

Un-Caging Meaning in John Capgrave's
Life of Saint Katherine of Alexandria:
Bodies and Brides of Christ

By

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*Ioye we, and make we myrthe, and yyue glorie to hym; for the weddingis of the lomb camen,
and the wijf of hym made redy hir silf. And it is youun to hir, that sche kyuere hir with white
bissyn schynyng; for whi bissyn is iustifyngis of seyntis.*

-Revelations 19:7-8

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Preface

In his general introduction to hagiography, Thomas Head (1995:433) points out that the term comes from the Greek *hagios* meaning ‘holy’ (therefore ‘saint’) and *graphia* meaning ‘writings’. It refers to writings about the lives or *vitae* of saints and served as a record of ‘the actions that had formed and demonstrated their holiness’. In addition to the portrayal of such exemplary behaviour by saints, hagiographers also included in their legends the miracles performed through the saints by God. Such miracles took place not only during the saints’ lives, but also at their tombs or in relation to their relics after their deaths (Head, 1995:434). Hagiography could serve a variety of purposes such as endorsing social and political agendas or affirming Church doctrine. Most saints’ legends were written by members of the clergy but were aimed at women and men from all walks of life. Although the basic story lines would remain the same, the lives of saints were continually rewritten in order to match the values and needs of new audiences (Winstead, 1999:1). For instance, John Capgrave and Osbern Bokenham, both members of the Augustinian order, each wrote a legend of Saint Katherine of Alexandria in about the mid 1400s. Although the principal features of the legend remain the same in both renditions, their approaches and foci differ in many ways.

It was not the intention of hagiographers to write biographies as we know them today and *topoi* were used to impart a moral message rather than a historically correct one (Head, 1995:434). Thus, despite the claim by many saints’ legends to be ‘true’ they tend not to

agree with the modern reader's conception of historical accuracy. For instance, the earliest lives of many saints (including St Katherine of Alexandria) were written centuries after the saints were thought to have lived. Furthermore, the fictiveness of the legends is indicated by the numerous similarities within the genre (Winstead, 1999:1). The biographies of numerous saints draw on a limited number of stock characters, standard plots, and conventional incidents. Violent confrontations, miraculous escapes, and inventive ways of inflicting pain and death are major features of the genre. This use of repetition, however, communicated a religious 'truth': that all saints are, indeed, the same in that they all live a life of holiness based on the example of Christ's life (Winstead, 1999:1-2). The devotion to such paradigmatic saints such as Katherine, Margaret and Barbara was long-established. Throughout the Middle Ages they attracted a tremendous amount of devotion and by the latter part of the period they 'had been joined by a whole galaxy of more or less cloned and identical virgin saints' (Duffy, 1992:171).

In the prologue to his rendition of St Katherine's legend in his *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* (Serjeantson, 1938:173), Osbern Bokenham refers to John Capgrave's version of her life as being particularly comprehensive:

More-ouyr alle þo þat redyn or here
 Shal þis trefyhs, as lowly as I kan,
 I beseche no wyse to lokyn here
 That I shuld telle hou she fyrst began
 To be crystyne, & howe oon clepyd Adryan
 Hyr conuertyd & crystnyd in hyr youthe,

For þat mater to me is ful vnkouthe.
 But who-so lyst knowleche for to haue,
 And *in* þat mater enuereyd to be,
 My fadrys book, maystyr Ioon Capgraue,
 Wych þat but newly compyld he,
 Mote he seke, & he þere shal se
 In balaadys rymyd ful craftyly
 Alle þat for *ingnoraunce* here nowe leue I.

(lines 6347-6360)

Capgrave's *Life of St Katherine of Alexandria* is, therefore, a potentially rich text to study for the detail it offers concerning St Katherine's life (rather than just her passion). This is significant as the development in England during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of the motif of her mystical marriage to Christ 'served to confirm her as the most powerful and important female saint, setting her apart from even the most popular of the other virgin martyrs' (Lewis, 2000:1). Capgrave chose to spend a large portion of his text on Katherine's life: her birth, education, conversion and mystical marriage. These are aspects which help to set Katherine apart from other saints. Many saints are portrayed as being of noble birth but Katherine is royal; her university-style education is not commonly found in legends of female saints, and although virgin saints were generally referred to as the brides of Christ, St Katherine participates in an actual wedding ceremony with Him (emulated by St Catherine of Siena in the thirteenth century).

The mystical marriage of St Katherine is presented in the illustration in the frontispiece of this thesis which reproduces a painting by an unknown Hungarian artist created in c.1500. In the centre of the painting we see the Virgin Mary holding the Christ-child on her lap while He presents St Katherine with a ring representing their spiritual union. In her other hand the Virgin Mary holds the host. The medieval Catholic Church believed that the consecrated communion wafer or host became, at the moment of consecration, the real body of Christ, referred to as the Real Presence. As a result, both the Christ-child (indicating the Incarnation) and the host represent the physical presence of Christ on earth. As the bride of Christ, St Katherine also serves as a reminder of the Church (which was seen as the bride and the body of Christ on earth; see Ephesians 5:21-33, for example) and thus recalls a third physical manifestation of Christ on earth.¹

Next to St Katherine we see St Barbara holding her tower with its three windows and across from her, with her dragon, we see St Margaret. Saints Katherine, Barbara and Margaret were the only female members of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, also known as the Auxiliary Saints. These saints were revered due to their believed efficacy as intercessors for humanity (Cross, 1958:113).² On the left of the Virgin Mary sits St Dorothy, holding a basket of flowers. St Katherine is set apart from the other saints in this painting as she is seated immediately to the right of the Virgin Mary (a position of honour). She is also the focus of the Christ-child's attention as she receives His ring and becomes His bride.

The painting thus combines the medieval theological concerns of the body and bride of Christ in their various forms. These issues are also of central concern in Capgrave's *St Katherine* and will be explored in greater detail in this study.

Introduction



... a desire of knowledge is the natural feeling of mankind; and every human being, whose mind is not debauched, will be willing to give all that he has to get knowledge.

*-Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)
James Boswell's 'Life of Samuel Johnson', (1791), 30 July 1763*

From the Garden of Eden to the present day, humankind has been in continual pursuit of knowledge, and surely always will be.

Despite the rather negative results, in Christian terms, of our first attempt at gaining knowledge - or perhaps because of it - the human thirst for knowledge never seems to be quenched. Accordingly, this quest is often pondered and questioned in terms of both its positive, and more frequently its negative aspects. Some roughly contemporaneous examples are Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* (c.1592), Shakespeare's Prospero in *The Tempest* (c.1610-1611) and Mariken in the anonymous *Mariken van Nieumeghen* (c.1515).

This preoccupation with knowledge seems to bear out Francis Bacon's (1561-1626) statement in his *Of Heresies* that: 'knowledge it selfe [*sic*] is a power' (Arber, 1895:129).³

Those who have knowledge, have power and humankind is always concerned with who has power, how much they have, and how they use it. The Catholic Church is a body that had such power during the Middle Ages. It was controlled primarily by men who had privileged access to books, knowledge and learning of various kinds and exerted a tremendous amount of control and influence in western Europe and England.

A further consequence of the Fall for Christianity has been the subordination of women. Through the ages one of the preferred and most effective ways for men to keep women in a subordinate role in western Christendom has been to deny them a proper education and this is perhaps why many women have been so determined to gain access to proper education. Women were, for instance, wholly or partially excluded from universities from their inception until as late as the first half of the twentieth century. They only gained full admission to Oxford University as late as 1919, while at Cambridge University, after a protracted struggle for recognition, they finally gained full admission in 1948 (Forster, 1986:133-168, esp. 158).

As a woman acclaimed for her great learning, and one of the most popular saints of the Middle Ages (Lewis, 1999a:26; 2000: xiii), the Christian martyr St Katherine of Alexandria is an interesting and potentially revealing subject of study. This thesis focuses on the consideration of the fraught relationship between knowledge and the feminine in the predominantly Catholic society of late medieval England, as presented in John Capgrave's rendition of St Katherine of Alexandria's legend.

According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, the word ‘fraught’ derives from the medieval English words ‘fraughten’ meaning ‘to load (a ship with goods, cargo, passengers)’, and ‘fraught’ meaning ‘loaded, laden, full’ (Kurath, 1955:865; Pearsall, 2001:562). Since its inception Christianity has ‘loaded’ the relationship between women and knowledge with a ‘cargo’ of guilt and blame due to the story of the Fall, when Eve was persuaded by Satan to eat the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, which is believed to have led humankind into a state of sin and suffering. As a result of the Fall women were sentenced to increased pain in childbirth and a life of subservience to men (Genesis 3:16). This religiously-sanctioned gender discrimination led to the general exclusion of women from much of the education available to men, which in turn enforced their subservience by denying them access to this potential source of power.

Due to St Katherine’s great popularity many versions of her legend were produced during the Middle Ages. In England there was, for instance, the thirteenth century *Seinte Katerine* (the earliest known vernacular rendition of the legend) written for nuns or female recluses in the West Midlands (Nevanlinna & Taavitsainen, 1993:7). Versions of St Katherine’s legend also appear in compilations of saints’ lives such as the *South English Legendary*, probably written in the 1280s (Lewis, 2000:16), John Mirk’s *Festial* composed in about 1400 and Osbern Bokenham’s *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* written in Suffolk in around 1443-1447 (Nevanlinna & Taavitsainen, 1993:7-8). The late Middle English prose version of Katherine’s legend includes her *vita* and *passio* and was composed during the first half of the fifteenth century (Nevanlinna & Taavitsainen, 1993:9-10).

Although it was common for authors to change the focus of this well-known legend to make it more suitable for their target audiences (Jenkins, 2003:140), Capgrave's lengthy version of St Katherine's legend (written in the 1440s) stands apart from other known renditions of her life (Winstead, 1999:6). He 'was the only one of the late medieval hagiographers to expand on the traditional descriptions of Katherine's learnedness, on the scenes of debate and argument and counter-argument so central to the foundation of the story' (Jenkins, 2003:140; see also Stouck, 1982:277, and Fredeman, 1979-1980:360). This unusual focus in Capgrave's rendition of the legend allows it to offer potentially valuable insights in terms of the relationship between knowledge and the feminine in his society.

John Capgrave's *Life of Saint Katherine of Alexandria* has been studied from various perspectives.⁴ Auvo Kurvinen (1960:268-324) attempted to trace the source text. Capgrave's use of popular romance style and characterisation in the text has been considered (Pearsall, 1975:121-37; Fredeman, 1979-1980:346-87). Karen Winstead (1991:59-80; 1994:361-76; 1996:389-400) has approached the text from the points of view of politics, gynaeocracy and the Chaucer tradition. Jacqueline Jenkins (2003:137-159) has considered the anxiety about translation revealed in late medieval lives of St Katherine, including Capgrave's rendition. James Simpson (2002:420-429) has explored the influence of Lollard iconoclasm in Capgrave's text, while Sarah Stanbury (2002:131-150) has explored this issue in relation to the St Katherine legend more generally. In addition, David J. Viera (2001:231-241) has noted the parallels between Capgrave's *St Katherine* and Vincent Ferrer's Catalan sermon on Santa Caterina. Katherine Lewis's

(1999a:25-46; 1999b:145-160; 2000) work on the cult of St Katherine in medieval England is illuminating, while Elizabeth Smith (2002:97-156) gives an overview of the medieval legends of St Katherine in terms of the interrelation of hagiography and romance. *St Katherine of Alexandria: Texts and Contexts in Western Medieval Europe* (Jenkins & Lewis, 2003) contains a number of interesting and insightful articles by a variety of authors focusing on the cult of St Katherine as well as on various versions of her legend.

Capgrave's *St Katherine* is made up of a prologue and five books, totalling 8624 lines of rhyme-royal verse. In the prologue he indicates his intention to 'un-cage' the meaning of his source text by translating it from an obscure dialect of English (prologue, lines 50-70 and 198-217). Capgrave states that his source text

...cam but seldom onto any mannes honde;
 Eke whan it cam it was nocht understonde
 Because, as I seyde, ryght for the derk langage.
 Thus was thi lyffe, lady [Katherine], kept all in cage.

(prologue, 207-210)

Thus in his rendition, he proclaims to St Katherine:

Now wyl I, lady, more openly make thi lyffe
 Oute of his [the author of the source text] werk, if thu wylt help ther-too...

(prologue, 64-65)

Kurvinen (1960:324) argues that as Capgrave made use of a Latin source text there is no reason to doubt his (Capgrave's) claim that there was a partial English translation of this

Latin text. There is no external evidence to support the existence of the English source text either, however Capgrave appears to see the text (whether real or imaginary), and to wish his audience to perceive the story, as having been ‘locked up’ or ‘caged’ in language. A similar conception of poetry has been expressed more recently by Jane Brimblecombe in ‘A poem’ (McQueen, 1980:1):

To write a poem
is to go hunting;
capturing a part
of a person or an hour
in a cage of words.

Capgrave’s stated intention is to ‘open the cage of language’ and to set the legend free for his lay audience:

It schall be know of man, mayde, and of wyffe,
What thu [Katherine] hast suffrede and eke what thu hast doo.

(prologue, 66-67)

As Pearsall (1975:130) has noted, Capgrave appears to have made allowances for a kind of audience somewhat different from that to which he was accustomed, namely men of learning and religion like himself. Consequently, although Capgrave uses a casual style which makes his text more accessible to a wide audience, he does not simplify the story. In this way he attempts to ensure that most readers will find in the text some aspect of interest to them (Winstead, 1999:6-7). Capgrave appears to have envisaged various potential reading communities. His references to ‘Ye that rede it’ (prologue, 247) and ‘ye reders of this lyffe’ (3.22) indicate that he anticipated that the text might be read in

private. Capgrave's *St Katherine* is extant in four manuscripts and the other texts which appear alongside his in these manuscripts suggest 'an explicitly (though not exclusively) female audience' (Jenkins, 2003:141). In addition, the legend's great length and the breaks in the narrative (which include summaries of what has occurred previously in the text) may indicate 'an extended oral reading situation', whether for the saint's feast day or in a public or communal reading context, such as at meals (Jenkins, 2003:141). Consequently, Capgrave's text could potentially have reached and appealed to audiences including women and men, the literate and the illiterate, layfolk and those following a religious vocation. Clearly such a diverse audience would lead to a multiplicity of understandings of, and perspectives on, the text. It appears that Capgrave may have foreseen such a variety of potential reading communities and this varied audience. His consequent attempts to cater for them by 'un-caging' the story make his text truly multivalent.

The word 'cage' could have a number of meanings and associations for a medieval audience. The *Middle English Dictionary* defines 'cage' variously as: a 'cage for prisoners; jail, prison, a cell; confinement, captivity'. To hold or keep in a cage meant 'to keep...closely confined'. Figuratively 'cage' refers to 'a womb' or 'a small enclosure, room, dwelling', while 'narowe cage' referred to 'the world'. The 'maidenes cage' refers to 'the Virgin Mary's womb', while death's cage indicates 'a grave'. The word 'cage' could also be used to refer to 'a place for torture' (Kurath, 1959:8-9). All of the above significations may be applied, or are specifically referred to, in Capgrave's rendition of *St Katherine*, as will be pointed out in the course of the following discussion.

The central, third book of the five into which Capgrave divided his text contains St Katherine's conversion and mystical marriage to Christ and forms the turning point of the text and the legend. It thus seems to invite a 'before and after' comparison of Katherine's words and actions as a pagan with her words and actions as a Christian. St Katherine's mystical marriage to Christ will therefore be of central importance to this thesis. This union not only invites consideration of the significance of the mystical marriage itself (which is given possibly its greatest medieval emphasis in Capgrave's text) but also calls for an examination of the gender issues involved and the relationship of the Church with Christ in the society from which the text emanated.

It will be noted that St Katherine's gender and her body (including her physical body, her body of knowledge, her position in the body politic and her place in the body of the Church) are employed in this legend in an attempt to explore the tendency of the medieval Christian community to place restrictions on bodies, especially with regard to the female use thereof. For example, both the human body and the body of knowledge are often identified as or associated with the feminine yet women were frequently prevented from gaining mastery over them. The body will consequently be approached as a trope of knowledge and of the feminine in this discussion.

This seems justified as medieval Catholicism involved a very physical spirituality. At the heart of the religion lay the belief in the Incarnation of Christ in human form, with the Virgin Mary serving as the means whereby He was clothed in humanity. The reason for

His taking on human form was so that He might suffer the Passion, die physically, and rise again in order to redeem humankind from sin. Consequently, physical attributes become of central importance to the spiritual. In the late Middle Ages this physical focus on the spiritual realm is further borne out by the rise of the theory of transubstantiation, which asserts Christ's Real Presence in the consecrated host. Sacred images and relics of saints (including ostensible body parts, believed to have power) were, of course, also major aspects of late medieval Catholicism.

This thesis aims to examine the fraught interrelations of women (or the feminine), knowledge (or education) and the idea of the body in Capgrave's *St Katherine*. It will be demonstrated that these interrelations are to a great extent governed by the medieval Christian conception of the institution of marriage, whether 'real' or mystical (metaphorically represented by means of the organic image of the body, which was also applied to society in general and the Church), and the hierarchical power relations this implies. While St Katherine is described as being of royal birth, a highly educated, intelligent and beautiful female saint, second only to the Virgin Mary in heaven, the use of the mystical marriage imagery to describe her conversion to Christianity and her intimate spiritual relationship with Christ subtly re-establishes the idea of patriarchal control over this potentially disruptive example of an outspoken and well-educated woman. As a result, the more closely St Katherine is associated with Christ and His example of self-sacrifice (the ultimate intention of any saint and martyr) the more closely she is linked with His body (as a member of the Church and as His Bride) and the more this learned and potentially unruly woman may be seen to be subsumed into the body

(bride) of Christ, the Church (gendered feminine) under the control of the masculine-gendered head (husband), Christ. St Katherine is, therefore, simultaneously praised and 'chastised', honoured for her supposedly 'super-feminine' achievements and returned to the 'proper' female role in the patriarchal social structure. This interpretation of Capgrave's text (from among multiple possible interpretations) will be explored here.

In chapter one, 'In the Garden: Women and Knowledge', the relationships between St Katherine, the Virgin Mary and Eve (as well as each woman's relation to knowledge) will be considered, using the enclosed garden (which can also be a 'cage' in terms of the *Middle English Dictionary's* definition) as the central, unifying image in order to explore the effects of St Katherine's association with both of these women.

Chapter two, 'Saint Katherine and the Church: Brides of Christ', will deal with the representation of both St Katherine and the Church as brides of Christ. It will explore the implications of the fact that the medieval Catholic Church, a religious institution with a purely male hierarchy, may be gendered feminine. The ways in which St Katherine, as a woman, may be seen to be a representative (or ambassador) of the Church, as well as being symbolic of the Church as a whole (in certain instances), will also be considered.

In chapter three, 'Saint Katherine and the Body of Rhetoric', the implications of St Katherine's use of rhetoric will be examined, as will the ways in which her use of rhetoric changes after her conversion to Christianity and the possible reasons for these changes. It will further be argued that, as a woman making effective use of the body of

rhetoric, she may be seen to be ‘chastised’ for this and brought under patriarchal control in various subtle ways.

Chapter four, ‘Body-bound: Power and the Word’, will deal with the organic analogies relating to the body such as the body politic, the Church as the body and bride of Christ (the Word) and the body of knowledge, particularly with regard to the spiritual implications. St Katherine’s simultaneous temporal defeat and spiritual victory in her confrontation with Maxentius will be briefly considered. The numerous parallels between St Katherine’s passion and the Passion of Christ will be noted in order to explore how the *imitatio Christi* theme converges with the *sponsalia Christi* motif to elide St Katherine’s body with the divine. Capgrave’s narration (in his prologue) of an English priest’s discovery of the book containing the legend of St Katherine which he is translating (‘uncaging’) will also be explored in terms of its associations with the eucharist and relics as well as with the Passion and Resurrection.

In Capgrave’s text St Katherine may be seen as a character in whom a number of medieval patriarchal ideas about the most and least desirable aspects of women meet. This makes St Katherine a potential site of debate for numerous gender and power issues. As a result, Capgrave was able to produce a remarkably multivalent saint’s legend which reveals issues of vital concern in his milieu.

Chapter One

In the Garden: Women and Knowledge



*... they who know the most
Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth;
The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life.*
-Lord Byron (1788-1824)
'Manfred' (c.1816)
Act 1, scene 1, lines 10-12

Saint Katherine of Alexandria (*d.* c.310) was a young Egyptian queen whose legend is a fine example of the virgin martyr formula in hagiography, detailing the ordeals and martyrdom of a beautiful young virgin who challenges pagan authorities in the defence of her Christian faith. In the thirteenth century hagiographers began to preface the conventional portrayal of her legend (dealing with her opposition to the Emperor Maxentius and her subsequent martyrdom) with detailed accounts of her youth (Winstead, 1999:2-3). Her cult enjoyed great popularity during the Middle Ages, partly due to her great learning and royal status (Winstead, 1999:3), and she was numbered among the Fourteen Holy Helpers (Apostolos-Cappadona, 1998:68). Until 1969, when her veneration was suppressed, her feast was on 25 November (Loxton,

1999:19).⁵ She was renowned for her exceptional education and her status as a bride of Christ, and was the patron saint of preachers, schools, scholars, universities, wheelwrights, millers, spinsters and young girls, among others (Apostolos-Cappadona, 1998:66-68). The clergy were ordinarily responsible for the generation and distribution of hagiographic texts and many found in her a saint with whom they could identify on the basis of their shared scholarly inclinations (Winstead, 1999:3). Indeed, in his text Capgrave addresses St Katherine thus:

Because thou were so lerned and swech a clerk,
Clerkes must love thee – resoun forsoth it is.

(3.38-3.39)

John Capgrave (1393-1464) wrote his *Life of Saint Katherine of Alexandria* in the 1440s (Seymour, 1996:237-238). It may well be the most elaborate and lengthy version of her legend produced in either Latin or a vernacular language in the Middle Ages (Winstead, 1999:3). It is, as Winstead (1999:5-6) notes, ‘very much a product of East Anglian culture’ and it reveals an author who appears not only to have read Chaucer, Lydgate and Bokenham, but to have been familiar with biblical drama and possibly to have had knowledge of Margery Kempe’s book. Capgrave became a novice at the Augustinian convent in Lynn in north-western Norfolk in 1407 and was ordained in about 1417. He pursued the customary course of studies before studying theology at the Augustinian convent in London and completing his education at Cambridge University, where he was awarded the degree of doctor of divinity, or *magisterium*, in 1427 at the age of thirty-four. Capgrave became an important figure within the order. The friary at Lynn was the

largest Augustinian house in England and he served as prior there from c.1441 to 1457. In July 1453 he was elected Prior Provincial, and he was re-elected in 1455. He held this position, which involved acting as the liaison with the Prior General in Rome and overseeing more than five hundred friars in thirty-four houses, until 1457 (Seymour, 1996:237-238; Winstead, 1999:4-5).

Capgrave's rendition of St Katherine's legend, which generally follows the traditional form of the female virgin martyr legend, runs in essence as follows: Katherine was a young Egyptian princess who had received an exceptional education. When she was about eighteen years old, her father died and she became queen. The lords in her parliament wanted her to marry as soon as possible so that they could have a king to rule the country. Using her superior education and rhetorical skill she managed to out-argue them on this point (as she wished to remain a virgin and pursue a life of study) although they were not completely convinced. Soon afterwards she was approached in her private garden by the hermit, Adrian, on the Virgin Mary's instruction. Katherine was converted to Christianity and experienced a mystical marriage to Christ. She then returned to her life of study. One day she heard a great commotion and discovered that Emperor Maxentius of Rome had entered Alexandria and was forcing her people to offer pagan sacrifices. She confronted him and denounced paganism. He called for the fifty most learned philosophers in his kingdom to confound her but they were eventually converted to Christianity by her. Despite various trials she also converted Maxentius's wife and the commander of his army, Porphiry. With divine aid she resisted Maxentius's attempts to convert, torture or subdue her. One instrument of torture, designed especially to be used

against her, was the spiked wheel. However, it was shattered by the power of God, killing a number of pagan spectators. Eventually, she was beheaded and milk ran from her neck as an indication of her purity. (The spiked wheel, the sword with which she was beheaded, the crown which indicates her royal status and the book which indicates her learning all became her attributes). Angels took her body and buried it on Mount Sinai where healing oil emanated from her grave.

