of female translators "extending and

She justifies the need for her translation as well as commenting upon the lowered moral quality of her audience:

Pur ço que li tens est mué
E des humes la qualité
Est la rime vil tenue
Car ele est asquans corrupue.³⁵
Pur ço si l'estuet amender
E le tens selunc la gent user. (lines 41-46)

Clemence also invokes the assistance of God (a *topos*) with the task of translating a Latin version of Catherine's life into the vernacular, "De latin respundre en rumanz" (line 33). Clemence's use of Anglo-Norman, a dialect of medieval French that was both spoken and written, is revealing. Anglo-Norman was "used not only within the cloister as an alternative to Latin, but also among the wider religious community as a medium of moral instruction for the laity."³⁶ Clemence's choice to write in the vernacular is quite deliberate, in that she is

redirecting *topoi* from within the clerical hagiographic translator's prologue repertoire to create their own narrative authorization" (Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "Wreaths of Thyme: The Female Translator in Anglo-Norman Hagiography," The Medieval Translator, IV, ed. Roger Ellis and Ruth Evans (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1994) 57.

³⁵ MacBain suggests that "a more primitive verse form had been used, possibly the assonanced *laisses* of the *chansons de geste* now out of favor in courtly circles."

³⁶ William W. Kibler et al, Medieval France: An Encyclopedia (New York: Garland Publishers, 1995) 35.

reaching out to "a wide aristocratic readership, both laity and religious."³⁷

Setting the stage for the dramatic action to follow, Clemence begins her *narratio* in which one must relate events which either took place or were supposed to have taken place in chronological order.³⁸ In this section, she provides the background, introduces her characters and sets up Catherine as dialectician. Clemence projects her story back into the distant past at the time of the persecutions of Christians during the fourth century.³⁹ The emperor Constantine, son of Constantius and Helen, has defeated the pagan emperor Maxentius and exiled him to Alexandria. He has lived there for thirty-five years

³⁷ Duncan Robertson, "Writing in the Textual Community: Clemence of Barking's *Life of Saint Catherine*," *French Forum* 21.1 (1996): 6.

³⁸ Cicero 59. It will be shown that an alternative to this approach, the use of artificial order, is prescribed by the emerging arts of poetry and employed in the lives of the Beguines.

³⁹ The legend of Saint Catherine's life did not conform neatly to any of the categories that included *fabula*, *historia*, or *argumentum*. *Fabula* is the name given to a story which is completely false, *historia* to true stories set back in time, and *argumentum* to fictitious tales which could have some basis in reality. As with any hagiographical account, Clemence did not have a sense of writing "history" in the modern use of the term; however, her reliance upon a Latin source would have provided her with a sense of the veracity of its details, as it did other hagiographers (Jones 36; Cazelles 17). In her mind, the account may have been closer to *historia* than to *argumentum*, although the opposite may have been more accurate. The chronological order of the *vita* would have added to the appearance of the veracity of Clemence's tale (a common *topos* upon which she never directly insists).

and has caused much suffering for Christians (lines 51-66).

Clemence first introduces the emperor whose evil character will be contrasted with Catherine's virtuous one. In Cicero's view, not only the events shall be recounted but also the "conversation and mental attitude of the characters." The conversations should be embellished by such techniques as presenting the "contrast of characters."⁴⁰ Clemence describes the emperor Maxentius as having little self-control:

Un jur cum en sun palais sist
En un felun penser se mist.
Cest penser volt par fait mustrer,
- Kar fel ne se puet celer;
Quant il veit liu de mal faire
Ne se puet mie bien retraire. (lines 67-72)

The emperor sets out to make sacrifices to the pagan gods, which draws the attention of "une jofne pulcele / Ki mult par esteit noble e bele" (lines 135-136). It is relayed that this young girl's name is Catherine, and that she is eighteen years old. Clemence's description of her as noble and beautiful renders her virtually indistinguishable from a heroine of secular romance. She also uses a *topos* in the lives of the saints ("contemptus

⁴⁰ Cicero 57.

mundi") as she describes Catherine's scorn of worldly love in favor of one that is everlasting⁴¹:

Sages ert mult de choses mundaines,
Mais sun desir ert as suveraines.
[En Deu mist tute sa entente,
Sa valur, sa bele juvente.
Tuz ses mortels amanz despit
Et a nent mortel amant se prist,
La ki amur est chaste et pure
Et dunt deliz tut tens dure.]
E cel delit n'ad nule peine
Car la joie n'est unches vaine. (lines 145-154)

Clemence sets her version of the St. Catherine character apart from others by presenting her as a "dialeticien." In this respect, Catherine's abilities and education in the liberal arts were exceptional when compared to that of typical twelfth-century women of similar social status.⁴² The same can be said of

⁴¹ Catherine is not interested in finding a mortal, "courtly" lover. According to Clemence, the love of God is superior to the love celebrated in secular romance in that it is chaste, pure and everlasting. Clemence criticizes the conventions of courtly love, through the medium of a narratorial voice, by contrasting them with the constancy of God's love. She uses its very conventions to attack it. The Church did not approve of courtly love, given that "the conception of love they (the troubadours) developed is directly at variance with Christian morality." Alexander J. Denomy, The Heresy of Courtly Love (New York: The Declan X. McMullen Company, Inc., 1947) 27.

⁴² "It was not unusual that noble girls learned to read and write; and in connection with this, not a few women also acquired a basic knowledge of Latin, which enabled them to read the psalter in Latin. (...)Women can be said to have possessed a higher education only by comparison with lay society as a whole. They were almost entirely excluded from the learned education that was acquired through the study of the trivium and the quadrivium." Joachim Bumke, Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages (New York: The Overlook Press, 2000) 340.

Clemence, for though we do not know specifics about her life, we do know the history of the abbey, which "stretches from its seventh-century foundation to the dissolution of the monasteries in the sixteenth century, and has some claim to be the home of the longest-lived tradition of female learning and literacy in British history."⁴³ The women living there "were largely from noble and gentry Anglo-Norman families and in many cases remained closely connected with Anglo-Norman courtly society."⁴⁴ This connection explains much about Clemence's personal knowledge of secular literature and the audience she had in mind.

In her notes to the translation of the Life, Wogan-Browne remarks that "such a formal education in *disputatio* would be exceptional among contemporary Anglo-Norman nobles for any except professional clerics and scholars and was never institutionally offered to medieval women"(64). Clemence's learning, as evidenced throughout her translation and in additions to the poem, includes a solid training in Latin, exposure to the history and precepts of classical rhetoric and logic, as well as a background in the writings of both the Church

⁴³ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Glyn S. Burgess, introduction, Virgin Lives and Holy Deaths (Vermont: J.M. Dent, 1996) xxv.

⁴⁴ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "Wreaths" 47.

Fathers and secular romance. The education of the Benedictine nun at Barking in the trivium would seem to challenge Wogan-Browne's assertion that this level of education was never institutionally offered to women.

Having established the character and education of St. Catherine, Clemence begins the section of her poem that corresponds to the classical *partitio*. In this section, the orator must present the argument so that the nature of the dispute is well-defined.⁴⁵ Only those "facts and topics" specific to the case should be examined. The dispute in this section of the Life is Maxentius' demand for his subjects, including Christians, to make sacrifices to the pagan gods. The *partitio* begins when Catherine hears of this act and hastens to the temple to challenge the wisdom of the king's actions. From the very beginning, her approach is shown to be that of rational argument: "L'amie Deu se purpensa / Que le rei a raisun metra / E par raisun voldra mustrer / Que il e sa lei funt a dampner" (lines 189-192).⁴⁶ Catherine

⁴⁵ Cicero calls upon the orator to make his *partitio* exhibit the following qualities: brevity, completeness and conciseness (65).

⁴⁶ Clemence's use of the term "raisun" is as nuanced as it appears in the Greimas. In the first instance above ("a raisun metra"), Catherine appears young and impetuous as she wants "to set the king straight" (my translation). In the following line, however, Catherine also reveals herself to be prepared to use logic ("par raisun") to convince the king of his error given her abilities as a dialectician. In a contemporary usage, the term "raisun" appears in

chastises him for his actions, echoing the opening lines of Clemence's *exordium* in which she exhorts all who know and understand goodness to proclaim it publicly.

Catherine's outrage is such that she can barely greet him appropriately and must openly criticize his worship of idols: "E si tu eusses en tei raisun / Ne aoreies rien se lui nun / E tu aures sa faiture / Ki faite est de sa criature" (lines 207-210).

One is struck by the character's audacity as she boldly insults the emperor by stating, "E si tu eusses in tei raisun" (line 207). Catherine makes the argument that man-made idols cannot see or hear (line 213). This theme is repeated in other early martyrologies. The pagans' lifeless statues are juxtaposed with Catherine's living, courtly lover God. Returning to this theme, Catherine will later point out what birds do to the powerless pagan statues. She asserts that having no power for good or evil (line 214), they can do no good to friends nor can they bring harm to enemies (lines 211-16). She insists that he explain his reasoning because she simply cannot understand it (line 218). Clemence has her character repeating the arguments in lines 396-401

contrast to "demesure" in Marie de France's "Equitan" in the context of love (lines 19-20). A lack of "mesure" is often attributed to youthful impetuosity. This example offers an interesting resonance with the interaction between St. Catherine and Maxentius.

that the gods not only have no self-awareness but also have no power to hear, speak, see, feel or think. She sums up her thought with irony, sarcasm: "Ohi, cum nobles deus ad ci!" (line 401). All of these arguments demonstrate Catherine's logic.

Clemence's Catherine speaks with the authority of the Christian apologists who, according to Jean Seznec, believed that "it is a crime to deify the physical world - to worship the thing created instead of the creator."⁴⁷ This perceived error is the catalyst for the dispute. The emperor is impressed with her beauty and eloquence: "Bele li semble e culuree, / De bien parler endoctrinee" (lines 223-224). As he greets her, he remarks on her fine speech but finds her statements illogical: "'Bele, fait il, mult bien parlez, / Mais poi de raisun i metez" (lines 227-228). By conceding that she is speaking well but nonetheless without reason, he is calling attention to her skill in rhetoric. As to her arguments, he remains unconvinced. Clemence places the same term in the mouths of Catherine and Maxentius to reveal the conflict at hand. The characters find each other lacking in "raisun."

⁴⁷ Jean Seznec, The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and its Place in Renaissance Humanism and art (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995) 43.

Maxentius defends his pagan law by tracing his beliefs back to Roman ancestry. The Roman embodiment of religious authority upheld these gods. This opportunity for a pagan to defend the faith of his fathers is unique in medieval hagiography. Clemence gives the emperor many lines to present his viewpoint in words that counter those contained in the Apostle's Creed. He refers to basic elements of Christian "lei," including the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection, as "cruelle." For him, there is no greater error (line 238) possible than to believe that Jesus Christ took our mortal flesh in order to die. He contends that his gods, on the other hand, are immortal (line 249). All people throughout the world, in his view, sacrifice to the sun and the moon. He cannot imagine a land so remote that it does not make such a sacrifice:

Quele gent [est] de fei si veine
E quele terre si luinteine
Ki al soleil ne sacrificit,
Sa merci humblement ne prit
E a la lune ensement
Ne face sacrificiement?
Co sunt les dues en qui jo crei.
Or est le respundre sur tei. (lines 251-258)

Maxentius' words represent a widespread view in Antiquity.⁴⁸ Catherine responds by arguing that he is worshipping created things rather than the Creator, an argument often presented in the lives of the saints. She contends that the heavens, the sun, the moon and the stars all render praise to their creator. She notes that "raisun" demands the prior existence of the creator (lines 267-274).

Clemence does not show Maxentius to be convinced by Catherine's argument. Rather, the character reiterates his earlier assessment that Catherine is indeed eloquent but lacking in wisdom. The king does not counter her arguments and thus is shown to be unskilled in the art of rhetoric. Instead he believes that she would be wiser ("mult plus serreies sage") if she were following the philosophy of the pagan masters instead of Christian.

⁴⁸ In The Survival of the Pagan Gods, Jean Seznec describes the process, which he calls "mythologization," whereby the astral bodies were divinized: "Every mind which perceives a governing intelligence behind the movement of the spheres instinctively places this divine power in heaven. From this it is but a step to considering the sun, moon, and stars as in themselves divine" (37). The planets, once subject to the patronage of the divinities, became divinities themselves. In essence, this was the pagan religion's equivalent of the "incarnation" as divinity was incorporated in them, within the material world. Later, some mortal men were subject to this process, and they, too, became divine. Cicero appears to ascribe to this theory in the Tusculan Disputations: "Is not almost the whole of heaven filled with gods of mortal origin?" (qtd. in Seznec 12). This quote echoes a theory of mythology ascribed to Euhemerus (a third century BC Greek philosopher) whereby the gods were once men like ourselves. This view is known as Euhemerism.

Clemence thus introduces a second argument for her *partitio* concerning the relationship between eloquence and wisdom as expressed in the works of the Ciceronian rhetorical tradition and by St. Augustine. Cicero opens the otherwise quite technical De Inventione with the statement: "I have often seriously debated with myself whether men and communities have received more good or evil from oratory and a consuming devotion to eloquence."⁴⁹ The nature of rhetoric was a favorite topic of discussion in literature as early as the works of Plato, who strongly dismissed rhetoric as a "knack"⁵⁰ or form of "pandering"⁵¹ in Gorgias until he reconciled rhetoric and philosophy (rhetoric serving truth) in the Phaedrus. In Cicero's view, wisdom and eloquence are inseparable, and both necessary for the benefit of the community: "wisdom without eloquence does too little for the good of states, but eloquence without wisdom is generally highly disadvantageous and is never helpful."⁵² In fact, a good man should "equip himself with the weapons of eloquence" in order to be "a citizen most

⁴⁹ Cicero 3.

⁵⁰ Plato, Gorgias, trans. Walter Hamilton and Chris Emlyn-Jones (New York: Penguin Books, 1960) 29.

⁵¹ Plato 30.

⁵² Cicero 3.

helpful and most devoted both to his own interests and those of his community."⁵³ Certainly, Clemence's description of Catherine demonstrates the good Ciceronian citizen, well educated in rhetoric to defend her Christian community. Cicero acknowledges that there are "evil men" who "misuse" the power that eloquence conveys; however, this fact only makes him insist that men "should study it the more earnestly" to keep such men from power. Quintilian takes up these arguments in the first chapter of Book 12 of the Institutio Oratoria and uses similar wording: "...if the power of eloquence proves to have put weapons in the hands of evil, there would be nothing more ruinous for public or private life."⁵⁴ Quintilian does not wish to provide "arms" for the "brigand" but rather the "soldier,"⁵⁵ extending Cicero's metaphor. St. Augustine enters this discussion as well in the fourth book of De Doctrina Christiana, confirming Cicero. He warns of the danger an eloquent speaker presents when audiences assume that he is speaking the truth: "Wisdom without eloquence was of little value to society but that eloquence without

⁵³ Cicero 5.

⁵⁴ Quintilian, The Orator's Education, Books 10-12, trans. Donald A. Russell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001) 197.

⁵⁵ Quintilian 199.

wisdom was generally speaking a great nuisance, and never beneficial."⁵⁶

The discussion from Antiquity about the relationship of eloquence and wisdom has much to bear upon the nature of the dispute between Maxentius and Catherine, for clearly the emperor as the head of state must be on guard against those among his people who pose a threat to the community, especially when an eloquent speaker such as Catherine is arguing that he should abandon his pagan law.

The next segment of the Life of Saint Catherine corresponds to the *confirmatio* or proof, "the part of the oration which by marshalling arguments lends credit, authority, and support to our case" (69), according to Cicero. Clemence placed supporting arguments in Catherine's speeches to the king in the *partitio* which he was unable to refute; therefore, Maxentius issues a call for the most accomplished rhetoricians "ki parler seivent e bel e bien" (line 332) to defend "s'onur et sa lei" (line 336). The setting down in writing of this request is bears witness to Clemence's familiarity with the *ars*

⁵⁶ Saint Augustine, On Christian Teaching, trans. R.P.H. Green (New York: Oxford UP, 1997) 104.

dictaminis, or art of letter writing practiced by medieval noblewomen.

Catherine is described by both Maxentius and the assembled rhetoricians as "une plaideresse"⁵⁷ (line 335 and 479), evoking the language of a trial although what follows is a university-style disputation. As a martyr, Catherine is by definition a witness to Christ, and given the focus of rhetorical treatises on judicial rhetoric over others, the idea of Catherine giving testimony in a public forum is illustrated in the poem literally and dramatically. In fact, in this text Catherine becomes "one of the few female figures represented as legitimately preaching in public in the Middle Ages."⁵⁸ It must be noted, however, that women in Antiquity neither studied the liberal arts nor did they speak for themselves in the public setting:

Some women attended philosophical schools, but there is no known example of a woman studying or teaching rhetoric. Women were not allowed to speak in the law courts or political assemblies in Greece or Rome; public speaking by women was largely restricted to a few queens ruling in their own right in Greek-speaking portions of Asia Minor or in Egypt.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ In Virgin Lives and Holy Deaths, Wogan-Browne has remarked that the use of this term is rare and may be translated to mean "public speaker" or "preacher" in its masculine form (65-66).

⁵⁸ Wogan-Browne, Virgin 68.

⁵⁹ Thomas O. Sloane, Encyclopedia of Rhetoric (New York: Oxford UP, 2001) 93. One notable exception is Hypatia of Alexandria, whose

When Clemence of Barking refers to Catherine's skills in debate, the verb "desputer" is used many times (lines 429, 449, 675 and 1080). A term for "trial" is not employed. Catherine is also referred to in the text in a courtly manner as "l'amie Deu." Clemence thus presents Catherine as a multi-dimensional character assuming different roles at different times, including the courtly heroine and Christian rhetorician.

At this point, Clemence reveals a new depth in the character of Catherine, about whom the listener knows only that she is a beautiful, young, learned maiden of the nobility. Maxentius inquires into her family and educational background:

Ne sai quels maistres tu'unt appris,
Mais par tei unt grant los cunquis.
De tutes arz iés paree
E de tuz biens enluminee,
Fors tant que amer ne vels noz deux
Ki poant sunt e nient mortels. (lines 367-372)

She says that her father had her instructed in the seven liberal arts: "Les arz me fist tutes aprendre" (line 379). She speaks well of her masters, describing them as "bons" and "bien desputantz," as well as "nobles de cuer"

legend states that she was a Neoplatonist who lectured publicly to crowds assembled around her. Elements of her life, according to Maria Dzielska, were "inscribed in the legend of Saint Catherine of Alexandria." The story of Catherine's life may represent a Christian adaptation of the pagan legend. Maria Dzielska, Hypatia of Alexandria, trans. F. Lyra (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1995) 12.

and "puissanz" (lines 381-382). Yet for Catherine, there was a point at which she came to disdain her education in the liberal arts: "mais puis que jo le sens oi / Del evangile mun ami/ Presai mult poi lur doctrine / Car a lui [sui] del tut acline" (lines 375-388). For the listener, the story of Catherine would have echoed another famous conversion, that of St. Augustine, whose ideas on eloquence and wisdom have already been cited. Through the character of this young woman, Clemence of Barking appears to be drawing a parallel to the life of the former professor of rhetoric and Church Father.⁶⁰

By placing the character of Catherine in the position to defend Christianity in debate, Clemence dramatizes the experience and thought of St. Augustine, particularly his idea of a Christian orator. Catherine

⁶⁰ In his own words in De doctrina christiana, St. Augustine reveals that he came to reconcile his training in pagan rhetoric with the need to use eloquent speech in defense of his newfound faith:

Since rhetoric is used to give conviction to both truth and falsehood, who could dare to maintain that truth, which depends on us for its defense, should stand unarmed in the fight against falsehood? (...) Who could be so senseless as to find this sensible? No; oratorical ability, so effective a resource to commend either right or wrong, is available to both sides; why then is it not acquired by good and zealous Christians to fight for the truth, if the wicked employ it in the service of iniquity and error, to achieve their perverse and futile purposes? (101-102)

It is implied within Clemence's poem that the character of St. Catherine reached a similar conclusion.

must make use of her skill to "fight for the truth" in a debate against the fifty rhetoricians on their way to answer the emperor's call.

Maxentius delineates for them the challenge which they face:

Une pucele ad ci od mei
Ki mes deus despit e ma lei.
Mult [est] jofne, mais si grant sens
Mustre qu'ele ait passé grant tens.
De chascune art set la nature,
Le sens, la reisun, la pruveure.
Mult se vante del desputer
E mortels ne la puet surmunter.
Plusurs en I ad si vencuz
Que tuit se teneient pur muz. (lines 423-431)

Through this character's words, Clemence is portraying the best possible apologist. The emperor is compelled to call for Catherine to be defeated in a public debate:

Mais ço me grieve plus assez
Que mes deux ad si avilez,
qu'ele les tient pur criature
E de enimi false culture.
Bien la pusse aver enfrainte
E sa bele parole esteinte,
Mais greindre honor me semblereit
Ki par desputer la veintereit...
(lines 433-440)

An additional insight into Clemence's vision of St. Catherine is offered on the eve of the debate. As the listener waits for the next part of the "oration" to begin, Clemence portrays Catherine praying "humblement" (line 523) for assistance during the debate.

