
THE LIFE OF

Saint Katherine
of Alexandria

JOHN CAPGRAVE

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INTRODUCTION

John Capgrave expected his *Life of Saint Katherine* to raise eyebrows. His fifteenth-century readers would have known all about the fourth-century virgin martyr, one of the best-loved saints of their day.¹ Most everyone would have heard of Katherine's exceptional learning, brilliantly displayed when she defended her faith in a debate against fifty pagan scholars. Many would have seen paintings of angels smashing the great spiked wheels that the emperor Maxentius built to destroy her. A few might have known of her mystical marriage to Christ, a Continental accretion to her legend that was just gaining currency in England. But Capgrave's version of the scholar-saint's life was unlike anything they would have encountered before. Not only did it relay new information about Katherine's forebears, upbringing, conversion, mystical marriage, and brief reign as queen of Alexandria, but it also offered a radically new take on Katherine herself. Indeed, Capgrave's narrative is not so much a conventional saint's life as the story of a girl's coming of age and of the dreams, anxieties, frustrations, and failures that precede her ultimate triumph as a Christian martyr. Capgrave's wayward heroine—selfish at first, albeit principled—learns more than theology and the seven liberal arts; she learns compassion and responsibility to others. The story of her personal growth is woven into a tapestry of political turmoil and religious repression that, as Capgrave's readers were bound to suspect, had everything to do with the England they inhabited and its recent past.

Capgrave addresses the reader's potential skepticism with an extended history of the source he claims to be translating. That history—a romance of sorts, featuring scholars-errant questing for a long-lost manuscript—was surely invented, one of the

“fables of origins” that many fifteenth-century authors supplied to legitimize what was actually poetic license.² The original life of Katherine, he claims, was composed by none other than the saint’s teacher, secretary, and eventual convert, Athanasius. Soon after Athanasius’s death, his eyewitness account disappeared, preserved by divine providence from book-burning heretics. A century later, a scholar by the name of Arrek recovered Athanasius’s work after a twelve-year quest and translated it from Greek to Latin. Arrek’s translation was itself lost, then recovered centuries later by an English priest who, like Arrek, had spent over a decade traversing distant lands searching for it. At the time of his death, the priest had completed a partial translation of Arrek’s Latin text, but his dialect was so obscure that it could only be read by a few people. Distressed that Katherine’s life was “known only by nine or ten Englishmen,” Capgrave undertook to redo the priest’s translation in an English that could be understood by the general public and to supply the missing portions of Katherine’s life.

Over half a millennium later, I am in a sense following in Capgrave’s footsteps, translating his Middle English narrative into modern English in the conviction that it *does* deserve to be known by more than a handful of academics. Capgrave’s *Life of Saint Katherine* is an extraordinary achievement, a bold literary experiment that transforms the genre of the saint’s life by infusing it with conventions and techniques more often associated with chronicles, mystery plays, fabliaux, and romances than with saints’ lives. What’s more: it’s a terrific story, with sharply drawn characters, a compelling plot, and a complex, unsettling moral.

Literary Context

By Capgrave’s time, the saint’s life was an established and enormously popular genre, which formed part of a broader body of literature known as hagiography, or writings about the saints.³ Since late antiquity, authors had been celebrating the

lives, deaths, and miracles of Christians whose exceptional holiness was thought to have earned them a special rapport with God. Though these authors, also known as hagiographers, routinely insisted upon the authenticity of their accounts, accurately relaying biographical detail had always been subordinated to the *moral* imperative of edifying readers with stirring examples of Christian heroism modeled on the life of Christ. In fact, the lives of many of the most popular saints of the Middle Ages were invented centuries after those saints purportedly lived. Katherine is a case in point: though she is supposed to have died in the early fourth century, the earliest mention of her dates from the seventh century, and the first account of her martyrdom dates from the tenth century.

Legendary saints like Katherine generally fall into distinct categories, and Katherine, a virgin martyr, belongs to one of the largest of them.⁴ In the typical virgin martyr legend, a beautiful Christian woman defies her family and refuses to marry, declaring that she is already betrothed to Christ. Her commitment to celibacy typically results in religious persecution, often initiated by her father or a disgruntled suitor. The significance of virgin martyr legends, which so often pit rebellious heroines against vicious sexual predators, has been hotly debated: do they indulge fantasies of violence against women or celebrate protofeminists defying the patriarchy? These, of course, are extreme interpretations, though not mutually exclusive. Many scholars have seen the genre's capacity to convey divergent, often ambiguous, messages about gender and power as a major source of its ongoing appeal and influence.⁵