In Capgrave's text St Katherine is associated with two important female figures in Christianity, the Virgin Mary and Eve. While her links with Mary are made explicit in the text, her connections with Eve are frequently less obvious. Eve has a notorious relationship with knowledge in Christian dogma while, through Christ, Mary's relation to knowledge is usually expressed in a far more positive light. As a result, the ways in which St Katherine is associated with Mary and Eve have important consequences for her own perceived involvement with learning and knowledge. In addition, in terms of their bodies, Mary and St Katherine were, unlike Eve, both renowned for their perpetual virginity. The ways in which these associations between the Virgin Mary, Eve and St Katherine may be seen to elaborate upon medieval attitudes to St Katherine's expansive education will thus be considered in terms of the idea of the body as a trope of both knowledge and the feminine.

A woman acquiring knowledge in a garden features at two important turning points in Christianity. Eve learns the knowledge imparted by the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden while Mary Magdalene is the first to encounter the risen

Christ in the garden outside His tomb, where she is instructed to impart the news of the Resurrection to Christ's disciples (John 19:41-42; 20:11-18). Just as the Virgin Mary's obedience to God's will was seen as reversing Eve's disobedience, in his *De Spiritu Sancto* (*On the Holy Spirit*, Book III, chapter 11) Saint Ambrose (c.339-397) describes Mary Magdalene's role in being the first to announce the Resurrection as making amends for the evil that came from the mouth of Eve (*PL* 16:793-794). Similarly, Saint Augustine (354-430) in his *In Epistolam Ioannis* (*Homilies on the First Epistle of John*; Homily III), explains her announcement of the Resurrection as undoing woman's original sin in a manner similar to the Virgin Birth (Augustinus Hipponensis, 2006). She was also celebrated in the Easter liturgy as 'a new Eve' and a new giver of life (Friesen, 1999:248). Medieval Christian art also often places the Virgin Mary in a garden in representations of the Annunciation as well as in depictions of her with the Christ Child.⁶ As Capgrave makes use of the garden setting in his legend as the place where Katherine first learns about Christianity, this chapter will focus on this setting as a point of reference for a discussion of the Virgin Mary, Eve and St Katherine in terms of their associations, as women, with 'bodies' of knowledge.

Throughout Capgrave's text St Katherine is closely associated with the Virgin Mary in a number of ways. In 1.177-1.189 he associates her birth to elderly parents with Biblical and apochryphal characters famous for having a child (often destined for important spiritual work) in their old age, such as Abraham and Sarah (the parents of Isaac), Zechariah and Elizabeth (the parents of John the Baptist), and Joachim and Anne (the

parents of the Virgin Mary herself). He also notes that, like the Virgin, Katherine is born to non-Christian parents:

Oute of the harde thorn brymbyl-tree
 Growyth the fresch rose, as men may see;
 So sprong oure Lady oute of the Jewys
 And Kateryne of hethen, this tale ful trew is.

(1.53-1.56)

This image recalls the flower growing from the tree or rod of Jesse. The tree of Jesse was a representation of the genealogy of Christ from Jesse, the father of David (commonly found from the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries), which was developed from the prophecy in Isaiah 11:1-2 (Roten, 2002):

And a yerde schal go out of the roote of Jesse, and a flour schal stie of the roote of it. And the Spirit of the Lord schal reste on hym, the spirit of wisdom and of vndurstondyng, the spirit of counsel and of strengthe, the spirit of kunnyng and of pitee...

The Virgin Mary was, in this context, referred to as '*virga ex radice*' or the 'branch or offshoot of the root of Jesse', while Christ was referred to as '*flos ex virga*' or the 'flower that blossoms on the branch' (Roten, 2002). As St Jerome (c.342-420) states in his letter (XXII) on virginity to Eustochium (Wright, 1933:93):

'There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a flower shall grow out of his roots.' That virgin rod is the mother of Our Lord, simple, pure, unsullied; drawing no germ of life from without, but like God Himself fruitful in singleness.

The flower of the rod is Christ, who says: 'I am the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys.'

In artistic representations Mary often appears at the top of the tree with the Christ Child in her arms (Ferguson, 1961:39). In the lyric, 'Of a Rose, a lovely Rose' (Stone, 1964:29) the idea of the tree of Jesse and the rose is used to proclaim the salvation made possible for humanity by the Virgin Birth:

In Bethlehem that flower was seen,
 A lovely blossom bright of sheen.
 The rose is Mary, heaven's Queen;
 Out of her womb that blossom rose.

(lines 13-16)

The tree was modelled on the Tree of Life in Eden and the Cross as the ultimate Tree of Life (Roten, 2002). The crucified Christ was sometimes represented in the tree of Jesse due to the tradition that only He could revive the dead Tree of Life by means of His blood by being grafted onto it. The vine was also sometimes used in place of the tree as a symbol of the eucharist (Ferguson, 1961:39).

In the prologue to Book Five Capgrave again mentions the association of the rose growing from the thorny briar (5.29-5.30) and refers to St Katherine as a red rose with five branches and five green leaves, which stand for the five books of his text of her legend. The red rose has, since early Christianity, been symbolic of martyrdom (Ferguson, 1961:37). In addition, this description creates a close association with Mary, as the rose is, of course, a principle aspect of her iconography (Winstead, 1999:310). For

example, in a carol from Trinity College, Cambridge MS 1230, written in an East Anglian dialect and dated by Robbins (1961:66 and 85) to the first half of the fifteenth century, Mary is described as a rose: ‘There is no rose of such virtue / As is that rose bare Jesu’. Another carol, in Bodleian MS. Arch. Selden B. 26, written c.1450 (Robbins, 1961:68 and 86), states concerning Mary:

This rose is red of color bright,

Through whom our joy gan alight

Upon a Christmas night,

Claro David germine.

[from the famous seed of David]

The number five is also traditionally linked with Mary (her five sorrows and five joys, for instance), as well as with Christ as in the five wounds of the Passion (Winstead, 1999:310). Many of these aspects combine in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Anderson, 1996:193-195) lines 619-665, and especially lines 640-661 where the explanation of the five sets of five properties associated with the pentagram on the outside of Gawain’s shield (the five senses, five fingers, five wounds of Christ, Mary’s five joys and the five virtues), and a description of the value to Gawain of the painting of the Virgin on the inside of the shield, are given. Mary, as the second Eve, is also referred to as the ‘rose without thorns’ as she was believed to be free from the penalty of Original Sin (Ferguson, 1961:37; Apostolos-Cappadona, 1998:320). This image possibly derived from the legend which held that the rose only developed thorns after the Fall to remind humanity of our sin, while the beauty and fragrance of the rose remind us of Paradise (Ferguson, 1961:37). These associations with Mary (and to a lesser extent, with Christ)

serve to place St Katherine in a positive spiritual light; however other references to Mary also serve to recall Eve.

In Romans 5:12-21 St Paul presents Christ as the ‘Second Adam’ who reverses the sin of the first Adam (Romans 5:12, 14, 17-18):

Therfor as bi o man synne entride in to this world, and bi synne deth, and so deth passide forth in to alle men, in which man alle men synned. . . . But deth regnyde from Adam `til to Moises, also in to hem that synned not in licnesse of the trespassyng of Adam, the which is licnesse of Crist to comynge. . . . For if in the gilt of oon deth regnede thorouy oon, myche more men that takyn plente of grace, and of yyuyng, and of riytwisnesse, schulen regne in lijf bi oon Jhesu Crist. Therfor as bi the gilt of oon in to alle men in to condempnacioun, so bi the riytwisnesse of oon in to alle men in to iustifyng of lijf.

This idea was elaborated upon, apparently independently, by Justin Martyr (c.100-c.165) and Irenaeus (d. 202) to incorporate the Virgin Mary as the ‘Second Eve’, the ‘mother of all the living in a new, spiritual sense’ (Warner, 2000:59) versus Eve, the mother of humankind in the fleshly or physical sense. The reversal of Eve’s name, ‘Eva’, in Gabriel’s greeting to Mary, ‘Ave’, was seen as representative of Mary’s reversal of Eve’s disobedience (Warner, 2000:60). In *Dialogus cum Trypho* or *The Dialogue with Trypho* (Williams, 1930:210), Justin Martyr wrote that the Virgin Mary bore Christ

in order that by the same way in which the disobedience caused by the serpent took its beginning, by this way should it also take its destruction. For Eve, being a virgin and uncorrupt, *conceived the word* spoken of the serpent, and *brought forth* disobedience and death. But Mary the Virgin receiving faith and grace. . . . [gave

birth to Christ]...by means of whom God destroys both the serpent and those angels and men that became like it... [italics mine]

Irenaeus, in his *Adversus Haereses* (Book V, chapter 19) or *Against Heresies* (Roberts & Rambaut, 1869:107) stated that

...as the human race fell into bondage to death by means of a virgin, so it is rescued by a virgin; virginal disobedience having been balanced in the opposite scale by virginal obedience. For in the same way the sin of the first created man...receives amendment by the correction of the First-begotten, and the cunning of the serpent is conquered by the harmlessness of the dove, those bonds being unloosed by which we had been fast bound to death.

Similarly, St Augustine stated in his *De Doctrina Christiana* (*On Christian Doctrine*, Book I, chapter 14): ‘The disease was brought in through a woman’s corrupted soul: the remedy came through a woman’s virgin body’ (Shaw, 1886:526). Justin’s statement (quoted above) that ‘the word spoken of the serpent’ led to the Fall and the fact that the One conceived by Mary who reverses the Fall and brings redemption is Christ, the Word, serves to indicate the importance and potential power of words and knowledge.

The narrative of the Garden of Eden and the Fall (Genesis 2-3) touches on many issues including those of gender and language. God’s prohibition in Genesis 2:16-17 sets the story of the Fall in motion while Adam is distinguished from the animals by the speech he uses to name them in Genesis 2:19-20. The discussion between Eve and the serpent centres on what God *said* about the Tree of Knowledge and what the serpent and Eve

reason that He actually *meant* (Genesis 3:1-5); the serpent's use of rhetoric in this conversation leads to the eating of the forbidden fruit and to the Fall, while Eve's (and the serpent's?) attempt to interpret God's words in Genesis 3:1-6 is pivotal (Stratton, 1995:109-110). The dialogue between Eve and the serpent 'is the first theological talk in the narrative' and serves as a warning 'that theological talk which seeks to analyze and objectify matters of faithfulness is dangerous enterprise' (Brueggemann, 1982:47), eventually leading to sin, punishment and suffering.

The story of the Creation and the Fall in Genesis has, of course, often been used to support women's subordination because woman was seen as being created 'derivatively' and considered to be responsible for tempting man into sin (Brueggemann, 1982:50). Modern feminists have praised Eve for the autonomy and decisiveness she displays in this episode (see for example Stratton, 1995:67-108, esp. 85-91; Tribler, 1978:72-143, esp. 105-115). However, Alice Laffey (1990:27) points out that as 'it was a patriarchal culture which produced the story, one must conclude that it was not the author's intention to laud her'. The patriarchal culture of medieval Catholicism, similarly, had no intention of praising her. It is small wonder, then, that women's speech was attacked. Christian instruction was circumspect about permitting women to take part in any public speaking. Due to the belief that sin had entered the world as a result of the words of a woman, women's speech as a whole was perceived as being hazardous (Leyser, 2001:61). As St Paul states in 1 Timothy 2:11-14:

A womman lerne in silence, with al subieccioun. But Y suffre not a womman to teche, nether to haue lordschip on the hosebonde, but to be in silence. For Adam

was first formed, afterward Eve; and Adam was not disseyued, but the womman was disseyued, in breking of the lawe.⁷

According to St Augustine in *De Civitate Dei* (*The City of God*, Book XIV, chapter 11, Dods, 1886:272), Adam would not have been misled by the serpent as Eve was and it was only out of a sense of solidarity that he took part in her sin. Thus the serpent tempted Eve as she was ‘weaker’ and more susceptible to sin:

...we cannot believe that Adam was deceived, and supposed the devil’s word to be truth, and therefore transgressed God’s law, but that he by the drawings of kindred yielded to the woman, the husband to the wife, the one human being to the only other human being.

Augustine associated her supposed ‘weakness’ with a sort of mental inadequacy:

‘Although they were not both deceived by credulity, yet both were entangled in the snares of the devil, and taken by sin’ (Book XIV, chapter 11, Dods, 1886:272). However, in his *Homiliae in Genesim* (*Homilies on Genesis*; Homily XII) Chrysostom (c.347-407) points out (PG 53:139) that Adam, as the man and ‘head’ in the relationship (with Eve as the woman and therefore, the ‘body’), should have pointed out her error to Eve rather than joining her in it (Blamires, 1997:113 and 114).

It is unsurprising, therefore, that some objected to women receiving anywhere near what would be considered an adequate education by today’s standards. In *Les Quatre Ages de l’homme* (*The Four Ages of Man*) Philippe de Navarre (c.1195-c.1265) states that women should only be taught to read and write if they are to be nuns as women’s reading and writing has resulted in a great deal of harm: ‘A fame ne doit on apanre letres ne escrire,

se ce n'est especiaument por estre nonnain; car par lire et escrire de fame sont maint mal avenu' (De Fréville, 1888:16). In his 'Address to Sir John Oldcastle' Thomas Hoccleve (c.1368-c.1450) states (Furnivall, Gollancz, Mitchell & Doyle, 1970:13):

Some wommen eeke, thogh hir wit be thynne,
 Wole argumentes make in holy writ!
 Lewde calates! sittith doun and spynne,
 And kakele of sumwhat elles, for your wit
 Is al to feeble to despute of it!
 To Clerkes grete / apparteneth þat aart
 The knowleche of þat, god hath fro yow shit;
 Stynte and leue of / for right sclendre is *your* paart.

(lines 145-152)

Women were also denied access to the universities (Labalme, 1980:3). Nevertheless, female personification was often applied to the theological sciences, as well as to Philosophy ('the mother of learning') and her daughters, the Seven Liberal Arts of rhetoric, grammar, logic (the *trivium*), astronomy, arithmetic, music and geometry (the *quadrivium*) (Hunt, 1966:148, 149, 160 and 162). This may be due to the fact that all of the Seven Liberal Arts as well as philosophy are of the feminine gender in Latin (see Lewis & Short, 1879:162, 184, 811, 823, 1075, 1179, 1370 and 1593).

It is ironic that these 'female' bodies of knowledge were generally reserved for mastery by men while women were excluded. The very word *mastery* is significant as there is no female or feminine equivalent, as the female is what exists *to be mastered*. The issues

raised by St Katherine's mastery of rhetoric in particular will be discussed in chapter three.

The desirable, yet elusive quality of genuine wisdom is stressed in the wisdom literature of the Bible. Wisdom is also metaphorically personified as a woman in various favourable female roles in Proverbs 1-9 (Metzger & Coogan, 1993:800). In Proverbs 8:22-31 Wisdom emphasises her presence at the dawn of creation. St Paul refers to Christ as the wisdom (*sophia*, 'wisdom' in Greek) of God in 1 Corinthians 1:24 while the brief creation account in John 1:1-3 deliberately recalls Proverbs 8 (Metzger & Coogan, 1993:801). In Christian art Sophia was symbolic of the allegorisation of wisdom in the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit (Apostolos-Cappadona, 1998:344). Lady Wisdom may indicate 'an irruption in the Bible of the persistent but biblically suppressed Israelite worship of a female counterpart to Yahweh' and fulfilled a significant role in both Jewish and Christian thinking (Metzger & Coogan, 1993:801). Thus Wisdom was associated with the feminine counterpart of God, with the Virgin Mary and with Christ. It is, therefore, perhaps appropriate that St Katherine, who in this legend becomes the female counterpart to Christ and is associated with the Virgin Mary, should be noted for her exceptional education and intelligence.

In the late Middle Ages there was much interest in exploring the contrasts between Eve and Mary, often by means of a comparison of the Fall and the Annunciation (O'Reilly, 1992:190). For example, in the *predella* panel painted by Giovanni di Paolo di Grazia, the Sienese master, in about 1445 (see Figure 1), Adam and Eve are shown being evicted

from paradise, while in a pavilion in the same garden Mary is portrayed at the Annunciation (Warner, 2000:61). Eve and Mary are even more directly contrasted in a miniature from the Archbishop of Salzburg's missal, produced by Berthold Furtmeyer in *c.*1481 (see Figure 2). Eve and Mary appear on either side of a single tree. Mary plucks fruit from beneath a crucifix in the tree. Upon closer inspection the fruit is seen to be a host which she distributes, in her capacity as Ecclesia (the Church), to the faithful who kneel to her right. In the boughs on the opposite side of the tree is a skull. Eve picks her fruit from this side of the tree, obtaining it directly from the mouth of the serpent coiled around the tree-trunk, and giving it to her followers. In this way the Garden of Eden scene is used to contrast not only the two Eves but also the 'two communions' of 'the fatal food Eve devoured and the life-giving food Mary offers' (O'Reilly, 1992:193-196). Thus the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge which brought death and the 'fruit' of Mary's obedience, Christ (represented by means of the eucharist, believed to be the real body of Christ by means of transubstantiation), who brought life, are contrasted. Christ's body is, therefore, directly connected with knowledge. This link is further strengthened by John 1:1-18 where Christ is referred to as 'the word' who took on human form and by the fact that Mary is often represented with a book at the Annunciation.

In the miniature by Berthold Furtmeyer described above, the Virgin was able to take on the characteristics of a priest who offers ordinary human beings 'the saving flesh of God, which comes most regularly and predictably in the mass', because the flesh of Christ was linked with the feminine by means of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. In terms of this doctrine, the body of Christ came from Mary as He did not have a human father (Bynum,

1992:100-101). In addition, in Catholic literature and art the transubstantiation of the host, ‘when the Holy Spirit descends over the altar and changes the wafer and the wine of the Eucharist into the body and blood of Christ’, was often compared with the Incarnation when ‘the word of God became flesh in the womb of the Virgin’. As the Holy Spirit caused the conception of Christ, the ‘living bread’, the Incarnation parallels the transubstantiation of the eucharist (Lane, 1984:41). In general, women were associated with the flesh, while men were associated with the spirit. In addition medical theory saw the bodies of women as being related to blood and flesh, while bleeding was perceived as both feeding (it was believed that the child was fed in the womb by the mother’s blood and that after the birth of the child the mother’s blood would become breast milk so as to continue the feeding process) and purging of excess. These medical ideas concerning blood led ‘to the association of Christ’s bleeding on the cross, which purges our sin in the Atonement and feeds our souls in the eucharist, with female bleeding and feeding’ (Bynum, 1992:98 and 100). This association recalls the legend that the pelican, because of its immense love for its offspring, punctures its breast to feed them with its blood. Thus the pelican is symbolic of the sacrifice Christ made at the crucifixion (due to his love for humanity) as well as of the eucharist (Ferguson, 1961:23). Representations of Mary with a book at the Annunciation, with the Christ Child, with the body of Christ when He is taken down from the cross, and with His body in the form of the host, all serve to conflate these images/symbols of the body of Christ.

Capgrave draws specific attention to the similarities between the hermit Adrian’s ‘appearance’ to Katherine in her private garden and the angel Gabriel’s appearance to the

Virgin Mary. When Adrian appears before Katherine he addresses her: ““All heyll, madame!”” (3.413). This greeting echoes Gabriel’s ‘Hail, Mary’ at the Annunciation (Winstead, 1999:299). The connection with the Annunciation is made clearer in 3.465-3.478 (Winstead, 1999:299) where Capgrave points out its similarities with Katherine’s conversion:

For thow He sent the ermyte as his messangere,
Or the ermyte cam, Crist Himself was there,

Ryght as Gabriell whan he fro hevene was sent
Onto oure Lady to do that hye message.

Into Nazareth in forme of o man he went,

Fayre and fresch and yong eke of age,

But ere that he cam onto this maydes cage,

Cryst was there, as we in bokes rede.

Ryth so dyd He here, if we wyll take hede.

(3.468-3.476)

In addition, a further connection may be observed in that Adrian’s ‘annunciation’ of Christianity or the word of God results in Katherine’s conversion, which leads to the spiritual ‘Virgin Birth’ of many converts, who may be seen as her spiritual children.

The fact that Adrian approaches Katherine while she is studying in her private, walled garden is significant (3.307-3.322 and 3.376-3.392). The image of the enclosed garden or *hortus conclusus* is symbolic of Mary’s Immaculate Conception and eternal virginity

(Ferguson, 1961:42). This symbol is derived from Song of Songs 4:12, ‘Mi sister spousesse, a gardyn closid togidere; a gardyn closid togidere, a welle aseelid’. In Northern medieval art the enclosed garden became the setting for the Virgin and Child, indicating that paradise was to be restored by means of Christ’s Passion, Death and Resurrection. In medieval art the enclosed garden was also frequently the setting for the Annunciation and sometimes for the Nativity as well (Apostolos-Cappadona, 1998:121).⁸ As a result, the enclosed garden associates St Katherine with the Virgin Mary and her Immaculate Conception as well as with the Virgin Birth of Christ and thus serves to draw further attention to, and to accentuate, St Katherine’s own purity and virginity. Indeed, the name Katherine comes from the Greek *katharos* which means ‘pure’ (Foreman, 1967:220).

As noted in the introduction, the word ‘cage’ had a number of different definitions and associations in the Middle Ages. For instance, according to the *Middle English Dictionary*, figuratively, ‘cage’ referred to ‘a womb’ or ‘a small enclosure, room, dwelling’, while ‘maidenes cage’ referred to ‘the Virgin Mary’s womb’ (Kurath, 1959:8). Thus lines 3.474-3.475 quoted above (‘But ere that he cam onto this maydes cage, / Cryst was there, as we in bokes rede’) introduce an interesting play on the word. Overtly, it is used to refer to Katherine’s enclosed garden or ‘small enclosure’ but in the context (with its associations with the Annunciation) it would also have reminded the medieval reader of the ‘maidenes cage’ or ‘the Virgin Mary’s womb’ and the Virgin Birth of Christ. Katherine later refers to this in her debate with the philosophers:

‘Ferthermore, whan He cam to that herbourgage,

His coming was lich the sune schynyng bryth;
 Lich to the glas I lykne that maydenes cage:
 The sune schynyth theron with bemes lyght
 And thorow it goth, as we se in syght,
 Yet is the glas persed in noo manere.
 So ferde that Lord whan He cam down here.'

(4.2178-4.2184)

Furthermore, according to the *Middle English Dictionary* a garden or 'gardin' is a 'cultivated piece of land (large or small, usually enclosed) for vegetables, herbs, flowers, trees, etc.', but figuratively it may refer to 'the soul, heart' while Christ's garden refers to 'the world' (Kuhn, 1963:31). Consequently, Katherine's enclosed garden, to which she alone has a key and where she spends her time in solitary study (1.337-1.364), may be seen as symbolic not only of her virginity but also of the purity of her heart and soul.

Katherine is studying when Adrian approaches her:

He is now come where as this emperesse
 Satte in hir gardeyn, stodying than ful sore.
 Sodenly enterd set he is hir before.

(3.376-3.378)

This connects her more closely with visual representations of the Annunciation where (as has already been noted) Mary is frequently presented reading a book, representing both her role as the 'seat of wisdom' or *sedes sapientiae* and her foreknowledge that Christ was born to die during her lifetime, thus making her acquiescence to God's request a

more significant sacrifice (Apostolos-Cappadona, 1998:18 and 52). It therefore also served as a reminder of Christ, referred to as ‘the word’, in John 1:1-18. St Katherine appears (reading a book) in a painting (*c.*1440/1460), by the Master of Flémalle (also known as Robert Campin) and his assistants (or one of his followers) in an enclosed garden with the Virgin and the Christ Child as well as St Barbara, John the Baptist and Anthony Abbot (Ferguson, 1961:plate 111; National Gallery, 2006; see Figure 3). Consequently, in this scene, St Katherine may also recall the image of Mary at the Annunciation. The book in her lap also parallels the Christ Child (the ‘Word’) in Mary’s lap.

However, the association with the Immaculate Conception, the Annunciation and the Virgin and Child by means of the enclosed garden also recalls the associated and frequently contrasted image of Eve (and the Tree of Knowledge) in the Garden of Eden. From this point of view the fact that Katherine is studying, and consequently adding to her already extensive and impressive education (1.246-434), recalls the Fall where Eve ate the fruit of the forbidden tree in order to gain knowledge. Both Eve and Katherine are thus presented in a garden setting in their pursuit of knowledge. As we see in Genesis 3:4-6 it was, in part, Eve’s desire for knowledge that led to the Fall:

Forsothe the serpent seide to the womman, ye schulen not die bi deeth; for whi God woot that in what euere dai ye schulen ete therof, youre iyen schulen be opened, and ye schulen be as Goddis, knowynge good and yuel. Therefore the womman seiye that the tre was good, and swete to ete, and fair to the iyen, and

delitable in bi holdyng; and sche took of the fruyt therof, and eet, and yaf to hir
hosebande, and he eet.