Paraphrasing St. Matthew, Clemence puts into St. Catherine's prayer key lines from the tenth chapter of his gospel. There it is written that one should not fear anything when standing before kings, for eloquence in speech ("buche te dunrai"), knowledge ("science") and wisdom ("sapience") come from God.⁶¹

At the end of the prayer, an angel arrives to comfort her by assuring a successful outcome to the debate, for the next day Catherine will literally be standing before a king, a dramatization of St. Augustine's (and Biblical) thought: "Sens e raisun e habundance / Avera de parler senz dutance / El estrif que tu as enpris / Pur li envers ses enemis" (lines 567-570). The terms "estриф"(lines 1625, 1854, and 2008), "estur" (lines 532 and 645) and "bataille" (line 656) are common metaphors that are transformed in this context to present St. Catherine as an Augustinian orator fighting for Christian truth. Catherine is a "miles Christi," a

⁶¹ St. Augustine shared this view as he quoted from St. Matthew as well in the fourth book of *De doctrina christiana*: "So let the person who wishes both to know and to teach learn everything that he needs to teach, and acquire the skill in speaking appropriate to a Christian orator; but nearer the time of his actual address let him consider that there is more suitable advice for a holy mind in what the Lord says: 'Do not worry about what to say or how to say it; for you will be given words to speak when the time comes. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of the Father who speaks within you' (121)."

soldier of Christ whose battlefield is the public forum and whose weapons are her skills in disputation.

The morning of the debate provides Clemence with another opportunity to contrast the character of Catherine with the emperor and the rhetoricians, as she did in the *narratio*. In Clemence's description, Catherine is loved for her beauty and praised for her wisdom: "Pur sun bel semblant tuit l'amerent / E sa reisun forment loerent" (lines 613-614). She compares her to other women by stating that a foolish woman often reveals herself through her speech; however, Catherine's eloquent discourse is beyond reproach and her wisdom is revealed through the beauty of her face (a *topos*):

Kar l'um veit relment femme fole
Que nel mustre en sa parole.
Mais ceste ne pot nul reprendre
De bel e bien sa reisun rendre.
Le sens que out en sun curage
Demustrout bien sun dulz visage. (lines 615-620)

Clemence highlights the sharp contrast between Catherine and her adversaries as she next describes Maxentius and the rhetoricians. Catherine's "bel semblant" is opposed to the "fol semblant" and "orgoill" of the men:

Le tyrant siet en sa chaiere,
La face ad orgoilluse e fiere.
Les clers ad assis juste sei
Ki mult demeinent grant podnei.
En [lur] fol semblant tres bien pert

Le grant orgoil que al quer lur ert.
Mult sunt de grant desmesurance
E de orgoilluse cuintenance.
Entr'els ert grant la risee
E la pulcele unt mult gabee. (lines 627-636).

The beginning of the debate between Catherine and her adversaries corresponds to the start of Clemence's *refutatio*, or "that part of an oration in which arguments are used to impair, disprove, or weaken the confirmation or proof in our opponents' speech" (123). The character of Catherine seems to stand in for Clemence as they both refute the arguments of the pagan rhetoricians and defend the Christian religion. In other words, this is Clemence's rhetorical construct of a rhetorical construct (the debate), in which the six standard divisions of an oration can be detected in Catherine's speech just as in the text of the Life.

Catherine demands at the start of the debate that if she is victorious, Maxentius will worship the Triune God, a request that he refuses. She turns to those assembled and demands that if there is a rhetorician or good dialectician present, let him engage her in *disputatio* and test her wisdom:

Seigneurs, fait ele, si cume jo crei
que ça estes venu pur mei,
S'il I ad nul rethorien
U nul bon dialeticien,
Vienge avant a mei desputer.

Tost purra mun sens espruver. (lines 671-676)

Catherine introduces her arguments by furnishing an *exordium* to her speech in which she repeats her earlier words to Maxentius, underscoring how pivotal her "conversion from rhetoric" is to the understanding of this text. The use of "oi" in line 689, the same verb used in line 385, indicates that she embraced the Christian faith after hearing it. Clemence shows St. Catherine explaining how she came to view her past education and that of those assembled as training in the "falses arz" (line 690) which "de fei furent veines" (line 693). Clemence shows Catherine using rhetorical technique when she seeks to bring her opponents into disfavor by speaking of how little she values their learning:

Certes tun sen pris jo petit
E mult l'ai jo pois preisié poi
Que mun Deu conuistre soi.
Pois que jo oi parler de li,
Tutes voz falses arz guerpi

Des queles ere ainz si sage
Que el monde n'oi per de mun eage.
Bien soi que de fei furent veines
E [de] dreite veie lointaines. (lines 686-694)

Through Catherine's *narratio*, Clemence presents the basic tenets of the Christian faith to instruct and edify her audience of listeners. The point at issue in the

text, or the *partitio*, is identified at the end of Catherine's speech: "E ço est de mun sen la sume / Que cestui crei Deu e hume / Iço est ma philosophie⁶² / Altre ne sai dunt ore die" (lines 729-732). Catherine defends her position, in accordance with *confirmatio*, by first arguing that Jesus is God and man through his power (lines 865-873). Next, she uses the language of *disputatio* by stating that she will present another proof, "Encore te frai altre pruvance" (line 876), which consists of the argument that demons speak the truth of God when summoned even against their will (lines 877-886). She also presents examples from pagan literature to her advantage: "Dous essamples te musteraï / Que jo en voz livres truvai / Que Platun⁶³ li sages escrist / De la sainte croiz Jhesu Crist" (lines 896-898). In this respect, through the character of Catherine, Clemence of Barking exhibits the "tendency of the Middle Ages to establish parallels between pagan wisdom and the wisdom of the Bible."⁶⁴ She echoes St. Augustine's philosophy which "Christianizes" Plato; she refers to him as wise.

⁶² For a discussion of the equation of philosophy and Christianity, see Curtius 211-213.

⁶³ Plato has been called "the most influential non-Christian thinker in the history of Christian philosophy" (743). Although his works were not well known in the Middle Ages, Plato's influence was felt in particular at the school of Chartres in the twelfth century.

⁶⁴ Seznec 16.

Clemence downplays a denunciation of pagan learning made in the source material, which would seem to indicate that she "takes pagan thought seriously."⁶⁵ In addition, according to medieval thought, there are parallels between Sibyls and prophets.⁶⁶ Clemence shows Catherine alluding to her writings effectively:

Sibille de la croz redit;
- Co sai, ses diz avez escrit.
Co dit: "Cil Deu est boneure
Ki pent en halt fust encore."
De sa venue profetiza,
De sa naissance assez parla
E de sa croiz e de sa mort.
Si co ne cries, dunc as tu tort. (lines 903-910)

One of the rhetoricians opposes her by presenting what he sees as more contradictions within her argument:

"S'il est Deu, ne murut naent./ S'il fud hom e mort
senti,/ Sa resurrectiun dunc desdi" (lines 936-938).

Catherine is shown to reply that she finds his "sens" lacking:

De tei ai jo apris petit.
Sage te tinc, ore I met mais,
Car encuntre dreit es trop engreis.
Nul mestier n'ai de ta science,
E si cuntredi ta sentence.
Par tun sens iés tu ci deceu,

⁶⁵ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "Sibyls and Soteriology: The Voices of Clemence of Barking" *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture c. 1150-1300: Virginity and its Authorizations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 228.

⁶⁶ Sez nec contends that "the Sibyls had had intuitive foreknowledge of Christian verity, and had foretold its coming" (17).

Kar tu n'as pas [bien] entendu.

(lines 942-948)

She presents a long summation to her arguments, or *refutatio*, by presenting an account of the Incarnation. Her *peroratio* consists of a brief appeal to the sentiments of those assembled by inspiring them to hope in an afterlife, ending with a statement declaring the error of her opponents: "S'ore ne me creis, dunc as tu tort" (line 1010).

At the end of Catherine's final speech, the reaction of the textual audience is important, because they appear to serve as judges as if this was a judicial oration:

Merveillent sei petit e grant
De ço qu'ele ad issi parlé
Sun dit issi par dreit pruvé
Ki dunc oist gent estriver
L'un desdire, l'autre granter! (lines 1012-
1016)

The emperor turns to the rhetoricians to ask them why they have stopped debating. He demands, "Segnurs, que nus est avenu?/ Avez vus tuz le sens perdu? Pur quei estes si amuiz / E pur une femme esbaiz?" (lines 1059-1062). Clemence creates the impression that Catherine has emerged victorious from the debate, for the rhetoricians have been rendered speechless. One among their ranks acknowledges that never have they heard a woman debate so well ("sagement desputer") and that no

one, man or woman, had ever presented such a challenge to them: "mais ne nus pot cuntrester / Nul a qui deussum parler" (lines 1085-1086). The clerks, unable to refute Catherine's arguments, are won over to her position (lines 1087-1094). These lines mark the end of Clemence's *refutatio*.

The aftermath of the rhetoricians' defeat in the text marks the beginning of the *peroratio*. In a classical oration, the *peroratio*, or conclusion, includes an emotional appeal to the audience. Clemence first invites her audience to respond to the suffering of Maxentius. She describes his fury as he reacts to the rhetorician's "defeat." He is enraged, and seeks to do them great harm. Those whom he has employed to defeat Catherine in debate have failed. He wishes to gather them together to torment them (lines 2155-2160). He is distraught in particular over the conversion of his wife, the Queen. He launches into a long soliloquy in which his concern over the danger of eloquence separated from wisdom reaches its logical, tragic conclusion. During his speech, he reveals himself to be a flawed courtly lover: "Coment viveras tu sanz mei / Et ge coment

viverai sanz tei?" (lines 2175-2176).⁶⁷ Clemence shows Maxentius' tortured love for his wife to be inferior to Catherine's serene love of God. Maxentius is shown to act in accordance with his perception of the public good. He feels compelled to put to death not only Catherine but his wife as well so their actions will not provide examples to other women (lines 2231-2242). This situation represents the key issue in the Life of Saint Catherine: the relationship between wisdom and eloquence must be resolved in the public form. When Tara Foster characterizes Catherine as "a woman whose speech is clearly portrayed as transgressive and harmful to social order" yet shown to be necessary given the "corrupt and illegitimate heathen society,"⁶⁸ she is describing the Ciceronian dilemma as it is understood and dramatized by Clemence of Barking.

Clemence ends the text proper with a lamentation scene common to twelfth-century literature. Proving herself to be a skilled versifier, Clemence relates the tears and the sighs of those witnessing Catherine's

⁶⁷Robertson correctly suggests that the passage should be read ironically: "The nun of Barking, passionately devout, introduces romance rhetoric into the speech of the emperor in order to discredit this fashionable discourse as a 'pagan' lie" (22).

⁶⁸Tara Foster, "Clemence of Barking: Reshaping the Legend of Saint Catherine of Alexandria" Women's Writing 12.1 (2005): 13-27.

martyrdom: "Mainte face I out arusee / E meinte voiz en halt crie / Meint bel oil I out moillié / E maint suspir fait de pitié" (lines 2513-2516). Catherine Batt rightly states that the listeners of the story can identify with the audience described by Clemence: "The grieving crowd offers a model within the text of the audience's own courtly sensibilities."⁶⁹

Clemence's epilogue provides a summing up of the main arguments presented throughout the text, especially those from the debate sequence. She writes of God's love to increase religious fervor among her audience. There is also a "narratorial signature"⁷⁰ in which she identifies herself and her purpose for writing: "Jo ki sa vie ai translatee / Par nun sui Clemence numee / De Berkinge sui nunain / Pur s'amur pris cest oeuvre en mein" (lines 2689-2692). Clemence reveals that she was not asked to perform this task, but rather she undertook it simply "for the love of" Barking Abbey. No patron or spiritual director is mentioned. She concludes by expressing her wish in the form of a *topos* that all who listen to her work "de bon cuer" will pray for her: "A tuz cels ki cest libre orrunt / E ki de bon coer

⁶⁹ Batt 113.

⁷⁰ Jocelyn-Wogan Browne, "Wreaths" 57.

l'entenderunt / Pur amur Deu pri e requier / Qu'il
voillent Deu pur mei preier"(lines 2693-2696).

As has been shown in the Barking poem, a structural analysis reveals its adherence to the guidelines for the classical oration and brings to light Clemence's central arguments regarding the nature of rhetoric as well as the relationship between wisdom and eloquence. These philosophical questions were considered not only by Cicero, but by Quintilian and St. Augustine as well. Clemence brings these rhetorical preoccupations to life when she dramatizes them in the speeches of St. Catherine and Maxentius.

In The Life of St Catherine, Clemence of Barking portrays the virgin martyr as a master of eloquence and wisdom. St. Catherine of Alexandria's speeches and actions represent those of an orator using the tools of rhetoric for a Christian purpose. It is essential to note that neither Cicero, nor Quintilian, nor St. Augustine could have conceived of an orator being female. Clemence of Barking, through her character, seems to respond to St. Augustine's call to wage a battle of words for the conversion of souls. In this text, the "battle" is dramatized in the form of a debate in which the young, noble woman is shown to be victorious over

fifty skilled male rhetoricians, having convinced them of the truth of her faith and the errors of their's.

The strong visual elements inherent in Catherine's legend and relayed in the Barking poem, such as the description of the saint, her trial and the circumstances of her martyrdom, lend themselves readily to artistic representation. It is therefore no coincidence that St. Catherine of Alexandria is considered "the most popular of all female saints"⁷¹ after St. Mary Magdalene, appearing in countless works of art. Her legend is so rich that she is distinguished by several different symbols and attributes. She is dressed in beautiful clothes and wears a crown to indicate her position as the daughter of a king. She often holds a book which symbolizes her great learning. In fact,

her position in art is so outstanding that it can be laid down as almost an invariable rule that when a young female saint is depicted, in a devotional group of saints, in or without the presence of the Madonna, holding a book in her hand, she is intended to represent St. Catherine of Alexandria.⁷²

⁷¹ De Bles, Major Arthur. How to Distinguish the Saints in Art by their Costumes, Symbols, and Attributes (New York: Art Culture Publications, 1975) 95.

⁷² De Bles 98.

Her martyrdom requires that she be depicted with a palm and/or the wheel constructed to end her life. A secondary emblem is the sword used to behead her.

In a painting by Martinus of Villanova simply titled "Saint Catherine" (1387 A.D.), the young saint is shown with the instruments of her martyrdom. She holds a palm in her right hand while she leans upon a spiked wheel with her left hand. To the Romans, the palm was a symbol of victory either in games or in battle. Christian artists appropriated the symbol to represent victory over death. The palm is held in the hands, as in this case, or brought to a martyr by an angel as if it were a gift from heaven. As for the wheel, it is noteworthy that it is shown intact as a testament to her strength and determination to uphold her faith.⁷³ Her crowned head is tilted to one side. The crown can indicate either nobility or martyrdom; in the case of St. Catherine, it is a symbol of her nobility and therefore the crown is worn rather than placed at her feet. The jewels in her crown suggest her wealth. She wears a red dress and blue brocade robe "modeled after Persian silks."⁷⁴ Her clothing

⁷³ De Bles 95.

⁷⁴ Robert S. Nelson and Kristen M. Collins, eds. Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2006) 269.

can be compared to that of other icons, particularly those of Jesus and Mary, in which a red undergarment (red symbolizes divine life) is covered by a blue outer garment (blue symbolizes human life) to represent the doctrine of the Incarnation. Significantly, the character of St. Catherine in Clemence of Barking's poem seeks to explain the Incarnation during her lengthy disputation with the pagan clerks, as we have seen. Both in art and in literature, we can see that the High Middle Ages showed great devotion to Christ's humanity.

Another representation of St. Catherine is the Italian "St. Catherine of Alexandria and Twelve Scenes from Her Life," by Donato d'Arezzo. The work dates from the first half of the fourteenth century and would have decorated the front of an altar. In the center of the painting, St. Catherine stands tall holding her attributes - a palm of martyrdom in her right hand and a book in her left. Around her head is a halo, an image replacing the nimbus from Antiquity, to represent her sanctity. She wears an elegant blue dress and red cloak with matching detail. This clothing (specifically the colors of the clothing), in direct contrast to that which is shown in the Barcelona painting, illustrates that

humans can aspire to heaven. Once again, the point is to illustrate doctrine.

On the left side of the painting, there are six scenes in which we see episodes from the life of St. Catherine: her visit to the hermit when she receives an image of Mary and the infant Jesus, her baptism, her dream, and her dispute with the philosophers. On the right, we see the martyrdom of the philosophers while St. Catherine prays. There are also scenes of her imprisonment during which she was visited by Christ as well as her martyrdom. The last scene shows St. Catherine kneeling before the executioner who beheads her and her burial by the angels on Mt. Sinai.

Two of these scenes in particular should be considered in relation to their counterparts in the Barking poem: the reception of the image of Mary and Jesus as well as the beheading of St. Catherine. In the fourteenth-century painting, St. Catherine sees in the image of Jesus an equally beautiful, noble, wealthy person worthy to become her spouse. She not only becomes enamored with Christ but also is converted to Christianity. In contrast, Clemence of Barking presents the catalyst for the martyr's conversion in a different fashion. St. Catherine is converted when she hears her

beloved's gospel read aloud: "Mais puis que jo le sens
oi / Del evangile mun ami / Presai mult poi lur doctrine
/ Car a lui [sui] del tut acline"(lines 385-388).⁷⁵ How
can we account for this difference? For the artist,
conversion is a response to an image. For Clemence,
whose poem was destined to be read aloud, conversion is a
response to a story. It is the medium that counts.

Also in the painting by d'Arezzo, St. Catherine is
shown kneeling in front of her executioner, hands folded
in prayer, and bleeding profusely. In Clemence's
version, St. Catherine hears reassuring words from
heaven before asking her executioner to quickly perform
his task:

Quant la dame la voiz entent,
Sun blanc col a l'espee estent,
"Ami, fait ele al mal serjant,
Fai la volenté al tyrant.
Ne seez ore pereçus,
Kar ja m'apele le mien espus.
Cil salt sus, si halce l'espee;
Ignelement l'ad decolee." (lines 2611-2618)

In both art and literature, the beheading of the martyr
deserves an important focus because this is the moment of
victory. In this case, there is a shift in meaning from
the art of Antiquity, in particular Roman art, that takes

⁷⁵ Clemence of Barking, The Life of St. Catherine by Clemence of Barking, ed. William MacBain (Oxford: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1964) 13.

place when considering the representation of Christian martyrdom:

Since traditional art had shown condemned or executed persons only to point out their crime vis-à-vis Roman society, it took time to make the sacred image a testimony of sympathy for those who there occupied the traditional place of the enemy.⁷⁶

For the hagiographer, the death of the saint was the climax of the story and was equivalent to marriage in the romance genre. Indeed, the character's words as written by Clemence reveal that the virgin does not wish for those assembled around her to mourn, for she longs to be with her bridegroom and hurries to do so. Two different responses are thus achieved by the artist and the hagiographer as the audience feels both sympathy and joy when the martyr is shown to pass from this world to the next.

Two fifteenth-century paintings by Masolino da Panicale focus on different aspects of St. Catherine's legend: her dispute with the pagan clerks and the episode of the wheel. In "The Philosophers of Alexandria" (1428-30 A.D.), one of a series of paintings in the Church of San Clemente in Rome, Catherine stands before the assembled philosophers while Maxentius looks

⁷⁶ Grabar 50.

on. True to the definition of a martyr, St. Catherine is a witness to her faith. There is a smaller image within the painting that shows Catherine praying during the martyrdom of these same philosophers.

In another painting from the San Clemente series, Masolino da Panicale depicts the "Martyrdom of St. Catherine" (c. 1428 A.D.) in which the wheel of legend is broken by an angel and thrown into the crowd of pagans. The broken wheel is symbolic - divine intervention shows it destroyed in pieces before even touching her. The same scene can be found in Clemence of Barking's poem (lines 2104-2112).

Late medieval artistic representations of St. Catherine focus on her mystical marriage, a focus not present in the Barking poem. The ring represents a distortion of Catherine's wheel, at times appearing so small in earlier paintings that it could be misunderstood. In one painting from the later period, Correggio's "The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine" (c. 1520 A.D.), a naked infant Jesus, sitting on the Virgin's lap, places a ring on the hand of St. Catherine, who is clothed in a loose flowing gold dress. Gold symbolizes the goodness of God, light, marriage and fruitfulness, and all of these ideas seem to be evoked in this work.

What is perhaps most remarkable about the artistic representations of the life of St. Catherine is that the paintings described above were created centuries after the Barking poem. How do we account for this time difference? Multiple explanations can be offered. First, St. Catherine's intercession was called upon by medieval theologians given her triumph over sophists, a devotion "which assumed vast proportions in Europe after the Crusades."⁷⁷ Second, her cult "received additional éclat in France in the beginning of the fifteenth century, when it was rumoured that she had appeared to Joan of Arc and, together with St. Margaret, had been divinely appointed Joan's adviser."⁷⁸ In addition, the later date of the paintings certainly attests to the enduring power of the images perpetuated by early hagiographic poems in the vernacular such as Clemence's and suggests a wide diffusion of the legend. Cynthia Hahn rightly advises that "we must view saints' Lives as products of a genre that is concomitantly literary and

⁷⁷ "St. Catherine of Alexandria," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Leon Clugnet, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03445a.htm>

⁷⁸ "St. Catherine of Alexandria," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Leon Clugnet, <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03445a.htm>>

artistic."⁷⁹ In the case of the life of St. Catherine, the rhetoric of medieval hagiography and iconography reveals shared commonplaces as well as a desire to preserve and adapt pagan arguments and symbols to edify and instruct the Christian faithful.

⁷⁹ Cynthia Hahn, Portrayed on the Heart: Narrative Effect in Pictorial Lives of Saints from the Tenth through the Thirteenth Century (Berkeley: U of California P, 2001) 5.

Chapter 2: The Life of Saint Agnes

One version of The Life of Saint Agnes, written in a combination of Francian and Northern dialects by an anonymous cleric, exists in a single manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale. The 1938 editor of the manuscript, Alexander J. Denomy, fixes the approximate date of its authorship as 1250 A.D. The poem consists of 984 lines and is short compared to Clemence of Barking's The Life of Saint Catherine; however, the poem shares with the Barking text its classical structure, portrayal of the virgin martyr as an orator engaging in rhetoric, and the presentation of arguments that reveal a medieval perspective on the pagan gods of Antiquity.