Virgin martyrs and other saints remained popular through the centuries because their stories were constantly being retold. In the process of retelling, they were tailored to the needs and interests of new audiences—not to mention the agendas, religious and otherwise, of their authors. Writers of saints' lives seem to have been especially attracted to Katherine, perhaps because her learning appealed to the mostly clerical authors of saints' lives, perhaps because her status as a queen made her appear more

glamorous than other virgin martyrs. In any case, representations of Katherine are more numerous and more varied than those of most other saints. She is one of the few martyrs to inspire stories about her life before her martyrdom. These stories, which center on her conversion and mystical marriage to Christ, can be found in art as well as in literature from the thirteenth century onward. Though no depictions of the mystical marriage survive in medieval English art, Capgrave's is the most elaborate of five known narrations of the episode that were produced in England.⁶

As my discussion of the saint's life as a genre may suggest, medieval readers would have expected a certain amount of variation among versions of a particular saint's legend; however, they would not have expected the narration to stray far from the plot, and they would have expected a certain *kind* of characterization (for example, the saint is clearly right, her opponents clearly wrong). The *extent*, rather than the mere *fact*, of Capgrave's modifications to both plot and character is what makes his *Katherine* so extraordinary.

Capgrave's *Katherine*

The *Life of Saint Katherine* is unlike anything Capgrave had written before.⁷ A Cambridge-trained doctor of theology and member of the Augustinian order of friars, he had produced almost exclusively Latin biblical commentaries and had composed only one work in English, a life of Saint Norbert of Xanten, founder of the Premonstratensian order, that Capgrave translated circa 1440 at the request of his acquaintance John Wygenhale, head of the Premonstratensian abbey of West Dereham, Norfolk. Given the reluctance Capgrave professed for the assignment of translating Norbert—"Who can write anything these days," he complained in his prologue to the translation, "without its being tossed and pulled like wool"⁸—it is surprising that he wrote anything further in English. But five years later he

undertook the *Life of Saint Katherine*, and apparently on his own initiative, because he mentions no patron or dedicatee.

In *Norbert*, Capgrave tried his hand at the “literary” approach to writing saints’ lives that Chaucer had inaugurated a generation earlier with his life of Saint Cecilia, best known as the Second Nun’s contribution to the *Canterbury Tales*. He used rhyme royal, a type of stanza made fashionable by Chaucer and later taken up by hagiographer and poet laureate John Lydgate as he continued Chaucer’s legacy into the fifteenth century. *Katherine*, however, was a more ambitious literary experiment than *Norbert*, appropriating not only a Chaucerian stanza but, among other literary devices, a Chaucerian narrator—bookish, opinionated, and intrusive.⁹ In contrast to the bland, dignified verse of *Norbert*, *Katherine* jangles with the tags and clichés of popular romance, often sounding more like Chaucer’s *Sir Thopas* than his *Second Nun’s Tale*!¹⁰ Certain moments are downright silly, as when Katherine’s swooning mother “dropped like a ball” at the end of book 2. To engage a popular audience of “man, maiden, and wife” (prologue), Capgrave alludes to matters of contemporary interest, such as trade, childrearing, pageantry, and fashion, and he treats political and religious issues that would have resonated with his audience. These issues are developed through the actions and dilemmas of a large cast of vividly realized characters.¹¹ In this more expansive treatment of the saint’s life, Capgrave was surely inspired by Lydgate, whose lives of Saints Edmund and Alban unfolded in multiple books and were far more historically and psychologically oriented than Middle English saints’ lives had ever been; however, in rejecting Lydgate’s elevated rhetoric for an idiomatic English, Capgrave created a mode of narration that was distinctly his own.

Most extraordinary of Capgrave’s characters is Katherine herself, the spoiled only child of an aging king and queen who had despaired of ever having offspring. Superbly educated but wholly undisciplined, Katherine grows up to be a reclusive, studious adolescent, unwilling to sacrifice her personal freedom to any other calling—not to the duties of government, and

certainly not to marriage and childbearing. When, after her father's death, her mother and the lords of her realm press her to marry for the sake of her kingdom, she summons all her wit and learning to stymie her opponents, not hesitating to deploy slick rhetorical tricks in defense of a stance she knows full well is unreasonable ("How I wish I weren't a queen, for I don't know how to—nor am I able to—refute the wisdom of that wise man," she thinks to herself when one of her barons implores her to marry; book 2, chapter 2). Readers can only sympathize with Katherine's widowed mother, struggling to deal at once with political malcontents and a rebellious daughter. Capgrave also invites us to sympathize with Katherine's subjects, dismayed by lawlessness and economic distress, who vainly warn that her failure to heed counsel will have dire consequences—as indeed it does when the emperor Maxentius takes over her realm and occupies her capital. Though Katherine might prove to be a heroic martyr, Capgrave does not downplay the earthly cost of her heavenly triumph, the political turmoil and the anguish of so many innocent people. His message—that otherworldliness, however laudable in a martyr, is ill-advised in a monarch—must have struck a chord with fifteenth-century readers, whose own king, Henry VI, was known for studiousness and excessive piety.¹² Indeed, Henry's political inattention and ineptitude would result in the outbreak of civil war in 1455 (less than a decade after Capgrave composed *Katherine*) and in Henry's own "martyrdom" in 1471.