As a woman, Katherine's desire for knowledge could, therefore, also be seen as potentially dangerous. For instance, in the marriage parliament in Book Two she out-argues her lords in order to remain unmarried and, as a result, to rule the land alone. As a soon-to-be Christian virgin martyr in a legend, this behaviour is admirable. In the socio-political reality (both Katherine's and Capgrave's), a woman publicly arguing her case against the patriarchal powers that be and possibly putting the safety of the country and its subjects in jeopardy would have been frowned upon.⁹

As the first garden and the site of the Fall, the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8-3:24) would certainly be recalled by a Christian reader of any spiritual text featuring a garden. In addition, the contrasts often drawn between the Fall and the Annunciation would make the association of the enclosed garden and the Garden of Eden likely. (Adam and Eve were, until the Fall, 'virginal' and innocent in spirit inside this apparently safe place). Katherine is approached by Adrian in the enclosed garden in a way which could also recall the manner in which Eve was approached by the serpent in the Garden of Eden. He enters her garden, speaks to her and persuades her to leave her gods and adopt Christianity (3.442-777) in a manner similar to the way in which the serpent persuades Eve to ignore God's command and to eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 3:1-5). Both the serpent and Adrian make effective use of language (rhetoric), however Adrian's eloquence is provided by God Himself, as Mary informs Adrian it will be (3.320-3.336). This time, instead of being led into sin, the female

character is led from paganism to Christianity and thus, in the medieval Christian view, to salvation. The scene may, therefore, be seen as a reversal of the Fall, just as Mary was represented as reversing the Fall at the Annunciation. In this way St Katherine may also be seen as a ‘new Eve’ and is associated with Mary, the ultimate example in medieval Christianity of the good, virginal woman. This does, however, mean that she is required to turn her back on her pagan knowledge and submit to the patriarchy of the medieval Catholic Church, as will be discussed in chapter three.

The Garden of Eden may also be considered to be symbolic of the Virgin Birth as God created life there through His power without making use of normal animal reproduction. Indeed, when Katherine questions the idea of the Virgin Birth, Adrian uses the creation of Adam and Eve as an example which proves that it is possible for God to do so:

‘Wythouten seed, lady, or withoutyn synne
 May God make a man, and so He dede or now:
 For if we at Adam or at Eve begyne,
 It is full pleyn for to schew onto yow.
 For whan that same Adam slept in a swow,
 Oure Lord owte of his syde than made Eve.
 Than be this ensaumple pleyedly may ye preve,

 Sith that He made a virgyne of a man,
 He was of powere eke for to make

A man of a virgyne...'

(3.645-3.654)

Thus Eden (and by association, the Fall) and the Virgin Birth (part of the reversal of the Fall) are directly and specifically connected in this scene.

It can, therefore, be seen that St Katherine is associated with the Virgin Mary in a number of ways in Capgrave's text. They are both famed for their purity and virginity, symbolised in this text by the enclosed garden. They are further linked by the echoes of the Annunciation created when Adrian goes to convert Katherine to Christianity. As the mother of Christ, Mary was seen as providing Christ's body, believed to be truly present in the eucharist and often represented as a book being read by Mary at the Annunciation (from the reference in John 1:14 to Christ as 'the word' who 'was maad man'). In these ways St Katherine is also associated with the body of Christ.¹⁰

Katherine's virginity and the fact that she is studying in her enclosed garden when Adrian approaches her with the message of Christianity connect her with Mary and thus with Christ as a 'good body of knowledge' and the 'good news' of the Redemption. The allusions to her associations with Eve and her 'bad body of knowledge' (and the negative occurrence of the Fall) may have raised concerns in the minds of some readers as to the appropriateness (for a woman) of Katherine's impressive education. Although these connections between Eve and Katherine are generally reversed in an attempt to align Katherine more closely with Mary, and these attempts are by and large successful, the potential associations with Eve are always present.

Eve's sin was seen as prime evidence for the rightness of the subjection of women and of preventing them from preaching, teaching or speaking in public. That this was used as a pretext for excluding women from a comprehensive academic education is well known. St Katherine stands out as she was famous for her superior education, which would have been the envy of many a man in the Middle Ages. Thus, while she was an excellent example of virginity and of Christian martyrdom she was also potentially dangerous in that she was highly educated and argued with men, winning her marriage debate with her lords in parliament and out-arguing the great pagan philosophers, converting them to Christianity. She is therefore not like other virgin martyrs (such as St Mary Magdalene and St Christine) who, while they speak and preach in public and convert many pagans to Christianity, show little or no indication that their skill derives from any other source than God and in whose legends no mention is made of superior education.¹¹ St Katherine, by contrast, is shown to be eloquent and powerful (despite the fact that she is a woman) even *before* she is converted due, by and large, to her exceptional (though pagan) education.

In conclusion, although Capgrave attempts to associate St Katherine with the Virgin Mary and thus to add to the admiration she deserves as a saint, the garden setting of the conversion scene serves as a powerful reminder of the Garden of Eden, Eve and the Fall, thereby revealing an underlying uneasiness with the exceptional level of education that Katherine, as a woman, has achieved. The garden setting thus not only frames, but also elicits, a consideration of the true nature of this woman, and perhaps of women in general.

Chapter Two

Saint Katherine and the Church:

Brides of Christ



*Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,
Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee,
And for thy maintenance; commits his body
To painful labour...*

-William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

'The Taming of the Shrew' (c.1589-1594)

Act V, scene 2, ll 147-150

One of the central aspects of the legend of St

Katherine, as told by Capgrave, is marriage. Books Two and Three, dealing with the marriage parliament (2.71-2.1498) and St Katherine's mystical marriage to Christ (3.876-3.1309), focus on the marriage relationship in various ways. There are also a number of references to marriage throughout the rest of the text (for example, prologue 178-179, 2.10-2.11, 3.337-3.340, 3.491-3.499, 4.433-4.435, 4.480-4.506, 4.512-4.513, 5.393-5.395, 5.622, 5.695-5.697, 5.861 and 5.869).

The focus of this chapter will be on the marriage parliament and St Katherine's mystical marriage to Christ. Her status as the virgin bride of Christ places her in a special position

in relation to the Godhead and allows her to be established in this legend as a symbolic representative of the Church. The image of the Church as the bride of Christ and the ways in which this essentially feminine image lends itself to associations with the body, as well as the Church's simultaneous portrayal as the body of Christ, will be considered first. The effects of shifting theories of atonement on the use of nuptial imagery (*sponsalia Christi*) in hagiography will then be briefly noted. The arguments which Katherine makes in the marriage parliament in favour of virginity will then be considered, followed by a discussion of the perceived benefits (especially the spiritual benefits) of virginity in the Middle Ages. Finally, the portrayal of Katherine as a symbolic representative of the Church (as a result of her status as bride and body of Christ) in Capgrave's text will be explored. As was demonstrated in chapter one, a number of parallels may be drawn between Eve, the Virgin Mary and St Katherine concerning knowledge. Some further parallels between Mary and St Katherine, in particular, in relation to the concept of the bride (and body) of Christ will be pointed out here.

It is, perhaps, unsurprising that late medieval authors should have chosen to explain the relationship between the female Christian virgin saint and Christ in terms of a marriage relationship, as the image of the Church as the bride of Christ is a common Biblical theme.¹² The love poetry of the Song of Songs is a case in point. This short book, consisting of under two hundred poetic verses, has baffled many through the ages. There is seldom much agreement regarding the issues of its date of composition, origin, unity and structure (Metzger & Coogan, 1993:708). As Metzger and Coogan (1993:708) have shown, the poetry's passionate style recalls the love lyric genre as seen in ancient

Egyptian collections. Despite opposition from some rabbis, who found its content inappropriate for the sacred literature of Israel, the Song of Songs was included in the Jewish canon in 70AD. Both Jewish and Christian commentators have sought to expound it in a religious manner since its inclusion in the official scriptures (Metzger & Coogan, 1993:708). It has frequently been interpreted as allegorical. The Jewish nation understood it as a portrayal of the relationship between God and Israel, His chosen people. From the earliest times Christian interpreters have similarly seen it as a representation of the love between Christ and His bride, the Church (Kinlaw, 1991:1202-1203). As the ultimate example of virginity and as a 'figure of the Church', the Virgin Mary was also identified with the bride in the text (Warner, 2000:128).

The medieval Church placed a high premium on virginity making it an indicator of particular piety (Kinlaw, 1991:1205-1206). In *De Bono Viduitatis (On the Good of Widowhood)* St Augustine states (Cornish, 1887:445):

...the good of marriage is indeed ever a good: but in the people of God it was at one time an act of obedience unto the law; now it is a remedy for weakness, but in certain a solace of human nature. Forsooth to be engaged in the begetting of children...by honest order of marriage, is not an affection such as we are to blame in a man; yet this affection itself the Christian mind, having thoughts of heavenly things, in a more praiseworthy manner surpasses and overcomes.

Thus virginity was seen as a higher good, where Christ is chosen as the spouse, and the Song of Songs was seen as a representation of the joy of this superior way. Consequently, the medieval Church was enamoured with the Song of Songs in which 'eroticism

precluded at the human level was permitted at the divine' (Kinlaw, 1991:1205-1206). The tradition of the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs was developed by early Christian mystics such as Origen (*c.*185-*c.*254), Methodius of Olympus (*d.* *c.*311), and Gregory of Nyssa (*c.*330-*c.*395) in the east and Ambrose (*c.*339-397) in the west. They explained it as expressing Christ's love for His Church. Ambrose was the first to conflate the Church, the Virgin Mary and the individual Christian represented by the infatuated bride in the text. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) presented eighty-six sermons expounding the Song of Songs, which form an impressive work of Christian mysticism (cf. Warner, 2000:126 and 129). Since the Church, the individual Christian, and the Virgin Mary (with whom Katherine may be paralleled in this text, as was shown in chapter one), can be portrayed as the bride of Christ, the association of Katherine with this role seems a natural progression which is also full of potential meanings.

There are a number of examples of marriage imagery in the New Testament. In John 3:28-29, John the Baptist explains Jesus' ministry in terms of nuptial imagery:

Ye you silf beren witnessyng to me, that Y seide, Y am not Crist, but that Y am sent bifore hym. He that hath a wijf, is the hosebonde; but the freend of the spouse that stonidith, and herith hym, ioieth with ioeye, for the vois of the spouse. Therfor in this thing my ioeye is fulfillid.

When questioned as to why His disciples were not fasting, Jesus Himself described His time on earth as a wedding celebration (Matthew 9:14-15; Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:33-35): 'And Jhesus seide to hem, whether the sones of the spouse moun morne, as long as the spouse is with hem? But daies schulen come, whanne the spouse schal be takun a wei fro

hem, and thanne thei schulen faste' (Matthew 9:15). This idea is elaborated in Ephesians 5:22-23 where the concept of the Church as the wife or bride of Christ is alluded to: 'Wymmen, be thei suget to her hosebondis, as to the Lord, for the man is heed of the wymman, as Crist is heed of the chirche...'

Furthermore, in Revelations 19:7-9 (as quoted in the frontispiece) the conclusion of the Second Coming is described as 'the wedding-feast of the Lamb':

Ioye we, and make we myrthe, and yyue glorie to hym; for the weddingis of the lomb camen, and the wijf of hym made redy hir silf. And it is youun to hir, that sche kyure hir with white bissyn schynyng; for whi bissyn is iustifyngis of seyntis. And he [the angel] seide to me, Write thou, Blessid ben thei that ben clepid to the soper of weddyngis of the lomb.

Thus the Church as an entity as well as the soul of each Christian may be seen as the bride betrothed to Christ, the groom. The Church/Christians are waiting for the Second Coming of Christ which may be seen as the ultimate realisation of this intended spiritual union. This serves to indicate St Katherine's superior spiritual status as she experiences her mystical marriage to Christ (3.876-3.1309) while she is still alive on earth, before the Second Coming. In addition, as Mary indicates to Adrian (the spiritual tutor), Katherine has been specifically chosen by Christ:

'...for my Sone in sothenesse
Hath chose hir specyaly above all othir lyvande
For hir vertew and for hir grete clenness.

He wyll wedd hir in schort tyme comande.’

(3.337-3.340)

The image of the bride is obviously a feminine one. For various reasons, women in the Middle Ages were frequently associated with the body (and emotion) and men with the head (and reason). This may be partially attributed to Aristotle (384-322 BC), whose physiology was quite influential from the latter part of the twelfth century onwards, when his writings were rediscovered and began to be studied at the University of Paris (Blamires, Pratt & Marx, 1992:39). In his *De Generatione Animalium* (*Generation of Animals*), he states that in procreation the female supplies the material or body while the male contributes the ‘principle of the movement’ and the ‘form’. In addition he states that ‘an animal is a living body, a body with Soul in it...the physical part, the body, comes from the female, and the Soul from the male, since the Soul is the essence of a particular body’ (Peck, 1953:109 and 185; 729a & 738b). Influenced by Aristotle’s theory, St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) argues in the *Summa Theologiae* (*Summary of Theology*, II.ii.26.10: reply) that one should love one’s father more than one’s mother (Blamires, Pratt & Marx, 1992:47) as ‘one’s father and mother are loved as principles in our natural origin. But the father, as the active partner, is a principle in a higher way than the mother, who supplies the passive or material element. And so, speaking *per se*, the father should be loved the more’ (Batten, 1975:149). In addition, in St Augustine’s *Confessiones* (*Confessions*, Book XIII, chapter 32) it is stated that (Watts, 1912:465; italics mine):

...like as in his [man’s] soul there is one power which bears rule by directing, and another nature made subject, that it might obey, so was there for man, corporeally

also, made a woman, who in the mind of her reasonable understanding should have a parity of nature, but in the sex of her body, should be in like manner subject to the sex of her husband, *as the appetite of doing is fain to conceive the skill of right doing from the reason of the mind.*

The female was inevitably associated with the body in the Middle Ages. Thus it stands to reason that the Church as the *bride* of Christ could also be conceived of as the *body* of Christ, especially as there is a sound Biblical basis for this correlation. In 1 Corinthians 12:27, the Church is envisioned as the body of Christ, ‘ye ben the bodi of Crist, and membris of membre’, while in Ephesians 4:15-16 it is explained that Christ is the head of that body:

But do we treuthe in charite, and wexe in him by alle thingis, that is Crist oure heed; of whom alle the bodi set togidere, and boundun togidere bi ech ioynture of vnder seruyng, bi worching in to the mesure of ech membre, makith encreesyng of the bodi, in to edificacioun of it silf in charite.

In Ephesians 5:23-24 (noted earlier) the concept of the Church as the wife or bride of Christ is linked with the idea of the Church as the body of Christ: ‘for the man is heed of the wymman, as Crist is heed of the chirche; he is sauour of his bodi. But as the chirche is suget to Crist, so wymmen to her hosebondis in alle thingis’. The submission required by a wife to her husband in Christianity is made clear here and was generally accepted in the Middle Ages, as is seen in the morality play, *Mankind* (c.1465-1470), where Mankynde sees the subjection of wife to husband as being as natural and appropriate as

the submission of the body to the soul (Eccles, 1969:160):

My name ys Mankynde. I haue my composycyon
 Of a body and of a soull, of condycyon contrarye.
 Betwyx þem tweyn ys a grett dyvisyon;
 He þat xulde be subjecte, now he hath þe victory.

Thys ys to me a lamentable story

To se my flesch of my soull to haue gouernance.

Wher þe goodewyff ys master, þe goodeman may be sory.

I may both syth and sobbe, þis ys a pytuose remembrance.

(lines 194-201; italics mine)

In addition to the numerous Biblical references to nuptial imagery explaining the relationship between Christ and the Christian, shifting theories of atonement also influenced the move from martial imagery to marital imagery in religious literature during the Middle Ages. In the early Middle Ages the classic atonement theory and the artistic representations of the crucifixion depict Christ as an omnipotent god. The theory stated that God and Satan had engaged in cosmic combat for the human soul. As human beings were incapable of securing their own salvation, God sent Christ to earth to overcome Satan. Satan was deceived by the fact that Christ appeared in human form, thinking that He was, therefore, under his control. Consequently, by having Christ put to death, Satan committed the ultimate act of treason. This gave God the right to defeat and punish Satan eternally. In terms of this theory Satan had been outmanoeuvred by God

(Mockridge, 1990:64, 65 and 67-68). In the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries a new perception of Christ arose which accentuated His humanity. The initiation of this movement has been attributed to St Anselm (1033-1109) whose *Cur Deus Homo (Why God Became Man)* presented a new theory of atonement known as the juridical or satisfaction theory. Anselm argued that the 'debt' incurred as a result of Adam's Original Sin had to be repaid so that humankind could be saved. He further argued that because the sin had been perpetrated by a man, a man would have to make satisfaction for it. However, only a man who was also divine could effect this satisfaction, as human beings were corrupted by sin and thus could not bring about salvation for themselves. The incarnation of Christ therefore took place so that He could redeem humankind (Mockridge, 1990:65). As Anselm (1889:101) states, '...He freely offered to His Father what He would never have been obliged to lose, and paid for sinners that which He owed not on His own account'.

By accentuating Christ's humanity the juridical or satisfaction theory of atonement led to the idea that the tremendous suffering Christ endured at the Passion served as an indicator of the magnitude of His love for humanity. Consequently, the suffering Christ became a focal point of later medieval piety (Bugge, 1975:82). Such adjustments in the depiction of Christ contributed to adjustments in the depiction of the relationship experienced by a saint with Christ (Mockridge, 1990:65) and made it possible to speak of Him 'in the metaphorical terms of human sexual love' (Bugge, 1975:83). In the high Middle Ages it is found with growing frequency that Christians envisage their relationship with Christ in terms of a human marriage. Christ is the bridegroom, while the Christian, whether female

or male, is placed in the role of the bride (Mockridge, 1990:69). With this move from martial imagery, where the Christian was portrayed as a '*miles Christi*' or 'soldier of Christ', towards nuptial imagery and the metaphor of marriage, the hagiographers working in the vernacular made possible a new dynamic of interaction between the divine and the human (Mockridge, 1990:65 and 68). Thus, according to Mockridge (1990:66), 'Where once there was a relationship of subordination, there is now one of mutuality'. This is not necessarily true, however, even if the marriage relationship can be seen as being based on a greater 'mutuality' between the two principal parties than the relationship between a soldier in an army and the commander of those forces. As the supposed ideal marriage relationship in medieval Christianity involved the complete subordination of the wife to the husband it cannot generally be described as a relationship of 'mutuality'. Moreover, in her study Mockridge (1990:72) found that in texts with male saints as protagonists, authors were more likely to use the metaphor 'friend' for both God and the male saint. This term tends to imply equality or 'mutuality' far more readily than the medieval Christian marriage, which implies the submission of the female. Thus the portrayal of the relationship between Christ and the Christian as a marriage with the Christian as the bride seems quite suitable, as a human being would clearly be subject to a god. The power dynamics in this relationship therefore seem less problematic than in an actual marriage between human beings where the idea of the superiority of the husband simply on the basis of gender seems less clear-cut and quite arbitrary (especially by modern standards). Indeed, as Katherine states to her lords in the marriage parliament, there is no guarantee that, simply because he would be a man, her husband would be stronger and cleverer than her. Thus it would, she states, be better to have her rule them

as they know that she is, at least, intelligent (2.1175-2.1197). Thus one can begin to feel compassion for Katherine in the marriage parliament and start to comprehend the medieval religious view that (for women in particular) a ‘marriage’ to Christ could be far more attractive than a traditional marriage.

The arguments which Katherine (who is still a pagan at this stage) advances in the marriage parliament against marriage and in favour of virginity in general will now be considered, followed by a discussion of the perceived benefits (especially the spiritual benefits) of virginity in the Middle Ages. In addition to her desire to remain a virgin, Katherine has other reasons for wishing to remain single. An important factor for her is that marriage (and the duties that would be required of her as a wife) would effectively force her to give up her life of study:

‘I supposed ful welle to leve now at myn ese;
 Now must I leeve my stody and my desyre,
 My modyr, my kyn, my puple, if I wyll plese.
 I mote leeve stody and wasch my boke in myre,
 Ryde owte on huntyng, use all new atyre.
 Godd, Thu knowyst my pryvy confessyoun:
 I have made all anothyr professyoun.’

(2.183-2.189)

Furthermore, Katherine appears to be attempting to maintain her independence by, for example, offering her lords the opportunity to choose a duke to lead them rather than a king who would be her husband and therefore rule over her (2.813-2.833). As she states:

‘So graunted I to yow to have youre choys fre,
 To chese a duke wech that schuld lede yow,
 Not for to have no governauns upon me,
 But to my byddyng he must lowte and bowe.’

(2.827-2.830)

She later reiterates this point:

‘But for ye say to me it schuld be joye
 To hafe a lord schuld governe both yow and me,
 I sey yow nay, it schulde be but a noye
 Onto myn hert.’

(2.1093-2.1096)

She further argues that, even if she had a loving and gentle husband, he might die or they might become estranged and she would then be heart-broken (2.1096-2.1113). Thus to save herself from such uncertainty she will rather not marry:

‘What, counsell ye me swech game to begynne
 Wech is not stedfast in lowe ne astate?
 In all her gladeness, sorow is evyr withinne,
 And with her plesaunce eft medeleth debate.
 Therefore that lyfe I despyce and hate
 That hath noo sewyrté but evyr is variable;
 I wold hafe lyffe and love that evyr is stable.’

(2.1107-2.1113)

A similar idea is expressed in *Hali Meidhad*, or ‘A Letter on Virginitie’, written in the early thirteenth century in the West Midlands. It is argued that any woman who gives up her virginitie for an earthly husband goes ‘from being God’s bride and his free daughter’ to being ‘a serf to a man and his slave, to do and suffer all that he pleases, however little she likes it; and from such blessed security as she was and might be in under God’s protection, gives herself up to drudgery...’ (Millett & Wogan-Browne, 1992: xi, 4-5; lines 25-29).¹³ Thus, Christ was also seen as the only truly reliable and stable husband. This idea of the security of the relationship that one has with Christ could stem from Hebrews 13:8 which states that He is the same ‘yistirdai, and to dai’. As a result, Christ cannot be a fickle husband. He will not stop loving His bride or be unfaithful; He will not be cruel, abandon her or die, as a normal earthly husband might. Consequently, a relationship with Him will be a stable one from His side, at least. As Jerome points out in his letter (XXII) on virginitie to Eustochium, she has learned from the example of her sister, widowed seven months after her marriage, the ‘troubles of wedded life and the uncertainties of marriage’. Consequently, says Jerome, Eustochium’s sister ‘has lost both the crown of virginitie and the pleasures of wedlock’ (Wright, 1933:83).

Moreover, Katherine argues, a husband may be neither intelligent nor strong, and

‘This were noo worchepe to me ne to myn kyn!

And sekyrly a full grete cause it is

That I wedde nowte, for owte of joye and blis

Schuld I than passe and make myselve a thralle...’

(2.1186-2.1189)

Katherine again raises her aversion to being a servant ('thralle') to her husband, particularly if he is unworthy of such devotion. It would surely be incredibly trying for anyone of such intelligence and learning as Katherine to be continually subject to another who is less intelligent and well-educated, simply because he is a man. By allowing Katherine to make this argument, Capgrave seems to be raising the question and perhaps inviting debate on whether all men are really superior to all women simply on the basis of gender. As a senior member of the medieval clergy (and even simply as a man of his era) this could imply a surprising open-mindedness on Capgrave's part. Katherine's arguments may also simply be seen as stock arguments against marriage and in favour of virginity which indicate that Christ is the only worthy spouse.

Indeed, as Katherine is still a pagan without knowledge of Christ, she unwittingly goes on to describe Christ as the perfect husband. Throughout the marriage parliament debate she manages to counter every argument proposed by her lords as to why she should soon be married. Finally, her lords select a clerk who

...was full wys and of full grete cunnyng.

For very stody his vysage was full pale;

Alle his delyte and joye was in lernyng.

Be alle her consent, he had enformyd a thyng

Whech he wyll uttyr if he may owte spede,

And all is lost but sche ther-to take hede.

(2.1269-2.1274)

He argues that she should marry in order to share her divinely-bestowed gifts of beauty, riches, cunning (i.e. intelligence) and royal blood. She has been so exceedingly well-endowed in these areas, he says, that she must share them lest the First Mover (God) be displeased with her and take the gifts away. The best way to share these gifts, states the clerk, is for Katherine to marry (2.1261-2.1372).