The prologue reveals the author's familiarity with Ciceronian precepts for the favorable preparation of the audience. Of the two species of *exordium*, the prologue in this text conforms to the idea of an introduction that addresses the auditor "directly and in plain language."⁸⁰ The poet sees in this task an "honorable" one that will quickly win the favor of his listeners. He knows that he is addressing a sympathetic audience. In the thirty-two line *exordium*, which is appropriately "of high

⁸⁰ Cicero, De Inventione De Optimo Genere Oratorum Topica, trans. H.M. Hubbell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1949) 43.

seriousness," the poet seeks the goodwill of his audience from the very nature of his subject matter which is understood to be "important"⁸¹ and which concerns "all humanity or those in the audience."⁸² He develops the idea that they should honor God through his saints, "ses amis" (line 22), and will present the case of Agnes as an example.

The poet's numerous references to the importance of speech and to the acts of storytelling and attentive listening are conventional in medieval literature. Similar to Clemence of Barking, he begins his work with a sententious remark: "Qui bien velt commenchier a parler / premierement doit chelui apieler / ki tout le bien puet toillir et donner / c'est nostre Sires que devons honorer" (lines 1-4). He believes that one must first invoke God in order to speak well (a *topos*) because our intentions are worth little unless God is their source. The Agnes poet not only performs this task but also recommends it, in effect acting as a teacher of rhetoric. He repeatedly refers to God as "Sires" and "Signor" in the prologue; God is a lord whom one must honor. The poet addresses an aristocratic audience, reaching beyond

⁸¹ Cicero 47.

⁸² Cicero 47.

the religious community, if indeed he belonged to one, to the laity. The tone of the prologue defines him as a man of his time, a supporter of feudalism and hierarchy:

Qui honor fait au chevalier le roi
li rois l'en aime et de cuer et de foi
Bien est raisons et si dirai por coi
Car il set bien que cil l'a fait por soi.
(lines 9-12)

Here the poet claims that God rewards our devotion to the saints for this devotion reflects back on him:

Quant les amis nostre Signor servons
Et jor et nuit lor hounor porcachons
Molt en sera riches li guerredons
Car cele hounour lui meisme faisons.
(lines 17-20)

The poet intends for the text to be read aloud, perhaps in court, as seen in lines such as "por chou dirai d'une dame l'istoire" (line 23) and "Ceste puciele don't jou chi vous voel dire" (line 25). Denomy argues that he could have been a minstrel⁸³ given the numerous indications in the poem that it was meant to be performed for an audience. This assertion is not out of the question. Other persons of importance, such as Bishop Fulk of Toulouse later in the century, were both troubadours and churchmen.

⁸³ Alexander J. Denomy, The Old French Lives of St. Agnes and other Vernacular Versions of the Middle Ages (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1938) 41.

The poet stresses the novelty of his enterprise, a commonplace of the *exordium*, and exhorts the audience to listen well: "Ki de bon cuer nostre Signor apiele / de vies estoire oie rime nouvele / chou est li vie d'une sainte puciele / ki por oir est molt et bonne et biele (lines 29-32). The phrase "de bon cuer," found also in the epilogue to Clemence of Barking's Life of Saint Catherine (line 2694), reflects the author's concern with the receptivity of the audience to the text. The reference to the use of a "rime nouvele" is curious because, in fact, he employs the decasyllabic rhyming quatrains of the *chansons de geste*. It is surprising that he does not use the more popular octosyllabic rhyming couplets of the romans courtois. In the late twelfth century, fifty years prior to the composition of the Agnes poem, Clemence of Barking was already critical of the use of the epic rhyme scheme in her vernacular account of the Life of Saint Catherine. William MacBain has argued that the epic rhyme with its *laissez similaires* had already lost favor with courtly circles at that time.⁸⁴ One explanation is that the Agnes author, as a minstrel, would have been accustomed to reciting poetry

⁸⁴ William MacBain, "Five Old French Renderings of the Passio Sancte Katerine Virginis" Medieval Translators and their Craft, ed. Jeanette Beer (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989) 46.

in decasyllabic rhyming quatrains; therefore, he adopted the form when writing his own verse.

To conclude with the first section, it is worthwhile to point out a few things that are not included in this author's *exordium*. First, the author makes no reference to himself; he neither names himself nor employs humility *topoi* of any kind. His anonymity reveals an intention to write as a devotional act, supported by the statement, "c'est nostre Sires que devons honorer" (line 4). Clemence of Barking's self-reference was the exception, not the rule. She drew attention to her religious community by identifying herself when she asked her audience to pray for her by name. On the other hand, there is no evidence that the Agnes poet is writing to promote a specific religious community or to fulfill someone's request. Also unlike Clemence, he states no problem with his source material and makes no claim to correct it. The author makes no moral commentary of the times in which he lived. The focus is strictly didactic. The *exordium* and the epilogue are preachy and aphoristic.

The next section of the poem, which corresponds to the classical *narratio* or statement of facts, is found in lines 33-52. To begin, he alludes to, but does not name,

his source when he states, "Li escripture sainte Agnes le nomme" (line 35). Denomy has identified the source as the sixth-century Gesta Sanctae Agnus.⁸⁵ According to Anne Thompson, the Latin text, commonly attributed to pseudo-Ambrose, "forms the basis for virtually all medieval versions of the popular and widely disseminated legend of St. Agnes."⁸⁶ It draws upon earlier versions of the legend popularized by Ambrose, Damasus, and Prudentius and is a mixture of Latin and Greek traditions:

The Latin legend, on the one hand, celebrates a very young maiden martyred during the third century. The Greek legend, on the other hand, venerates a Roman Saint Agnes, martyred in 157 under Septimus Severus, and introduces the theme of virginity. The sixth-century Gesta combines the two legends by borrowing from the Greek legend the dramatic bordello episode, and from the Roman tradition, the reference to the heroine's young age.⁸⁷

In the *narratio*, the poet provides the background information to the events that will take place during the text. Once again, the narrative of the virgin martyr life is set back in time to the age of Christian persecutions in ancient Rome. To introduce his heroine,

⁸⁵ Denomy 133.

⁸⁶ Anne B. Thompson, "The Legend of St. Agnes: Improvisation and the Practice of Hagiography," Exemplaria 13.2 (Fall 2001): 362.

⁸⁷ Brigitte Cazelles, The Lady as Saint: A Collection of French Hagiographic Romances of the Thirteenth Century (Philadelphia, PA: U of Pennsylvania P, 1991) 89.

the poet presents a portrait of Agnes that conforms to the methods of epideictic rhetoric and the conventions of the hagiographic genre. He describes Agnes in the manner appropriate for the praise of an individual, by treating her external circumstances, qualities of character, and physical attributes. External circumstances are described first, and thus it is written that she is of noble birth ("fille d'un haut homme" line 34). She is well-loved by her father, a faithful Christian: "Ceste fille eut chiere sor toute riens/ car elle estoit florie de tous biens" (lines 39-40). She is endowed with all that is good. This is, of course, a hagiographic *topos*. The author then proceeds to describe her character and virtues. Agnes is "preus" (lines 34 and 49) and "sage" (line 34), revealing qualities of her character that seem exceptional given her youth. She is both learned and wise, a *topos* of epideictic rhetoric known as *puer senex*.⁸⁸ She is a mere "XIII ans" (line 51) and thus a schoolgirl, "l'escole antoit avoec autres enfans" (line 52). This is the only reference to her education, unlike Catherine whose extraordinary command of the liberal arts was highlighted by Clemence. As for her physical

⁸⁸ The paradoxical description is a typical "characterization of female ideal figures" (101) from the literature of late Antiquity, according to Ernst Curtius.

attributes, Agnes, like other virgin martyrs, is distinguished by her beauty. The author uses hyperbole to express it: "En li volt Deus demostrer se faiture / car molt estoit d'esmerree figure / nule n'en eut en Romme a se mesure / Gentement eut en li ouvre nature" (lines 41-44). Such a description of superlative beauty is also a *topos*. St. Agnes, like St. Catherine, is young, beautiful and noble. The generic description of these martyrs serves to create a "type" rather than to delineate specific, individual traits.⁸⁹

In typical hagiographic fashion, Agnes exhibits *contemptus mundi* as she is said to think only of God instead of her earthly beauty: "Mais n'avoit soing, cele sainte meschine / de la biaute ke li mors atermine / A Diu amer trestout son cuer encline / et tout son sens met en la loi devine" (lines 45-48). Unlike Clemence of Barking, however, this poet does not elaborate on this *topos* in order to contrast the conventions of courtly love with the love of God. The *topos* is employed to show how Agnes raises her thoughts from her self to her God.

Following the epideictic description of the heroine, the author proceeds to demonstrate the virtues set forth

⁸⁹ St. Agnes often appears in art with a lamb, her iconographic attribute. The lamb is a symbol of her purity and innocence, and it evokes the Paschal lamb as well, Christ. A lamb often rests in her lap or in her arms.

through dialogue and drama to exhort his audience to imitate the saint. In his De Inventione, Cicero calls for "great vivacity" from the narrative and suggests varying methods for achieving this, including the description of "fluctuations of fortune, contrast of characters, severity, gentleness, hope, fear, suspicion, desire, dissimulation, delusion, pity, sudden change of fortune, unexpected disaster, sudden pleasure, a happy ending to the story."⁹⁰ Many of these elements are present in the text. For example, the Agnes poet begins with "desire" as he describes a young man falling in love with her at first sight: "De se biaute tous li sens amarit / mais bien en cuide aemplir son delit" (lines 55-56). He experiences a "coup de foudre." According to Cicero, "the narrative will be plausible if it seems to embody characteristics which are accustomed to appear in real life,"⁹¹ and such is the case for the events recounted by the author. The young man first makes his request for Agnes' love through the intermediation of his friends, who relay his promises to her of wealth: "or et argent" (line 59). Then, when that effort is unsuccessful, he

⁹⁰ Cicero 57.

⁹¹ Cicero 61.

goes to her home to plead his case. The author presents his speech in the idiom of courtly love:

Biele, dist il, je sui en vo prison
pour vous sui jou en grant affliction.
Vostre biaute m'a mis en grant error,
vos dous regars m'a f[ai]t muer coulor.
Or me verre[s] [m]orir a grant doulor
se ne suis fis, biele, de vostre amour.
(lines 63-68)

The poet transforms the prefect's son into a courtly suitor who seeks to woo Agnes. His words indicate the classic "symptoms" of courtly love. These lines could appear just as well in a work of secular romance. He expresses his desire to marry her and to provide her with worldly comforts: "Plus vous donrai de pailes et d'ormier / que ne poront porter IIII sommier" (lines 71-72). She could be mistress of all his father's riches, he offers, "se vous voles avoir de moi pite" (line 76).

In the first of Agnes' speeches, the author presents her as a well-spoken, epideictic orator despite her youth and the absence of this skill in the martyr's legend. The Agnes poet does not directly claim that she is skilled in disputation as Clemence did Catherine, but her lengthy response provides the opportunity for her to demonstrate her eloquence and wisdom. Agnes speaks of her beloved in an extended metaphor that never reveals Christ's name, for she must be careful not to give

herself away lest she be denounced as a Christian. The Agnes poet's conflation of courtly and Christian rhetoric is such that the audience will be both entertained and edified. Courtly love is satirized in favor of a higher, nobler love, that of Christ. This suggests that the Church of that time viewed the popularity of the courtly romance genre as a threat to the established feudal order and to public morality in general. It also indicates a desire to encourage religious vocations.

The poet designs Agnes' speech as one of an epideictic orator in that she "praises" Christ according to the rhetorical method mentioned above (external circumstances, physical attributes, qualities of character). She continues her description of Christ's "illustrious descent"⁹² which reveals tenets of her faith, specifically his virgin birth: "Chius est molt biaux, s'a le fache molt clere / de tout le mont roi est et emperere / Onques en femme ne l'engenra ses pere / puciele virgene sera tous jors sa mere" (lines 89-92). It is surprising that these words do not signal to the young man that she is a Christian, but his lack of comprehension creates tension within the text and further

⁹² Rhetorica Ad Herennium 181.

underscores his dull-wittedness. The thirteenth-century audience would have understood what is happening.

The Agnes poet shows the martyr's affected modesty as she makes use of a common humility *topos*.⁹³ The character of St. Agnes expresses frustration over the inability to adequately describe the nobility of her beloved, thereby emphasizing the superiority of Christ as lover over an earthly one: "Chius miens amis il est de tel linage/ nus hom ne set aconter son parage" (lines 93-94). Christ thus takes on the aspects of an ideal lover who is handsome, noble and wealthy. In contrast, Agnes is shown to "censure" her potential suitor. She criticizes him, urging him to flee her sight: "Fuite de moi, trop ies de fol contien" (line 101). She seeks to contrast her "ami," a term borrowed from the courtly idiom to render the Latin "sponsus" into the vernacular, with the would-be lover when she describes the "parole" of each one. This contrast provides another example of the poet's attention to the power of speech. The words of her spouse are sweet like honey: "En sa parole saveur de miel gousta / si grant douchour illuecques aconta / qu'a sen comant toute mal endonna / Toute sui suie, autre

⁹³ Curtius 83.

chose [t]ensa" (lines 109-112).⁹⁴ In comparison, she states that she attributes no value to the suitor's words ("petit vaut ta parole" line 82), and even finds them to be harmful ("tes paroles me sont fille de mort" line 86). His words could only lead her away from chastity, and perhaps, salvation. By way of allegory, one of the embellishments encouraged in the Rhetorica Ad Herennium,⁹⁵ Agnes describes the royal gifts bequeathed to her by her beloved. She reveals that the young man's promises of wealth hold little appeal to her when compared to the superior wealth offered by her spouse. Her beloved has adorned her "de margerites, de gemmes, et d'anors" (line 106). The transmission of wealth and property was of great concern to this feudal audience. Given that marriages were arranged, a young girl would not have had a say in the choice of her spouse. It appears that at least for entertainment purposes the hagiographer presented the idea that a young girl would have a choice between suitors, and the better choice is Christ.

Agnes concludes her speech by indicating that even her natural beauty, which has attracted the young man to

⁹⁴ The origin of this description is from Psalm 118.

⁹⁵ Rhetorica Ad Herennium 345.

her, is a gift from her beloved. It is his blood that gives color to her face and his gaze which makes her beautiful: "De sen senc ai le fache encoulouree / a sen ues m'a gentement atornee" (113-114). Jesus' love, evidenced by his shedding of blood on the cross, has given her new life and therefore gives her face color. The character demonstrates her resolve and her fidelity as she completes her speech with the wish never to betray nor anger her spouse. Her devotion to him represents a portrayal of conjugal love, so to speak, that stands in contrast to the often adulterous love touted in courtly romance. This section, just as in The Life of Saint Catherine by Clemence of Barking, concerns the promotion of the virginal state over the married state. The poet exalts the metaphor of the virgin bride of Christ in order to promote religious vocations among the audience of aristocratic women. The words from Agnes' speech could be used by young women (in theory but less likely in practice) to respond to suitors or fathers who seek to marry or arrange marriages for them. Agnes is giving a point-by-point rebuttal to her suitor's description of his love for her.

In the next section of the poem that corresponds with the classical *partitio* or division, the point at

issue is clarified. The section is short because brevity is particularly important here, such that "no word is used unless necessary."⁹⁶ The drama continues when the young man, unable to tempt Agnes away from her beloved, is shown to be quite literally lovesick and having taken to his bed: "Mais a souspirs que on li voit jeter / et en la fache souvent coulour muer / se sont perchiut ki est sospris d'amer / Cil l'a ichit, ne le puet mais celer" (lines 133-136). The poet thus dramatizes courtly convention. When his father learns the cause of his son's "illness," he approaches Agnes on his behalf. He asks Agnes to accept his son's offer of marriage: "Biele,' dist il, 'ne vous soit mie grief / Prendes mon fil se vous donrai men fief'" (lines 143-144). During this brief interchange, the author inserts a single line to indicate that her response is full of wisdom: "Ele respont comme chose senee" (line 145). Agnes replies that she is already betrothed to another: "'Sire,' dist ele, 'jou ai m'amour donnee / a un millour de cui sui afiee / Ne le faura pour atendre l'espee'" (lines 146-148).

The young man's father, as the prefect, is taken aback because his authority is challenged by Agnes'

⁹⁶ Cicero 65.

refusal. As part of her rhetorical approach, she continues to praise her beloved to the prefect when she claims that his beauty surpasses that of the sun and the moon (lines 155-6). The Agnes poet thus alludes to an argument developed more fully in The Life of Saint Catherine.⁹⁷ Agnes' arguments are subtle by necessity given she did not wish to openly reveal her Christianity lest she be denounced. The poet must introduce the character of a servant who reveals to the prefect that Agnes is a Christian:

Crestienne est, nel tenes pas en vain.
Tout a son cuer torne a mal savoir,
dist que Jesus est ses amis pour voir.
Pour chou n'a ele cure de vostre avoir,
de vo proiere, ne de tout vo pooir.
(lines 158-162)

The pagan's description of Christianity as "mal savoir" corresponds to the description of it as "cruelle" in The Life of Saint Catherine. The particulars of the counter argument to Christianity are not explored in this text, however, leaving it one-sided. One must notice that the "charge" against Agnes is not the refusal of the young man's offer of marriage, nor is it the apparent challenge to the prefect's authority, but rather for her acceptance of Christianity and defiance of the state religion:

⁹⁷ As previously explained in that chapter, the pagans viewed astral bodies, including the sun and the moon, as divinities.

"Jesu Christ aime, et aëure, et maintient / car les nos
dex ne sert ne point ne crient" (lines 163-164). In
other words, the practice of Christianity amounts to
treason. The servant who has denounced her suggests to
the prefect that she be brought to reason in order to
praise their gods: "mais a raison metre le vous convient
/ que li loënge des dex ne voist a nient" (lines 158-
168). Although the wording is similar to that in the
Life of St. Catherine, an interesting reversal takes
place. In this poem, it is the male authority figure who
must set the young virgin straight revealing a difference
between this male-authored text and that of Clemence of
Barking.

The prefect must now call for Agnes to be put on
trial, and so demands of his servants to bring her before
him since she has insulted the gods: "Ales," dist il,
"je vous commanch et proi / cele meschine amenes devant
moi/ car mespris a vers les dex de no loi" (lines 178-
180). It is evident that he has no desire to debate with
her. In this text there are no terms for battle
("estриф") or debate ("desputer") as in the Barking
manuscript. The prefect relays that he wishes to force
her to recant whether she likes it or not: "Bon conseil
m'as donne / Par le destroit de sa crestiiente / la

meterai toute a ma volente / u voelle u non, del tout
ferai mon gre" (lines 169-172).

The segment of text that can be designated as the *confirmatio*, or proof, includes appeals to *logos*. In typical hagiographic fashion, Agnes' beauty is shown to have an effect on the prefect from the beginning of the trial: "Li prouvos vit la puciele molt gente/ plus biele estoit que ne soit flors sor ente" (lines 201-202). He expresses his feeling that it is a shame such a young girl should be unreasonable: "Grans dels," dist il, "est or de tel jovente / qu'a nul savoir ne velt metre s'entente" (lines 203-204). The argument relayed is one-sided, for the prefect, as was the emperor Maxentius in The Life of Saint Catherine, is evidently unskilled in the art of disputation. In his effort to bring Agnes "a raison," as the servant had suggested to him in line 167, the provost merely reiterates his son's and his own earlier promises to her of "grant hounor et grant joie" (line 206), here using a courtly term to promise her earthly happiness. Agnes, however, remains steadfast: "Mais le puciele de riens ne se desvoie / de quank'il quiert u point, ne li otroie" (lines 207-208). When the text reveals that he wishes to challenge her faith ("de sa loi le prist a calengier" (line 212), he is said to do

so in the fashion of a courtly flatterer or traitor, "par losenges" (line 217). The prefect's words are few, and the poem suffers once again because of this missed opportunity to develop the opposing, pagan viewpoint. His only argument is a reversal of sorts; Agnes should cease "blaspheming" the pagan gods because they are powerful. She should serve them and make sacrifices to them, lest they take vengeance upon her.

Agnes, dist il, nos dex por coi blast[enges]?
Jou te conseil que tu ta coupe [en ren]g[es],
dorenavant a lor servich[e] entenges.

Poëstiu sont, bien se pueent drechier
envers tous chieaus k'il osent corechier.
Or te convient a iaus sacrefiier,
qu'en toi ne voellent lor maltalent vengier.
(lines 218-224)

Once again, the author affords Agnes a disproportionately long response in order to present Christian apologetics. The provost spoke seven lines. In contrast, she will speak sixty-two lines. The author draws attention to Agnes' coming speech in a manner that underscores the intended oral delivery of the text: "Oiiies que dist la virgene en son respeus" (line 225).

Just as Agnes' earlier words to the prefect's son contrasted the courtly suitor with his heavenly rival, Agnes' epideictic speech in this section of the poem will

include both the censure of the pagan gods and the praise of the Christian God.

In response to the prefect's assertion that the pagan gods are powerful, she states that the prefect has too many gods ("trop en aves des deux" line 226) and seeks to refute his argument by presenting their true "nature": "Chil que vous dites qu'il sont or diu puissant/ che furent homme malvais en leur vivant/ de mal afaire, et de put couvenant/ plain de malise, et de tout messeant" (lines 229-232). Agnes' description of the pagan gods as having once been evil men on earth reveals the poet's familiarity with Euhemerism. Early Christian apologists, according to Sez nec, "seized eagerly upon this weapon which paganism itself had offered them, and made use of it against its polytheistic source."⁹⁸ The Middle Ages continued the apologists' practice and it appears that hagiographers, such as the Agnes poet and Clemence of Barking as well, made use of euhemeristic theory to update the arguments of the virgin martyrs against their pagan opponents.

Agnes' speech continues as she is shown to employ the same technique as the author when she remarks to the prefect, "Oies com dist nostre vraie escripture" (lines

⁹⁸ Sez nec 12.