With a neat rhetorical move Katherine turns his argument against him (2.1373-2.1456). She agrees with him but refuses to settle for a husband of lower stature than herself (as she has been rated by the clerk):

‘Ye have sett oure loos above so hye
 We pase all women that now formed are.
 And on youre grounde ageyn I thus replye:
 I wold know to me who that worthy ware.
 This is your argument, this is your owne lare, [instruction]
 That I am worthyest lyvyng of all women,
 Than must I hafe the worthyest of all men...’

(2.1387-2.1393)

She goes on to describe her ideal husband in greater detail (2.1402-2.1456). He should (among other admirable qualities) be without peer and be able to kill or save whomever he wishes. He should be so wise that he knows everything and so mighty that he requires the help of no creature, yet he should control his might with moderation. He should be so rich that he has no need for the goods of others, and he should be generous. He must also be handsome, even better-looking than Katherine herself. Finally, he should be immortal

since she could never bear to lose such a wonderful husband. After hearing this, her mother and the lords in her parliament despair, believing that such a perfect man cannot be found (2.1457-2.1488). Thus, as Winstead (1994:365-366) has also noted, Katherine believes that she has out-argued her lords and evaded marriage as such a man could not exist. However, the dramatic irony of the scene would not have been lost on the original medieval Christian readers who would have realised that the ideal husband she has just unwittingly described is Christ Himself and that she will soon be His bride. Thus, from the latter part of the marriage parliament scene onwards the reader anticipates her mystical marriage to Christ. Mary refers to the incident when she sends Adrian to convert Katherine:

‘For if sche enqwyre who thee thedyr sent,
The same lord, sey ageyn to hir,
Whom that sche chees syttyng in parlement...’

(3.345-3.347)

Although all Christians could, in general, be viewed as brides of Christ, acquiring the title in the Middle Ages usually required absolute virginity. For the major portion of the Middle Ages the ideal condition for a woman was, according to the Church, that of ‘total virginity’ or ‘*integritas*’, a state of spiritual and sexual purity. It was believed that an existence of ‘sexless perfection’ could allow women to overcome their lamentable sexuality and physical constraints. Female virginity received far greater admiration than male virginity, despite the fact that chastity was equally rigorously maintained by both genders in monastic communities and the early Church. It was the single most important

requirement for an existence of Christian perfection for women and by means of it they would gain access into heaven or the ‘celestial gynaeceum’. The body of the virgin was seen as a treasure, a jewel, ‘a sacred vessel to be cherished’. The virgin was considered to be a bride of Christ who needed to be attentively guarded in order to remain pure for Christ, the bridegroom (Tibbetts Schulenburg, 1986:31-32). In addition, the female saint was usually incorporated with the image of the bride of Christ. She was to all intents and purposes a nun, even if she had not taken formal vows. The rights and benefits which she enjoyed were the result of her status as bride or spouse of Christ (Uitti, 1991:249). Hence the Church (Ecclesia), the Virgin Mary, Christian virgins in general and female saints (who were usually virgins) were all portrayed as brides of Christ.

Hali Meidhad attempts to convince young women of the emotional and social advantages of virginity by appealing to their desires and fears. The arguments presented in the text have, on occasion, been disapproved of for being aimed at the virgins’ self-interest and portraying spiritual benefits as social attractions. However, according to the preaching theory of the Middle Ages, it is commendable technique to commence an argument by appealing to the interests and status of the target audience, ‘and medieval virginity literature characteristically literalizes spiritual metaphors in order to appeal to young women’ (Millett & Wogan-Browne, 1992: xvii-xviii). Consequently, the commitment to a close spiritual relationship with Christ is spoken of in terms of marital metaphors. In Capgrave’s text, Katherine’s spiritual commitment to Christ and to the Christian religion is portrayed in terms of a literal marriage ceremony where she even receives a ring

(3.1275-3.1281). Marital metaphors are also used in *Hali Meidhad* to describe the Christian virgin's relationship with Christ as:

...a high position, of such great dignity, and such honour as it is to be God's spouse, the bride of Jesus Christ, the lover of the Lord to whom all things do homage, lady of all the world as he is lord of all; like him in integrity, spotless as he is, and that blessed virgin his beloved mother; like his holy angels and his highest saints; with such freedom for herself that she need not think about anything at all apart from pleasing her beloved with true love, because the lover she has chosen will care for her in all that she needs while she loves him well with constant faith...

(pp. 4-5, lines 11-19)

In the Middle Ages some young women, such as Catherine of Siena (c.1347-1380), went to great lengths to avoid marriage and maintain their virginity and so achieve the status of a bride of Christ. They would, for example, fast excessively, cut off their hair and/or threaten to mutilate themselves in order to make themselves ugly so as to avoid marriage (Bynum, 1987:222). The toil of household chores and the perils of childbirth made marriage even less appealing for women, and preachers frequently mentioned these deterrents to marriage in treatises and sermons on virginity. Catherine of Siena is a case in point. Her brief concession to her sister's urging that she should try to be more alluring to men by making herself more attractive came to an abrupt end when the same sister died in childbirth, thereby demonstrating the possible consequences of such attentions (Bynum, 1987:226). Like Katherine of Alexandria, Catherine of Siena experienced a

mystical marriage to Christ, who appeared to her wishing to celebrate a marriage feast with her soul. As with Katherine of Alexandria (3.1149-3.1174 and 3.1268-3.1281), the Virgin Mary presented Catherine of Siena's hand to Christ, and both saints received wedding rings (Kieckhefer, 1984:158). According to her hagiographers Catherine's ring was made of gold or silver with jewels. However, Catherine herself insisted that the ring was made from Christ's foreskin and stated that this ring of Christ's circumcised flesh with which He marries the Christian 'is a sign that he is the spouse of our humanity' (Bynum, 1987:174-175). For example, in a letter to a nun from the Santo Stefano Monastery in Pisa, Suor Bartolomea della Seta, Catherine states (Noffke, 2001:179, 183-184):

You see very well that you are a bride and that he has espoused you – you and everyone else – and not with a ring of silver but with a ring of his own flesh. Look at that tender little child who on the eighth day, when he was circumcised, gave up just so much flesh as to make a tiny circlet of a ring!

Margery Kempe (c. 1373-1440), who was roughly a contemporary of John Capgrave and also lived in King's Lynn (although it is not known whether they were acquainted or if they even knew of one another), offers another example of the description of a spiritual relationship or event in terms of a mystical marriage which follows the form of a traditional marriage ceremony:

And than the Fadyr toke hir be the hand in hir sowle befor
the Sone and the Holy Gost, and the Modyr of Jhesu, and alle the
xii apostelys, and Seynt Kateryn and Seynt Margarete and many

other seyntys and holy virgyne, with gret multitude of awngelys,
seying to hir sowle:

‘I take the, Margery, for my weddyd wife, for fayrar, for
fowelar, for richar, for powerar, so that thu be buxom and bonyr
to do what I byd the do. For, dowtyr, ther was nevyr childe so
buxom to the modyr as I schal be to the, bothe in wel and in
wo, to help the and comfort the. And therto I make the suyrt.’

(lines 2848-2857)¹⁴

As in the the mystical marriages of Katherine of Alexandria and Catherine of Siena, the Virgin Mary is present at Margery’s mystical marriage to Christ. Note that Katherine of Alexandria, possibly the most famous bride of Christ, is also present. Her presence could, therefore, be seen as an endorsement of Margery’s mystical marriage. Catherine of Siena and Margery Kempe’s mystical marriages also serve as examples of the influence that Katherine’s mystical marriage may have had on medieval women and their perceptions of themselves and their relationships with the Almighty. In addition, the portrayals of her mystical marriage may have served as models for theirs.

Consequently, as a bride of Christ St Katherine could be seen as a model for or representative of individual Christians, particularly virgins and after her mystical marriage to Christ, for/of wives. She may also be seen as a symbolic representative of the Church, and the ways in which she is associated with the Church in Capgrave’s text will now be considered. The correlations between Katherine and the Church become even easier to make when one considers the common personification of the Church as a lady,

sometimes referred to as Ecclesia and contrasted with Synagoga. Ecclesia was often presented as a youthful woman wearing a flaming crown. Her eyes were shown to be wide open, as opposed to those of Synagoga, who was blindfolded (Apostolos-Cappadona, 1998:115), probably referring to the supposed spiritual blindness of the Jews. In William Langland's (c.1330-c.1386) *Piers Plowman* 'A lovely lady of leere in lynnenclothed' (I.3) appears to the dreamer, Will.¹⁵ After she speaks to him about the faith he begins to wonder who she is:

Thanne hadde I wonder in my wit what womman she weere
 That swiche wise wordes of Holy Writ shewed,
 And halsede hire on the heighe name, er she thennes yede,
 What she were witterly that wissed me so faire.

'Holi Chirche I am,' quod she, 'thow oughtest me to knowe.'

(I.71-I.75)

Representations of Ecclesia can also be found in medieval architecture. The hammer beam roof of the church of St Mary in Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk was built in about 1445 (around the same time Capgrave was writing his *St Katherine* in King's Lynn only about 60 kilometres away). On the roof of the nave appears a sculpture of a woman carrying a crown. The woman in the sculpture is at once the image of the Virgin Mary and the personification of Holy Church or Ecclesia which Mary, as both the spouse and mother of Christ, customarily figured. Mary's womb was also considered to be the mystical bridal chamber (McMurray Gibson, 1989:170-173). In his *In Psalmum (On the Psalms)*, for instance, St Augustine interprets Psalm 18:6/19:5: "And He as a

bridegroom coming forth out of His chamber” (ver. 5). And He, coming forth out of the Virgin’s womb, where God was united to man’s nature as a bridegroom to a bride’ (Coxe, 1888:54-55). The image portrays Mary processing to her coronation and mystical marriage to Christ, while figuratively it also portrays the Bury church of St Mary; Queen Margaret of Anjou as the ‘contemporary English embodiment of holy queenship’, and the universal Church processing to ‘glorious triumph’ (McMurray Gibson, 1989:170-173):

All these signs and significations merge in the perspective of eternity as the Bride bears her crown toward the sanctifying altar of the Mystic Marriage and the Eternal Mass, making the Word flesh in the visible signs that speak of the invisible grace.

The Church was often depicted as being born from the wound in Christ’s side at the crucifixion. For example, in *De Civitate Dei* (Book XXII, chapter 17), St Augustine states (Dods, 1886:496):

For at the beginning of the human race the woman was made of a rib taken from the side of the man while he slept; for it seemed fit that even then Christ and His Church should be foreshadowed in this event. For that sleep of the man was the death of Christ, whose side, as He hung lifeless upon the cross, was pierced with a spear, and there flowed from it blood and water, and these we know to be the sacraments by which the Church is ‘built up’.

This association of Christ’s Incarnation in Mary, the mystical marriage and the eucharist all involve Christ uniting His Godhead to the physical (body) for the spiritual benefit of the Church.

Both the ‘birth’ of Eve and the ‘birth’ of the Church may, consequently, also be seen as virgin births. They are, however, both images of inversion portraying men as ‘giving birth’ not only to women but to their own wives. As Bynum (1992:34-35) has noted, from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries the lives of male religious as lived and told frequently involve the inversion of gender-roles. In the life of St Francis by St Bonaventure, for example, Francis is portrayed as nude, weak and female in moments of crisis and his first disciple is described as the first child to whom he gives birth. The Church may also be seen as a ‘new Eve’ faced with the temptations of sin on a daily basis as well as ‘Mother Church’, the mother of all Christians. ‘Virginity signifies humanity’s pre-lapsarian wholeness’ (Millett & Wogan-Browne, 1992: xv) thus it could be argued that the relationship between Christ and His bride, the Church, should follow the form of a pre-lapsarian marriage. Indeed, Jerome wrote in his letter on virginity (XXII) to Eustochium that ‘virginity is natural and that marriage came after the Fall’ just as the ‘command to increase and multiply is fulfilled after the expulsion from Paradise’ (Wright, 1933:91 and 93).

In his *In Psalmum* (Psalm 55/56), Augustine carries the idea of the Church as the bride of Christ further by envisioning converts as children produced by God/Christ, the husband, through the Church/Christians, or wife: ‘...in what manner must God be loved, the true and truth-speaking Husband of the soul, making fruitful unto the offspring of everlasting life, and not suffering us to be barren?’ (Coxe, 1888:223). Consequently, those converted to Christianity by St Katherine could be considered to be her spiritual offspring for Christ. This concept of Mother Church is shown in more literal terms in a pulpit by

Italian sculptor Giovanni Pisano (c.1250-1314) where the figure of a woman suckling two small children appears. This figure is generally believed to depict Ecclesia (Meiss, 1951:116, figure 108). Furthermore, in Catherine of Siena's *Dialogue* God says the following to her (Thorold, 1896:49):

‘What I say of the universal body and the mystical body of the Holy Church (that is to say the Christian religion) I also say of My ministers, who stand and feed at the breasts of Holy Church; and, not only should they feed themselves, but it is also their duty to feed and hold to those breasts the universal body of Christian people, and also any other people who should wish to leave the darkness of their infidelity, and bind themselves as members to My Church.’

The Church is therefore depicted as a mother nourishing the spiritual needs of the Christian. Similarly, Hildegard of Bingen's (1098-1179) *Scivias* (Hart & Bishop, 1990:183) states:

[I]f the baby does not suck at its mother's breast or take the food ground up for it, it will die at once; and so also if a baptized person does not receive the nurturing of his most loving mother, the Church, or retain the words his faithful teachers proposed to him at baptism, he will not escape a cruel death for his soul, for he has refused his soul's salvation and the sweetness of eternal life.

In Capgrave's text St Katherine may be seen as representative of the Church in a number of ways. As has been noted, she is explicitly referred to as the bride of Christ, which is also the Church. Due to the fact that the Church is also frequently portrayed as the body

of Christ, St Katherine may also be associated with this image. The figure of the body is an important one which can be widely applied, whether to the Church as the body of Christ, to the structure of society in the body politic, or to rhetoric as a body of knowledge. As Mary Douglas (1978:115) has stated:

The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious. The body is a complex structure. The functions of its different parts and their relation afford a source of symbols for other complex structures.

As a virginal woman Katherine recalls the personification of Ecclesia and she is specifically portrayed as the bride of Christ, just as the Church (Ecclesia) and Mary are. Like many of the members of the medieval clergy she is well-educated. The Church had what Colette Murphy (1994:156) describes as a ‘monopoly on education’. As a result, Katherine’s exceptional education serves to associate her even more closely with the clergy, especially as she is a saint. In Books Four and Five of Capgrave’s text she also preaches, argues for the faith and creates converts to Christianity (including the fifty philosophers, Maxentius’s wife and Porphyry) just as the Church is required to do.

Even before her conversion she is portrayed as a saintly person and is likened to Cornelius (Acts 10), who had faith despite the fact that he was not baptised (1.778-1.847). Capgrave makes use of the imagery of the body of the Church when he states that after his conversion Cornelius ‘...was made to Cryst a ful ryght lyme’ (1.810). A few lines later he states that Katherine was a ‘noryschere of vertu’ (1.820). This recalls the depictions of Ecclesia as a mother nursing converts to the faith. The words that Capgrave

then puts in her mouth when she chastises those who misbehave again recall the idea of the Church as the body of Christ. Indeed, he makes her sound very much like a priest censuring errant members of the Church (or even a mother, like Mother Church, warning a child to behave):

‘What wene ye now whan ye trespace?

Thow I not aspye yow, I sey yow trulye.

There is oon above that loketh on oure face

And on all the membrys of oure bodye;

If he ony fowle dede may in us aspye,

He deynyth oure servyse.’

(1.827-1.832)

The fact that she then goes on to state that she believes that there is one God above all (even though she has not yet learnt of Christianity) adds to the impression of her as the Church. Furthermore, this ‘noble lady’ (which now seems to refer potentially to the Church as well as to Katherine herself) is generous, cares for the sick, and is godly in her speech (1.841-1.847). These are all duties of the Church.

In addition, there are a number of references to Katherine’s body and its importance during the scene of her mystical marriage to Christ in Book Three. Capgrave makes a point of stating that she must have been physically present in the heavenly realm. He believes this to be the case as she was baptised before the marriage and

No man may be baptyzed, if we treuly speke,

But thei have a body, be thei yong or olde...

(3.934-3.935)

When Katherine finally catches sight of the Lord she cannot look upon His face,

But evyr sche in poynt is to falle onto the grounde -

Hir body is cause. It must be claryfyed,

And all the carnalyté fully purifyed...

(3.992-3.994)

Once again her body is important. She must be baptised in order to cleanse her soul of sin before she may approach and look upon Christ and, eventually, ‘marry’ Him. Christ insists on her baptism, saying that those who wish to look on Him must be clean

‘...in body and in gooste,

Wasched fro all synnes that be fowle and derk;

Of swech hafe I here – ye see a grete hoste

Clensyd with My blode and merkyd with My merk.

All this was My laboure and My bysy werk

Whan I in erde was to bye mankynde...’

(3.1037-3.1042)¹⁶

The idea of the cleansing and purifying function of baptism for the Church as the bride of Christ can be seen in Ephesians 5:25-27:

Men, loue ye youre wyues, as Crist louyde the chirche, and yaf hym silf for it, to make it holi; and clenside it with the waisching of watir, in the word of lijf, to yyue the chirche gloriouse to hym silf, that it hadde no wem, ne ryueling, or ony siche thing, but that it be hooli and vndefoulid.

Christ further asserts that Katherine's baptism must be performed by a man who is a priest (3.1053-3.1057), thereby affirming the position of the clergy.

Katherine is (in medieval Christian theology) the woman, the bride or wife, and the body in her relationship with Christ. This has a number of implications for her behaviour or portrayal. She is presented as the loyal wife protecting and serving the interests of her absent husband when she decides to confront Maxentius (Winstead, 1991:69 and 73):

Thoo sche remembred what covenaut that she made

Rith in hir baptim, whan she waschid was,

Eke in hir weddyng with behestis ful sadde,

That she schulde nevyr for more ne las,

Thow sche were throwe in hote caudron of brasse,

Forsake hir love which she had only chose

...

If she holde silens than is she not trewe

Of hir behestis, rith so thoute she, loo;

The fayre ryng which was sumwhat blewe

Which was eke gove hir at hir weddyng newe

Sche thoo behelde, and seyde thus be hir one:

'Fy on the world, fy on crown and trone!

I shal kepe that trewth which that I made

Onto my husband, thow I shuld be dede.'

(4.484-4.489 and 4.499-4.506)

Consequently, Katherine also serves here as the body. She is the one who is physically present on earth and Christ, her husband, works through her. In the same way the Church (Christ's bride) is the body and physically present here on earth while Christ, the husband, works through 'her'. In Capgrave's version of the legend Katherine may thus be seen as a symbolic representative of the Church (the bride/body) working in perfect harmony with Christ (the groom/head). She and her legend may therefore serve as models or *exempla* both for the Church and of the Church (as an entity and for each individual Christian) in its relationship with Christ and its role (under His guidance and control) on earth, as well as being a model of the perfect medieval Christian wife. According to Katherine Lewis (1999a:38), St Katherine served as a role model not only for maidens but also for women as educators and household managers. As a result, her legend served as 'a useful socializing tool' for the training of young women. As the epitome of maidenhood she provides a suitable model for young ladies to follow in order to become sought-after as wives. Once married, her life continues to be of use to them as household managers (Lewis, 1999a:38). In *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* Christine de Pizan (1365-c.1430), advising virgin women, states that among other things, such as maintaining their virginity, dressing in a decorous manner and behaving with humility, 'a young girl should also especially venerate Our Lady, St Catherine, and all virgins, and if she can read, eagerly read their biographies' because 'girls taught and brought up in this way are much sought after by men looking for wives' (Lawson, 1985:160-162). It

appears that to behave towards Christ as an ideal wife was expected to act towards her husband would result in being a good Christian (not to mention a good wife).

As the Church may consequently be seen as both Christ's body and His bride, and the Church is made up of individual Christians, this means that all Christians, *both female and male* (and the Church as an entity) may be considered to be gendered female in their relationship with Christ. The association of the female with the body adds further to the notion of the gendering of the Church (which includes Christians of both genders), as female. The Church as the body and bride of Christ may thus be placed in the position of the feminine. This has implications not only for women, but also for the medieval Church, as far as the relationship with knowledge and Christ is concerned (as will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three).

The fact that the Church is cast in the feminine role and thus (in medieval Christian terms at least) in the subservient position in its relationship with God, the omniscient creator of all, is to be expected. In the case of female virgin saints such as St Katherine this description of the spiritual relationship with Christ appears to be especially suitable and useful, since the relationship between Christ and the Christian was portrayed in this way in the Bible (as has been discussed). In addition, it permits a concrete and, perhaps, more easily understandable description and explanation of the spiritual relationship between Christ and the Christian for a (frequently not very well-educated) lay audience/readership who would often have some experience of marriage (whether married themselves or from observation of parents, married siblings and/or friends). St Katherine's legend, therefore,

demonstrates the reflection in the earthly realm of spiritual truths or beliefs. As Warner (2000:156) notes, the ‘tendency to organize the realm of heaven according to the customs of earth...was highly developed in the fourteenth century’.

Marital symbolism is still maintained in Christianity today in the consecration ceremony of nuns. This ceremony is traditionally carried out by the bishop. The novices appear before him dressed in white carrying their rings, habits and oath of profession. They are questioned and profess their desire to enter the order. The habits are then blessed and sprinkled with holy water and the novices then withdraw to put them on. They then return with lighted candles and each reads the oath of profession while kneeling before the bishop, who is seated in front of the altar with the abbess to his left. The novices then retrieve their veils, which are blessed, and then go up individually to be invested with the veil. The rings, each of which is sprinkled with holy water, are then received. This spiritual marriage concludes with each novice being crowned with a garland. A banquet is often held after the profession, where the recently admitted nuns are treated like brides (James, 1933:95-98). The ring indicates the nun’s position as Christ’s bride, while the white dress, the veil and even the garland recall the marriage ceremony. James (1933:98) notes that the ceremony also resembles the coronation rite. In addition, in Catholic countries such as Spain, France and Belgium, young girls are decked out (and pose) as brides in their white communion dresses for their first holy communion (Warner, 2000:128).

The portrayal of the individual Christian or the Church as a whole as the spouse of Christ is and was, therefore, a commonly understood method used to express the intimacy of the relationship striven for with God. This Biblically derived nuptial imagery explaining the relationship between the divine and the human is both powerful and comprehensible for humanity as it attempts to explain the divine in terms of familiar temporal concepts. The portrayal of St Katherine's mystical marriage to Christ as a literal marriage ceremony and her subsequent behaviour as a good wife therefore increases her accessibility as a role model and makes the special nature of her relationship with Christ clear.

Chapter Three

Saint Katherine and the Body of Rhetoric



For the more he discerns the poverty of his own speech, the more he ought to draw on the riches of Scripture, so that what he says in his own words he may prove by the words of Scripture; and he himself, though small and weak in his own words, may gain strength and power from the confirming testimony of great men.

*-Saint Augustine (354-430)
'De Doctrina Christiana' (c.397-426)
Book IV, Chapter 5*

In chapter one some of the numerous and complex interrelations between the Virgin Mary and Eve, St Katherine and the Virgin Mary and St Katherine and Eve were explored. In chapter two it was noted how women, perceived as potentially 'transgressive' beings, were believed to be contained and controlled within the marriage relationship. In this chapter various ways in which St Katherine may be seen as 'transgressive', as well as some of the ways in which Capgrave demonstrates attempts to control this transgressiveness, will be investigated.

'Space forms the arena in which social relationships are negotiated, expressed through the construction of landscapes, architecture and boundaries. The resulting spatial maps represent discourses of power based in the body' (Gilchrist, 1994:43). Human beings

often attempt to organise spaces by means of boundaries and once such boundaries become established within a space the scene is set for the potential transgression of those boundaries. Such spaces and boundaries may be ideological and/or physical, and physical boundaries often become representative of ideological boundaries.

The use of architecture for the purposes of segregation was integral to the process of classifying the female body in both secular and monastic situations. Women's chastity was safeguarded by means of enclosure, but an idea of femininity which had fidelity to either earthly or heavenly bridegrooms as its principal concern, was simultaneously reaffirmed (Gilchrist, 1994:57). Indeed, both before and after her conversion, Katherine spends most of her time studying in her private palace and its enclosed garden, which her father had built for her for this purpose:

The kyng dyd make there for hir alone
 A paleyse wallyd ryght on the sowth syde,
 Open to the sune there was hir trone –
 There is no swych now in this worde wyde.
 It was made for Kateryne there to abyde
 Whan sche wold stody be hirselve sole.
 In the grete garden was most hir scole.

(1.337-1.343)

Adrian (an outsider) enters only by divine assistance when he comes to convert her (3.301-3.322). After her conversion, shortly before she discovers that Maxentius has entered Alexandria without her knowledge, we find her still studying in this private area:

Oure noble mayde, oure holy devoute qwene
 To whom this story longyth as now only,
 This holy virgine Kateryne, hir I mene,
 Was thoo in silens sitting in hir stody,
 All contemplaytyff, sperde fro hir meny;
 The wordly welthis are nowe fro hir shake,
 Aftir that tyme that Cryst hath hir thus take...

(4.428-4.434)

The depiction of Katherine in her enclosed garden and private palace not only represents but also helps assure her chastity. After her mystical marriage it appears that she only leaves the garden to defend the interests of her mystical spouse, Christ (4.505-4.535). Barbara Hanawalt (1995:1-17, esp. 17) proposes that a laywoman's space in medieval culture was chiefly in the domestic arena and as such formed the site in which she would carry out the traditionally female social tasks of bearing and rearing children. To move independently beyond this sphere of activity (especially without an escort, not wearing the correct dress or without displaying the 'proper' demeanour) would frequently be considered suspect and open to allegations of transgressive conduct. Maxentius appears to view St Katherine's confrontation of him in similar terms (4.603-4.608).

According to Liz Herbert McAvoy (2004:3-4), while Hanawalt's analysis was generally true in the Middle Ages, a number of women

...fell into the grey area which lay between the domestic and the religious locations and, although never fully integrated into the male sphere of activity, the

marginal status this occupancy could afford them could allow for a level of participation and acceptance in both spheres, tenuous though it might be. The consideration of those women who inhabited the grey areas and margins is complicated by the fact that to some degree ‘*all* women were subject to social marginalisation because of their ideological exclusion from the public sphere of influence within a patriarchal society’ (Herbert McAvoy, 2004:7). The reasoning behind such treatment of women can frequently be traced back to Eve.

The writings of the early Church Fathers, which filtered down through the centuries and greatly influenced opinions about and behaviour towards women, associated ‘Eve’s transgression’ with ‘uncontainable monstrous appetite – primarily for food, for knowledge and for sex’ (Herbert McAvoy, 2004:1-2). The remythologising of the Fall narrative and its appearance in a number of renditions during the late Middle Ages caused it to become, as Gillian Overing (1991:40) puts it, a ‘master narrative’ which supplied a ‘context, pretext, and metatext for patriarchal ideology’.

Patriarchal ideology found a convenient symbol in its depiction of Eve as a violator of her appointed space beside Adam as his helpmate, and as a transgressor of the ontological female role. These morally and socially transgressive desires in Eve were often portrayed in the drama of medieval England (Herbert McAvoy, 2004:1-2). In the Chester *Adam and Eve* (the Drapers), for example, the Serpent is described as having ‘a maydens face’ (Lumiansky & Mills, 1974:21; line 195), i.e. a basilisk, thereby suggesting the idea of

women as evil incarnate and even more closely assigning the blame for the Fall to women. In addition, the Demon decides to tempt Eve as:

That woman is forbydden to doe
 For anythinge the will therto
 ...
 for wemen they be full licourouse,
 that will shee not forsake.

(Lumiansky & Mills, 1974:20-21; lines 185-186 and 199-200)

Thus the transgressiveness of Eve is extended to all women and represented as typical of the female nature. Maxentius's comment that the only way to deal with Katherine is with

'...fayre wordes, which draw womanhoode
 And makith hem often othir thingis to tast
 Than thei shulde do if thei wold be chast'

(5.332-5.334)

also alludes to this belief. Similarly, in the York *Fall of Man* (the Coopers), Satan chooses to tempt Eve, 'That redy way' (Beadle, 1982:65; line 16).

Like Eve, Katherine attempts to transgress what in medieval society was perceived as her 'natural' ideological space beside her husband by refusing to marry. In addition, she takes this 'transgressiveness' even further by arguing in favour of gynaecocracy (female rule) in the marriage parliament. St Katherine further resembles Eve in what may have been considered her 'uncontainable monstrous appetite' – not for food or sex, in which areas

(being a saint) she may be considered a model of restraint (1.799-1.803), but for knowledge (1.781-1.786).

St Katherine is a noteworthy female character in medieval literature as she is presented as being highly intelligent and extremely learned. Her vast education far exceeds what any medieval woman could have hoped to have the opportunity to attain as well as what the majority of medieval men could have aspired to. Indeed, Capgrave states:

For of all the scoleris that are now or were
Sche is hem above...

(1.249-1.250).

In Book One (1.246-1.434) we are told about her impressive childhood education, which includes the study of Latin and Greek (1.274) and the Seven Liberal Arts (1.365-1.399) of grammar, rhetoric, dialectic or logic (the *trivium*), arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy (the *quadrivium*). As for her teachers,

Sche had maystyres fro ferre that were full wyse
...

Among all othir, a wyse man there was
And ful sad therto; he was hir chauncelere.
Men called him be name Mayster Athanas.

He was survyoure to all that there were, [supervisor]

And, as I seyde ere, he payed her hyere.

He was an hye clerk and a sovereyne.

All the seven artes coude he ful pleyne...

(1.253, 1.260-1.266)

Due to their exclusion from institutions of higher education such as universities, the rigorous liberal arts education described by Capgrave would not have been available to women despite the fact that women's education was receiving increased attention in England at the time (Winstead, 1999:291).

Some girls did attend schools in the late Middle Ages, particularly petty and dame schools for those from the lower classes. Girls from the elite classes might attend a convent school. However, for the majority of upper-class children the household served as the school. Despite the fact that, even for aristocratic women, higher education was not available, their household education was similar to that received by men. The skills taught to a woman would have allowed her, when she married, to manage her household (Michalove, 1999:68-70). St Katherine did receive her education at home but it clearly far exceeded the knowledge required to run a household. Often, however, the education of a woman did not exceed signing her name and reading the Psalter. During the Middle Ages almost all of the great intellectual women were produced by religious schools despite the tradition of discouraging education for women which was started by St Paul: 'Y suffre not a womman to teche, nether to haue lordschip on the hosebonde, but to be in silence' (1 Timothy 2:12). As a result there was little reason for a woman to advance beyond the study of letters to rhetoric or philosophy as she was not permitted to teach publicly. In the thirteenth century the dominance of the universities led to the decline of women's education. Even though a few monasteries continued running scriptoria and

teaching Latin, men's education was taking a new direction. No longer was it merely the study of the *trivium* from which one might progress to the study of theology and philosophy, or, if one had good teachers, the *quadrivium*, but a far more formal education in specialised fields such as theology, medicine and law, intended to prepare men for careers in the Church, the professions, university teaching or the government (Ferrante, 1980:10, 12 and 17).

The rise of the universities produced a greater disparity between the levels of education available to women and men than had previously been the case as, by being excluded from these institutions, women were also excluded from the fields taught at them (Ferrante, 1980:18). St Katherine's education resembles a university education in its scope. It is the kind of education that was generally reserved for men. She even passes an examination (very much like the doctoral *viva* which is still held as a public examination at Oxford University) by some of the greatest clerks in the land:

Thus for hir lernyng had sche swech fame
 That hir fader dede gader thorowoute the land
 All the grete clerkys that were of any name
 Ryth to this entent, as I undirstande:
 To wete yf his doutir dare take it unhand
 To be apposyd of so many wyse men.
 Thei were gadred in that place thre hundred and ten:

Eche of hem schall now do all his myght

To schew his cunnyng; if any straunge thyng
 Hath he lernyd his lyve, he wyll now ful ryght
 Uttyr hit, for his name therby schall spryng.
 But there was ryght nowt but Kateryn the yyng
 Understod all thyng and answerd ther-too;
 Her problemes all sche hath sone ondoo.

‘O good Godd,’ seyde these clerkes thane,
 ‘This mayd hath lerned more thyng in hir lyve
 Than we supposyd, for more than we sche can.
 We wondyr how sche may oure argumentis dryve
 For hir conclusyoun now; in yerys fyve
 Cune we not lerne that sche doth in one.’
 Thus seyde these wysmen be row everychon.

(1.400-1.420)

This event not only serves to demonstrate Katherine’s superior learning and intelligence but, as Winstead (1999:291) notes, anticipates her debate on Christianity with the fifty best philosophers in Maxentius’s kingdom in Book Four. After her conversion Katherine adds theology to her list of accomplishments (4.43-4.70), thereby ensuring that her education is comprehensive by medieval standards.

As Margaret King (1980:75) has noted, women who in their academic attainments equalled or exceeded learned men were not as a result welcomed into the company of

men but were ostracised from the company of women. ‘Like divine miracles, they were both wondrous and terrible; as prodigies, they had exceeded – and *violated* – nature. Male by intellect, female in body and in soul, their sexual identity was rendered ambiguous...’ (King, 1980:75; italics mine). As a result of her keen intellect and exceptional education (1.247-1.434) Katherine may be seen to be ‘violating’ nature. The fact that her intellect would consequently be viewed as ‘male’ only serves to increase her transgressiveness by the ambiguity which this adds to her gender identity.¹⁷

Another way in which Katherine may be seen to be transgressing gender boundaries is by means of her holiness and virginity. According to patristic writers female virgins had, by means of their virginity, overcome their sexuality and repudiated ‘their unfortunate female nature’ thereby rising above the limitations and weaknesses of their gender. These virgins were seen as genderless beings and thus ‘nearly as spiritual equals’ to men. For embracing virginity they frequently attained the highest patristic praise of becoming ‘virile’ or ‘male’ (Tibbetts Schulenburg, 1986:32). In addition, the female saint (usually a virgin), in general, was often presented as an aberration due to the fact that she had adopted a ‘virile virtue’, one normally associated with men (Semple, 1994:168). Therefore, for women the desire for a closer relationship with Christ by means of the ascetic life or martyrdom were described as endeavours to ‘become male’ and the ‘courage, conscious choice, and self-possession’ required for this ‘constituted gender transgression’ (Miles, 1989:55).

Katherine is able to put all her learning to use by being a powerful and convincing public speaker (with superb rhetorical skills) as we see in Books Two and Four. This sets her apart from the traditional medieval image of women as being ruled by their emotions rather than having great powers of speech and reason, which were considered to be male (Withycombe, 1991:103). St Katherine may therefore be seen as being transgressive in a number of ways: by being a woman and yet ‘male’ in the type and level of her learning, her powers of speech and reason, her virginity and her holiness or saintliness.

‘Transgression’ was thus not *all* unacceptable to medieval society. It is used here more as a catch-all term than by definition one of opprobrium. However, virgin martyrs were frequently treated with caution by the patriarchal Church hierarchy. The *exempla* ‘of the saints – their holy lives and miracles – were immediately accessible and powerful, precedents difficult to control because they continued in the present’ and were thus ‘potentially disruptive’ (Brasington, 1992:142-143). It was consequently often argued that such examples should be revered but not imitated, hence the maxim: ‘*non imitanda set veneranda*’ (Blamires, 1995:145).

Another transgressive body with which Katherine may be associated is the body of rhetoric. Rita Copeland (1994:141) argues that, by its very nature, rhetoric resists and challenges the principles that attach ‘to ideas of the integrated body and, by extension, to ideas of a disciplinary body of knowledge’. As a result, rhetoric had to come under regulation of a discursive and institutional nature. In order to allow rhetoric to be ‘disciplined’ a ‘body’ had to be invented for it. This ‘body’ was an unlicensed and transgressive one so as to ‘justify the severest regulation or discipline’ (Copeland,

1994:141). From a study of the history of the Latin word *disciplina* it becomes clear that the word developed over time from meaning ‘a metaphorical body of knowledge’ to include ‘physical regulation and correction of the body’. The human body is frequently subjected to disciplinary action in order to prevent physical and moral transgression. In the same way, disciplinary structures serve to control bodies of knowledge. The immediately apparent connection between *disciplina* as punishment and *disciplina* as a science is correction. Metaphorically, however, the connection is the body. Rhetoric is a body which needs to be effectively managed in order to produce knowledge which is valid and it is most important to control its ‘artificial excesses’ such as artifice and ornamentation. ‘Significantly rhetoric here registers its own unrestrained artifice and permeability in terms of the disfigured body and the sexually ambiguous body’ (Copeland, 1994:141-145). One of the most well-known images of rhetoric is female excess, while another familiar trope associates a rhetoric which is undisciplined with the transgressive sexuality of the male body (Copeland, 1994:147). According to Copeland (1994:148-149),

...rhetoric is invented through constructions of sexual transgression. As a sexual body, rhetoric can be disciplined from within its own system through a kind of enforced purity, in which it is compelled to expose, and therefore be purged of, its excesses... Giving rhetoric a sexual body establishes a discursive construct through which institutional power can work. Rather than simply eliding the sexual body, the institutional powers of pedagogy, literature, and intellectual tradition continually stage their repression of the body, and it is in this drama of its own correction that rhetoric willingly participates.

The description of Chaucer's Pardoner in the 'General Prologue' to the *The Canterbury Tales* as 'a gelding or a mare' (Benson, 1987:34; line 691) points, as Copeland (1994:149) notes, to either 'a disfiguring absence or a transgression of gender boundaries' and this may be viewed as an embodiment of the figure of rhetoric as a male body which is effeminate or emasculated. The performance of the Pardoner (in his discussion of rhetoric in his Prologue) is realised by means of the images of the fragmented, disabled body and the 'unruly appetite' (Copeland, 1994:149). In his Prologue the Pardoner theorises and performs a formidable rhetoric which threatens to transgress its proper boundaries. Significantly, the need to discipline this rhetoric is articulated by the Host in a threat of aggression against the body of the Pardoner. The Host carries out the disciplining of rhetoric by naming the bodily deficiency of the Pardoner when he threatens to castrate him (Copeland, 1994:154):

'I wolde I hadde thy coillons in myn hond
 In stide of relikes or of seintuarie.
 Lat kutte hem of, I wol thee helpe hem carie;
 They shul be shryned in an hogges toord!'

(Benson, 1987:202; lines 952-955)

The censure and threatened attack is a public disgrace for the Pardoner equivalent to public punishment. The punishment is aimed at the Pardoner's rhetoric by means of his possibly already emasculated, transgressive and ambiguous body which 'reproduces the nature of his crime, rhetoric' (Copeland, 1994:154).

As has been noted, Katherine may be viewed as a sexually transgressive body in a number of ways. Like the ‘unruly’ and ‘transgressive’ body of rhetoric, Katherine has also become an ‘unruly’ or ‘transgressive’ body. Attention is drawn to the fact that she is physically a woman by references to her great beauty (see 2.1283-2.1285, 2.1310-2.1329, 3.389-3.392, 4.611, 4.748, 4.761-4.763, and 5.1146-5.1154). However, as has been noted above, she may also be viewed as ‘male’ in her powers of reason and speech or rhetoric, her education, her virginity and saintliness. Due to her transgression of these gender boundaries her gender may, in a similar manner to that of Chaucer’s Pardoner, be perceived as ambiguous. As in the ‘Pardoner’s Prologue’, St Katherine’s legend also contains images of ‘unruly appetite’. Her ‘unruly appetite’ is, unlike the Pardoner’s, for knowledge (an appetite, as indicated earlier, also believed to be present in Eve). Images of the fragmented, disabled body appear mainly in Book Five as the fifty philosophers, Maxentius’s wife, Porphyry, and finally Katherine herself, are martyred. By defending her desire to remain a virgin through the use of the ‘unruly body of rhetoric’ she – being female and practising the ‘male’ art of rhetoric – is further identifying herself as, and associating herself with, an ‘unruly’ (or ‘transgressive’) body. In addition, as Boose (1991:204) notes, the tongue was often seen as the body’s ‘unruly member’, especially in women and such a view

...situates female speech as a symbolic relocation of the male organ, an unlawful appropriation of phallic authority in which the symbolics of male castration are ominously co[-]implicit... The tongue (at least in the governing assumptions about order) should always already have been possessed only by the male. Needless to say, theologians found ways of tracing these crimes of usurpation by the woman’s

unruly member back to the Garden, to speech, to Eve's seduction by the serpent, and thence to her seductive appropriation of Adam's rightful authority.

Due to her supposed usurpation of male authority and the consequent threat to social order which this may be seen to pose, Katherine's transgressive body is disciplined and controlled in this text. As Eskin (1999:109) states: 'The anxiety that the feminine inspires in male rhetoricians is a motivating factor for the regulation of the discipline of eloquence'.

As one of the two major debate scenes (the other being St Katherine's debate with the fifty philosophers in Book Four), the marriage parliament serves as a platform for the exhibition of Katherine's exceptional education and rhetorical ability. Her desire to remain a virgin and her lords' desire for her to marry soon so that they may have a king to rule the land and for her to bear heirs are in direct opposition (see for example, 2.22-2.28, 2.124-2.140, 2.346-2.350 and 2.259-2.280). Although she presents a number of cogent arguments against marriage (and, consequently, in favour of gynaecocracy) this scene helps to prepare the reader for Katherine's eventual mystical marriage to Christ.

Karen Winstead (1994:362 and 376) has suggested that this debate may be the first in-depth consideration of the gynaecocracy question in English literature and that Capgrave allows Katherine a tremendous amount of eloquence in the expression of her desires and opinions here. Such openness on this issue is not generally found in the works of his contemporaries. For example, Sir John Fortescue's (c.1394-c.1476) *Opusculum de Natura Legis Naturae et Eius Censura in Successione Regnorum Suprema* (*Concerning*

the Right of Succession in Supreme Kingdoms) presents a debate concerning who is the rightful new monarch: the deceased king's daughter, her son or her uncle. The king's daughter has both her son *and* her uncle opposing her and she has comparatively little to say. It is argued against her (in chapter LXIII) that man has pre-eminence over woman in the same way that the soul is superior to the body and the superior part of reason to the inferior part (Fortescue & Fortescue, 1869:326-327). Interestingly, it is also claimed (in chapter LXVI) that the subjection of woman to man is substantiated by the prefiguration of the Church as a woman (Fortescue & Fortescue, 1869:329-330). It is finally judged (in chapter XIX) that a woman cannot rule the kingdom and as a result, her son has no claim to the throne through her either (Fortescue & Fortescue, 1869:331).

Unlike other medieval authors Capgrave does not try to explain Katherine's unconventional behaviour 'as performed through a special grace that, under extraordinary circumstances, God sometimes grants to women' (Winstead, 1994:365). As this was a common explanation for such behaviour by female saints, and as St Katherine's legend was well-known, it may not have been necessary for Capgrave to mention this argument for his readers to apply it to Katherine here. However, the fact that he specifically omits it and has Katherine make such detailed arguments in favour of gynaecocracy may have allowed readers to be more open to the consideration of her arguments and possibly to have pondered their application to ordinary women. As the marriage parliament, or gynaecocracy debate, anticipates and prepares for her mystical marriage (as has been discussed in chapter two and noted above), Katherine's transgressive rhetoric is significantly undercut and controlled by it. The medieval reader's familiarity with her

legend would have provided her/him with ‘inside knowledge’ not available to the characters in the text. As a result, even if a reader gave due consideration to her arguments against marriage and in favour of gynaecocracy, s/he could see Katherine’s behaviour as part of her spiritual development towards Christianity while resting assured of her future status as a virgin saint and martyr under the dominion of her mystical spouse, Christ.

As was stated in chapter two, the ‘body is a model which can stand for any bounded system’ (Douglas, M, 1978:115), such as the Church. Another system for which the body can stand is the system of government, commonly referred to as the body politic. Medieval society was often called a body or *corpus*. Politically, this analogy was most frequently used to emphasise that different parts had different functions, the king being the head, and therefore in control, and the subjects of the realm being the body, and consequently subject to his control (Black, 1992:15). The marriage parliament or gynaecocracy debate in Capgrave’s text is essentially a debate over whether a woman can take the position of the ‘head’ and rule over both women and men, when women (in general) were traditionally associated with the body and subordination. Essentially, the lords in Katherine’s parliament (perhaps like the majority of people in the Middle Ages) cannot accept a female monarch as they cannot accept that a woman can take the position of the ‘head’. As Capgrave states when Katherine’s father dies:

What is a lond whan it hath non hed?

The lawes are not kept, the lond desolate,

The hertes hangyng and hevy as lede,

The comonys grucchyng and evyr at the bate.

There is kept non rewle, kept non astate.

Thus seyde the puple of Surry all aboute:

‘Oure kyng is now ded; oure lyth is nye owte.’

(1.848-1.854)

Later in the marriage parliament Katherine observes that once people have chosen a ruler then ‘to her heed hemsself yet must thei lowte’ (2.994). Katherine’s apparent attempt to usurp the ‘male’ position of ‘head’ in order to rule a country may be seen, in medieval terms, as a transgression of both social and gender boundaries and a threat to order. These aspects of the body politic as well as the perceived importance of the body and beauty to women can be seen in the plea made by the people of Alexandria to St Katherine during the events leading to her martyrdom:

‘What woman are ye that so despyse your age,

Youre body, your beuté, that ye set at nought?

Ye may have worchepe, ye may be set in stage

Ryght as a goddesse – where on is youre thowte?

And all the world for beuté schulde be bowte:

Here myght thei fynde it; thei need no ferther seke.

Syth ye be wyse, syth ye be holde so meke,

Why wyll ye not obey onto the kyng?

[Maxentius]

Bettyr it is to bowe than vylensly to be dede.

[cruelly]

In youre bokes I trow ye lerned this thinge:

The grete dygnyté may ye not down trede;
 It longyth to yow to obey onto your heede. [head i.e. Maxentius]
 Syth it is ryght, why will ye not it doo?
 We wolde do thus if ye councelled us soo.'

(5.1149-5.1162)

Katherine's arguments for female rule do, however, seem to stem more from her desire to remain a virgin than from any apparent conviction in her arguments in favour of female rule. Indeed, in the marriage parliament Katherine is, initially, somewhat amazed at her deep desire to remain a virgin:

'Yet wondyr I sore that my hert is sett
 On swech a poynte that I cannot lett...'

(2.174-2.175)

This is especially so as her desire for herself is not in the best interests of her country's law which it is her duty to defend (2.176-2.177). Her argument in favour of gynaecocracy is, consequently, further undercut as she does not seem to be convinced of her own arguments. Thus although her argument in favour of gynaecocracy may have been perceived as transgressive or unruly, as a saint her desire to remain a virgin would have been seen as divinely ordained and inspired and would have been viewed positively as a result, especially as she herself is amazed at her desire.

As has been previously noted, in the Middle Ages women were under the control of their fathers or husbands. In St Katherine's legend this source of control is removed with the

death of her father, and her mother and the lords are anxious to replace this lost source of control in Katherine's life with a new one – a husband (1.854-1.867 and 2.125-2.140). As Boose (1991:194) notes of Shakespeare's Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew*, she must learn 'to come with gratitude and loving obedience into the social containment called wifhood'. Katherine's refusal to marry would be striking but hardly alarming to the medieval reader as this is the legend of a saint and her dissent would be seen as part of her spiritual movement towards Christ. This source of control is, nevertheless, restored in Katherine's life (at her conversion or mystical marriage to Christ) in the form of Christ, her new 'mystical husband':

Oure Lord tok that ryng in His honde;
 He put it on the fyngere of this clene virgyne.
 'This is a tokne,' He seyde, 'of that bonde
 Whech ye youreselfe, as on of Myne,
 Lyst nowe youre wyll to My wyl enclyne.
 This tokne eke beryth wytnesse full ryffe
 That here I tak yow for My weddyd wyffe.'

(3.1275-3.1281)

As a result she becomes part of a new spiritual family and patriarchal control may be seen to be restored at the highest level. This attempt at control or discipline is highlighted as the turning point in Capgrave's text as it takes place in the third of five books and thus allows, and even invites, a clear before-and-after comparison of her words (including her use of rhetoric and dialectic) and actions.

St Katharine threatens all that is expected of her as a woman, a queen, and a member of her pagan society by refusing to marry, questioning the need for a male ruler and becoming a Christian. Her 'unruliness' is, therefore, mainly directed against her pagan society but her actions (except for being Christian) would also be frowned upon in the medieval Christian society. Ironically, by violating many of medieval Christian society's perceptions of the suitable role and attributes of women (for example marriage, silence and submission), she is in fact promoting the Christian faith.