238). Just as Catherine had argued with the pagan authorities over the folly of idol worship, so does Agnes: "Or aves fait lor image d'argent / d'or, et de piere, et de fust ensemment / paindre les faites d'asur u d'or piument / Ses aoures par molt fol escient" (lines 233-236). This list of items of wealth used to make pagan idols echoes what Agnes' suitor was offering her as a marriage gift. In effect, he is offering her paganism.

The character appeals to the writings of her religion as an authority for the truth she wishes to convey. Agnes' speech attests that it is the Christian God who is truly powerful ("poëstius") and describes his attributes in *laisses similaires*:

Mais li nos Dex il est poissans et fors.
En lui servir nous gist molt grans confors,
car en sa main est no vie et nos mors;
d'autre servir chou est pechies et tors.

Li nostre Sires grans est et poëstius.
Quant nous pechomes n'est pas vers nous
eskius;
ains nous castie quant tans en est et lius,
car il est dous, et benignes, et pius.
(lines 245-252)

The technique allows for the repetition of Agnes' praise of God. In addition, the poet underscores once again the conventional argument of creator over creation as he returns to the idea that God created the sun and the moon as well as everything on earth: "Lune et soleil che sont

sa creature / mer fist, et tere, et tout[e] lor vesture /
Apri[es] fist l'omme a la suie figure / m[ais le] fist
biel, bien en seut la mesure" (lines 257-260). Echoing
Catherine in the Barking manuscript, Agnes argues that
the pagan gods are worthless because they neither hear
nor see:

De lor serviche ne vous vient pourfis;
tous jors poës huchier a leur merchis
et haut crier, ja n'en seres oïs,
car leur consaus est tos tans endormis.

N'est pas merveille car ne puent oïr,
ne iex n'en ont don't il puissent veïr;
bien doit sa vie a deshounour fenir
ki se painne onques de leur amout tenir.
(lines 269-276)

The concluding lines of her argument are emphatic
"since what has been said last is easily committed to
memory, it is useful, when ceasing to speak, to leave
some very strong argument fresh in the hearer's mind."⁹⁹
She fittingly summarizes her main points, adding that God
is true and loyal:

Nos Dex est vrais, mais li vostre sont faus
cil ot et voit et nos biens et nos maus.
Ki si le siert, n'est pas vains ses travaus;
il li rent bien, car vrais est et loiaus.
(lines 281-284)

By the end of her speech, Agnes has met the requirements
for victory in debate in accord with the Rhetorica Ad

⁹⁹ Rhetorica ad Herennium 189.

Herennium: "The entire hope of victory and the entire method of persuasion rest on proof and refutation, for when we have submitted our arguments and destroyed those of the opposition, we have, of course, completely fulfilled the speaker's function."¹⁰⁰

The prefect's response to Agnes' arguments is one of *vituperatio*, in which he states that she has said too much (lines 289-292) and spoken "folement" (line 294). He has only tolerated her speech because it is obvious to him that she is still a child with little knowledge:

Encour ai jou tout souffert bonnement
quanque tu as respondu folement;
ne doit avoir nu[s] preudom maltalent,
car enfes ies de petit esciënt.

Bien nous poöns perçoivre a ton eäge,
tu n'ies encor parfitement bien sage.
Pour chou ai jou tout soffert ton outrage,
c'ainc ni mua mon sens ne mon corage.
(lines 293-300)

Rather than offering a rebuttal to her specific arguments, he has only mocked and derided her personally. The criticism of Agnes based on her age does not allow for the possibility of youth and wisdom (*puer senex*) to be combined.

The trial continues as the prefect offers Agnes a version of pagan chastity. She can become a vestal

¹⁰⁰ Rhetorica Ad Herennium 33.

virgin if she will only recant and pray at the temple of the goddess. The normally serene virgin becomes sarcastic as she states that it would be stupid to kneel before a stone. Agnes underscores the idea that there is indeed a difference between Christianity and paganism despite apparent resemblances. Her refusal angers the prefect: "Quant cil l'entent, a poi n'esrage vis / 'N'a pas bon sens,' dist il, 'cou m'est avis / par enredie as tel chose entrepris / don't tu giras en reprochier tous dis'" (lines 321-324). Once again, he alludes to her lack of wisdom ("bon sens") and concedes that he has not persuaded her to abandon her faith.

The next section of the poem, which corresponds to the *peroratio*, begins as the enraged prefect demands that Agnes be disrobed (lines 337-340). The appeals to *logos* now give way to a series of scenes that will evoke an emotional response, or *pathos*, in the audience.

According to Cicero:

The peroration is the end and conclusion of the whole speech; it has three parts, the summing-up, the *indignatio* or exciting of indignation or ill-will against the opponent, and the *conquestio* or the arousing of pity and sympathy. (147)

The author of this vita elects not to provide a summation of the arguments but rather proceeds directly with the

indignatio. Cicero lists no less than fifteen "topics" that will enable a speaker or writer to arouse enmity, and it suffices to note the cruelty of the prefect's action "which we are denouncing."¹⁰¹ Agnes is described as "honteuse et esperdue" (line 343) when she sees that she is naked. She calls out to her Lord for help: "he! Dex ...or ai mestier d'aiüe" (line 344). The audience thus witnesses her shame and is disposed to be "gentle and merciful" (157) in line with Cicero's precepts. The *conquestio* works not on the intellect of the audience but rather on the emotions: "When such a passage is delivered gravely and sententiously, the spirit of man is greatly abased and prepared for pity, for in viewing the misfortune of another he will contemplate his own weakness."¹⁰² The audience is truly "moved to pity by the actual occurrence, as if he were present, and not by words alone."¹⁰³

The author relays miracles to attest to the validity of Agnes' arguments about her beloved. He continues the established legend of St. Agnes by telling how God allowed her hair to grow to her feet to cover her

¹⁰¹ Cicero 153.

¹⁰² Cicero 157.

¹⁰³ Cicero 159.

nakedness. The prefect orders her to be sent to a bordello where she may be deprived of her virginity: "Voisent avoec garchon et jovenenciel / la porront faire de li tot lor reviel" (lines 355-356). All fear to touch her except for the suitor, who is struck dead in the attempt, in another proof of his evil and the impotence of the pagan gods. The prefect is at last convinced after witnessing the miracles wrought by the Christian God with this own eyes.

Agnes is not saved from death, however, for the pagan priests do not want her to convert others to Christianity. Agnes is an example whose discourse has public impact. The emperor Maxentius condemned Catherine for the same reason in the Barking text. A fire is made at the arena for Agnes' execution, and women gather there in a lamentation scene typical of the genre revealing its theatrical aspect: "ces dames plaindre, ces pucieles plorer / la biele Agnies douchement receer" (lines 651-652). This scene is less powerful than a similar one in The Life of Saint Catherine, for it is a scene of ladies weeping rather than a courtly lamentation scene with different levels of society reacting to her death.

The Life of Saint Agnes concludes with a brief epilogue in which the author repeats the themes announced

in the *exordium*. He exhorts the audience to pray for the intercession of St. Agnes: "Prions li tout, li grant, et li millor / k'ensi nous daigne aqueillir a s'amor / k'ele nous soit a nostre darrain jor / bonne plaidive envers nostre Signor" (lines 965-968).

In the prologue, the poet demonstrated an awareness of the receptivity of his audience and continued to keep them in mind as he makes separate appeals to those who will read the text and to those who will listen to it. In her article, "Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages," Ruth Crosby explains this approach: "Since it was true that most people heard rather than read, it became customary for writers to address their works to the hearers as well as to the readers."¹⁰⁴ (90). The poet requests that those who will read this text "de cuer bon," the phrase used earlier in the *exordium*, should pray that St. Agnes will protect them and obtain forgiveness for their sins: "Cil ki liront che romanch de cuer bon / a ceste dame si fachent orison / qu'ele nous prenge en se protection / si nous recuevre de nos pechies pardon" (lines 969-972). The repetition of this phrase calls to mind once more the goodwill and the receptive attitude that the author seeks

¹⁰⁴ Ruth Crosby, "Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 11.1 (January 1936): 90.

for audience to benefit from the text. It is important to note that the author makes a point of designating his text by "romanch," indicating that he has written in the vernacular to reach a widespread audience. In the next decasyllabic rhyming quatrain, he addresses his listeners to serve God: "Tous ki aves ceste raison oïe / de Dieu servir molt est grant cortoisie/ De bien a faire ne vous oublies mie / si en ares le parmenable vie" (lines 973-976). Recalling the references to courtly love within the work, the Agnes poet states that the highest "courtesy" is to serve God. The conclusion is aphoristic, for he states that one will enjoy eternal life if he serves and remembers God, abandoning the world and its glory.

In The Life of Saint Agnes, the poet presents a version of the legend that is methodical in its application of Ciceronian rhetoric. Once again, the structure of the poem follows that of a classical oration. Compared to the earlier Life of Saint Catherine, the Agnes poem is less sophisticated doctrinally and rhetorically yet it also presents the virgin martyr as an orator. In addition, although there is no conscious discussion of themes such as that of the relationship between wisdom and eloquence found in the

Barking text, the author does make similar use of euhemeristic arguments reflecting the medieval perspective on the origin of the pagan gods.

Chapter 3: The Life of Saint Barbara

Our study of rhetoric within the lives of the virgin martyrs continues with a version of The Life of Saint Barbara composed during the late 1200s, roughly one hundred years after the writing of Clemence's Life of Saint Catherine.¹⁰⁵ Originating in the district of Hainault in northeastern France, the text exists in one manuscript in the Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique in Brussels. The author is unknown, but most likely a male cleric. The short poem, written in 512 lines of octosyllabic rhyming couplets, was inspired by the version of the legend of Saint Barbara popularized in Jacobus de Voragine's mid-thirteenth century Legenda Aurea.¹⁰⁶ The poem is largely overlooked by modern scholarship, much as the Life of Saint Agnes. Comparing and contrasting the techniques used to create a didactic poem shows that a structural analysis of the work is both appropriate and useful. The literary value of the work

¹⁰⁵ St. Barbara is another Eastern saint (her name means "foreigner") who appeared in medieval iconography. Her cult became popular in France during the eleventh century. Like St. Catherine, she is represented in elegant dress befitting her nobility. Her crown is an emblem of her martyrdom (she was not royal) and she frequently holds a palm for the same reason. Her chief attribute is a tower, an image from her life.

¹⁰⁶ Cazelles 102.

can best be discussed in the context of our study of Ciceronian rhetoric.

In the manner of Clemence of Barking and the Agnes poet, the unknown Barbara poet inserts a prologue which reveals his knowledge of the precepts for the classical *exordium* as well as his familiarity with the conventions of the genre. Echoing Clemence, the poet begins with an allusion to the parable of the talents: "Qui a talent de Dieu servir / Si viegne avant pour moy oÿr." The parable became a commonplace of medieval literature, prompting Ernst Curtius to characterize it as "the possession of knowledge makes it a duty to impart it."¹⁰⁷ The poet exhorts his listeners to use their talents to serve God. They will learn how by hearing his story. This is a clear indication that the author has prepared his text to be delivered orally. In fact, strewn throughout the text are numerous indications that, like the authors of the earlier virgin martyr lives, the writer is aware that he must engage the audience's attention frequently. He employs narrative techniques demanding that those assembled focus on the key moments and messages of the story. For example, he commands dramatically, "Or escoutes! Que Diex vous garde!" (line 19).

¹⁰⁷ Curtius 87.

In Ciceronian rhetoric, the *exordium* must reveal matters which are new and important. As we have seen in the earlier lives, rhetorical precepts become medieval commonplaces, and in this case the demand for novelty translates into the *topos*, "I bring things never said before."¹⁰⁸ The Barbara poet emphasizes the novelty of his approach to the legend by distinguishing his heroine from the most famous epic heroes in The Song of Roland:

Histore voel conter nouvelle,
Piecha n'oïstes la pareille.
Sachies que ce n'est pas d'Ogier,
Ne de Rolant ne d'Olivier,
Mais d'une sainte damoiselle
Qui par tant fu courtoise et belle. (lines 3-8)

The author demonstrates his familiarity with rhetorical precepts and understanding of the conventions of the hagiographic genre when he appeals to his late thirteenth-century audience by focusing on her courtesy and beauty. Barbara's beauty is such that the author employs a *topos* of affected modesty: "La grant clarte de son cler vis / Nus sages clercs, tant soit apris / Ne le saroit (dou) tout deviser / Mais un petit en voel conter" (lines 9-12). He concludes the prologue with a common statement of humility that he simply cannot express the extent of her beauty in writing:

¹⁰⁸ Curtius 85.

Le chief ot bloncq com lius pares,
Bien fait le vis et bouce et nes,
Coulour avoit en sa masielle;
Mout estoit bielle damoiselle.
Le grant biaute de sa faiture
Ne le puis exposer par escriture. (lines 13-
18)

The prologue is followed by the *narratio*, which represents the largest section of the poem in contrast to the earlier virgin martyr lives that focus more heavily on the debate or trial sequence in the *confirmatio* and *refutatio*. Rather than presenting Church doctrine through a dialectical disputation or a statement before a tribunal, the Barbara poet chooses to present the theological aspects of the work at this point according to the martyr's legend. This poet provides the background information to the story chronologically, as dictated by treatises such as Cicero's De Inventione, an aspect shared by all three of the virgin martyr lives under consideration. This section contrasts the characters of a father and daughter and their differing religious beliefs. Barbara is the daughter of a wealthy nobleman named Dyoscorus.¹⁰⁹ He is described simply as a pagan, with no elaboration on his beliefs (line 27). Barbara, on the other hand, is a Christian and the poet devotes many lines to summarize her beliefs:

¹⁰⁹ Etymologically, Dyoscorus means "to cut in two."

E la pucielle en Dieu creans;
Le Pere, le Fil, le Saint Esperit
[lui] Mout bien creoit par fine espir,
Et la benoite vierge Marie
Amoit par fine jalousie;
Les dis comans, les sacremens
Mout bien creoit par [fine] sens
Tout cou cascun jour recordoit
Quand elle toute seulle estoit. (lines 28-36)

The repetition of "fine" in this lines would evoke in the listeners, familiar with the idiom of courtly love, the idea of "fin'amors." The profane is made religious by this poet as faith, hope and love, known as the three theological virtues, are preceded by "fine," thereby conflating courtly and Christian rhetoric. The narratorial voice of the poet intervenes once again to draw the audience's attention to what will follow: "Or escoutes de la pucielle / Qui tant par fu courtoise et belle" (lines 37-38). Her beauty attracts many suitors. However, she tells her father, in a statement that contains the only reference to Barbara's youth, that it is not the time for her to accept a proposal:

Pere, fait elle, par amour
Relaissies moy de tel dolour
Jovenete sui de poy de tamps
A ce venrai-ge ases a tamps. (lines 52-56)

Although it would seem by Barbara's words that she would entertain the idea of a suitor when she got older, her father soon realizes that his daughter will have no

part of any marriage and thus conceives of a plan to build "un castelet" where he can hide her. Just as the other virgin martyr poets, the Barbara poet is interested in the psychology of his characters, especially in their motives, lending an unexpectedly modern aspect to this text. For example, Dyascorus' reasons for hiding Barbara are analyzed:

Un castelet a fait fremer
Pour sa fille mieus agarder.
Çou ne fist il pas pour vengeance
Mais pour l'emblen don't ot doubtance,
Car mout estoit la damoiselle
Couvoitable, plaisans et bielle.¹¹⁰
(lines 61-66)

By stating that Barbara's father is not acting out of vengeance, the author offers a sympathetic view of the character's motives. Such a presentation is particularly noteworthy given the emphasis in the saints' lives on the rejection of wealth and worldly comforts by the martyr in favor of supernatural treasures. For Dyascorus, it was not a question of accumulating more wealth or land through an arranged marriage.

The author follows the established legend faithfully as he writes at length about the construction of the bath house. Before leaving the country, Dyascorus instructs

¹¹⁰ This is a typical situation in courtly poetry, see Marie de France's "Yonec."

the workers to include two windows facing eastward and with a floor of marble. During her father's absence, Barbara speaks to the workers and changes her father's orders without fearing his displeasure. She takes an active stance by demanding that the masons construct three windows instead of two. Barbara's demand for the workers to listen to her, " 'Signour,' fait elle, 'or entendes!,'" is an embedded signal by the author to those listening to the story to pay close attention to what would follow. The author emphasizes Barbara's particular devotion to the Trinity and would like to inspire a similar devotion among his audience: "Deus feniestres viers orient / San la t[i]erche chou est niënt / Faites la terche, çou est prois / E bien sacies que çou est drois" (lines 113-116).¹¹¹ It is an important moment in the text because the character is actively asserting herself and announcing to those around her that she is a

¹¹¹ In "Stories of St. Barbara" by Lorenzo Lotto (1524 AD), the artist represents the most famous episodes of her legend, including St. Barbara's conversation with the workers. Lotto expresses St. Barbara's desire to indicate the Trinity with the three windows by showing her hold up three fingers to the masons. As we can see in the vernacular poem, the episode has the same importance, taking up a good deal of textual space. Given that the emphasis on the doctrine of the Trinity is an aspect shared with St. Catherine of Alexandria, it is not surprising that the two virgin martyrs are frequent companions in art. Take for example their representation with the Madonna and Child by Ambrosius Benson (c. 1530 AD) in which they are both dressed in elegant red robes and hold books in their hands, the symbol of their erudition.

Christian. The author presents her as an example through a seemingly minor detail.

Barbara gives her own blessing to the structure by tracing the sign of the cross into a stone: "La Dieu amie, sainte Barbe / Viers orient dedens un marbre / A fait le singne de le crois / De Jhesucris[t] d'un de ses dois" (lines 129-132).¹¹² Barbara's blessing of the structure under construction is in juxtaposition to her dramatic condemnation and destruction of her father's pagan idols immediately afterwards: "Les dieus son pere a despeciet / Et degabet et defroissiet / Et puis se dist nostre sergant / Trestout a vous soient samblant" (lines 149-152). Barbara has rejected her father's beliefs and by extension her father, and in the process defines herself as Christ's "amie."

A special note should be taken of the poet's reference to Barbara as "nostre sergant" in line 151. She is depicted as a military figure paralleling (and in the prologue, replacing) epic heroes such as Roland and Olivier. Instead of the grand scale of a crusade, her battle takes place in her own home against her father.

¹¹²The action evokes a topos of the genre that also appears in the Life of Christina of Markyate as the young girl is leaving a monastery: "She made a sign of the cross with one of her fingernails on the door as a token that she had placed her affection there" (39).

She finds that she must profess her faith against her pagan father's wishes. In addition, to describe this young girl as a military figure calls to mind the battle metaphors employed by Clemence of Barking in the earlier chapter on The Life of Saint Catherine.

Upon his return, Dyascorus learns that his daughter has redesigned the bath house. Barbara's explanation to her father provides an opportunity for the character to expound on the doctrine of the Trinity:

Pere, fait elle, je oc grant droit,
Deus feniestres ne font nul profit;
Deus ne rendent point de clartet.
Trois demoustrent la trenitet,
Car tout ensi que vous vees
Que tous cieus lieus est alumes
D'une clarte par trois fenestre,
Ensi le voet le roy celestre.(lines 167-174)

Barbara's profession of her Christian faith to her father is met with anger: "Mout li semont nouvelle rage / La damoiselle ferir vot / Mais grasce a Dieu car il ne pot" (lines 186-188). Dyascorus does not try to debate his daughter. Rather, he reacts to the mere sight of Barbara praying by beating her: "Batue l'a li fourjugies / Li mescreans, li escumeniies" (lines 211-212). The character of Dyascorus is presented as a weaker figure than Maxentius or the fifty rhetoricians who engage in disputation with Catherine in the Barking text, and this

makes the chapter less sophisticated rhetorically. The poet's treatment of the father is unsympathetic, creating more of a caricature of the violent pagan in contrast to Clemence of Barking's sophisticated and thought-provoking depiction of pagan authorities. The audience must witness Barbara being dragged down a hill by her father and locked in jail, "tout sans mengier / Tout sans confort, sans solacii" (lines 217-218).

The next section, which corresponds to the *partitio*, is necessarily brief, complete and concise, following Ciceronian precepts. The *partitio* consists solely of Dyascorus approaching the city's prefect to denounce his daughter as a Christian. Dyascorus states his daughter's crime of publicly speaking against the pagan gods: "Ma fille va nos diex faussant / En celui croit qui fu penes / En crois pendus, en claus fikes" (lines 222-224). The father who wanted to protect his daughter from earthly suitors now seeks help to protect her from her otherworldly suitor, Christ. However, he would have known that he was condemning his daughter to martyrdom if she did not publicly recant her faith. The response of the prefect is described not by dialogue but by actions as he hastily prepares a trial: "Li prouvos vint

hastieusement / Tantost s'asist au jugement" (lines 225-226).

In this short poem, the sections corresponding to the *confirmatio* and *refutatio* are not separated; rather, the author treats them together. The prefect begins the trial by demanding: "Ou est," fait il, "ceste dervee?" (line 228). The author's choice of words indicates that the pagan prefect views a Christian as a mad person. When the prefect learns that she is in jail, he proclaims that death will be Barbara's sentence if she does not recant her faith: "Ca[r] la menes par devant moy / Par icel dieu en cui je croy / A honte le ferai morir / Se nostre loy ne voet tenir" (lines 231-234). Unlike the formal university-style disputation which took place in the Life of Saint Catherine, this segment of text represents a legal procedure with the martyr facing the judge. In this respect, there is a shift from one form of rhetoric to another. The author states that the prefect tries to reason with her ("Li provost l'a araisonnee" line 237), which would indicate that the prefect will present logical arguments to convince her to obey the pagan law. However, the prefect's approach, much like that of the prefect in the Agnes poem, consists of a promise to arrange a good marriage for her if she

publicly abjures her Christian faith: "Bielle," dist il,
"entent a moy / De ton erreur si te recroy / Mout rice
femme toy feray / Et hautement te mariray" (lines 237-
242). Note that the expression "entent a moy" signals to
the listeners to pay attention to a point in the text of
great importance. The narratorial emphasis once again
underscores that this text was to be delivered orally.

Barbara's response to the prefect is bold and
certainly not courteous. She begins by silencing him:
"Prouvos, fait elle, taisies vous" (line 243). She
alludes to her God's great wealth ("Il a tout l'or et
tout l'argent" line 245) in order to oppose the riches
offered to her by the prefect. Barbara's argument would
be a defense for any woman choosing to become a
religious. As noted in the previous chapter, Agnes made
similar statements to her antagonists. Barbara continues
by noting that her God is the omnipotent creator of
heaven and earth: "Et ciel et terre et tout crea /
Pissons, oysiaus, quanqu'il y a" (lines 247-248).

Barbara's epideictic praise of her Christian God is
followed by her censure of the pagan gods, whom she deems
less powerful: "Li vostre diex est diablerie / Il n'ont
poïr d'iaus avengier / Les diex mon pere confroisai /
Por lor poïr nel laiss[er]ay." (lines 249-254). These

few lines reveal the poet's viewpoint of the pagan gods. In the earlier lives of Catherine and Agnes, the pagan gods are presented as either astral bodies such as the sun and the moon or as mortal men raised to the level of gods after death. The Barbara poet sees them as devils, in agreement with the first apologists who claimed that the pagan gods appropriated their magic gifts from demons.¹¹³ Barbara is unafraid of these gods, and she recalls her earlier destruction of the idols. Her experience convinced her that they are powerless, unable to act on their own, in contrast to her living God who created the earth and all that is in it.

The reaction of the prefect, like that of Dyascorus, is one of rage: "Li fel[s] se prist a couroucier" (line 255). He makes no attempt to reason with her and does not refute her arguments. The Barbara poet misses an opportunity to present a balanced debate, such as the one in the Barking text. The pagans are presented as incapable of logical argument. The prefect simply orders for her to be disrobed, whipped and clothed with a hair shirt.

During the night she spends in jail, Barbara has a

¹¹³ Seznec 17.

vision of her courtly spouse who comes to comfort her:
"Droit a s'amie est descendus / Pour li solaciiier est
venus" (lines 273-274). Direct discourse is used to
relay God's words, a daring technique for the medieval
poet: "Bielle," dist Diex, "or soies forte / Ouverte
t'a dou ciel la porte / A la parolle que je te di / Dois
tu bien croire sans contredi" (lines 277-280). The use
of the word "parolle" underscores the importance of
speech in this poem. The educated part of the medieval
audience would have detected the literary allusion to the
gospel of John and would have grasped the many layers of
meaning involved in which Christ is called the Word
("Logos"). God encourages Barbara to be strong and
insists that she can believe his words; in effect, the
"Word" is using language in order to convince her to
believe in his teachings. The Barbara poet has Christ
employing the art of persuasion to strengthen Barbara's
resolve. He uses anaphora, a rhetorical device, when he
confirms his identity: "Je suis tes Diex, je suis tes
Sire / Je suis Jhesus, li fils Marie" (line 281). He
also employs a commonplace of the genre by insisting upon
the truth of his words: "Cela te di ge tout a cierte"
(line 284).

On the following day, the prefect (now identified by the name of Martianus¹¹⁴) presides over Barbara's trial once again: "L'endemain sist au jugement / Martianus mout asprement / La damoiselle a fait mander / Et sa sentence presenter" (lines 293-296). He notices that she has been healed of her wounds from the day before and inquires how this could be: "Dy moy," fait il, "qui t'a curee / De tes plaies, de tes douleurs / Dy qui t'a fait si grant souscours" (lines 298-299). Through her response to this question, the character identifies Christ as the one who provided comfort and solace to her in jail. She employs the same terms which the author used to describe those things which were not provided by her father in lines 217 and 218: "Garder le fist tout sans mengier / Tout sans confort, sans solaciiier." The poet uses anaphora again as he poetically presents Barbara's profession of faith: "En lui crerai ge et en lui croy / En lui crerai ge par bonne foy / De lui servir m'en forceray / Pour a morir ne le lairay" (lines 301-310). The pattern is repeated, and Barbara's statement angers Martianus, described once again as "fel" and who orders her to be beaten and tortured.

¹¹⁴ The root of Martianus, "mar," signifies "to injure."

The trial sequence is followed by the *peroratio*, which consists of Barbara offering two prayers before her death. The holy maiden then presents her neck to her father who beheads her with a sharp sword. The author comments on the horror of the scene to elicit an emotional response from his audience, in keeping with the purpose of the *peroratio*: "Ciertes ce fu cose mout ville / Quant li peres ocist sa fille" (lines 371-372). Such scenes became popular among iconographers.

The remaining lines of text before the epilogue give an account of posthumous miracles attributed to Barbara. Although the poet had claimed to be writing a new kind of story, specifically about a new kind of hero(ine), it is significant that he still wishes to place Barbara within the tradition of established female saints. This is yet another example of how medieval hagiographers sought to achieve a balance between novelty and tradition. In particular, she is compared to St. Catherine given their shared focus on the doctrine of the Trinity: "Car de la sainte trenite / Mout bien demoustra le deite / Ensi com fist la Kateline / A cinquante de grant doctrine." (lines 399-403). Another reference is to St. Agnes and a comparison of the similar tortures they endured.

In addition, the Barbara poet asks the audience to listen to a posthumous miracle attributed to her: "Or escoutes le grant miracle" (line 437). According to the text, the character Christ had promised young Barbara that anyone who would love her and fast on the eve of her feast days would go to heaven. A young knight practiced this devotion and was rewarded with this help when his head was cut off. The head without a body, expressing a wish to receive communion, called out to a priest who asks, "Tel miracle que senefie? / Dittes le moy, je vous en prie" (lines 471-472). The knight informs him that he has been a "loyaus amis" (line 478) of the saint and has always loved her: "Car tousjours l'ay forment amee" (line 479). His devotion has been rewarded by her intercession on his behalf:

Car elle fist une priere
Au Roi du ciel qui mout l'ot ciere;
Par fine amour et par fianche
Li demanda sa connissance
Qui tout tantost li ottria
Quant ses peres le decolla.
Sauves seront par son merite,
La verite vous en ai ditte. (lines 485-492)

In an addition by the medieval poet, Barbara makes her intercessory request "par fine amour et par fianche." A hierarchy is thus described as the knight expresses his courtly affection for Barbara. She, in turn, refers to

her own devotion when addressing her beloved and her fiancé. Significantly, Barbara's love for Christ is the one that is the purest love. This reverses the usual courtly love conceit in that the lady holds the highest love and is not the object of the idealized love. Also, it is shown that the character of the knight insists on the truth of his story, thereby stating a commonplace of medieval literature and echoing the words attributed to Christ when he visited Barbara in her cell.

The epilogue contains a commonplace when the poet encourages the audience to pray to Barbara, "la Dieu ancelle." He exhorts his listeners to perform good works in order to obtain Heaven and concludes with a prayer:

Tels oeuvres nous doinst maintenir
Que nous puissimes parvenir
Lassus en paradis tout droit.
Dittes amen que Diex l'otroit.
Explicit le vie sainte Barbe. (lines 501-513)

The Barbara poet depicts an assertive heroine who forthrightly states her beliefs and stands up to pagan tyrants. Her father's response begins with his intent to lock her up for her protection then shifts ultimately to beheading her. He is presumably still acting in her best interest. The tensions between earthly wealth and spiritual ideals were being played out intensely in the private sphere, reflecting the rise of the mendicant

orders and the increase in various expressions of lay piety during this century. In addition, the heresies which revolved around the identity of Christ were countered by the poet's focus on the Trinity.

In terms of rhetoric, the organizing principle of the Life of Saint Barbara is still that of the classical oration. Rather than depicting the virgin martyr in elevated disputations, the poet has her professing her faith in simple terms. Perhaps due to the short length of the poem, there is less emphasis on St. Barbara's speeches in this text; however, her few words before the prefect Martianus do continue the tradition of censuring the pagan gods in the euhemeristic terms as seen in the other two virgin martyr lives under consideration.

Chapter 4: Hagiography and Theatricality: The Martyr as "Actor Veritatis"

The dramatization of Christian doctrine and rhetorical debates within the medieval vernacular lives of the virgin martyrs indicates an overlap between rhetoric and theater. In ancient rhetorical treatises, the orator is often compared to an actor performing for the public. Medieval hagiographers cast the martyrs in the role of an orator to engage in Christian apologetics, indicating continuity with the past and an attempt to resolve age-old rhetorical dilemmas, such as the relationship between wisdom and eloquence, within these texts. The martyrs engage in dramatic dialogues and speeches before textual audiences. Like their hagiographers, the martyrs as characters are depicted as using different forms of rhetoric and switching between them to suit their purposes. In fact, the grand performance in hagiography often consists of a verbal confrontation between the virgin martyr and her pagan tormentors. This public performance can take the form of a university-style dialectical disputation or a judicial tribunal before a prefect. It has been noted that "holy men and women are seen to live holy lives, but on many

occasions it is by their words as *performed*, as opposed to their example, that they manage to convert sinners."¹¹⁵

A great deal of scholarship has been devoted to the exemplarity of the lives of the saints, but for our purposes, let us follow Tudor's lead by considering the theatricality of the martyrs' discursive performance and the ways in which the saint as orator resembles an actor, particularly the "actor veritatis" described by Cicero.

The subject matter of Scripture, liturgy and legend is readily formulated into events and scenes. As Frappier has noted, "Toute religion est dramatique."¹¹⁶ This is an astonishing statement given that this was written seventy years ago, many years before anyone began to think about theatricality and performance issues in these texts. The composition of the *vitae* is contemporaneous with the birth of French drama, appearing in the form of Le Jeu d'Adam and subsequent morality plays. This fact is not insignificant. The *vitae* and the early plays were written in the vernacular. This suggests an expanding audience beyond the religious in

¹¹⁵ Adrian P. Tudor, "Preaching, Storytelling, and the Performance of Short Pious Narratives," Performing Medieval Narrative, eds. Evelyn Birge Vitz, Nancy F. Regalado, and Marilyn Lawrence (Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2005) 147.

¹¹⁶ Jean Frappier and A.-M. Gossart, Le Théâtre Religieux au Moyen Age (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1935) 5.

monasteries and convents. Dramatization rendered the material accessible to more people so that they would be instructed, edified, and entertained. Both genres, the *vitae* and the plays, were popular literature. Medieval plays were performed everywhere except the theater as we know it. They were staged "in city streets, in churches, on playing fields, in college halls and in private houses."¹¹⁷ In contrast, the *vitae* were destined to be read to oneself or aloud to groups. Saints' lives were recited on their feast days. In Benedictine communities, a weekly reader was chosen for the purpose of reading these stories aloud for the edification of others at mealtimes. Not everyone was eligible for the position, however. St. Benedict specified "only those who edify their hearers," an acknowledgement that some are more eloquent than others as well as the importance of delivery.¹¹⁸ Within the *vitae*, discourse markers indicate the desire to capture and hold the attention of the audience. The lives were poems, not prose, with the rhyme scheme providing an aid to the memory of the one reading, or performing, the text. In Robertson's view,

¹¹⁷ Meg Twycross, "The Theatricality of Medieval English Plays," The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre, ed. Richard Beadle (New York: Cambridge UP, 1994) 37.

¹¹⁸ Leonard J. Doyle, St. Benedict's Rule for Monasteries (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1948) 199

the mere act of translating the *vitae* from Latin into the vernacular, and thus from a written to a spoken language, gave these texts "voice."¹¹⁹ The texts of the *vitae*, and the rhetorical speeches within, were brought to life.

Within the Ciceronian tradition, the roles of the orator and the actor intersect in the realm of delivery. As Fumaroli has noted, "le voeu profond de la rhétorique, c'est de s'accomplir en dramaturgie."¹²⁰ This thought is echoed by Enders: "Persuasion was not possible until rhetoric was delivered - and delivered effectively and dramatically."¹²¹ One senses, though, in Ciceronian treatises, that there was a desire to keep them separate, an elitism of sorts. For example, the anonymous author of the Rhetorica Ad Herennium acknowledges that territory is shared but considers the orator to be superior to the actor. The author contrasts the use of voice between the orator and the actor:

For the Dignified Conversational Tone it will be proper to use the full throat but the calmest and most subdued voice possible, yet not in such a fashion that we pass from the

¹¹⁹ Duncan Robertson, The Medieval Saints Lives: Spiritual Renewal and Old French Literature (Lexington, KY: French Forum Publishers, 1995) 22.

¹²⁰ Marc Fumaroli, Héros et Orateurs: Rhétorique et dramaturgie cornéliennes (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1990) 271.

¹²¹ Jody Enders, Rhetoric and the Origins of Medieval Drama (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992) 21.

practice of the orator to that of the tragedian.¹²²

In addition, the author advises the orator to pay particular attention to facial expressions and gestures: "lest we give the impression that we are either actors or day labourers."¹²³

Likewise, Cicero appears to share this notion of the superiority of the orator. In each of the three books of the De Oratore, Cicero develops the concept of the "actor veritatis," translated by Posner as the "advocate - and performer - of truth", to further clarify the difference between the two.¹²⁴ Like the author of the Rhetorica ad Herennium, Cicero asserts that when it comes to "voice, breathing, gestures and the tongue itself (...) we must carefully consider whom we are to take as patterns, who we should wish to be like."¹²⁵ He advises the orator to pay attention to actors in order to avoid their negative example: "We have to study actors as well as orators, that bad practice may not lead us into some inelegant or ugly habit."¹²⁶ He continues the comparison

¹²² Rhetorica Ad Herennium, trans. Harry Caplan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1954)199.

¹²³ Rhetorica Ad Herennium 203.

¹²⁴ David M. Posner, The Performance of Nobility in Early Modern European Culture (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999) 10.

¹²⁵ Cicero. De Oratore (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1942) 107.

¹²⁶ Cicero 107.

in the second book of the De Oratore when he poses the rhetorical question, "What actor gives keener pleasure by his imitation of real life than your orator affords in his conduct of some real case?"¹²⁷ Here we are getting closer to the issue at hand.

The difference between the orator and the actor is what he must represent, truth and actuality on the one hand or the mere imitation of reality on the other. Cicero warned the would-be orator not to neglect delivery, however:

My reason for dwelling on these points is because the whole of this department has been abandoned by the orators, who are the players that act real life, and has been taken over by the actors, who only mimic reality.¹²⁸

Attention to delivery, the "department" alluded to above, is a necessary evil for Cicero. In the final pages of the De Oratore, Cicero laments, through the character of Crassus, that "truth" should suffice, but the art of persuasion must be employed given that human psychology is what it is, clouded by emotion.¹²⁹ One senses a resignation that St. Augustine will share.

¹²⁷ Cicero 29.

¹²⁸ Cicero 171.

¹²⁹ Cicero 171.

The first text to consider in light of Cicero's "actor veritatis" is Clemence of Barking's Life of Saint Catherine. Many versions of the Catherine character, including the Latin Vulgate, show her to be a model of eloquence. In this respect, Clemence is not original because she is simply following the established legend. It is Clemence's treatment of the tradition that is novel. Clemence presents a classically trained Catherine participating in a university-style disputation with learned men. In what respect can we say that Catherine resembles an actor? Can it be said that she is performing "truth" and presenting actuality during these interchanges?

Examining the text of the Barking poem, there are few references to those elements singled out in rhetorical treatises: voice, gestures, and facial expressions. During the debate sequence, when Catherine has finished her dialogue, it is simply indicated that she fell silent ("A tant se taist la Deu amie," line 925). The one gesture that is noted is the sign of the cross which she makes before she begins her first speech to the assembled rhetoricians ("De la seinte croiz se seigna," line 640). The simplicity of the gesture conforms to the standard that it not be conspicuous for

"elegance or grossness," according to the Rhetorica Ad Herennium.¹³⁰ Facial expressions should show "modesty or animation," and thus the beauty of Catherine's face that expresses her inner goodness, expressed in the form of a *topos* (lines 595-598), conforms as well.¹³¹

To determine whether or not Catherine is presented as an "actor veritatis" or advocate of truth, one must consider the subject of the disputation at the center of the poem, which concerns the nature of the godhead. Through the character of Catherine, Clemence of Barking presents a sophisticated explanation of the dual nature of Christ, a perennial topic in Christian apologetics.

In addition, there is another debate that is dramatized within the text. It does not concern doctrine, but rather, a discussion carried over from Antiquity regarding the potential dangers of persuasive discourse. It is remarkable that Clemence's poem is not only a point-by-point example of rhetoric in its structure and style but also contains a discussion of the purpose of rhetoric as well. Rhetorical treatises, such as Matthew of Vendôme's Ars Versificatoria from the same

¹³⁰ Rhetorica Ad Herennium 203.

¹³¹ Rhetorica Ad Herennium 201.

time period, often contained similar discussions on rhetoric itself.

Throughout the Barking poem, the emperor Maxentius exhibits the concern expressed by pagan philosophers over the orator's role in society and the potential for good or harm to the State. Maxentius' concerns echo those of Scaeveola, a historical figure presented as a character in the De Oratore. In the opening dialogue with Crassus, Scaeveola claims, "I could cite more instances of damage done, than of aid given to the cause of the State by men of first-rate eloquence."¹³² It is a fear that Maxentius wrestles with throughout the conflict with Catherine, particularly after the conversion of his wife. Maxentius' distrust of the art of persuasion is repeated in every age in various manifestations and applies jointly to rhetoric and theater. According to Davis and Postlewait,

Actors in many societies and eras have often been criticized, marginalized, ostracized, and punished because of their suspect craft and skills, and anyone who resembles them is tarnished by the mimetic brush. In addition, actors' social behavior and identity have often been seen as threats to the order and standards of the community on the basis of their ability to make mimesis credible.¹³³

¹³² Cicero 31.

¹³³ Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait, Theatricality (New York: Cambridge UP, 2003) 5.

The character of St. Catherine, as she is molded by Clemence of Barking, represents the twelfth-century response to this dilemma when she becomes a Christian "actor veritatis" as opposed to an actor who "mimics reality," as described by Cicero. The message of this poem is that Christian wisdom combined with eloquence will lead to salvation. What St. Augustine promoted in the De Doctrina Christiana is therefore dramatized within the Barking poem.

Even when a virgin martyr is not singled out for eloquence of speech, her dialogues still reveal her ability to present the arguments of apologetics and to praise her bridegroom, borrowing from the language of epideictic rhetoric and the Song of Songs. At all times, the Christian martyr must be a witness - a rhetor by definition if not by choice. This is true in the lives of St. Agnes and St. Barbara. The performance sequence in their *vitae* is not of a dialectical disputation like Catherine's in the Barking poem but rather testimonies before tribunals. Thus, there is a shift from dialectic to deliberative and judicial rhetoric, where the martyr "deliberates" the future good of keeping her faith and enjoying heaven as her reward, while encouraging others to follow her lead. The martyrs

contrast the merits of Christ with the perceived faults of the pagan gods. Denounced before the tribunal as Christians, St. Agnes and St. Barbara are accused of treason against the pagan State. Pagan law and pagan religion can be viewed as equivalent in these texts. There is the sense that more than just the martyrs were "on trial." Christianity was being judged.

Once again, let us ask of these texts in what respect can we say that Agnes or Barbara resembles an actor? In what respect can we say they are depicted as performing truth or presenting actuality?

In the Life of St. Agnes, there is little to be discerned in the way of voice, gestures and facial expressions. There are merely narratorial comments on her responses, such as "Li jovenenciele k'espira Damedeus / de gentil cuer rendi cortois respeus" (lines 77-78) and "Ele respont comme chose senee" (line 70). The hagiographer is concerned more with *sententiae* than stage direction. No gestures are indicated. Rather than regarding the character of St. Agnes as an actor, it is more useful to consider her as an "actor veritatis" when she proceeds to discredit the pagan gods to the prefect. St. Agnes employs the arguments of medieval euhemerism,

which is considered at greater length during the chapter on this particular poem.

In the lives of St. Agnes and St. Barbara, the testimony is short and less theologically complex in comparison to the Barking text. Likely the hagiographers composing their *vitae* worked more closely with their Latin sources and made a more faithful translation than did Clemence. In the case of the *vita* of St. Barbara, for example, the doctrine of the Trinity is presented in the form of a metaphor rather than as an argument. The godhead is illustrated through the image of the windows of the bathhouse, which appears as an emblem of St. Barbara's in her iconography.

In conclusion, vernacular hagiography in the high Middle Ages reflects the power that the medieval audiences found in persuasive discourse. In these poems, hagiographers fashion the virgin martyrs as eloquent orators to teach and edify. It is difficult to view the martyr-orator as an actor in these texts because indications of the characters' delivery are few or nonexistent; it appears that the performance of the text itself, and the delivery of its message, takes priority. However, a consideration of the philosophical ideal of the "actor veritatis," an accomplished speaker who

advocates truth, does illuminate the role of the martyr as Christian witness. The characters of the martyrs address points of theology that were of contemporary interest, such as the nature of the Trinity, and in so doing, are created by hagiographers to embody the fusion of eloquence and wisdom for their time.

Chapter 5: The Beguines

Accounts of the lives of the Beguines represent another example of hagiographic literature in the Middle Ages. In these texts, I will demonstrate how Ciceronian rhetoric, mediated through medieval arts of poetry, served to equip hagiographers with the necessary tools to defend and to promote different views of sanctity in the thirteenth century. Before considering the two texts at hand, The Life of Marie d'Oignies and The Life of Saint Douceline, it will be useful to consider the changing social conditions which gave rise to this group considered to be "the first identifiable women's movement in Christianity."¹³⁴

Several important conditions drastically affected the women of the High Middle Ages, limiting the paths which their lives could take and creating the need for alternative ways for them to express their faith. Emilie Zum Brunn labels these conditions as "indissociably religious, social, and economic."¹³⁵ First, there were restrictions placed on women who were called to the

¹³⁴ Marie A. Conn, Noble Daughters: Unheralded Women in Western Christianity, 13th to 18th Centuries (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000) 5.