Her 'unruliness' or 'transgressiveness' is, however, also 'disciplined' by Christianity. Her mystical marriage to Christ allows her to conform to both the principal medieval views of a good woman: she is at once a holy Christian virgin and an obedient Christian wife. She even begs Christ to make her His servant rather than His bride (3.1224). Therefore, the arguments she presents in Book Two against marriage, such as that it will lead her out of 'joye and blis' (2.1188) and make her a 'thralle' (2.1189) are undermined when she in fact happily marries and desires to be subservient to her 'husband', Christ, in Book Three. Her mystical marriage and the use of marital imagery allows the often outspoken and apparently independent female virgin saint to be perceived to be under traditional patriarchal control in the guise of Christ (as the husband) who was, and often still is, generally viewed as a male entity.

Furthermore, as has been noted in chapter two, she is portrayed as a wife defending her husband's interests in His absence when she confronts Emperor Maxentius in order to defend the Christian faith against him and his pagan gods:

‘I shal kepe that trewth which that I made
 Onto my husband, thow I shuld be dede.’

(4.505-4.506)

Incursion into the public sphere would frequently be countenanced if the woman was perceived to be behaving herself in a manner befitting a wife and/or mother (Herbert McAvoy, 2004:7). Thus St Katherine’s status as the bride or spouse of Christ (as discussed in chapter two) is of importance here as it allows her a certain amount of freedom in her bold movement from private study in her enclosed garden into the public arena to argue for the Christian faith on behalf of her physically absent mystical spouse (4.440-4.602). She is indeed, as Winstead (1991:73) notes, ‘a loyal *wyf* representing her absent husband’s interests – a role which fifteenth-century laywomen could readily appreciate’. As a result Katherine’s ‘transgression’ into the public sphere is in many ways cancelled as it is now *required* of her as a good wife. In Petroff’s (1994:162, 164, 176) study of how rhetoric is used in legends written by men to transform the transgressive behaviour of historical women saints into non-transgressive behaviour, she argues that ‘there is only one real transgression for a woman: to go public, to be a visible, speaking, informed moral leader’. Public teaching and literacy are the two most hazardous activities for women in this context. However, due to the demands of sainthood (especially to change the world through great heroism), women saints had to have a public voice and be literate. As these traits were generally unacceptable in ‘good’ women, the biographers of female saints used ‘a rhetoric that denied transgression’ while simultaneously depicting female saints transgressing the limits of appropriate female behaviour (Petroff, 1994:176-177). St Katherine was definitely literate and had a public voice. However, before her

conversion she used her knowledge and voice to achieve her own private desires even if they were detrimental to her country. After her conversion or mystical marriage to Christ she is depicted as a wife acting on behalf of her husband in the interests of Christianity. Thus Capgrave may be seen to be exercising ‘a rhetoric that denied transgression’ or to be demonstrating the disciplining of this transgressive woman by having her act in the interests of an absent ‘husband’, which would have the positive effect of creating converts to Christianity (rather than the negative effect of invasion of the country due to ineffective rule).

Differences can be discerned in Katherine’s use of rhetoric in the marriage parliament, or gynaecocracy debate, in Book Two, which takes place before her mystical marriage to Christ, and in her debate with the fifty philosophers in Book Four which takes place after it. In Book Two, when she debates with the lords against marrying, she is able to counter all their arguments. They continually bemoan her great learning and the Earl of Lymasons says to her:

‘Alle these lordes that now here sitte
 Wondyr full sore of your grete resonnes.
 Thei wayle, eke, that ye have swech a wytte.
 Youre wordes are scharpe – thei can bynde and kytte - [cut]
 But had ye ben as other women are
 Than schuld ye a ferde as other women fare.’

(2.835-2.840)

Throughout Book Two we see that although her subjects are impressed by her great learning they are also very negative about it (perhaps because it gives her a power which prevents them from influencing her and making her do what *they* want her to do):

‘O mercy Godd,’ seyde the gret Baldake,
 He was thoo lord and prince of Palestyne,
 ‘There may no man my lady grype ne take;
 Hir craft is swech we may hir not enclyne.
 There is no philosophyre ne ek noo divine
 Whech sche dredyth – hir termys be so wyse.
 Whatevyr we say, sche gevyth of it no pryce.’

(2.1114-2.1120)

Finally, they ask God never to allow there to be a female ‘king’ or such a learned woman ever again for their sakes:

Thus wayled the lordes as thei sote bedeen,
 Cursyng hir maysterys, cursyng hir bokes alle.
 ‘Alas,’ thei seyde, ‘that evyr any qween
 Thus schuld be comered! Oure worshep is down falle.
 God send nevyr rem kyng that wereth a calle. [caul – woman’s cap]
 We pray Godd that he nevyr woman make
 So gret a mayster as sche is, for oure sake.’

(2.1478-2.1484)

Thus, despite the fact that Katherine manages to out-argue the lords in her parliament, she never convinces them that her refusal to marry will not negatively influence the country.

Nor are they convinced that, as a woman, she can rule the land effectively. In the marriage parliament Katherine's pagan lords are unable to control her 'transgressions' (refusing to marry, using rhetoric to argue in favour of gynaecocracy, being more educated than them), but after her conversion her social-gender transgressions are controlled in a variety of subtle ways while simultaneously being used to the advantage of Christianity (very much a patriarchal institution during the Middle Ages). As St Augustine states in his discussion of the use of rhetoric by the Christian teacher in Book IV, chapter two, of his *De Doctrina Christiana* (Shaw, 1886:575):

Now, the art of rhetoric being available for the enforcing either of truth or falsehood, who will dare to say that truth in the person of its defenders is to take its stand unarmed against falsehood?...Since, then, the faculty of eloquence is available for both sides, and is of very great service in the enforcing either of wrong or right, why do not good men study to engage it on the side of truth, when bad men use it to obtain the triumph of wicked and worthless causes, and to further injustice and error?

Before Katherine's debate with the fifty philosophers in Book Four she prays to Christ to be allowed to speak effectively and with eloquence for the Christian faith (which He promises to ensure). As she notes in 4.1163-4.1169, this allies her more closely with the apostles and Christ's Biblical promise (Matthew 10:18-20; Mark 13:10-11; Luke 12:11-12, 21:12-15) that they would be given the words they needed to argue for the faith as they needed them (Luke 21:12-15):

But bfore alle these thingis thei schulen sette her hoondis on you, and schulen pursue, bitakynge in to synagogis and kepyngis, drawynge to kyngis and to iusticis, for my name; but it schal falle to you in to witnessyng. Therfor putte ye in youre hertis, not to thenke bfore, hou ye schulen answere; for Y schal yyue to you mouth and wisdom, to whiche alle youre aduersaries schulen not mowe ayenstonde, and ayenseie.

This is, indeed, true for Katherine. Her prayer, however, also removes from her much of the credit for the clever arguments she makes to out-debate the fifty best philosophers in Maxentius's kingdom. The credit obviously goes to Christ, who was (and still is in most cases) viewed as a male entity. In this way Katherine's 'unruliness' is further 'disciplined' and order is restored as the power of rhetoric is symbolically returned to its 'natural' male domain. In addition, at the beginning of her debate with the philosophers Katherine announces that she has rejected all of her pagan learning, including Aristotle, Homer and Ovid, in favour of Christianity (4.1324-4.1400). She states:

'I fonde noo frute in hem but eloquens'

...

'And in these bokes no othyr thing fond I

But vanyté or thing that schall not lest.

And evyr me thowte that swech lernyng was best

That trettyth of thing which evyr schall endure.

Swech thing lerne I now, turned to Criste Jhesu...'

(4.1325, 4.1349-4.1353)

The belief that her pagan learning was nothing but ‘eloquens’ or ‘vanyté’ recalls the idea of a rhetoric which is full of artifice and ornament as being a transgressive rhetoric in need of discipline. She also sees her pagan learning as consisting mainly of outward appearance but having no substance whereas Christianity deals with things ‘whech evyr schall endure’. Finally, she asserts her full dependence upon Christ, her mystical spouse (and not on herself or her own learning), for her ability to argue against the fifty philosophers:

‘But in His name whom I now rehers,
 I schal be strong all materes to conclude.
 There schall no man have myght me to reverse,
 Thow ye bryng a grettere multitude.
 He can make wyttys that be ful dull and rude
 To schyne with sciens on the freschest wyse,
 My Lord Jhesu, and foles ofte He make wyse.’

(4.1394-4.1400)

Indeed, she seems to be apologetic for the fact that she, as a woman, must argue for the Christian faith – this despite her great knowledge, learning and rhetorical skill:

‘Thu art my conyng, Thu art my hardynesse,
 Thu art all in Whom oonly I trost.
 There comth no vertew but of Thi worthynesse.
 Let not Thi powere as this day be lost.
 Thu makyst all thing, bothe the hete and the frost,
 Wherefore, I pray, Lord, thow I a woman be,

Yet for Thi worchepe yette so enforce me...’

(4.1177-4.1183)

Her arguments now, however, have a greater effect on the beliefs and attitudes of her hearers. The fifty philosophers all convert to Christianity and are martyred (5.99-5.329). The spectators marvel at this woman who preaches and those Christians who had made offerings to Maxentius’s idols repent:

And wher that a woman prechith constantly,

There thei forsake Him. ‘This thing goth no ryth,

That the freler kind shall so stablyly [frailer – a woman]

Confesse oure feith, wher that myty [strong – men]

Held her pees and dare speke with nought...’ [their]

(4.1829-4.1833)

Emperor Maxentius finds it hateful that a maiden is wiser than the (male) philosophers and can convince them (4.2103-4.2106) and eventually rails against ‘this whych [witch]’ who stands so steadfastly for her Christian faith against pagan men:

Swech was his crye: ‘Fy on swech a rowte [crowd]

That schall thus suffyr a woman here defame

Oure hye goddys, her servyse, and her name!

How long schall we this whych thus susteyne?

How long schall we suffyr this cursidenes?

To all good leveres it schuld be very peyne

To here a woman with swech sturdynesse

Ageyn all men, the more and eke the lesse,
 Thus evermore crye – ley on hondys, for schame –
 Ye stand as men me thinkyth were lame!’

(5.1118-5.1127)

However, in her debate with the fifty philosophers St Katherine does *not* actually out-argue them on all matters. She states that they simply have to believe and they do (4.1784-4.1820 and 4.2329-4.2339) which may seem rather surprising to a modern reader. This could, though, be due to the fact that in aspects of religion, faith is an integral requirement. Scholarship can only take one so far.

For instance, despite all her education, Adrian warns Katherine:

‘Ye can nevyr grace of youre Lorde crave,
 Ne youre soule eke schul ye nevyr save,
 But if ye forsake forevyr your elde beleve,
 And trow swech thing as ye can not preve.’

(3.718-3.721)

She has to accept, as he stated earlier, that:

‘Nature fayleth whan we feyth lere...’

(3.710)

Katherine clearly takes his insistence on the need for faith to heart as later, when one of the philosophers questions the triune nature of God and the Incarnation (4.2201-4.2226), she replies:

...‘Sere, ye lacke nothing

That longith of vertu to youre soules rest
 But feyth alone.'

(4.2228-4.2230)

She then goes on to pray that God will make the philosopher accept the truth of Christianity because nature has taught him all that she can (4.2230-4.2237). After Katherine has converted the philosophers one of them thanks her for teaching them the science of theology (5.104-5.112) and goes on to state that:

'Naturall scyens hath in this matere no space.'

(5.126)

Similarly, after all his travels and scholarly enquiry, the priest whose story Capgrave tells in his prologue (47-117) has to have faith and, in his (the priest's) dream, eat the book as he is commanded to do before he can discover St Katherine's biography buried in Greece.

Capgrave's message for the scholarly reader seems to be that although there are many benefits to be gained by acquiring a higher education, the medieval scholar should always bear in mind that no matter how learned s/he might be, salvation may only be attained by means of faith and the grace of God. If this was true for St Katherine, of whom he says: '...of all the scoleris that are now or were / Sche is hem above...' (1.249-1.250), then it must be true for all.

For everyone then, no matter how well-educated they are, Christianity (or any religion) requires a leap of faith. The leap of faith made by the philosophers, for instance, would

demonstrate to a medieval audience that the Holy Spirit was at work in them. This idea of the involvement of the Holy Spirit in effective rhetoric is also expressed in the Dutch play, *Mariken van Nieumeghen*. After she has been educated by the devil, Mariken states that she is a poor scholar of rhetoric as it is an art which cannot be mastered simply by hard work and study due to the fact that it is a gift of the Holy Spirit (Coigneau, 1982:95; lines 504-516). Thus, the glory for the conversion of the fifty philosophers is directed to its proper object (or subject), God (and not St Katherine through whom He worked). St Katherine may be shown to have been further disciplined as it becomes clear that her rhetoric in the marriage parliament, although intellectually sound, was ineffective as it was ultimately unconvincing. With the assistance of Christ, however, her rhetoric in the second debate is convincing (as far as is possible in matters of faith). Furthermore, in the first debate she receives the glory for her clever arguments while in the second debate this transgression is chastised or disciplined as the glory goes to God (its proper subject).

Like Eve, by usurping male authority, Katherine may be seen as posing a threat to the social order of the pagan society of which she is a member. To them (as to Capgrave's contemporaries) she would indeed have seemed to be an unruly and dangerous woman. Her refusal to marry may be seen to weaken the country's military and political position as it is soon invaded by the cruel tyrant Maxentius (4.183-4.238), a reality of which Katherine appears to be the last to become aware (4.422-4.469). By accepting Christianity she rejects the religious values of her society and by leaving her enclosed domestic space and entering the public arena to argue for her new faith she seals her own fate as well as the fate of those she converts (death in the pagan view, but a re-birth into

eternal life in the Christian perspective). Her behaviour would have been perceived as equally unruly in a medieval Christian society. What perhaps makes her unruliness more acceptable, and even desirable, is the fact that she is the heroine of a saint's legend. She is undoing a pagan society and spreading Christianity. She is also brought under patriarchal Christian control in the text. It is as if Christianity is harnessing the fear of the unruly woman, the daughter of Eve, and using her as a secret weapon for good (i.e. Christianity) against the evils of a pagan society.

Overtly, it may seem that St Katherine's martyrdom is the form of aggression against her body which serves as her 'punishment' for her transgressive behaviour and rhetoric.

However, in Christian terms martyrdom is the ultimate victory. As a result, her martyrdom may only be seen as her punishment in terms of the pagan society of the text. In terms of the Christian readership and the society from which this text emanated, the disciplining (rather than punishment) of her unruly and transgressive behaviour may be perceived in her mystical marriage to Christ (or her conversion to Christianity) as this is the decisive event which brings her under patriarchal control. Before, she was acting on her own behalf but after her conversion, she was acting for Christ and the dissemination and preservation of Christianity in Alexandria (and potentially beyond). It therefore becomes clear that St Katherine may be considered to be transgressive in a number of ways especially in terms of transgressing the boundaries of gender, and that various attempts to control this transgressiveness may be seen in Capgrave's text.

Semple (1994:169) notes that while ‘the theme of female sanctity’ seems to ‘elevate women’ it ‘can actually reinforce Church teaching about women’. This observation seems to be true in the case of Capgrave’s text. Katherine was popular and admired as a great and learned saint and martyr, but in Capgrave’s version of the legend, at least, any threat she could be seen to pose to the status quo (for example, being a learned woman accomplished in the use of rhetoric and promulgating the idea that a country does not need a man to rule it) is neutralized in subtle ways.

Chapter Four

Body-bound: Power and the Word



*The desire of power in excess caused
the angels to fall; the desire of knowledge
in excess caused man to fall*

*-Francis Bacon (1561-1626)
'Of Goodness and Goodness
of Nature' (1625), p.34*

In chapters two and three it was noted that Mary Douglas's (1978:115) statement that the 'body is a model which can stand for any bounded system' can be applied to both the spiritual hierarchy of the Church and the secular hierarchy as expressed in the body politic. It was also noted that the marriage relationship was perceived in a similar way, with the husband associated with the head and the wife with the body. The concepts of the body of knowledge and the body of rhetoric were also discussed. In this chapter these organic analogies will be further explored in terms of Capgrave's portrayal of St Katherine. The ways in which St Katherine's passion may be seen to parallel Christ's Passion will be explored, as will the ways in which the discovery of the book containing St Katherine's legend by the English

priest (as narrated in Capgrave's prologue) may be associated with the eucharist, the Passion and Resurrection, and relics. The relation of these aspects to the concept of the body of Christ (the Word) and the implications for the portrayal of St Katherine will also be examined.

Although the physical was in many ways seen as being at odds with, and inferior to, the spiritual, the human body was (and still is) an important aspect in Christianity. Not only is the Incarnation central to Christian doctrine but the physical human body is an essential component in many facets of Christianity and Capgrave draws attention to some of these in his text, such as baptism (as discussed in chapter two), the Mass, martyrdom, relics and images. The body was not only important in the Church but in secular society as well as in the body politic. Consequently, both temporal and spiritual power as experienced on earth may be understood to be 'body-bound', requiring the use of physical bodies and/or to be explained in terms of body imagery. This chapter will focus on the spiritual relevance of the body, especially as it relates to St Katherine and her status as a martyr and part of the body of Christ.

In Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*, St Katherine tells Maxentius: 'the poet says, "If you are ruled by the mind you are king, if by the body you are slave"' (Granger Ryan, 1993:336). Maxentius is very much ruled by the body which is, in some ways, ironic as he is a relatively successful king ('head'). His focus is largely temporal and physical and he exercises temporal power even in Katherine's kingdom. He was crowned the 'kyng of pers' (4.190) and during her martyrdom Katherine's people ask: "'Why wyll ye not obey

onto the kynges?" (5.1156) referring to Maxentius, who has usurped her position in her kingdom. They therefore see Maxentius as the 'head' of the body politic and believe Katherine should, consequently, obey him. That they apparently so readily accept this intruder's rule over that of Katherine indicates the gender stereotyping of the society (both Katherine's society as represented in the text and Capgrave's society as the target audience) since a male intruder and tyrant is more readily accepted as a ruler than the legitimate and intelligent female heir. Even though he is seen as the 'heede' (5.1160) of the body politic (the temporal power structure) Maxentius himself seems, as has been noted, to be ruled more by the body than the head, while Katherine may be perceived to be ruled by her own head before her conversion and later by Christ as the head of the Church and her 'husband' (the 'head' in the 'marriage').

Maxentius is introduced as a lecherous man (4.148-4.154, 4.175). He worships idols (4.386-4.427), which Katherine refers to as being 'Agens all reson' (4.584) and therefore against the 'head'. As Lewis (2000:135) indicates, in the *South English Legendary* version of St Katherine's legend, 'Christianity and belief in God is established as entirely rational', while Mirk's *Festial* (Erbe, 1905:275) states that Katherine, when she confronted Maxentius, 'preuet hym by open reson þat Crist was God'. As Lewis (2000:135) further notes:

Katherine, the Christian is ruled by her mind, caring little for the potential damage that may be wreaked on her body, despite calls for her to have mercy on her tender flesh. Maxentius, on the other hand, after an initial show of intellect which cannot match Katherine's, calls in the Philosophers to deal with her, and becomes

much more akin to the archetypal vengeful and lustful virgin martyr villain. He is entirely governed by his bodily desires and is demonised by his craving to break and possess Katherine.

Maxentius, therefore, sees only Katherine's physical beauty and does not learn from her as the philosophers do (Lewis, 2000:217-220); indeed, when he first sees her he is 'Astoynd with her beuté' (4.611). Similarly, in *De Santa Catalina*, a Castilian version of her legend which appears in MS Escorial h-I-13 from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, Maxentius is again blind to the import of Katherine's words. As he perceives only her external beauty, 'he finds her speech sexually seductive, as so much female speech has been categorized by medieval moralists' (Francomano, 2003:132, 139-140). Maxentius is, therefore, focused on the external and temporal and serves as an inferior and negative reflection of heavenly concerns.

For instance, inspired by her physical beauty, Maxentius suggests that Katherine occupy a position in his court just below his queen. This is a demotion for the fair and wise queen, Katherine, even in temporal terms. It also reminds the reader of the high heavenly status attributed to her by Capgrave early in his prologue:

Ryth thus be ordyr we wene Thou ledyst the daunce;
 Thi modir folowyth Thee next, as reson is,
 And aftir othir, thei goo rith as her chaunce
 Is schap to hem of joye that may not mys.
 But next that Lady above alle othir in blys

Folowyth this mayde weche we clepe Kateryne.

(prologue, 8-13)

Being the spouse of Christ, and second only to the Virgin Mary is a position of honour, power and respect in the heavenly realm – which is, of course, superior to the temporal realm.

Maxentius also proposes to have an image of Katherine created. Any who passed it would have to do reverence to it and any wrongdoers who honoured her image would have their offence forgiven. He also proposes to have a temple of marble built in her honour (5.400-5.420). Katherine scorns his proposition, arguing that the statue would be an inanimate object (unable to walk, touch, see or speak) thus without the powers of even an ordinary human body (let alone the powers of a god). She points out that it would be of no profit to her soul and that while adults might honour it, small children would not and birds and dogs would defile it (5.421-5.525), thereby illustrating its powerlessness. Once again Maxentius is concerned with the external and the temporal. The image ‘will counterfete youre [Katherine’s] face’ (5.402) which he refers to as a ‘fayre visage of bewté’ (5.353). Katherine’s vehement opposition may seem ironic considering the large number of images of this popular saint which were created by, and available to, medieval Christians, but Maxentius’s proposed image serves as an example of the incorrect use of, and attitude towards, images. He is focused on what the image will look like and that it should be made of precious metal (whereas God can make living human beings from the dirt):

‘This ymage shall not only be made of stone,

But of clene metall, gylt full bryght and shene.
 Whoso comyth forby with sufficient evidens
 Shall be knowen full wele that sche was a qwene
 Whos ymage stant there...'

(5.406-5.410)

It also appears that it is only Maxentius (a mere mortal) who will pardon or punish those who do or do not pay homage to Katherine's image. Furthermore, Capgrave indicates that he speaks with 'feynyd plesauns' (5.419). He is consequently a weak and corrupt temporal echo of the all-powerful and good God who was believed to be behind the images in the medieval Church, images that were not to be 'deyfyed' (5.415) as Maxentius proposed Katherine should be in her image. As Reginald Pecock (c.1395-c.1460) points out in his *Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy* (Babington, 1860:153-154):

Thou maist not seie that hauers and vsers of ymagis ben ydolatrers; and that for thei trowen sum godli vertu to be in thilk ymage...Forwhi no man is bi eny thing an ydolatrer, saue by which he takith and makith a creature to be his God, and worschipith him as his God...

In addition, he indicates a positive and popular use for religious images in the Middle Ages, arguing that images are more beneficial to the memory than books, and uses St Katherine to illustrate his point (Babington, 1860:215):

Confirmacioun into this purpose mai be this: Whanne the dai of Seint Kateryn schal be come, marke who so wole in his mynde alle the bokis whiche ben in

Londoun writun upon Seint Kateryn's lijf and passiouns, and y dare weel seie that thou₃ ther were x. thousind mo bokis writun in Londoun in thilk day of the same Seintis lijf and passioun, thei schulden not so moche turne the cite into mynde of the holi famose lijf of Seint Kateryn and of her dignitee in which sche now is, as dooth in eche ₃eer the going of peple in pilgrimage to the College of Seint Kateryn bisidis London... Wherfore ri₃t greet special commoditees and profitis into remembraunce making ymagis and pilgrimagis han and doon, whiche writingis not so han and doon.

It could, therefore, be argued that it is the value and association attached to the image which may be problematic in terms of idolatry and not the use of images *per se*.¹⁸

Maxentius thus represents the temporal, and in the confrontation between him and Katherine, he apparently 'wins' in temporal terms. He takes over control of Alexandria from Katherine and when he cannot subdue or control her, he has her beheaded.

Katherine, however, through the power of Christ, sows the seeds of the destruction of his (and her) pagan society by converting many of them to Christianity, including his own wife and the commander of his army, Porphiry. By persecuting and killing her he makes her a martyr (5.1064-5.1068) and increases her spiritual status. Thus although he takes over her earthly kingdom, he speeds her entry to the heavenly kingdom. Katherine also prophesies Maxentius's death and damnation, which Capgrave asserts happened as she said (5.1071-5.1113). Consequently, Katherine 'wins' in spiritual terms (the ultimate victory as the state of the soul for eternity may be perceived as more important than what one has or endures temporarily on earth), thus affirming that the spiritual is more

important than the physical but that the latter can nevertheless have significant implications for the spiritual. It is interesting to note that, much like the Christian Church as perceived in Capgrave's text, Maxentius attempts to subdue and control Katherine by conversion (to paganism) and some form of marriage (being his concubine?) but is unsuccessful. As a result, he has her put to death by removing what seems to him to be the cause of her unruliness, her head.