¹³⁵ Emilie Zum Brunn and Georgette Epiney-Burgard, introduction, Women Mystics of Medieval Europe (New York: Paragon House, 1989) xxi.

religious life which did not apply to their male counterparts: "Whereas men might become secular priests, monks or friars, women wishing to embrace a religious rule were invariably enclosed."¹³⁶ A notable example of this is the enclosure of St. Clare of Assisi, despite her desire to follow in the footsteps of St. Francis and be "in the world but not of it." She was required to be enclosed within her community at the church of St. Damian in Assisi.¹³⁷ Demographically, women simply outnumbered men, a problem known as *Frauenfrage*: "There was a surplus of marriageable women and widows in the Low Countries, Germany and France due to local feuds, wars, crusades, and the large number of celibate secular and regular clergy."¹³⁸ Economic factors also determined the paths open to women. Basic requirements for entrance to an order included noble birth and a dowry to support the woman; however, the limited number of places did not permit entrance to all who sought it. In addition, the established orders were increasingly closing themselves off to female recruits because women without dowries were

¹³⁶ Fiona Bowie, Beguine Spirituality: Mystical Writings of Mechthild of Magdeburg, Beatrice of Nazareth, and Hadewijch of Brabant (New York: Crossroad, 1990) 11.

¹³⁷ Brenda Bolton, "Mulieres sanctae," Sanctity and Secularity: The Church and the World (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1993) 88.

¹³⁸ Bowie 13-14.

expensive to care for and they were also a distraction.¹³⁹
All of these factors led many women to adopt a semi-religious lifestyle at the margins of society.

Four stages are generally identified in the Beguine movement. At the beginning, it consisted of individual women living alone in urban areas who wished to follow the ideals of the *vita apostolica*. As their numbers increased, they joined together to form communities based on "spiritual discipline and common tasks."¹⁴⁰ At this stage the Church intervened by appointing members of the existing orders to care for the spiritual needs of the women. In the third stage, these communities became increasingly centered around hospitals where the women tended to the sick and the poor. The final stage consisted of the organization and enclosure of the beguines in a parish, called a beguinage:

The full-blown beguinage comprised a church, cemetery, hospital, public square, and streets and walkslined with convents for the younger sisters and pupils and individual houses for the older and well-to-do inhabitants.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ André Vauchez, Saints, Prophètes et Visionnaires: le Pouvoir Surnaturel au Moyen Age (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999) 180.

¹⁴⁰ Elizabeth A. Petroff, Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism (New York: Oxford UP, 1994) 53.

¹⁴¹ Ernest W. McDonnell, The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture with special emphasis on the Belgian Scene (New York: Octagon Books, 1969) 479.

The approach of the Beguines was in marked divergence to society at that time. Elizabeth Petroff asserts that "the communities that evolved were radical in medieval terms and would still be considered radical today."¹⁴² Since the women were not enclosed, they did not follow a general rule as required in the established orders. Therefore, each Beguine community, or Beguinage, devised its own. The absence of a rule was particularly unsettling to the Church, given that

the need for a binding vow was one of the common assumptions that had bound together all religious orders in the Middle Ages. They were all based on one fundamental idea - that a life fully pleasing to God could not be lived in the secular world.¹⁴³

In general, the daily activities of the Beguines included the education of children and the care of the sick and the poor, in addition to prayer. They strived to blend the active and the contemplative life "in the world but not of it." They did not beg, but rather supported themselves by the work of their hands (and sometimes found themselves in competition with the local guilds). Unlike women in the orders, the Beguines could possess private property, although they often renounced it. In

¹⁴² Petroff 52.

¹⁴³ R. W. Southern, Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages (New York: Penguin Books, 1990) 341.

addition, they were not required to take a vow of perpetual chastity, yet this virtue was practiced. They were also free to change their status at any time.¹⁴⁴ The ambiguity of the Beguines' status as "neither fully regular nor straight-forwardly lay"¹⁴⁵ raised the suspicions of both laity and clergy. The situation was complicated due to the Beguines' sex:

Women together, driven only by their religious aspirations, were perplexing. Any group of laity seeking spiritual consolation from their own resources, outside the formal structures of the church, raised the spectre of deviation.¹⁴⁶

It is important to keep in mind that the Beguines had numerous detractors and few supporters. Here, two biographies are considered, both of which went against the prevailing currents to praise specific Beguine women and their way of life. One, by Jacques de Vitry, is significant because of his position in the church hierarchy. In the second biography, Philippine de Porcellet presents an account of the founder of a Beguine community to validate and preserve Beguine spirituality.

¹⁴⁴ Bowie 13.

¹⁴⁵ R. N. Swanson, Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215-c. 1515 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 111.

¹⁴⁶ Swanson 111.

Chapter 6: The Life of Marie d'Oignies by Jacques de Vitry

The Life of Marie d'Oignies (Vita Mariae Oigniacensis), written by Jacques de Vitry in 1216, has earned its place among the most important works of medieval hagiography as "the first spiritual biography written in the Middle Ages in honor of a lay woman."¹⁴⁷

In addition, its purpose was quite ambitious:

For the first time in fact since Late Antiquity, the life of a saint was going to be used by its author not only to defend an ideal of religious life by praising a servant of God, but also to combat heretics and try to bring them back into the church.¹⁴⁸

Jacques de Vitry's testimony and defense of the early Beguines also contributed to the genre of hagiography by expanding the notion of female sanctity to include those inspired by the apostolic movements of his day. In contrast to the vernacular lives of the virgin martyrs examined earlier in this dissertation, the author writes this life in Latin, indicating a different, more limited target audience - fellow churchmen - as well as a desire to give his text the same authority as the early Latin

¹⁴⁷ André Vauchez, Saints, prophètes et visionnaires: le pouvoir surnaturel au Moyen Age (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999) 175.

¹⁴⁸ Vauchez 175.

vitae. De Vitry has been described as both an ardent reformer¹⁴⁹ and a staunch traditionalist,¹⁵⁰ and accordingly he uses traditional methods to present a discourse of orthodoxy in view of legitimizing this group of women considered to be at the margins of society. In this chapter, I will argue that these methods came from Ciceronian rhetoric as they were mediated through the medieval *artes poeticae*, in particular through the earliest of the *artes*, Matthew of Vendôme's Art of Versification.

Where did Jacques de Vitry learn rhetoric? De Vitry, born in Rheims sometime between 1160 and 1170 to a family "of some rank,"¹⁵¹ was educated at the cathedral school of Notre Dame and the nascent University of Paris where he undertook theological studies. He therefore would have received a classical education with instruction in the *trivium* and *quadrivium*. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, "at Paris one was not regarded

¹⁴⁹ Dennis Devlin, "Feminine Lay Piety in the High Middle Ages: The Beguines," Medieval Religious Women: Volume One - Distant Echoes. Ed. John A. Nicholas and Lillian Thomas Shank. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984) 185.

¹⁵⁰ McDonnell 29.

¹⁵¹ Thomas Frederick Crane, introduction, The Exempla or Illustrative Stories from the *Sermones Vulgares* of Jacques de Vitry (New York: Burt Franklin, 1971) xxv. E. McDonnell, The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture with Special Emphasis on the Belgian Scene (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1954) 21.

as a serious scholar unless he had a particular master,"¹⁵² and it is known that Jacques de Vitry was part of the circle surrounding Master Peter the Chanter.¹⁵³ Stephen Ferruolo has assessed the significance of de Vitry's participation in this group:

According to Master Peter the Chanter, preaching was the highest duty of the theologian. By preaching (*praedicatio*) the knowledge gained in the schools - by *lectio* and *disputatio* - could be made useful to the rest of society. In his commentary on the Psalms, the Chanter had argued that just as the apostles and martyrs of the primitive Church had successfully preached to unbelievers, preachers needed to be mobilized to take up the challenge of encouraging good conduct and correcting the evils of modern society. The Chanter's teaching had a great impact on Jacques, who embraced and extolled preaching as an effective means of promoting both moral reform and spiritual renewal.¹⁵⁴

Indeed, Jacques de Vitry studied at the University of Paris at a pivotal time: "Jacques' years as a student and master coincided with a great revival in preaching that was both academic - that is, inspired by the

¹⁵² "University of Paris," Catholic Encyclopedia 15 September 2003 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11495a.htm>>

¹⁵³ John W. Baldwin, Masters, Princes and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter and His Circle. Vol. 2. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970) 36-39. Stephen C. Ferruolo, "Preaching to the Clergy and Laity in Early Thirteenth-Century France: Jacques of Vitry's *Sermones ad Status*." Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History 12 (1985) 12-22.

¹⁵⁴ Ferruolo 14.

teaching in the schools - and popular."¹⁵⁵ An inexplicable increase in religious fervor, particularly among the laity, created a demand for more preachers to spread the Christian message. This period, therefore, marked the beginning of the rhetorical *ars praedicandi*, or art of preaching, for which de Vitry was best known in his lifetime.

Although at first glance it would seem strange that an ambitious churchman would seek to align himself with such a marginal group, it is likely that the young priest was drawn to them given the fervor and zeal common to these holy women and the early mendicants. It was actually a common practice for men of the church to collect information on such groups.¹⁵⁶ As Devlin has noted, both lay religious groups as well as mendicants shared an interest in "a return to the primitive Church and its spiritual foundation, a concern for the conversion and salvation of souls throughout the world, and evangelical poverty which included the common life and honest manual labor."¹⁵⁷ These themes are repeated throughout de Vitry's biography of Marie d'Oignies.

¹⁵⁵ Ferruolo 13.

¹⁵⁶ Bolton 82.

¹⁵⁷ Devlin 186.

Jacques de Vitry first encountered the Beguines in 1208. He withdrew from his studies in Paris to seek out Marie, a young woman whose reputation for holiness was spreading throughout the diocese of Liège in Belgium. Bernard McGinn speculates that de Vitry "had inner tensions and self-doubts that seem to have found some relief and consolation when he put himself under the care of the ecstatic and miraculous *mulier sancta* Mary of Oignies."¹⁵⁸ This began a five-year friendship which lasted until her death. De Vitry's actions show that her memory remained dear to him for the rest of his life.

The Life of Marie d'Oignies, therefore, came out of Jacques' rich education at the University of Paris as well as his personal relationships with Marie and the women around her. In the prologue, he positions himself within the tradition of the Church Fathers when he reveals his concern that the pious activities of the women of Liège will fade from memory. He sets out to "gather up the fragments (of their lives) lest they be lost."¹⁵⁹ De Vitry seeks to imitate the apostles who

¹⁵⁸ Bernard McGinn, The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism - 1200-1350 (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998) 34.

¹⁵⁹ Jacques de Vitry, The Life of Marie d'Oignies, trans. Margot H. King (Toronto, Ontario: Peregrina Publishing Company, 1998) 39.

put down in writing the virtues and the works of the saints who went before them for the use of those coming afterwards in order to strengthen the faith of the weak, instruct the unlearned, incite the sluggish, stir up the devout to imitation, and confute the rebellious and the unfaithful.¹⁶⁰

In these lines, he reveals his awareness of the variations within an audience, an awareness he demonstrates throughout his literary corpus.¹⁶¹

De Vitry expresses his desire to imitate the Church Fathers who "always had before their eyes the verdict of the stringent judgment concerning the talent which had been entrusted to them,"¹⁶² thus reiterating the parable of the talents so often evoked by medieval writers both secular and religious. Additionally, he employs a commonplace¹⁶³ when he asserts that his work in particular would be "very useful to many others."¹⁶⁴ McDonnell remarks rightly that de Vitry writes not "as a historian, penetrating as his observations could be, but as a prelate and an apostle, keenly conscious of his

¹⁶⁰ De Vitry 39.

¹⁶¹ In his later sermon collections, he would also show himself to be adept at the rhetorical techniques necessary to appeal to persons from all walks of life, which no longer consisted solely of those who labor, pray, or battle. See Ferruolo.

¹⁶² De Vitry 39.

¹⁶³ Ernst Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1983) 87.

¹⁶⁴ De Vitry 49.

mission."¹⁶⁵ Once again, it must be understood that Jacques de Vitry, like the hagiographers of the virgin martyrs, does not present history as we understand it today, but rather he demonstrates an ideal of sanctity through the medium of a literary recreation of the life of an individual and employs rhetorical techniques to that end. In fact, he makes his rhetorical plan very clear when he states that "many who are not moved by commands are stirred to action by examples."¹⁶⁶

Given that de Vitry places himself within a long rhetorical tradition, it is not surprising to note the striking similarities between the prologue of the Life and that of Matthew of Vendôme's The Art of Versification. Matthew was an instructor of grammar in Orléans who spent about ten years in Paris from around 1175 to 1185. It is conceivable that Jacques de Vitry was familiar with the work while he was a student in Paris. If the text of the Art did not provide a direct influence, it reveals a rhetorical tradition which formed an integral part of the Parisian education.

¹⁶⁵ McDonnell 25.

¹⁶⁶ De Vitry 40. Like de Vitry, Matthew of Vendôme also believed that "the best way to make an idea clear is through easily understood examples" (35).

A comparison of the prologues of the Life and the Art sheds light on how the task of writing was conceived. Matthew's treatise, like many others, is an example of the rhetoric it seeks to teach. As he begins his prologue, he employs a standard humility *topos*, "I have desired to translate my promises into accomplished fact according to the meagerness of my slight talent"¹⁶⁷ to capture the goodwill of his audience. Of course, this is not to be read literally, for it was a convention of the genre to claim inadequacy.¹⁶⁸ In addition, Matthew anticipates criticism and seeks to prevent it: "Since I am offering the truce of reasoned judgment to my detractors, let them not in presumptuous attack rashly prejudge my little book without so much as even consulting the domain of reason or having studied what I have written."¹⁶⁹

In contrast to Matthew who writes in support of his work, Jacques de Vitry strives to defend the pious women of the diocese of Liège. Whereas Matthew's motives could be considered unnecessarily affected, de Vitry gives the impression of showing only selfless concern for others.

¹⁶⁷ Matthew of Vendôme, trans. Aubrey E. Galyon, The Art of Versification (Ames: Iowa State UP, 1980) 25.

¹⁶⁸ Ernst Curtius 83.

¹⁶⁹ Matthew of Vendôme 25.

De Vitry's prologue is rather lengthy in comparison to the prologues of the lives of the virgin martyrs, perhaps because in rhetorical terms the defense of the Beguines presented a difficult case, one which would not win over an audience easily. As Cicero instructed: "In the difficult case, if the auditors are not completely hostile, it will be permissible to try to win their goodwill by an introduction."¹⁷⁰

De Vitry states in the prologue that he was asked by his friend, the bishop Fulk of Toulouse, to record the lives of the holy women of Liège so that their faith and pious practices would serve as "an *exemplum* in preaching against the heretics of his own diocese."¹⁷¹ The southern heretics, known as the Albigensians, were attracting many women in that region with their ideas. According to de Vitry, the bishop believed that the Beguines' example would provide an attractive model of orthodox womanhood in response to the Albigensian threat. Using a

¹⁷⁰ Cicero, trans. H.M. Hubbell, De Inventione De Optimo Genere Oratorum Topica (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1949) 43.

¹⁷¹ Brenda Bolton, "Mulieres Sanctae," Sanctity and Secularity: The Church and the World (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1993) 253.

rhetorical device, de Vitry recounts his version of the bishop's request:

With what a disposition of love you asked me, as her intimate friend, to write down her life before she went to the Lord and to entrust to memory many things about her virtues. Indeed you asked me to write not only her life but [the lives] of other holy women in whom the Lord worked wondrously in the country around Liège. [. . .] you said that it was very fitting for you and many others to preach in public against the heretics in your province by means of those contemporary saints in whom God works in our days.¹⁷²

Although writing at the request of another is a commonplace of medieval literature,¹⁷³ de Vitry's words have been taken at face value. It is significant that this quote specifies the idea of preaching in public because it supports the notion that this text was destined by de Vitry to be used by fellow preachers instead of being circulated among the laity. De Vitry recalls that he agreed to write the story of the Beguines with the understanding that he could not do so during their lifetimes because he did not wish to offend their humility. It simply was not hagiographic practice to write a *vita* before a saint's death.

¹⁷² De Vitry 48-49.

¹⁷³ Curtius 86. Paul John Jones, Prologue and Epilogue in Old French Lives of Saints Before 1400 (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1933) 22.

From the beginning, de Vitry adopts the "direct approach" to dispel two misconceptions surrounding these women.¹⁷⁴ He remarks "the great faith and devotion of these holy women who venerated the Church of Christ and the sacraments of holy Church with the greatest desire and reverence, but who were almost or completely humiliated and held in contempt in their own regions."¹⁷⁵ It was imperative that he emphasize their obedience to the Church and their reception of the sacraments, scorned by those attracted to the heresies of the time. The analysis of Marie's virtues that will follow in this chapter will illustrate and support this argument. De Vitry and the Bishop knew these holy women personally, which gives credence to the account, although scholars of this genre advise readers to be cautious. De Vitry never differentiates between "good" and "bad" Beguines, yet the group was not homogenous. In writing about Jacques de Vitry's *exempla* from his sermon collection, the Sermones ad status, Stephen Ferruolo issues a warning that equally applies to the Life, "The *exempla* are often personalized giving the impression that Jacques is drawing from his own experience (...). However, one should not be misled into

¹⁷⁴ Rhetorica Ad Herennium 13.

¹⁷⁵ De Vitry 40-41.

making too much of this testimony or too readily accepting the stories as factual."¹⁷⁶ Ferruolo goes on to say that "whatever the subject of the *exempla*, the historian is wise to beware."¹⁷⁷ This warning is particularly helpful to keep in mind, especially in light of Matthew of Vendôme's rather loose requirement that a description "either is true or *seems* to be true."¹⁷⁸

Jacques de Vitry writes as if he is having a conversation with the bishop and provides descriptions of the women so the reader can "see" them through the bishop's eyes:

You saw many holy virgins in the lily gardens of the Lord and you rejoiced. You saw crowds of them in different places where they scorned carnal enticements for Christ, despised the riches of this world for the love of the heavenly kingdom, clung to their heavenly Bridegroom in poverty and humility and earned a sparse meal with their hands...You saw holy women serving God and you rejoiced...You have seen holy women serving the Lord devoutly in marriage and you rejoiced, women teaching their sons in the fear of the Lord, keeping honourable nuptials and 'an undefiled wedding bed', giving themselves to prayer for a time and returning afterwards together again "in fear of the Lord lest they be tempted by Satan."¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Ferruolo 17.

¹⁷⁷ Ferruolo 17.

¹⁷⁸ Matthew of Vendôme 47. In *The Art of Poetry*, Horace offers the same advice, "Either follow tradition or invent what is self-consistent" (46).

¹⁷⁹ De Vitry 41-42.

The technique is effective as he repeats the phrases "you saw" and "you have seen." In the fourth book of the Rhetorica Ad Herennium, this is referred to as "ocular demonstration" which necessitates that "the business seems to be enacted and the subject to pass vividly before our eyes."¹⁸⁰ This passage is clearly designed to elicit sympathy from the reader, and the next one will incite anger toward their enemies. Jacques de Vitry does not mince words when dealing with the Beguines' detractors:

You have seen and marvelled at those shameless men (indeed you greatly hated them) who, hostile to all religion, maliciously slandered the ascetic life of these women and, like mad dogs, railed against customs which were contrary to theirs. And when there was nothing more they could do, they invented new names to use against them, just as the Jews called Christ a Samaritan and called Christians Galileans.¹⁸¹

What Jacques de Vitry accomplishes is based on the following technique encouraged by the Rhetorica ad Herennium: "From the discussion of the person of our adversaries we shall secure goodwill (on the part of the reader) by bringing them into hatred, unpopularity, or contempt."¹⁸² Interestingly, de Vitry does not name those

¹⁸⁰ Rhetorica Ad Herennium 405.

¹⁸¹ Jacques de Vitry 43.

¹⁸² Rhetorica Ad Herennium 15.

persons who were so against the holy women, perhaps because they figure among the ranks of his fellow priests, nor does he reveal the names used against the women. In fact, he never uses the term "Begaine" in this text; therefore, it must be concluded that the term had a thoroughly negative connotation at the time.¹⁸³ One theory for the origin of the name Begaine is that it came from "Albigensian"¹⁸⁴ a fact which underscores how important it was for de Vitry and the bishop to show the differences between the two groups. In fact, the hope for de Vitry was to present the Beguines as examples to the Albigensian women. The name beguine was definitely "intended as a smear"¹⁸⁵ by their detractors.

In order to present the orthodoxy of Marie d'Oignies, and by extension the Beguines as a group, it can be argued that Jacques de Vitry followed the guidelines of Matthew of Vendôme's eleven personal attributes derived from Cicero's De Inventione (I, 24). A comparison of de Vitry's description of Marie in light of these attributes will follow as evidence of this

¹⁸³ Douceline, however, embraces the term: "E dizia que aquest nom de beguina li plazia mot, e mais lo prezava; car era humils e mesprezatz a l'erguell d'aquest mont" (Albanés 28).

¹⁸⁴ R. N. Southern, Southern, Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages (New York: Penguin Books, 1990) 321.