Consequently, when Maxentius threatens Katherine with torture and death if she does not worship Apollo (5.526-5.554), she indicates her willingness to suffer and die for Christ's sake:

'Peyne is welcome to me,' seyde she than,
 'And deth, eke, I wil it noth forsake,
 For thou ye smyth, fle, sle, or banne,
 It skyllyth me rith noth for my Lordis sake
 Swech myschevys for His love to take.
 He toke for me mych more wrechydnes
 Whill He lyved her in this worldly wyldernes.'

(5.554-5.560)

Her spiritual fortitude is thus ultimately demonstrated through her body in her martyrdom (5.1884-5.1900). In Christianity 'martyrdom' may be defined as: 'Death for the sake of Christian faith or Christian morals' and someone who accepted her/his own death under such circumstances was seen and honoured as a witness (Rahner and Vorgrimler, 1983:293). As a martyr St Katherine needs her body to sacrifice for Christ. This is an

extreme statement of faith as well as a rejection of this world (temporal) in favour of the next (spiritual). Thus the body, the physical, is an important requirement for making a spiritual statement or stand.¹⁹

Thus, in response to Maxentius's threats (5.1069-5.1070), St Katherine declares:

'Too Him that was offered in Calvery on a tre,
To Him I offyr my flesch, my blode, and my felle.' [skin]

And later, in 5.1779-5.1785:

'I shall folow the Lombe that washid with His blode
Oure bloody synnes, wretchid and unkynd,
I folow the Lombe whech is full meke and good,
Whos steppes folow virgines withouten mynd.
Come of tyraunt [Maxentius], sle and do thi kynd:
I abyd not elles but deth and goo to lyffe;
I drede no fere, water, swerde, ne knyffe!'

She does indeed sacrifice herself for Christ and there are a number of parallels between St Katherine's martyrdom, or passion, and the Passion of Christ. Since saints all live lives of holiness based on the example of Christ's life (Winstead, 1999:1-2), their passions frequently have similarities with Christ's Passion, as in the legends of St Margaret and St Christine, for example. However, these similarities are seldom developed in as much detail as they are in Capgrave's text.

When Katherine goes to confront Maxentius some of her servants follow her (4.519-4.525). This recalls the way Peter followed Jesus to the high priest's house after He was arrested (Luke 22:54). She is beaten across the bare back 'for hir spouses love' (5.622) in 5.617-5.623 and is whipped in 5.1131-5.1141 with a whip with 'yrn and plumbys of lede' (5.1133) which is reminiscent of when Pilate had Jesus whipped before handing Him over to be crucified (Matthew 27:26). St Katherine is also bound and led through the city (5.1142) which recalls the way in which Christ would have been led between Gethsemane and the high priest's house (Luke 22:54), between Pilate and Herod (Luke 23:7 and 11), and between Pilate and Golgotha (Luke 23:25-26). The people following Katherine as she is led through the city plead with her to give in to Maxentius (5.1143-5.1183) but she responds: "Wepe noth for me but for yourselve ye wayle" (5.1220), and later

Sche seyde ageyn, 'Moderes and maydenys alle,
 Wepe not for me, lette noth my passion,
 Leve youre wordes with which ye on me calle;
 For if nature encline you to consolacion,
 To have mercy on myschefe and desolacion,
 Wepe ye than rith for youre owne synne
 Whech ye have haunted, in which ye be inne.

Wepe for youre errour whech shall you bryng
 Onto brennyng fyre where youre goddes dwelle.'

(5.1793-5.1801)

Her words here parallel those of Christ to the crowd (which included women weeping for Him) who were following Him to the place of His crucifixion (Luke 23:27-31).

The words spoken by Katherine at her eventual martyrdom also recall the words of Christ at the Passion. She tells the executioner: “I pray to God forgeve thee thi trespace” (5.1890) as Jesus prayed for His tormentors: ‘But Jhesus seide, Fadir, foryyue hem, for thei witen not what thei doon’ (Luke 23:34). She also prayed:

‘O Jhesu Cryst, my sowle I comende now

Onto Thi handys; I pray Thee Thu it take.’

(5.1848-5.1849)

These words are, of course, modelled on Christ’s final words before His death: ‘And Jhesus crynge with a greet vois, seide, Fadir, in to thin hoondis Y bitake my spirit’ (Luke 23:46).

In addition, Capgrave makes sure to point out that, like Christ, St Katherine died on a Friday:

This passion was, as oure story seyth,

On a Fryday, rith for this entent:

That syth she fauth so strongly for oure feyth,

Men wene therfor it was convenient

That this same day wech oure Jhesu went

Oute of this world, that same day his mayde

Shuld dey for Him; thus oure auctore sayde.

(5.1940-5.1946)

Both Christ and St Katherine are of royal blood. Katherine is the queen of Alexandria and the bride of Christ, while Christ is the king/prince of heaven. Although parallels were often drawn between the passions of martyrs and the Passion of Christ, Capgrave has, in this instance, made a particular point of drawing many clear associations between Christ's Passion and St Katherine's passion, perhaps in an effort to emphasise her high heavenly status and close relationship with Christ, which he points out early in his text (prologue, 8-13). In addition, this device creates a closer connection between Christ's body and Katherine's body (which may be said to be a part of His as a member of the Church and His bride).

According to Sarah Salih (2001:30):

Sponsalia Christi frequently appears alongside *imitatio Christi* in virgin martyr legends, in which the virgin can simultaneously be Christ, desire him, and desire to be him, a situation which does not necessarily produce heterosexual stability.

In the case of Capgrave's St Katherine she may be said to 'be' Christ in terms of the medieval organic analogy of social hierarchical systems with the body. Both as His wife and as a member of the Church she *is* His body (or at least the representative of His body) on earth (somewhat like the consecrated host in the theory of transubstantiation, although the host lacks the marital aspect). Katherine's body (and the bodies of all Christians) may therefore be seen as Christ's body (Colossians 1:17-18): 'he [Christ] is bifor alle, and alle thingis ben in hym. And he is heed of the bodi of the chirche...'. As a Christian and a

member of the Church St Katherine is a part of the body of Christ. If she is viewed as symbolic of the Church (as discussed in chapter two) then she may also be seen to be symbolic of Christ's body as a whole. She is also His mystical bride and may therefore be seen as His body and subject to Him as expressed in Ephesians 5:22-23 (noted in chapter two): 'Wymmen, be thei suget to her hosebondis, as to the Lord, for the man is heed of the wymman, as Crist is heed of the chirche; he is sauour of his bodi'.

So St Katherine fulfils both the role of the Church and the wife as portrayed in this quotation and aims to meet the requirements of both of these comparable roles. As a result, during her martyrdom – which, as has been discussed, has a number of similarities with the Passion of Christ – St Katherine may be seen not only as imitating Christ but as a representative of Christ, as has been noted: the good wife protecting her absent husband's interests. The attack on her body may be understood as an attack on the body of Christ and may thus be perceived in some ways as a re-enactment of His Passion in a similar way to which attacks on the host were portrayed as an attack on the real body of Christ due to His Real Presence (by means of transubstantiation) in the consecrated host, as may be seen in the late fifteenth-century Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*.²⁰ Moreover, in terms of this analogy, Katherine may be seen to be further 'chastised' for her 'transgressive' behaviour in this text as, due to her conversion or mystical marriage, she is no longer her own head – she has been elided into the body of another. Much like the married woman in the Middle Ages, she no longer exists in her own right. She has lost what she fought for in the marriage parliament, and even her freedom to rule herself. However, in the spiritual context of the legend this 'loss' saves her soul (which is of

ultimate importance) and therefore subtly supports the patriarchal terms in which the story is couched.

As Lewis (2000:129) notes: 'St Katherine's life is structured as an *imitatio Christi* and thus her actions serve as a heightened reminder of Christ's life, and more particularly his passion'. In response to one of Maxentius's threats Katherine says of Christ:

'He offered himselfe to the Fader of blys
An host ful clene, undefyled with synne,
And I wil offyr my body, for it is His,
Onto His plesauns whch I wold wyne.'

(5.575-5.578)

Katherine's use of the word 'host' in this context reminds the reader of the direct link made in medieval Catholicism between the crucified body of Christ and His Real Presence in the consecrated host or communion wafer. Her statement that her body belongs to Christ recalls the concept of the Christian being a part of the body of Christ in the Church. The link between the body of Christ in the host and in the Incarnation is alluded to by Antony Black (1992:174): 'Christians had from the start defined the church as "the body of Christ"; that is to say, as the real presence of the God-man on earth.' Katherine's body may also, as has been noted, be seen as Christ's in terms of their mystical marriage relationship.

An interesting connection is made between the acquisition of knowledge, the eucharist (and thus Christ's body) and St Katherine in the prologue to *St Katherine* in lines 47-117.

Capgrave relates how the English priest who made the translation he is now using was so devoted to St Katherine that he spent eighteen years travelling through many countries and enduring immense hardship while trying to learn more about her parents, her birth, her country and her language (praying and fasting all the while). Eventually he has a dream in which he is required to eat a book in the same way that the prophet Ezekiel was commanded by God to eat a scroll (Ezekiel 3:1-3). The priest is told that the book will be bitter in his mouth but sweet in his stomach. After some protest he does as he is told in the dream and shortly afterwards he finds the book from his dream buried in a field. It contains the legend of St Katherine.

Ezekiel 3:1-3 states:

And he [God] seide to me, Sone of man, ete thou what euer thing thou fyndist, ete thou this volym; and go thou, and speke to the sones of Israel. And Y openyde my mouth, and he fedde me with that volym. And he seide to me, Sone of man, thi wombe schal ete, and thin entrails schulen be fillid with this volym, which Y yyue to thee. And Y eet it, and it was maad as swete hony in my mouth.

Here the scroll which has been consumed indicates 'the divine empowerment to speak'. In addition, the passing of the entire scroll through Ezekiel's digestive tract signifies that he 'becomes the embodiment of the word'. Consequently, this occurrence anticipates Christ, as the Word of God, becoming flesh at the Incarnation as expressed in John 1:14 (Brownlee, 1986:32). Thus when Ezekiel eats the scroll containing the words of God he may be seen as similar to Mary, who was a 'temple' of the divine Word without being divine herself. Indeed, it was suggested that at the words of Gabriel, Mary conceived the

Word, Christ. This idea was sometimes interpreted literally as in the following translation of the Latin hymn *Gaude virgo, mater Christi*:

Glade us, maiden, moder milde,
 Thurru thin herre thu were wid childe — [ear]
 Gabriel he seide it thee —

(Saupe, 1998: poem 87; lines 1-3 and notes)

This idea was also presented visually with the words of Gabriel entering Mary's ear, such as in Simone Martini's 1333 portrayal of the Annunciation (see, for e.g. Pelikan, 1996: colour plate 5).

A parallel to the episode in Ezekiel occurs in Revelations 10:9-10, where John writes:

And Y wente to the aungel, and seide to hym, that he schulde yyue me the book.
 And he seide to me, Take the book, and deuoure it; and it schal make thi wombe to be bittir, but in thi mouth it schal be swete as hony. And Y took the book of the aungels hond, and deuouride it, and it was in my mouth as swete hony; and whanne Y hadde deuourid it, my wombe was bittere. And he seide to me, It bihoueth thee eftsoone to prophesie to hethene men, and to puplis, and langagis, and to many kingis.

In his prologue, Capgrave reverses this image of the scroll being sweet in the mouth and sour in the stomach, to the book being bitter in the mouth of the English priest and sweet in his stomach. The reversal could possibly be an error, perhaps due to the use of

'hysteron-proteron, i.e., two events placed in reverse order' (Aune, 1998:572) in these biblical verses.

It need not have been an error, however, as Capgrave specifically refers to the source in Ezekiel where the reference is made to the scroll being sweet in his mouth but makes no reference to its becoming bitter in either his mouth or his stomach. According to Aune (1998:572) the incident of the eating of the scroll in Revelations is derived from Ezekiel and the addition in Revelations 10:9-10 that it would turn sour in the stomach may be John's interpretation of the description of the scroll in Ezekiel 2:9/10: 'And he spredde abrood it bifor me, that was writun with ynne and with outforth. And lamentaciouns, and song, and wo, weren writun ther ynne'. Capgrave may, as a result, have associated the idea of the scroll becoming bitter in the stomach with a message of woe (although the word of God, being divine, may be 'sweet', the message could be a 'bitter' one). As the legend of St Katherine is one of redemption it may be described as sweet. For the English priest who expended 'grete labour' (prologue, 48) with 'prayere, fastyng, cold and mekyll tene [great hardship]' (prologue, 77) for eighteen years (prologue, 49 and 76) to find her legend, it took hard or 'bitter' work to find but the reward was sweet. Capgrave describes how he unearthed the text:

Yet at the last he found it, to his gret joye,

Fer up in Grece i-beryed in the grownde.

Was nevyr no knyth in Rome ne eke in Troye

Mor glad of swerde or basnett bryght and rownde

Than was this preeste whan he had it fownde:
 He blyssed thee [St Katherine] ofte, and seyde all his laboure
 Was turned to solace, to joye and socowr.

(prologue, 50-56)

Capgrave also notes, 'There had he salve to all his byttyr bale' (prologue, 117). In relation to Capgrave himself, the process of translation could be viewed as hard (or 'bitter') work but the spiritual rewards for himself and his English audience could potentially be described as positive or 'sweet' (see, for example, prologue 57-70 and 246-252). As Jacqueline Jenkins (2003:146) has indicated, Capgrave could be said to ingest 'These Latyn bokys' (2.52), 'the storyes' (5.766) and the 'auctoures which this legend trete' (5.1697) figuratively 'in order to produce from the "derk langage" a new and "swete" text'. In addition, Capgrave's reversal of the sweet/bitter image could be associated with the difficulties inherent in living a good Christian life versus the sweetness of the reward of eternal life, and the legend of St Katherine's martyrdom followed by her eternal afterlife with Christ would be an extreme example. Furthermore, the image could also be associated with medicine which may taste 'bitter' or unpleasant but has a positive or 'sweet' effect on physical health.

The episode in Revelations 10:9-10 has a parallel with the words used by Christ at the Last Supper and subsequently adopted in the celebration of the eucharist in the instruction to 'take and eat'. The phrase 'sweet as honey' was a metaphor used for agreeable or pleasant speech in antiquity, as may be seen, for example, in Proverbs 16:24

(Aune, 1998:572). Honey's purity and sweetness has led it to become symbolic of Christ and His ministry as well as of God's work (Ferguson, 1961:42). In the Middle Ages eucharistic miracles in which the mouth of the recipient was filled with honey were reported (Bynum, 1992:123). The bee, because it produces honey, has come to symbolise 'religious eloquence'. Due to the virtue of its habits and because it produces honey, a symbol of Christ, the bee is sometimes also used as a symbol of Mary's virginity (Ferguson, 1961:12). As Capgrave was an educated Augustinian monk and went on to write a commentary (now lost) on Revelations, *In Apocalypsim Ioannis (On the Apocalypse of John)*, in about 1459 for the bishop of Ely, William Gray (Seymour, 1996:247), he would surely have been well acquainted with this episode, its parallel in Ezekiel, and the possible interpretations. The fact that St Katherine's legend was revealed to the priest in this way with its Biblical parallels and 'divine empowerment to speak' gives Capgrave's version of her legend greater spiritual credibility due to the divine nature of its revelation. The 'religious eloquence' alluded to by the references to honey recalls (and foreshadows in Capgrave's text) the great rhetorical skill and eloquence St Katherine demonstrates in arguing for the Christian faith (particularly in Book Four) as well as Adrian's eloquence when converting her (3.320-3.336), and could be taken to refer to Capgrave's own eloquence as well.

This incident creates an interesting intersection of images. St Katherine is connected with Mary as well as with the Incarnated Christ as both the Word and the eucharist (and thus with Christ's body). In addition, the book is one of St Katherine's attributes, symbolising her great learning (Ferguson, 1961:171). As has been noted in chapter one, in artistic

representations of the Annunciation Mary is often depicted reading a book, which serves as a reminder of the Incarnation of Christ, the Word, in a human body.

Another, if less immediately obvious, parallel may be drawn between St Katherine and Christ in this incident in Capgrave's prologue. In addition to the eucharistic allusions discussed above there are also parallels with the Resurrection. Capgrave indicates that after his dream the priest found the text of St Katherine buried in Greece (prologue, 51) where it had apparently been hidden from heretics who had been burning books (prologue, 190-197). The text had, as a result, been 'from mynde all i-ded' (prologue, 190). Thus, it could be argued that, in order to save the text from 'eternal death' by fire, it had to suffer a 'temporary death' by burial from which it was later 'resurrected' by its rediscovery and translation into a comprehensible form of English. Capgrave's translation may, therefore, be seen as completing the 'resurrection' of the text by translating the first four books from an obscure dialect into a more well-known English form and the last book from Latin into English (prologue, 57-70).

According to the *Middle English Dictionary* (Kurath, 1959:8), 'dethes cage' refers to 'a grave'. Capgrave may, therefore, be said to 'un-cage' or 'resurrect' the text by translating it. His translation may also be perceived as a sort of 'giving birth' because (as has been noted earlier), figuratively 'cage' refers to 'a womb' (Kurath, 1959:8) and a pagan convert may be said to be '(re)born' into Christianity. As Octavio Paz (1971:159-160) has pointed out, the poet selects words and fixes them in the form of her/his poem. It is the task of the translator to release the elements of the text from their fixed form in the

source language and to transform them into the target language. As Capgrave says to St Katherine concerning her legend:

It cam but seldom onto any mannes honde;
 Eke whan it cam it was nocht undyrstonde
 Because, as I seyde, ryght for the derk langage.
 Thus was thi lyffe, lady, kept all in cage.

(prologue, 207-210)

He, therefore, promises:

Now wyl I, lady, more openly make thi lyffe
 Oute of his [the English priest's] werk, if thu wylt help ther-too...

(prologue, 64-65)

He again refers to the 'un-caging' of the text in Book Three:

Evene so was this lyffe, as I seyde in the prologe before,
 Kept all in cage aboute, it was not bore. [brought forth]

Now schall it walk wydere than evyr it dede
 In preysyng and honour of this martir Katerine.

(3.27-3.30)

It thus seems that Capgrave viewed his translation task in similar terms to Paz's concept of setting the text free or releasing it from the 'bonds' or 'cage' of its source language, thereby making it accessible to a new audience or readership.

The potential 'death' of the text by fire at the hands of heretics corresponds with eternal damnation in the fires of hell awaiting the unredeemed. The text is spared this fate by its burial and rediscovery, which is clearly analogous to the burial and Resurrection of Christ as well as to the death, burial and physical (bodily) resurrection in a better and immortal form looked forward to by Christians at the Final Judgement. For example, Katherine says to the people who plead with her to give in to Maxentius that she will die physically but that because of her baptism she will rise again in 'fayrer forme' (5.1221-5.1228)

The text which the English priest discovers may, therefore, be seen as being suggestive of Christ, the Word, and St Katherine herself who (in medieval Christian terms) was saved from damnation when she was converted from paganism to Christianity in a similar way to which the text was translated from Greek into Latin (prologue, 174-175), into an obscure dialect of English and finally into a more well-known English dialect (prologue, 57-70). It may also be associated with all Christians and the Church as the body and bride of Christ, all of which St Katherine may be seen as representing. In addition, the burial and rediscovery of the text recalls the 'burial' of Christ (in a tradition probably more immediate to the experience of Capgrave's readers) in the form of the consecrated host in the Easter sepulchre on Good Friday and its/His removal/Resurrection on Easter morning (see Duffy, 1992:29-31 for a discussion of this ceremonial tradition).

According to Anke Bernau (2003:117), the 'audience's participation in Katherine's ordeals and death through visualization of the images offered by the texts can be read as analogical to the individual's reception of the Eucharist'. The 'audience(s) of the legend

were to “consume” the sacrifice of the virgin in order to strengthen and (re)confirm their faith’ in a way similar to their consumption of Christ’s body in the form of the host (Bernau, 2003:117). This idea led to the texts of saints’ legends being worn as amulets or even eaten as medicine throughout the Middle Ages (Bernau, 2003:117). The host itself was, of course, also believed to have both spiritual and physical healing properties, as may be seen, for example, in the late fifteenth-century sacrament plays, *Dat es Tspel vanden Heiligen Sacramente van der Nyeuwervaert* and the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, where miracles of healing take place through Christ in the host.²¹ (The eucharistic associations of the English priest’s consumption of the book containing St Katherine’s legend in a vision have already been noted.) The belief in transubstantiation and miracles in which the host becomes the bleeding flesh of Christ led to the idea of the eucharist as ‘symbolic cannibalism’. In this way the faithful were understood to consume and assimilate (as seen in cultures of cannibalism like the Aztec or Iroquois) ‘the power of the tortured god’ (Bynum, 1992:185). Ingesting the most respected elders or the mightiest enemies has, in certain societies, been viewed as a way to gain the powers they possessed in life (Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999:1). The act of translation has also been described in cannibalistic terms. Post-colonial Brazilian theorists have proposed a view which accentuates the translator’s freedom and creativity by considering the translation act ‘in terms of physical metaphors’ (Bassnett, 2002:5). Thus both the English priest and Capgrave ‘consume’ a version of St Katherine’s legend in order to produce their own new versions.

Moving from linguistic translation to the translation of relics, Jacqueline Jenkins (2003:144) suggests that Capgrave's prologue to *St Katherine* serves as a kind of *translatio* as 'the legend itself, in the narrative, is "translated" like an actual relic into England from Greece'. Narratives which recounted the translation of the relics of saints between places (*translationes*) usually included divine help, normally from the saint her- or himself; a lengthy and arduous journey, as well as some form of miraculous disclosure of the site where the body was to be found. All of these elements are present in Capgrave's (probably fictitious) description of the history of the book containing St Katherine's legend. Capgrave's prologue may have been meant to create renewed appeal for a well-known and popular legend: 'an attempt to direct attention towards his version as the new one, the best one, even the divinely authorized one' (Jenkins, 2003:144). The *translatio* motif therefore 'implicates the new legend with the act of revealing a new and powerful patron, bringing her out of the obscurity of pagan lands (in this case, old suppressed texts and "derk langage") and placing this version firmly in a new context' (Jenkins, 2003:144). Thus Capgrave's *St Katherine* may in some ways be viewed as a translated relic, part of the body or *corpus* of work on St Katherine.

The cult of relics demonstrates the importance of the body in Christian belief 'as the "temple of the Holy Ghost", and the shrine of the immortal soul, since even after death it continued to have a supernatural significance' (James, 1933:192).²² Relics were believed to have life-preserving or healing properties. For example in his *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* (Serjeantson, 1938) Osbern Bokenham relates that his life was saved by a ring that had been in contact with St Margaret's foot, which was preserved in an old priory

near his home in England (lines 135-170). Similarly, healing oil is said to emanate from St Katherine's grave and even if a stone is removed from her grave it will continue to secrete the substance (5.1947-5.1956). The shrine of St Katherine at the monastery at Mount Sinai is described in *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, written in about the second half of the fourteenth century (Moseley, 1983:9-10 and 69-72). Mandeville describes her shrine and how her bones exude the oil (Moseley, 1983:70):

And beside the High Altar are four steps leading up to the tomb of alabaster wherein the body of the holy virgin Saint Katherine lies. And the prelate of the monks shows the relics of this virgin to pilgrims; with an instrument of silver he moves the bones of the virgin on an altar. Then there comes out a little oil, like sweat; but it is like neither oil nor balm, for it is blacker. Of this liquid they give a little to pilgrims...

The identification of the body discovered on Mount Sinai as belonging to St Katherine (rather than another virgin martyr) was, perhaps, a crucial element 'in the subsequent universal popularity of her cult' as not many 'saints could boast such an important shrine' (Lewis, 1999b:153). According to legend, Symeon, a monk from Sinai, brought three of St Katherine's fingers to Rouen in 1026 and this had a potent effect on the spread of her cult in Europe (Lewis, 1999b:147).

Relics had associations with the eucharist. According to Bynum (1987:255) '[the] sense of body as locus of the divine had become so powerful by the thirteenth century that the consecrated host was frequently compared to the bodies of the saints and revered as a relic of Christ'. The host was, for example, sometimes kept in a reliquary and visited as if

it were a relic (Bynum, 1987:255). Miracles in which the host was seen to become the actual body of Christ meant that this association of host and relic was clearer and easier to make (Bynum, 1995:316). The whole body of Christ was deemed to be present in each particle of the eucharist (Bynum, 1987:51). The division of the saint's body into relics was viewed in a similar way and the division and distribution of relics was seen as spreading the saint's power (Bynum, 1995:317). Thus the finger bones at Rouen 'were believed to be part of St Katherine's martyred body and were therefore objects of fervent devotion, a direct link to the saint and her power' (Lewis, 1999b:148). As has been noted, she was a popular intercessor and part of an elite group of saints: the Fourteen Holy Helpers.²³ Capgrave appeals to her for assistance in producing his text of her legend:

Now wyl I, lady [Katherine], more openly make thi lyffe
 Oute of his werk, if thu wylt help ther-too;
 It schall be know of man, mayde, and wyffe,
 What thu hast suffrede and eke what thu hast doo.
 Pray Godd, our Lorde, He wyll the dore on-doo,
 Enspire oure wyttys with His pryvy grace
 To preyse Him and thee that we may have space.

(prologue, 64-70)

He also appeals to his readers to pray for Katherine's intercession with God for the souls of those who contributed to the text:

Thus endyth the prologe of this holy mayde.
 Ye that rede it pray for hem alle
 That to this werk eythere travayled or payde,

That from her synnes with grace thei may falle
 To be redy to Godd whan He wyll calle
 With Him in hevyn to drynke and to dyne,

Thorow the prayere of this mayde Kateryne.

(prologue, 246-252)

This seems quite appropriate, not only because the text presents her legend, but since she was viewed as the ultimate scholar (1.249-1.250) and a powerful saint.

Thus although St Katherine's 'unruliness' (due to her education and out-spoken nature) may be seen to be 'chastised' in various ways through the image of (mystical) marriage, her close association with the masculine-gendered divine would, nevertheless, most likely have been interpreted in the most positive terms as her spiritual empowerment as a saint and a potent intercessor for humanity. The subtle attempts to bring her more into line with medieval patriarchal and Christian norms serve to make her a less potentially disruptive example as a woman while simultaneously celebrating her currency as a saint and a powerful patron.

Conclusion



*Knowledge is, indeed, that which, next to virtue,
truly and essentially raises one man above another.*

-Joseph Addison (1672-1719)

'The Guardian', No. 111 (18 July 1713)

The improvement of the rights and education of women are still issues of major concern in many parts of the world today. In medieval England and Western Europe, however, the interest seemed to be more in how to keep women in a position of subjection than to encourage their empowerment.

This investigation has focused on the fraught relationship between knowledge, the feminine and the idea of the body in the predominantly Catholic society of late medieval England as it is revealed in John Capgrave's comprehensive and multivalent fifteenth century *Life of Saint Katherine of Alexandria*.

In chapter one the interrelations between Katherine, the Virgin Mary and Eve – particularly with regard to each woman's relation to knowledge – were considered, using

the enclosed garden as the central unifying image. It was established that Capgrave makes concerted attempts in his text to associate Katherine with the positive example of the Virgin Mary and her relation to knowledge through Christ, the Word, in order to increase admiration for Katherine as a saint. However, the use of the garden setting in Book Three not only creates parallels between Katherine and the Virgin Mary, but also between Katherine and Eve, as the conversion scene in the enclosed garden also strongly recalls the Garden of Eden and the Fall. In this way an underlying uneasiness with Katherine's exceptional level of education as potentially disruptive and negative is achieved.

The centrality of marriage to Capgrave's text, as indicated in the marriage parliament debate in Book Two and Katherine's mystical marriage to Christ in Book Three, was explored in chapter two. The representation of Katherine and the Church as the brides of Christ and the ways in which this essentially feminine image lends itself to associations with the body, as well as the Church's simultaneous portrayal as the body of Christ, were considered. It was established that Katherine may be perceived as a symbolic representative of the Church and although both the bride and body images have implications of subservience for those placed in the feminine role they also serve to express the intimacy of the relationship striven for with God.

Drawing on the possible negative associations of Katherine's exceptional education (as considered in chapter one) and on her status as a bride of Christ, which associates her closely with the body of Christ (as explored in chapter two), chapter three examined

Katherine's use of the body of rhetoric. It was demonstrated that the changes in Katherine's use of rhetoric after her conversion and mystical marriage indicate that, as a woman making effective use of the body of rhetoric to argue for female rule, she may have been seen as transgressing gender boundaries in medieval patriarchal society. Although such transgressions were not necessarily always seen in a negative light – as, for example, when holy virgins were perceived as having attained virile virtues – the 'disciplining' of Katherine's 'unruly' or 'transgressive' behaviour may be seen in her mystical marriage to Christ as this is the decisive event which brings her under patriarchal control. In the marriage parliament in Book Two she argues on her own behalf but after her mystical marriage she acts for Christ (her mystical husband) and the dissemination and preservation of Christianity regardless of the consequences to herself. As a result, any threat she might have been seen to pose to the patriarchal status quo is subtly neutralised.

In chapter four the organic analogies relating to the body, such as the Church as the body and bride of Christ and the body of knowledge (established in chapters two and three), were further considered, particularly with regard to the spiritual implications. The parallels between St Katherine's passion and Christ's Passion were noted to indicate how the *imitatio Christi* and *sponsalia Christi* themes converge in Capgrave's text to elide Katherine (as the 'body' and bride of Christ) with the divine. In terms of this analogy, Katherine may be seen to be further 'chastised' for her 'transgressive' behaviour, as due to her conversion and mystical marriage she is no longer her own 'head' but has been elided into the body of another. As this elision may be read as her spiritual salvation it

reveals an underlying support for the patriarchal terms in which it is couched. The discussion of the incident in Capgrave's prologue where the English priest consumes a book in a dream and then discovers St Katherine's legend, may be seen to reveal her elision with the divine by means of the interrelations created between St Katherine, the book containing her legend, the eucharist, the Passion, the Resurrection, relics, the body and the translation of her legend as an 'un-caging' of meaning. It was demonstrated that although Katherine's 'unruliness' may be seen to be 'chastised' in various ways through her mystical marriage, her close association with Christ (perceived as male) through this marriage would, nevertheless, have been interpreted in positive terms as implying the spiritual empowerment of Katherine as a saint and an intercessor for humanity.

Thus, although Capgrave achieves his aim of producing a legend which honours God and St Katherine, he clearly does not shy away from the issues of gender power-relations that were pertinent to his society. He appears to be unique among his peers in allowing for quite a balanced debate of these (and other) issues in his text. However, as a product of his society and a high ranking member of the Augustinian order in England, he includes aspects which subtly undercut Katherine's strident independence as a woman. In this way he is able to honour the saint while simultaneously confirming the 'proper' position of women in medieval patriarchal society by equating it to the position of humanity in the Church vis-à-vis Christ. As a result, Capgrave was able to openly consider challenges to, and yet subtly affirm, the status quo of his society in this remarkably multivalent saint's legend.

Endnotes

¹ All Biblical references and quotations are taken from the John Wycliffe translation of the Bible available at the *Wesley Center Online: Wesley Center for Applied Theology* (Northwest Nazarene University, 1993-2005).

² This group of saints consists of three bishops (Blaise, Erasmus or Elmo, Denis of Paris); three knightly saints (Achatius, Eustace, George); three virgins (Barbara, Katherine of Alexandria, Margaret); Pantaleon, a physician; Cyriacus, a deacon; Vitus, a martyr; Giles the monk; and Christopher the patron of travellers. In some regional adaptations other saints, such as Dorothy, were included as one of the Auxiliary Saints (Douglas, J, 1978:91).

³ More recently Michel Foucault (1926-1984) has investigated the power-knowledge dynamic but from an angle that does not directly illuminate my analysis of Katherine in this study of John Capgrave's *Life of Saint Katherine of Alexandria*.

⁴ All references and quotations from John Capgrave's *Life of Saint Katherine of Alexandria* are taken from *The Life of Saint Katherine* (Winstead (ed.), 1999).

⁵ According to the *Patron Saints Index*, St Katherine was canonised 'pre-congregation', that is before the initiation of the investigations carried out by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, and the exact date of her canonisation is not available (Jones, 2003). Her legend first appears in Greek renditions from the ninth century, while in the Latin West there are few accounts of her cult before the eleventh century. Her cult began developing in Britain with the Norman Conquest although a few traces of previous awareness of the saint exist (Wogan-Browne & Burgess, 1996: xix and xxii).

⁶ The garden is, of course, also the setting for secular love or lust, as seen in Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's *Roman de la rose* (begun in about 1237) and January's garden in Geoffrey Chaucer's (c.1340-1400) 'Merchant's Tale' (Benson, 1987:153-168) in the *Canterbury Tales*. Katherine and Adrian are in her enclosed garden when he tells her that the desirable husband she described in the marriage parliament is waiting for her (3.582-3.609).

⁷ Chaucer has the Wife of Bath (Benson, 1987:105-122), the embodiment of 'the negative female stereotype' (Brown, 1994:108) break these rules by having her invert the generally accepted doctrine of the Church Fathers and 'preach' in favour of marriage over virginity. She aims to teach her fellow pilgrims by means of a sermon with biblical quotations (lines 15-19, 49-52, 100), and direct appeals to her audience to ponder her message, by posing questions (lines 59-62, 71-72, 115-117). She thereby conveys an unorthodox message in a generally orthodox form.

⁸ The Song of Songs and its references to the bride will be discussed in greater detail in chapter two.

⁹ It is interesting to note, however, that in just over a hundred years Elizabeth I (1533-1603), the 'Virgin Queen' would ascend to the throne of England and rule for over forty years (1558-1603). For more on Elizabeth I see, for example, *Queen Elizabeth I* (Zamoyska, 1981).

¹⁰ These associations will be further investigated in chapters two and four.

¹¹ See, for example, the legends of St Mary Magdalene and St Christine in Osbern Bokenham's (1393-c.1447) *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* (Serjeantson, 1938:58-86 and

144-172) and Jacobus de Voragine's (c.1230-1298) *Legenda Aurea* or *Golden Legend* (Granger Ryan, 1993:374-383 and 385-387).

¹² See *New Testament Nuptial Imagery* (Batey, 1971) or 'Bridegroom-Bride Imagery for Christ and the Church in the New Testament Against its Biblical Background' (Edwards, 1964) for a detailed account of Biblical nuptial imagery, especially in the New Testament.

¹³ All quotations and translations of *Hali Meidhad* are taken from *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group and 'Ancrene Wisse'* (Millett and Wogan-Browne (eds.), 1992).

¹⁴ All quotations from *The Book of Margery Kempe* are taken from the edition edited by Barry Windeatt (2000).

¹⁵ All quotations from William Langland's *Piers Plowman* are taken from *The Vision of Piers Plowman* (Schmidt (ed.), 1995).

¹⁶ Christ's description of His crucifixion as being necessary to 'bye' mankind indicates that the satisfaction theory of atonement which focuses on the humanisation of Christ (thus leading to an increased use of marital imagery) is, indeed, at work in this text (as would be expected at this period).

¹⁷ For a discussion of how the depiction St Katherine with shorter hair, especially in manuscript illuminations in north-western European Books of Hours of the late fourteenth- and fifteenth century may, in part, have been associated with her more 'masculine' aspects such as her education and sovereignty, see Karen Winstead, 'St Katherine's Hair', in *St Katherine of Alexandria: Texts and Contexts in Western Medieval Europe* (Jenkins & Lewis, 2003:171-199).

¹⁸ Images, idolatry and the Lollard opposition to the use of images in the Catholic Church were issues of major concern in the later Middle Ages. These matters are broached in Capgrave's *St Katherine* but are beyond the scope of the current study. For discussions of these questions as they relate to St Katherine see James Simpson (2002:420-429), *Reform and Cultural Revolution* and Sarah Stanbury, 'The Vivacity of Images: St Katherine, Knighton's Lollards, and the Breaking of Idols', in *Images, Idolatry, and Iconoclasm in Late Medieval England: Textuality and the Visual Image* (Dimmick, Simpson & Zeeman, 2002:131-150).

¹⁹ A number of medieval senses of the word 'cage' can be applied to aspects of St Katherine's martyrdom, although Capgrave does not specifically point these out. She is imprisoned (5.673-5.967), thus according to the *Middle English Dictionary* a 'cage for prisoners; jail, prison, a cell; confinement, captivity', 'to keep...closely confined'; suffers various tortures (as will be discussed below), therefore 'a place for torture' and is prepared to die and leave 'the world' or 'narowe cage' (see Kurath, 1959:8-9). In the 'Miller's Tale' (Benson, 1987:66-77) Chaucer describes John, the carpenter, as keeping his young, flirtatious wife Alison 'narwe in cage' as he is afraid that she will cuckold him (line 3224-3226). The use of the word in this reference is therefore closely related to the issues of patriarchal control and female transgression of concern in the current discussion.

²⁰ For the text of the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* see *Early English Drama: An Anthology* (Coldewey, 1993:277-305).

²¹ For the text of *Dat es Tspel vanden Heiligen Sacramente van der Nyeuwervaert* see *Middelnederlandsche Dramatische Poëzie* (Leendertz, 1907:213-276).

²² 1 Corinthians 6:19-20:

Whether ye witen not, that youre membris ben the temple of the Hooli Goost, that is in you, whom ye han of God, and ye ben not youre owne? For ye ben bouyt with greet prijs. Glorifie ye, and bere ye God in youre bodi.

²³ For a detailed discussion of St Katherine's perceived power as an intercessor in late medieval England see Lewis, K (2000) *The Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria in Late Medieval England*, especially chapter three (pp. 111-174).

Appendix



Figure 1 (pp. 25-26)

The Annunciation
Giovanni di Paolo di Grazia

1445
National Gallery, Washington, D.C. (2006)

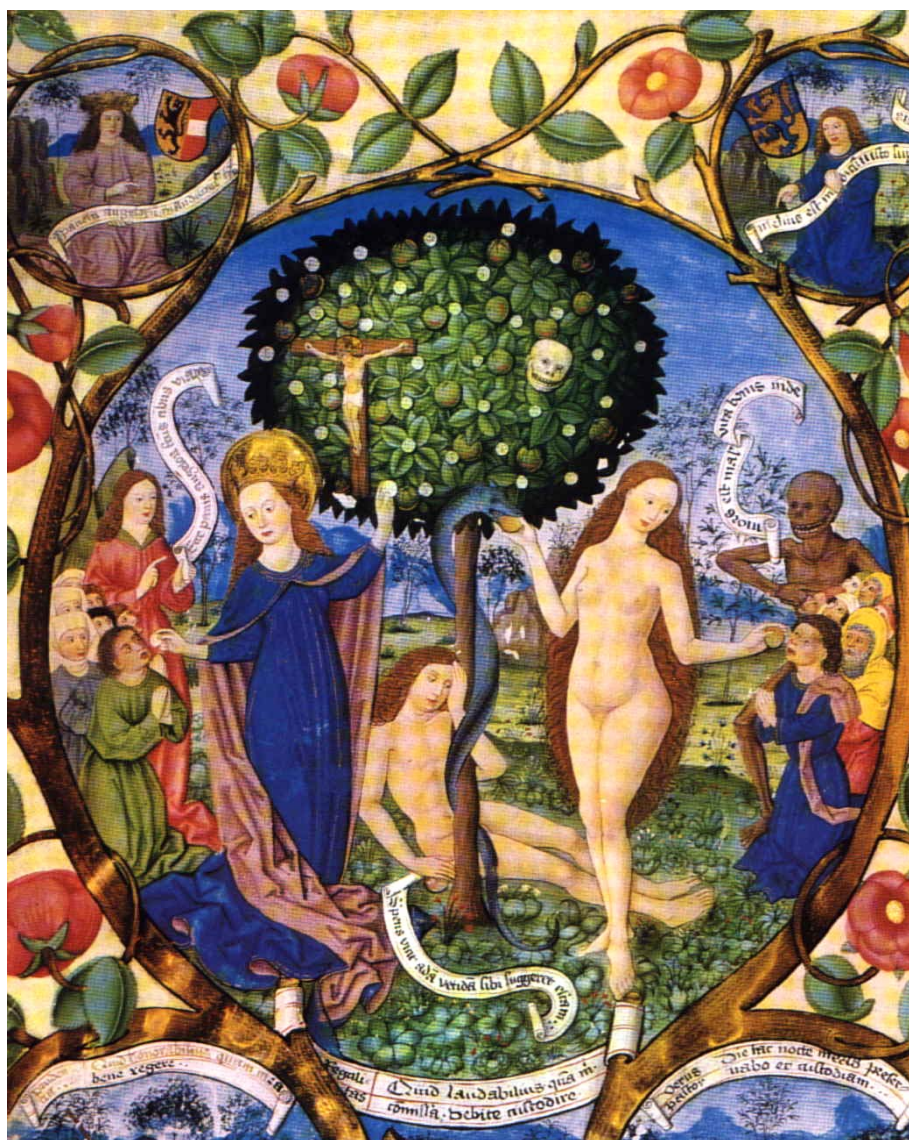


Figure 2 (p. 26)

Tree of Life and Death from the Archbishop of Salzburg's Missal
Berthold Furtmeyer

c.1481

Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Clm. 15710, f. 60v.
(O'Reilly, 1992:195)



Figure 3 (p. 31)

Madonna and Child with Saints in the Enclosed Garden

The Master of Flémalle (also known as Robert Campin) and Assistants (or one of his followers)

c.1440/1460

National Gallery, Washington, D.C. (2006)

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Abstract

Katherine of Alexandria, one of the most popular saints of the Middle Ages, was acclaimed for her great learning. This investigation focuses on the fraught relationship between knowledge, the feminine and the idea of the body in the predominantly Catholic society of late medieval England as it is revealed in John Capgrave's fifteenth century *Life of Saint Katherine of Alexandria*.

In chapter one the interrelations between Katherine, the Virgin Mary and Eve – particularly with regard to each woman's relation to knowledge – is considered. Capgrave attempts to associate Katherine with the positive example of the Virgin Mary and her relation to knowledge through Christ, the Word, in order to increase admiration for Katherine as a saint. However, as the conversion scene is set in an enclosed garden it recalls the Garden of Eden and the Fall thus also creating parallels between Katherine and Eve. In this way an underlying uneasiness with Katherine's exceptional level of education as potentially disruptive and negative is achieved.

The centrality of marriage to Capgrave's text is explored in chapter two. The representation of Katherine and the Church as the brides of Christ and the ways in which this essentially feminine image lends itself to associations with the body, as well as the Church's simultaneous portrayal as the body of Christ, is considered. It is proposed that Katherine may be perceived as a symbolic representative of the Church and although

both the bride and body images have implications of subservience for those placed in the feminine role they also serve to express the intimacy of the relationship striven for with God.

Chapter three examines Katherine's use of the body of rhetoric. It is demonstrated that the changes in her use of rhetoric after her conversion and mystical marriage indicate that, as a woman making effective use of the body of rhetoric to argue for female rule, she may be perceived as transgressing gender boundaries in medieval patriarchal society. The 'disciplining' of Katherine's 'transgressive' behaviour may be seen in her mystical marriage to Christ as this is the decisive event which brings her under patriarchal control. Therefore any threat she might have been seen to pose to the status quo is subtly neutralised.

In chapter four the analogies relating to the body are further considered, particularly with regard to the spiritual implications. Parallels between St Katherine's passion and Christ's Passion are noted to indicate how the *imitatio Christi* and *sponsalia Christi* themes converge in Capgrave's text to elide Katherine (as the 'body' and bride of Christ) with the divine (perceived as male). The incident narrated in Capgrave's prologue, where an English priest has to consume a book in a dream before he can discover St Katherine's legend, may be seen to reveal her elision with the divine through the interrelations of Katherine, the book containing her legend, the eucharist, the Passion, the Resurrection, relics, the body and the translation of her legend as an 'un-caging' of meaning.

Thus Capgrave does not shy away from the issues of gender power-relations that were pertinent to his society. Although he appears to be unique among his peers in allowing for quite a balanced debate of these issues in his text, he includes aspects which subtly undercut Katherine's strident independence as a woman. In this way he is able to honour the saint while simultaneously confirming the 'proper' position of women in medieval patriarchal society by equating it to the position of humanity in the Church vis-à-vis Christ. Consequently, Capgrave is able to openly consider challenges to, and yet subtly affirm, the status quo of his society in this multivalent saint's legend.

Opsomming

Die faam van Sint Katarina van Aleksandrië, een van die gewildste heiliges van die middeleeue, was veral aan haar uitsonderlike geleerdheid te danke. Hierdie ondersoek fokus op die verwantskap tussen kennis, die vroulike en die konsep van die liggaam in die oorheersend Katolieke samelewing van Engeland in die laat-middeleeue, soos dit in John Capgrave se *Life of Saint Katherine of Alexandria* uitgebeeld word.

In die eerste hoofstuk word die verwantskap tussen Katarina, die Maagd Maria en Eva ondersoek met betrekking tot elke vrou se verhouding met kennis. Om Katarina se roem as heilige te versterk, assosieer Capgrave haar met die positiewe voorbeeld van die Heilige Maagd en die kennis wat Sy deur Christus (die Woord) bekom. Katarina se bekering tot die Christendom vind egter plaas in 'n private tuin, wat die leser aan die paradystuin, die sondeval en Eva herinner. Op hierdie wyse word 'n onderliggende spanning geskep: Katarina se ongekende geleerdheid is wel goed, maar kan ook as latent skeurend of negatief beskou word.

Die sentraliteit van die huwelik in Capgrave se teks word in hoofstuk twee ondersoek. Die voorstelling van beide Katarina en die Kerk as 'bruide van Christus' en die wyse waarop hierdie vroulike beelde met die liggaam geassosieer kan word, word (naas die Kerk se voorstelling as die liggaam van Christus) onder die loep geneem. Katarina word as 'n simboliese verteenwoordiger van die Kerk voorgehou. Alhoewel die beelde van die

bruid en die liggaam 'n bybetekenis van onderdanigheid dra vir diegene wat in die vroulike rol geplaas word, impliseer dit ook die soort vertrouensverhouding met God waarna elke Christen strewe.

Hoofstuk drie bestudeer Katarina se gebruik van die kennisgeheel van retorika. Daar word aangetoon dat die verandering in haar gebruik van die retoriek ná haar bekering en haar geestelike huwelik daarop dui dat sy, as 'n vrou wat die retoriek effektief gebruik om 'n vroulike gesag voor te staan, beskou mag word as 'n oortreder van die middeleeuse patriargale samelewing se geslagsgrense. Die 'dissiplinerings' van hierdie 'oortreding' in haar geestelike huwelik met Christus mag dan beskou word as die beslissende gebeurtenis wat haar onder patriargale beheer bring. Sodoende kan daar gesê word dat enige uitdaging wat sy vir die *status quo* inhou subtiel geneutraliseer word.

In hoofstuk vier word die analogië wat met die liggaam verband hou verder ondersoek, veral in terme van hulle geestelike implikasies. Ooreenkomste tussen Sint Katarina se marteldood en Christus se Passie word uitgelig om aan te dui hoe die temas van die *imitatio Christi* en die *sponsalia Christi* in Capgrave se teks in een punt saamloop om Katarina (as die 'liggaam' en die bruid van Christus) met die goddelike (wat as manlik beskou word) te laat saamsmelt. Die voorval in Capgrave se proloog, waar 'n Engelse priester in 'n droom 'n boek moet opeet voordat hy Sint Katarina se legende kan ontdek, demonstreer hierdie samesmelting met die goddelike by wyse van die verwantskappe tussen Katarina, haar legendeboek, die nagmaal, die Passie, die Wederopstanding, relikwië, die liggaam en die vertaling van haar legende as 'n ontsluiting van betekenis.

Capgrave deins nie terug van die belangrike kwessie van geslags/magsverwantskappe in sy samelewing nie. Alhoewel hy uniek in sy portuurgroep blyk te wees in dat hy 'n gebalanseerde oorweging van dié strydvrage in sy teks toelaat, ondergrawe hy ook op subtiële wyse Katarina se selfstandigheid as vrou. Sodoende kan hy haar as heilige vereer terwyl hy gelyktydig die 'geskikte' onderdanigheid van vroue in die middeleeue goedkeur deur dit gelyk te stel met dié van die mensdom teenoor Christus. Gevolglik kan Capgrave in hierdie veelsydige legende sulke uitdagings oorweeg terwyl hy die *status quo* eintlik subtiel bevestig.

Key Terms

- Medieval
- Literature
- Hagiography
- Saint Katherine of Alexandria
- John Capgrave
- Medieval Church
- Bride of Christ
- Body of Christ
- Women
- Knowledge
- Education
- Rhetoric