¹⁸⁵ R. N. Southern 322.

assertion. Central to Matthew's theory of descriptions, these attributes include "name, nature, way of life, fortune, character, goals, appetites, judgement, luck, exploits, and eloquence."¹⁸⁶ The treatment of these attributes replaces the six parts of a classical oration as the organizing principle for this later work of hagiography, indicating that this work was meant to be read privately rather than aloud as well as reflecting a new poetics. Cicero listed these attributes under "*confirmatio*" or proof which represented "the part of the oration which by marshalling arguments lends credit, authority, and support to our case."¹⁸⁷ Accordingly, Jacques de Vitry used the information for these attributes to make his case, the praise of Marie,¹⁸⁸ as an obedient follower of Church teaching on such matters as confession and communion. It was crucial to de Vitry's case to demonstrate that Marie and the Beguines posed no threat to ecclesiastical, and specifically priestly, authority.

¹⁸⁶ Matthew of Vendôme 48.

¹⁸⁷ Cicero 69.

¹⁸⁸ In Matthew's view, the primary purpose of descriptions is to praise or condemn a person, which places this approach under the umbrella of epideictic rhetoric, one of the three branches along with forensic (judicial) and deliberative (political). Hagiography belongs under the epideictic genre, for its aim is to praise the virtues of one whom the author deems virtuous.

In the Art of Versification, Matthew begins with the statement, "A theme or point drawn from a name is a matter of interpreting a person's name to suggest something good or bad about the person."¹⁸⁹ De Vitry begins Book 1 of the Life of Marie d'Oignies in the following manner:

There was in the diocese of Liège in a town called Nivelles a certain young woman whose name was Marie, *as gracious in life as in name.* (my emphasis)¹⁹⁰

A commonplace of the genre is to interpret the name of the saint as an indication of virtue and nobility. Marie's description of graciousness certainly evokes the Virgin Mary, often referred to by Christians as "full of grace."

By "nature," Matthew's second attribute, he refers to Cicero's treatment of both mental and physical characteristics as well as to "those attributes which are a result of nationality, native land, age, family or sex."¹⁹¹ The sentence above revealed her native land, age and sex. Curiously, no physical description is given of Marie, and this may be due to Matthew's emphasis on

¹⁸⁹ Matthew of Vendôme 48.

¹⁹⁰ De Vitry 53.

¹⁹¹ Matthew of Vendôme 49.

internal over external descriptions¹⁹² and his theory of descriptions which will be discussed later in this chapter. Jacques de Vitry does provide details of her parentage and includes the topos of *contemptus mundi* which figured into the earlier lives of virgin martyrs:

Her parents were not of common stock but even though they abounded in riches and many temporal goods yet, even from her early childhood, her inclination was never attracted by transitory goods.¹⁹³

As for her "way of life," de Vitry illustrates her early, pious practices: "Wherefore when she was still young, she would frequently kneel before her bed at night and offer up certain prayers which she had learned to the Lord as the first fruits of her life."¹⁹⁴ This is in line with Cicero's suggestion that the character of one's home life be described.¹⁹⁵ Marie's holiness became obvious to her parents, much to their dismay. She scorned their lifestyle and their gifts of beautiful clothes: "And when her parents, as is the custom of worldly people, wished to adorn her in delicate and refined clothing, she was saddened and rejected them."¹⁹⁶ Instead of assisting

¹⁹² Matthew of Vendôme 9.

¹⁹³ De Vitry 53.

¹⁹⁴ De Vitry 53.

¹⁹⁵ Cicero 73.

¹⁹⁶ De Vitry 54.

her in a religious vocation, however, they arranged for her to be married: "Her parents were indignant when they saw these auspicious deeds and when she was fourteen years old they joined her in marriage to a certain youth."¹⁹⁷ Her "fortune" was "foreshadowed in her youth what, through a divine sign, she would be in the future in her old age."¹⁹⁸ It is noteworthy that de Vitry does not relay what was allegedly revealed to Marie by God to be her fate. The idea is conveyed, however, that she learned she would pursue a religious vocation and that she might enter heaven.

Next, Matthew describes the attribute "character" as "a lasting property of the mind" and a "goal" as "any undertaking to which one willingly and ardently applies his mind."¹⁹⁹ Marie's character is revealed in de Vitry's description, ". . . mercy and righteousness grew in her from her infancy and she loved the ascetic life as if with a natural affection."²⁰⁰ Marie's goal is evident when de Vitry tells of a defining moment in her young life:

¹⁹⁷ De Vitry 54.

¹⁹⁸ De Vitry 53.

¹⁹⁹ De Vitry 51.

²⁰⁰ De Vitry 53.

...it once happened that when some Cistercian brothers were passing in front of her father's house, she glanced up at them and she so admired their religious habit that she followed them stealthily. And when she could do no more, she put her own feet in the footprints of those lay brothers or monks from her great desire.²⁰¹

The idea suggested by de Vitry is that Marie's admiration of the brothers reinforced her desire to seek a religious vocation, a commonplace of the genre which also appeared in the lives of the virgin martyrs. A similar event is described in the Life of Christina of Markyate, a twelfth-century English mystic:

...Autti and Beatrix brought their dear daughter Christina with them to our monastery of the blessed martyr St. Alban, where his sacred bones are revered, to beg his protection for themselves and for their child. When the girl therefore had looked carefully at the place and observed the religious bearing of the monks who dwelt there, she declared how fortunate the inmates were, and expressed a wish to share in their fellowship.²⁰²

The similarities of the event suggest a frequently-used *topos*. As asserted by Neel, Marie's experiences were "so

²⁰¹ De Vitry 53. The fact that Marie is inspired in her vocation by Cistercian brothers reminds us of the lack of obvious female role models "in the world." Female religious were invariably enclosed. Also, for an analysis of the commonalities between Beguines and Cistercians, see Devlin 189-191.

²⁰² C.H. Talbot, The Life of Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth-Century Recluse (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1988) 39.

exactly in harmony with his own rhetorical purposes that (the text's) accuracy should be suspect."²⁰³

The personal attribute "appetite" is also called feeling by Matthew of Vendôme and is described as "a sudden and passing change in either mind or body."²⁰⁴ An example in de Vitry's text comes from a description of Marie's prayer life:

And when she prayed in a special way for anyone to the Lord, he replied to her in the spirit. Her spirit was fastened to the Lord with the fat of devotion and she sweetly grew sleek in prayer when the Lord granted her what she had asked for. She often knew from the elevation or dejection of her spirit whether he had heard her or not.²⁰⁵

Marie's love of poverty affects her "judgment," which is defined by Matthew to be "a careful sorting out of which alternatives to reject and which to choose."²⁰⁶ Early in her religious life, she yearns to leave the Beguines so that "she might beg from door to door,"²⁰⁷ another commonplace of the genre:

When the poor little woman of Christ had said her farewell and wanted to take to the road ... with her little bag and her cup, her friends

²⁰³ Carol Neel, "The Origins of the Beguines," Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989) 246.

²⁰⁴ Matthew of Vendôme 51.

²⁰⁵ De Vitry 67.

²⁰⁶ De Vitry 52.

²⁰⁷ De Vitry 88.

who loved her in Christ sorrowed so much and shed so many tears that she could not endure it and she was filled with compassion. Although she wanted to flee and to beg, she was restrained by two things: she chose to remain because her absence would have seemed intolerable to her brothers and sisters.²⁰⁸

The problem of women begging was one of the reasons why the Church was so insistent on their enclosure.

Consequently this is a very important passage, given de Vitry's task of presenting Marie as an orthodox example. De Vitry was relieved that Marie's friends (and probably himself among them) were able to dissuade her from her decision. Bolton remarks that Marie shared "a strong attraction for the mendicant life" with her contemporary, Clare of Assisi.²⁰⁹ De Vitry's conviction about women mendicants is demonstrated in the prologue, when he reports with pride that even during a famine, none of the holy women of Liège were forced to beg in public.²¹⁰

Matthew of Vendôme's ninth attribute describes "luck" ("accidents") as "the usual issue of adversity through which we can see something of men's

²⁰⁸ De Vitry 89.

²⁰⁹ Brenda Bolton, "Vitae Matrum: A Further Aspect of the Frauenfrage," Medieval Women: dedicated and presented to Professor Rosalind M.T. Hill on the occasion of her seventieth birthday, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978) 262.

²¹⁰ De Vitry 44.

characters."²¹¹ Marie's response to adversity consisted mainly in prayers:

She rendered good for evil and did not reply to calumniators but prayed for those who persecuted her, persevered in her plans through constancy of mind, bore everything through firmness of soul, willingly approached difficult things through magnanimity and did not fear threatening problems because of her serenity.²¹²

Marie's "exploits," or "customary practices from which something about a person may be inferred,"²¹³ include her devotion to the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist as well as her fasting. She made regular confessions, as described admiringly by de Vitry,:

Since it is a habit of good minds to recognise a sin where there is none, she often flew to the feet of priests and made her confession and never stopped accusing herself. We could barely restrain from smiling when she remembered something she had idly said in her youth, for example, some words she had uttered in her childhood.²¹⁴

In addition, according to de Vitry, she performed astonishing works of penance: "She fasted continuously on bread and water from the Feast of the Holy Cross until Easter for three years, and yet she sustained no hurt to

²¹¹ Matthew of Vendôme 43.

²¹² Jacques de Vitry 116.

²¹³ Matthew of Vendôme 54.

²¹⁴ De Vitry 60. Remarking Marie's frequent confession shows her respect for the role and authority of the priesthood.

the health of her body or to the work of her hands."²¹⁵

In the prologue, de Vitry had stressed the importance of the sacrament of the Eucharist to all the holy women he knew in the diocese because this sacrament was rejected most strongly by the Albigensians. According to de Vitry, the women "took it not only as refreshment in the heart but also received it in their mouth as a perceptible consolation."²¹⁶ He deliberately contrasts the Albigensians' rejection of the sacrament with the Beguines' fervent reception of it and concludes by moralizing:

Some of them ran with such desire after the fragrance of such a great sacrament that in no way could they endure to be deprived of it; and unless their souls were frequently invigorated by the delights of this meal, they obtained no consolation or rest but utterly wasted away in languor. Let the heretic infidels be ashamed who received the delights of this food neither in the heart nor with faith.²¹⁷

Lastly, Matthew of Vendôme presents "language" as a personal attribute which is "a customary way of speaking

²¹⁵ De Vitry 64.

²¹⁶ De Vitry 47.

²¹⁷ De Vitry 47.

which reveals something about a person."²¹⁸ Jacques de Vitry writes of Marie's speech in the following manner:

Christ was for her a meditation in the heart, a word in the mouth, an example in her works. I do not remember that I ever heard a worldly statement from her lips, for she could barely speak a single sentence without repeatedly interspersing it with a Christ-like seasoning.²¹⁹

Matthew of Vendôme's list of attributes to praise or blame an individual, which were based on rhetorical precepts, have been useful when examining Jacques de Vitry's approach to the writing of the Life. Matthew's overall theory of descriptions concerning classes of persons explains how de Vitry was able to use the *exemplum* of Marie to represent the Beguines in general:

Listeners should concentrate, not on what is said, but on the manner in which it is said. Therefore, those characteristics which are attributed to the Pope, or to Caesar, or to various persons who are described should be understood, not as peculiar characteristics of those particular persons, but as characteristics that may apply to other persons of the same social status, age, rank, office, or sex. Names of specific persons are thus used to represent a general class of persons and not to indicate special qualities belonging alone to those persons who are named.²²⁰

²¹⁸ De Vitry 54.

²¹⁹ De Vitry 87-88.

²²⁰ Matthew of Vendôme 45.

Indeed, de Vitry goes so far to say that Marie truly is the ideal Beguine: "I discovered the fullness of almost all the graces in one precious and surpassingly excellent pearl."²²¹

To consider Matthew of Vendôme's poetic theory further and its possible influence on de Vitry's text, it should be noted that according to this theory any given description must be believable "because it employs common knowledge, that is, tradition and commonly accepted notions of the qualities certain types of persons should have or traditionally value."²²² This explains the following statement by Elizabeth Petroff regarding de Vitry's approach: "He is, in fact, protecting them by making them seem harmless - that is, by making them seem traditional, or by assimilating them into a medieval stereotype, the holy nun."²²³ It would seem that Jacques de Vitry followed Matthew's prescription, as cited above, to the letter. His *exemplum* is effective because he uses traditional methods of writing encouraged by classical rhetoric and the medieval *artes*.

²²¹ Jacques de Vitry 48.

²²² Matthew of Vendôme 6.

²²³ Elizabeth A. Petroff, "A New Feminine Spirituality: The Beguines and Their Writings in Medieval Europe," Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism (New York: Oxford UP, 1994) 55-56.

Given de Vitry's stated desire to present an *exemplum* of virtue to the women of Toulouse, it is of interest to learn how successful he was in this endeavor. André Vauchez addresses this question in his work, Saints, prophètes et visionnaires. Vauchez concludes that the result was mediocre for several reasons. First, there is no known version of the Life in Occitan, perhaps because Bishop Fulk of Toulouse was unable to return to his diocese with the text until 1229 after which he soon died. Translations in the vernacular were limited, and extracts only appear in manuscripts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In addition, the tone was simply "too mystical to be understood and received in the Christianity of his time."²²⁴ He notes with interest, however, that the work was popular within the cloister:

It appears significant to me in this respect that his text was very successful in the cloisters in the thirteenth century and that it did not reach the public for which it was destined until the fourteenth century, that is to say, at a time when feminine mysticism was commonplace and was accepted by the Church.²²⁵

Once again, it can be asserted that De Vitry's use of Latin would seem to indicate that fellow churchmen were the primary audience he had in mind when composing the

²²⁴ Vauchez 187.

²²⁵ Vauchez 187.

text in view of it serving as a tool in the preaching against the Albigensian heresy. However, it appears that the text was not used by preachers for this purpose. De Vitry was more successful when he personally presented his text to the Curia on behalf of the Beguines seeking to regularize their status. Although his visit coincided with the Fourth Lateran Council's pronouncement forbidding the creation of new religious orders, Jacques de Vitry's meeting with the new pontiff, Honourable III, resulted in the granting of "papal permission for the 'pious women in the bishopric of Liege and in all of France and Germany' to live together in communal houses and strengthen one another to do the right thing through mutual 'exhortations.'"²²⁶ The language is necessarily vague following the Council's ban. As for Marie's fate in the history of the Church, "Although termed indiscriminately *sancta* and *beata*, she does not seem ever to have been formally canonised, but papal licenses must have been given over for the translation of her body, and her name was admitted into various martyrologies."²²⁷

²²⁶ Grundmann 75.

²²⁷ Thomas Frederick Crane, introduction, The Exempla or Illustrative Stories from the *Sermones Vulgares* of Jacques de Vitry (New York: Burt Franklin, 1971) xxv.

In The Life of Marie d'Oignies, Jacques de Vitry demonstrates his knowledge of both classical and medieval rhetoric and employs their precepts to convince his readers that the Beguine way of life was not only orthodox but also holy. In contrast, the earlier examples of the genre, in the form of the lives of virgin martyrs, were designed to edify and entertain. De Vitry creates an original biography of a woman he knew and respected, again indicating a departure from the earlier *vitae* which were translations into the vernacular and re-workings of older Latin biographies and legends. Whereas the audience of the earlier biographies was as varied as the people who sat in all the refectories of monasteries and convents of 12th century France, de Vitry wrote in Latin to his fellow preachers. The result is the renewal of the hagiographic genre.

Chapter 7: The Life of Saint Douceline by Philippine de Porcellet

The Life of Saint Douceline²²⁸ is a worthy *vita* from the early fourteenth century that merits particular attention²²⁹ given that its female authorship "offers a rare glimpse on medieval women's views of sanctity."²³⁰ The small community of Beguines to which both the author and subject belonged is the target audience for this text. The author focuses on virtues necessary for peaceful living in a community of women, whereas Jacques de Vitry's focus was to gain widespread ecclesiastic acceptance for the Beguine movement as a whole. Rhetoric in this *vita* is most evident in the author's treatment of *dispositio* that represents a departure from the chronological order dictated by Ciceronian treatises. The text thus reflects Geoffrey of Vinsauf's contribution to literary theory and practice as detailed in his arts of poetry from this same time period.

²²⁸ The first edition of the work, from the year 1297, is lost. A second version dates from 1315.

²²⁹ Scholarship on The Life of Saint Douceline is unfortunately limited to the introductions of the Albanès, Gout and Garay translations of the text. This chapter benefits from their insights into the author's identity, aims, methods and target audience.

²³⁰ Michael Meckler, "Saints Lives," Literature of the French and Occitan Middle Ages: eleventh to fifteenth centuries. eds. Levi Sinnreich and Ian S. Laurie. (Detroit: Gale Group, 1991) 348.

In his lengthy and informative introduction, the translator Abbot Albanès notes the three-fold importance of this work - linguistic, historical and hagiographic. The Life of Saint Douceline was written in Occitan, the dialect spoken in Marseille at the time, and has been called a "chef-d'oeuvre" of the vernacular by R. Gout. Historically, it provides valuable information on many aspects of life in medieval Marseilles, ranging from its monuments to the customs of its inhabitants. In addition, it describes prominent individuals from the early Franciscan leaders such as John of Parma and Douceline's brother Hugh de Digne, and provides glimpses into the private lives of Douceline's royal connections, such as Charles of Anjou. Although Douceline (ca. 1215-1274) was born about the same time as the death of Marie d'Oignies, the lay religious movement which gave rise to the Beguines still forms the background of this biography. Unlike in the Life of Marie d'Oignies, however, there is no specific mention of the fight against heresy. Rather than defending the Beguine way of life to the Church, the author draws attention to the parallels between the spirituality practiced in the community and that of the Franciscans.

The author of the work is not identified, but Albanès goes to great lengths to determine both its author and the purpose for writing. He calls it "un témoin oculaire" of which the author could only have been a local person with first-hand experience of the daily life in the establishment.²³¹ This individual's love, admiration, and enthusiasm for the subject of her biography, as well as the revealing use of the first-person plural "we," indicates that the writer was a member of the community. Based on textual evidence, Albanès concludes that Philippine de Porcellet authored the biography. As the second founder of the establishment, she was in a position to gather all of the requisite information for the biography. Further, her education level allowed her to write it herself.²³²

Albanès goes further in his treatment of the text when he states that the Life "était destinée à raviver parmi les filles le souvenir de la sainte mère...(xix)" and was "écrite dans l'intention de la louer, de la faire

²³¹ xviii. The term can likewise be applied to de Vitry's text.

²³² In the epilogue, she refers to herself in the form of a humility *topos* as "crude and coarse and uneducated" and writes of her "ignorance and ineptitude": "En la qual s'es mot mostrada li vertutz de la Sancta, e del[s] sieus meritis, e li bontatz de Dieu; car so que ben I es fach, non pot hom dar a savieza de persona, ni az entendement. Car motas cauzas I a escrichas e pauzadas, queper sa rudeza non entendia: car persona grossiera e ruda, ses deguna sciencia, s'enn es enpachada" (244).

connaître et honorer...(lix)." R. Gout adds that Philippine is preparing Douceline's "dossier" for beatification and that she is offering to the beguines "un type de sainteté, un 'miroir²³³ de perfection'". The woman being praised is to be presented to the community as an *exemplum*, and the "visible préoccupation" of the text is the preservation of its audience, the Beguines and their way of life.

Since Philippine's intended audience was primarily the women within her own community, it is logical that she would choose to write in the vernacular. It is possible, too, that while she could read Latin she could not write in it. Philippine's precise education is unknown, but we may gather ideas about it. In Joan Ferrante's article, "The Education of Women in the Middle Ages in Theory, Fact, and Fantasy," she states that "women were educated either at home or in convents," and due to the wealth of the Porcellet family she could have

²³³ Although this text is not titled *speculum*, the genre of the same name serves the "double function of showing the world what it is and what it should become" (Ritamarly Bradley 101). In this case, the author wishes for the community of beguines to see both a reflection of themselves and a superior example of holiness to which they can aspire.

received the best education that money could buy.²³⁴

Ferrante describes the curriculum of the latter option:

Convent schools...at least the better ones, taught the trivium, Holy Scripture, the Fathers, and music, and some gave the rudiments of medical care. Religious houses trained not only their own novitiates but the sons of daughters of the nobility and, in the High Middle Ages, of the wealthy bourgeoisie as well.²³⁵

Although rhetoric formed part of the trivium, if women were not allowed to "teach publicly," then, "there was little reason for them to go beyond the study of letters to rhetoric, let alone philosophy."²³⁶

Given the probability that Philippine was not formally instructed in rhetoric, she would have had to look for a saint's life on which to model her biography of Douceline.²³⁷ According to Philippine, it was Douceline's habit to model herself after the saints:

Alcunas ves, dis a sas familiars, cant las amonestava a creisser en las sanctas vertutz,

²³⁴ Joan Ferrante, "The Education of Women in the Middle Ages in Theory, Fact, and Fantasy," Beyond their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past. ed. Patricia H. Labalme (New York: New York UP, 1980) 11.

²³⁵ Ferrante 12.

²³⁶ Ferrante 12.

²³⁷ The author of the Rhetorica Ad Herennium refers to the five canons of rhetoric as faculties that a writer must acquire by the following means: theory, imitation and practice (7).

dizia enformant las, qu'illi non auzi anc
perfeccion de santz, qu'illi non prezessa.²³⁸

The saint most dear to her heart was St. Francis:

Car cant illi parllava, ni mentavia lo
gonfanonier de la ost de Crist, mon seinnher
sant Frances, ensenhalatz d'aquels sagratz
seinnhals, no remania en si mezesma, que
tantost era tirada az aquell sentiment, per la
sobre fervent devocion qu'illi avia en lo
bollier de Crist. En el, apres Ihesu Crist e
la sieua maire bezeneta, davant totz autres
sans, majormens si fizava, e per los sieus
[heissemles] volia esser regida. Motas ves la
trobavan raubida, lo libre en las mans, legent
la sieua vida; e totares qu'illi pogues movia
az aver devocion en aquest sant; car ades, en
totas sas paraulas fazia salsa de sant
Frances.²³⁹

Given Douceline's affection for St. Francis as well as
her conscious imitation of him, it is understandable why
Douceline's biographer modeled the text of her life after
that of St. Francis. It is known that an Occitan
version of the work was available at this time in

²³⁸ Albanès 68. When she was urging those closest to her to increase their practice of holy virtues, she would sometimes tell when she instructed them, that she had never been told of any perfection of a saint that she had not taken up herself (48).

²³⁹ Albanès 99. "When she was talking about the standard bearer of Christ's army, my lord Saint Francis, who was marked with the holy stigmata, she could no longer control herself, and was immediately carried away by her emotion, because of the extraordinary devotion she had for Christ's keeper of the seal. After Jesus Christ and his blessed mother, she put her trust principally in him, ahead of all the other saints, and she wanted to be governed by his example. They frequently found her in a state of ecstasy, with the book in her hands, reading the saint's life. She urged everyone to be devoted to him; and in almost all her discourses, she would talk about Saint Francis" (58).

Provence.²⁴⁰ According to R. Gout, "il lui arrive alors de traduire saint Bonaventure à qui elle n'emprunte, du reste, que des lieux communs sur les vertus chrétiennes."²⁴¹ However, Gout's statement is not entirely true. A close examination of the two texts reveals that Philippine's work imitates St. Bonaventure's imagery and structure. Both works contain fifteen chapters, including similar chapter titles arranged in a similar order.

St. Bonaventure's text was considered the definitive biography of St. Francis at the time it was written.²⁴² In fact, in 1266 the general chapter of the Franciscan order in Paris "decreed that all the 'legends' of St. Francis written before that of Bonaventure should be forthwith destroyed."²⁴³ Given the stature of St. Bonaventure's text, it is interesting to compare the

²⁴⁰ Meckler 348.

²⁴¹ Gout 14-15.

²⁴² "The chapter (General Chapter of Narbonne) requested Bonaventure to write a 'legend' or life of St. Francis which should supersede those then in circulation. This was in 1260. Three years later Bonaventure, having in the meantime visited a great part of the order, and having assisted as the dedication of the chapel on La Verna and at the translation of the remains of St. Clare and of St. Anthony, convoked a general chapter of the order of Pisa at which his newly composed life of St. Francis was officially approved as the standard biography of the saint to the exclusion of all others."

²⁴³ "St. Bonaventure," Catholic Encyclopedia 15 September 2003 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02648c.htm>>

prologue with that of Jacques de Vitry in The Life of Marie d'Oignies. For example, let us identify St.

Bonaventure's purpose for writing:

I know myself, then, to be most unworthy and unequal to describe the life of this most venerable man thus set forth for the imitation of the faithful; nor should I ever have attempted such a task, but for my ardent love for my brethren; being moved thereto by the urgent request of our General Chapter, and no less by the devotion which I am bound to bear to this our Father, by whose merits and invocation I was (as I well remember), while yet a child, delivered from the jaws of death. Were I then to be silent in his praise, I should fear justly to incur the charge of ingratitude. Good reason, indeed, have I to undertake this labour, that so, in return for the bodily and spiritual life preserved to me by God for the sake of his merits and virtues, I, on my part, may preserve as best I may (albeit imperfectly), the acts, words, and virtues of his life, which are scattered and dispersed in divers places, and so gather them together, that they may not perish with the lives of those who lived and conversed with him on earth.²⁴⁴

St. Bonaventure clearly incorporates the humility *topos* which serves to underscore his admiration for his subject and reveals that he was asked to record the details of St. Francis' life. A direct echo of de Vitry's text (as well as John 6:12) is heard in the last lines of the above quote, as it was written in the prologue to Marie

²⁴⁴ Bonaventure 7.

d'Oignies biography that he desired to "gather up the fragments lest they be lost."²⁴⁵

St. Bonaventure's education in rhetoric is revealed not only in his use of *topoi*, but also in an address directed at the reader when he describes his method of writing and organizing his text:

Now, in describing all these things, and the sublime and wonderful deeds which God was pleased to work by this His servant, I have judged it fitting to avoid all curious ornaments of style and vain eloquence of words - believing that the devotion of the reader will be enkindled rather by a pure and simple idiom than by an ornamental phraseology.²⁴⁶

Neither have I been careful, in weaving the web of my story, to follow the order of time; but, to avoid the confusion of subjects which might thence arise, I have rather studied to follow such an order as would string together facts of the same class and kind, although they may have taken place at different times. The beginning, therefore, and course of this life, and finally the end of it, shall be related in fifteen chapters, the contents of which, for greater clearness and distinctness, are set down below.²⁴⁷

St. Bonaventure's concern for the ordering of his text (or *dispositio*) reveals his familiarity with Geoffrey of

²⁴⁵ De Vitry 39.

²⁴⁶ Later in the work, this view of rhetoric appears again as he describes the preaching of St. Francis: "For his word was as a burning fire, penetrating the inmost heart, and filling the minds of men with admiration, inasmuch as he sought after no ornaments of human invention, but showed forth only the divine inspiration and doctrine" (116).

²⁴⁷ Bonaventure 8.

Vinsauf's early thirteenth-century rhetorical treatises, Documentum de Modo et Arte Dictandi et Versificandi and the Poetria Nova.²⁴⁸ In a departure from the chronological order recommended by the treatises of the Ciceronian rhetorical tradition,²⁴⁹ Geoffrey of Vinsauf distinguishes between a "natural" beginning and an "artistic" beginning:

A natural beginning occurs when the discourse begins at the point where the subject to be treated begins. This kind of beginning might be called either ordinary or common, since everyone tends to begin in this manner.

The artistic beginning occurs when the discourse begins elsewhere. An artistic beginning, moreover, can be handled in eight ways. For one could begin in the middle, or at the end, or from a proverb in three ways: near the beginning, near the middle or near the end; from an exemplum in three ways: since it can be used near the beginning, near the middle, or near the end.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ The idea behind Geoffrey's Poetria Nova was that it would supplant Horace's Ars Poetica.

²⁴⁹ See Cicero's De inventione (I.xx.29) and the Rhetorica Ad Herennium (I.ix.15).

²⁵⁰ Geoffrey of Vinsauf, Documentum de Modo et Arte dictandi et versificandi, trans. Roger P. Parr (Milwaukee: Marquette UP, 1968) 40. A similar passage exists in the Poetria Nova: "The poem travels the pathway of art if a more effective order presents first what was later in time, and defers the appearance of what was actually earlier. Now, when the natural order is thus transposed, later events incur no censure by their early appearance, nor do early events by their late introduction." Geoffrey of Vinsauf, Poetria Nova, trans. Margaret F. Nims (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1967) 18-19.

Let us now begin our examination of the lives of Douceline and St. Francis to emphasize the extent of Philippine de Porcellet's imitation of Bonaventure's model text (even in its imagery) and to identify the virtues Philippine wished to promote within her community. In the prologue to the Life of St. Francis and in the first chapter of the Douceline biography (which has no prologue), both authors use the image of the light from the Gospel of St. John to describe how God has sent these holy people to become examples to everyone. St. Bonaventure describes St. Francis in the following manner:

For so graciously did God look upon this truly poor and contrite man, that He not only raised the poor and needy from the vile dust of worldly conversation, but also set him to be a light to the faithful, making him to become a true professor, leader, and herald of evangelical perfection, that, bearing witness to the light, he might prepare before the Lord a way of light and peace in the hearts of the faithful.²⁵¹

Similarly, Philippine de Porcellet introduces both Douceline and her brother Hugh as "doas grans lumnieras a Nostre Senhor, que resplandiron e la nueg e lo jorn."²⁵²

²⁵¹ Bonaventure 5.

²⁵² "Two great lights that shone night and day" (25).

It is noteworthy that Douceline is also described at this moment as "dousa e dinha," a play on her name.²⁵³

To show how closely Philippine de Porcellet followed St. Bonaventure's work, it will serve our purposes to examine selections from various chapters, noting the nearly identical wording of the passages and the resulting comparison of Beguine and Franciscan spirituality. Douceline made decisions and acted in imitation of St. Francis; Philippine copied St. Bonaventure's wording to express that imitation. St. Bonaventure describes St. Francis' "humility and obedience" by revealing his decision to place himself under the obedience of a superior:

Now this evangelical merchant, that he might make the greater profit, and spend every moment of his life in laying up merit, ever chose to be a subject rather than a superior: to obey rather than to command. Therefore, laying aside his office of Minister-General, he desired to be under the Guardian, that he might in all things obey his will.²⁵⁴

In the parallel chapter of Philippine's text, also on humility and obedience, Douceline's decision to abandon her position as the prioress of her two convents is

²⁵³ This rhetorical technique is discussed in Matthew of Vendôme's The Art of Versification.

²⁵⁴ Bonaventure 56.

described, thus serving to promote the internal structure of the community:

Non era fencha en ella vera humilitatz; ans aquist vertutz era en ella en aissi cant maires, que la noiria, e la creissia cpmtomia, ems em Dieu. E per so que en mais de manieras ill gazainhes en aquesta vertut, illi ques era generals prioressa d'amos aquels covens, volc aver una donna per prioressa, a cui illi humilmens obezis; e promes li hobediencia am gran devocion. Per so que tostemps ill fos obediens per amor dell Senhor; vodet atressi obediencia a fraire Jaucelin, homs santz, ques era menistres des fraires menors en Prohensa, le calis fon pueis evsques d'Aurenga; al cal illi, tant cant visquet, humilmens obezi.²⁵⁵

This virtue of humility also informed Douceline's choice of the Beguines' way of life:

Non podia sufrir que res s'aginolles az ella, neis d'un enfant; que enans qu'il si fossan clinatz, ill s'era aginollada. Sobre totas cauzas s'estudiet en aquesta vertut a fondar si mezesma e tot son estament. Aquesta vertut mandava fort gardar a totas sas filhas, aissi cant fundament de tot son estament. E per aisso, illi non volc sufrir qu'ellas aguessan edifici de gleisa, ni outras dignitatz; ni aguessan sotileza de letras, ni cantessan

²⁵⁵ Albanès 32. "Her humility was not feigned, but true; and this virtue was like a mother within her, nourishing her and making her grow continually in God. So that she might increase in this virtue in more ways she, who was the general prioress of both convents, wanted to have a sister to be her prioress, whom she would humbly obey and she promised obedience to her with great devotion. In order to be always obedient through the love of the Lord, she also swore obedience to Brother Jaucelin, a holy man, who was a minister of the Friars Minor in Provence, and who was later the bishop of Orange; as long as she lived, she was humbly obedient to him."

l'ufici; ni volia aguessan neguna cauza per que trop s'eslevessan.²⁵⁶

Philippine's sixth chapter, which treats Douceline's "austerity and good works," reveals some of her pious practices and dealings with those in her charge. Douceline gave explicit directions to the Beguines regarding how they should deal with the opposite sex:

Las familiaritatz desl homes, lurs paraulas e lurs esgartz, comandava que fossan esquivadas, ses tota merce, non solamens de la sieuas, mais de totas cellas que al sieu consell volian vieure. Ni illi a penas negun home conoissia per cara.²⁵⁷

As for St. Francis, "So faithfully did he turn away his eyes lest they should behold vanity, that, as he once said to one of his companions, he hardly knew any woman by sight."²⁵⁸ Although the language is nearly identical, the contrast in the reasoning behind their avoidance of any interaction between the opposite sex and themselves is intriguing. It is logical to believe that Douceline was concerned about the women either being tempted

²⁵⁶ Albanès 50. "She strove above all to establish her order on humility. She told all her daughters to keep this virtue as the foundation of her entire institution. For that reason, she did not want to allow them to have a church built, or to have any other worldly things of value; she did not want them to acquire skill in letters or to sing the office, or to have anything that would raise them too high."

²⁵⁷ Albanès 50. "She ordered the shunning of the company of men, their words and their looks, and required this, without any mercy, not only of her own women but of all those who wanted to live under her direction. She herself hardly knew any man by his face."

²⁵⁸ Bonaventure 48.

sexually or being temptresses themselves. In the case of St. Francis, the concern for beholding "vanity" would seem to indicate that he wishes to behold no other beauty except that of God.

In addition, both Douceline and St. Francis warned their charges against idleness and foolish talking. St. Francis "taught them above all things to avoid idleness, as the sink of all evil thoughts, showing by his own example how to tame the lazy and rebellious flesh by continual disciplines and useful labours."²⁵⁹ A clear echo is found in Philippine's account of Douceline's demands: "Non volia atressi li sancta maire que estessan ociozas, ni vaguejessan de cor ni de paraulas; mais que s'exercitessan en totas bonas obras."²⁶⁰ St. Francis is depicted as being quite harsh in disciplining unnecessary talking as well:

According to the Gospel precept, he would have the brethren to observe silence - that is, to carefully abstain at all times from evil words, seeing that they must give account thereof at the day of judgement; and if he found some brother to be given to foolish talking, he severely reproved him, affirming that modest taciturnity is no slight virtue, but the guardian of purity of heart.²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ Bonaventure 48.

²⁶⁰Albanés 52. "The holy mother did not want them to be idle or to wander, either in their hearts or in their words; rather she wanted them to practise every good work."

²⁶¹ Bonaventure 49.

Likewise, Douceline advised the ladies of Roubaud to avoid all excessive talking: "Aondansa de paraulas esquivava fort en totas."²⁶²

Another pious practice shared by both subjects was the shedding of holy tears,²⁶³ an occurrence often noted among the medieval mystics. In St. Francis' thinking, "whosoever would attain to a life of perfection must cleanse his conscience daily with abundance of tears."²⁶⁴ Douceline was likewise afflicted:

E per so que s'arma tengues plazent a Dieu,
continuamens si lavava, e de jors e de nuegz,
am gran plueia de lagremas; que a son cors ni
a sa freolesa non perdonava.²⁶⁵

In the eleventh chapter titled "understanding Scriptures and prophecy," Douceline's knowledge and abilities are discussed. Although earlier in the text she is presented as a "simpla femena, e ses letras"²⁶⁶ the evidence is provided elsewhere that this is just another humility *topos*. Douceline studied scripture and saints' lives, necessitating an understanding of Latin.

²⁶² Albanés 52.

²⁶³ The most famous mystic known for the shedding of holy tears is, of course, Margery Kempe. The idea of theatricality more evident in the lives of the virgin martyrs is not entirely absent from this brand of women's mysticism.

²⁶⁴ Bonaventure 50.

²⁶⁵ Albanés 56. Douceline "continually washed herself, day and night, in a great shower of tears so that her soul would always be pleasing to God."

²⁶⁶ Albanés 72. "Simple, uneducated woman."

According to Philippine, Douceline's pursuit of virtue aided in her comprehension:

A tan gran esclarziment de pensa era venguda li humil serveiris de Crist, per lo continu estudi d'oracion, am lo maravillos exercici de vertutz ques avia, que ja l'avia menada l'auteza de sa contemplacion a l'entendement de las escripturas; jassiaisso que d'autramens ill non agues sotileza de letras. Alcnas ves, avian li fraire collacion ab ella de sancta escriptura, e li fazian d'alcunas questions; illi respondia lur tan autamens e tan clara, per esperit de Dieu, que li gran clergue de l'orde s'en meravillavan.²⁶⁷

Her insight was so remarkable that she could even persuade others, such as a great Franciscan teacher, to her way of thinking:

Una ves, uns grans lectors de l'ordre qu'estava a Marsella, li demandet d'alcunas questions ques eran d'aut entendement. E li Sancta de Dieu respondet li am fervor d'esperit, tan hubertamens, e am tan clar entendement, que jassiasso que le lectors, per sa sciencia, ho entendes d'autramens, manifestamens e huberta connoc qu'en aissi era veramens con illi li dizia. E adoncs, aquell grans homs connoc e dis, que l'entendementz de la Sancta puiava plus aut, per esperit de contemplacion, que non fazia le sieu, per razon de la sciencia ques avia. La qual cauza comptava pueis als fraire[s] am mot de maravilla.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ Albanés 152. "Through her constant attention to prayer and her remarkable practice of virtue, this humble servant of Christ had reached such clarity of thought that her deep reflection had led her to an understanding of the Scriptures, although she was otherwise not well-educated. Sometimes the Friars would confer with her about the Holy Scriptures and ask her questions. Inspired by God's spirit, she would give such profound and clear answers that the most learned among them would be amazed."

²⁶⁸ Albanès 152. "Once, one of the order's renowned teachers, who was in Marseilles, asked her some particularly difficult questions, God's Saint answered him so confidently and with such clarity and

Likewise with St. Francis, his private meditations on the Scriptures led him to an unsurpassed understanding of them:

...although he had no knowledge of the Scriptures by human teaching, nevertheless being illuminated by the splendour of the eternal light, he investigated with marvellous acuteness of mind all the most profound secrets of the sacred writings, because his understanding, being purified from every stain, penetrated the most hidden things of the holy mysteries; and where theological science enters not, but remains without, thither entered the affection of the lover of God. He read continually the sacred books, and what had once entered his mind he retained firmly in his memory.²⁶⁹

The cumulative effect of Philippine's borrowing from St. Bonaventure's biography of St. Francis is the link between Beguine and Franciscan spirituality. Philippine makes Douceline's behavior a model for present and future members of the community by focusing on the virtues of humility, obedience, and good works. The mystical aspects of Douceline's life, such as holy tears and foreknowledge, demonstrate the marks of sanctity that are

insight that, even though the man's learning had led him to a different understanding, he recognized readily and openly that what she had said was right. And then this great man admitted that, because of her contemplative spirit, the Saint's understanding surpassed his own, even with all his learning. Afterward he told the friars about this, with great admiration."

²⁶⁹ Bonaventure 101.

commonplaces of women's mystical literature from this period.

Philippine's work offers the reader a privileged view on the culture within her community of religious women. Lacking formal training in rhetoric, she cleverly makes use of St. Bonaventure's biography to validate the way of life practiced by Douceline and to facilitate the process of her canonization, although eventually unsuccessful. In so doing, Philippine's text reflects current literary practices as presented in the works of contemporary arts of poetry.

Conclusion

In the lives of the saints treated in this dissertation, it is clear that medieval hagiography reflects the statement, "Antiquity has a twofold life in the Middle Ages: reception and transformation."²⁷⁰ The vernacular poems of the virgin martyrs as well as the prose biographies of the Beguines are testaments to this process as they reveal medieval perspectives on such topics as pagan learning and religion. Hagiography from the 12th to the 14th centuries presents a privileged view of a society defining itself against the past.

As I have shown, medieval hagiography is a product of writers trained in or somehow familiar with the treatises of the Ciceronian rhetorical tradition that were the standard textbooks of the time. Although often dismissed for their similarities, these works should be carefully considered by students of French literature given their precise following of precepts that govern their structure and content. Simply put, rhetoric once represented the whole of literary criticism, and one cannot read these texts without an appreciation for this fact. A rhetorical analysis of these texts highlights

²⁷⁰ Curtius 19.

their literary value and illustrates their role in the history of ideas.

The lives of the virgin martyrs present their subjects as orators to a greater or lesser degree. The young women are shown to be called upon to be literal witnesses for their faith and at times engage in debates with authority figures. The result is that they present an example for both men and women to admire.

The challenge of these texts is that there are two levels of rhetoric that can be discerned. Both the author and the subject employ rhetoric to present and defend arguments. The structural approach to these particular texts reveals that all three virgin martyr lives under our consideration contain euhemeristic arguments to counter pagan theology. Why do the translators of these *vitae* resort to this tradition? Although Christianity was clearly the dominant religion of this time, the setting of these texts in the past necessitated that they be placed in their historical context. Given that the subjects of these poems were legendary martyrs during the time of the Christian persecutions, it is logical that they would be shown to confront their persecutors with proper arguments. In addition, the Church Fathers' belief in euhemeristic

theory rendered it readily available to these hagiographers, themselves members of the church community to varying degrees. Last, the medieval audience could find interest in the depiction of this denouncement of paganism as this was the time of the Crusades as well as the rise of Scholasticism in the nascent universities. Some concern for intellectual "paganism" can perhaps be detected in the characters of the clerks in the Barking poem as they are presented as well-versed in rhetoric, dialectic and philosophy, skills of the 12th century Scholastics.

In the two lives of the Beguines, it is apparent that the changing face of classical rhetoric into the new arts of poetry has influenced the technical aspects of the genre. In The Life of Marie d'Oignies and The Life of Saint Douceline we can see a reflection of the "new" poetics as found in the treatises of Matthew of Vendôme and Geoffrey of Vinsauf. Jacques de Vitry and Philippine de Porcellet present the virtues of contemporary holy women as exemplary according to the Ciceronian "attributes of persons," no longer bound by the chronological order dictated by earlier treatises. The resulting depiction of sanctity no longer includes one of a strong orator debating and witnessing her faith in a

public forum; rather, sanctity is found in humble works of self-sacrifice and simple obedience to church doctrine. In fact, Douceline's desire for the ladies of Roubaud to avoid acquiring skill in letters stands in direct contrast to the eloquence of St. Catherine of Alexandria.

This dissertation has also looked at rhetoric and medieval saints' lives in the broader context of iconography and theatricality. The art of the time, like hagiography, had a primarily didactic purpose. The statues and paintings of virgin martyrs show a marked consistency with written saints' lives and reflect the enduring quality of the images of their erudition, faith and triumphant deaths. Medieval iconography has its own conventions, symbols, and *topoi*. The fact that the virgin martyrs are so well represented in art demonstrates the widespread appeal of their legends. The people of the Middle Ages, we can conclude, place great value on these accounts. In addition, the theatrical aspects of hagiography cannot be ignored given the dramatization of doctrine and philosophical debates going back to Antiquity. Given that the goal of this dissertation is to provide the student of hagiography with a point of entry to these remarkable texts and to

encourage future scholarship, I would like to suggest further study of the relationship between hagiography and the fields of iconography and theatricality.

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