Katherine's headstrong personality makes it difficult for her to accept Christianity. She disdains the Virgin Mary's chosen messenger as too shabby to be a great queen's emissary, and she dismisses as gibberish his talk of a virgin mother and a tripartite God. Such frank skepticism of basic tenets of the Christian faith might seem surprising in a future saint (and, to my knowledge, it has no equivalent in other versions of Katherine's legend), but it allows Capgrave to convey the message that truth withstands scrutiny and that knowledge produces faith, a faith one is willing to die for. That message had a particular urgency in fifteenth-century England, when concerns about the Lollard

heresy had prompted the Church to enact harsh censorship measures designed to curtail the spread of error by prohibiting the discussion of theology in English.¹³

Capgrave reaffirms his confidence in an informed, intellectualized Christianity in Katherine's debate with the fifty pagan scholars, in which the saint defends Christian doctrine against spirited attack.¹⁴ Though the eyes of modern readers might glaze over at the extended discussions of arcane points of dogma, such as the theory of adoption, we must resist the temptation to dismiss them as the dull pieties one would expect to find in religious literature. Such long doctrinal disquisitions were in fact rare in saints' lives. By including them, Capgrave is using the genre of the saint's life to teach ordinary men and women some of the nuances of their faith, thus flouting the restrictions on vernacular theologizing favored by many within the Church hierarchy. Should he be taken to task for his doctrinal excursions, he could protest that he was merely translating the life of a time-honored saint, using a source composed by none other than the venerable church father Saint Athanasius, whose orthodoxy nobody would dream of questioning.

Capgrave promotes a Christianity that is both intellectually grounded and humane.¹⁵ The empress, whom Katherine eventually converts, is initially attracted to Christianity because of the simple piety and integrity of its practitioners: "These Christians don't harm anybody," she muses: "They pay for what they buy; and each and every day they sing anew a good song to their god. . . . They aren't extravagant in their clothing, gluttonous, or drunkards—this way of life pleases me very much" (book 5, chapter 13). The empress has no desire to be a rebel, much less a martyr. Indeed, she hesitates to convert for fear of the gossip, not to mention the trouble she would be in should her husband find out! This modest and timid wife, who summons up the courage first to proclaim her faith and then to die for it, shows that saints and martyrs are not much different from the ordinary readers of Katherine's story. In this, she is much like Katherine herself, who loves the privileges of her class but will "endure" poverty "if it comes" (book 5, chapter 10).

Like the characters of contemporary mystery plays, Capgrave's protagonists are surprised by God's intervention in their lives, and they are reluctant players in the grand dramas of salvation history. The hermit Adrian, who converts Katherine to Christianity, does not recognize the Virgin Mary when she suddenly appears in his remote desert retreat, even as the infirmities of old age, about which he has just been complaining, miraculously vanish. Readers might well smile when he invokes God's blessing upon the Queen of Heaven, or when he protests that he cannot possibly go on an errand for her and her son because he has vowed his service to Christ and his mother. Even after Mary identifies herself and Adrian stammers his apologies, he is in no hurry to travel to Alexandria on her behalf: The city is big, he protests, and he doesn't know the way; what's more, he might die of fatigue or be killed by wild beasts along the way. No wonder Mary takes the precaution of (temporarily) blinding this down-to-earth priest when, much later in the story, she has Katherine undress for her baptism.

In his practical-mindedness, Adrian resembles the unnamed English priest of the prologue. After years of searching for Katherine's long-lost life, the priest receives a vision in which an otherworldly figure shows him a book and orders him to eat it—recalling Ezekiel 2:8–3:3, where the prophet is ordered to consume a scroll. Whereas Ezekiel immediately obeys, Capgrave's priest protests that the book is too big for his mouth, and with its rotten cover and moldy pages, “this food isn't likely to do me any good!” Capgrave's portrayal of the English priest and Adrian reflects his general practice of deflating the dignity and insisting on the humanity of authority figures—saints, clergymen, and even (as we shall see) his own narrative voice—acknowledging their limitations without denigrating their worthiness.

Capgrave's villain, the emperor Maxentius, is as unusual as his protagonists. Unlike the conventional bellowing tyrants of martyr legends, Capgrave's Maxentius seeks counsel and realizes that violence is not the best means to quell dissent; in book 4, chapter 13, he is even shown to participate productively in the affairs of his subjects. By recounting the degeneration of

a ruler who once enjoyed the respect and support of his people, Capgrave conveys a more nuanced message about governance. Indeed, through the complementary examples of Maxentius and Katherine, he asserts that rulers can fail for very different reasons: Maxentius because he is all too determined to impose his will on others and Katherine because she has no royal will.¹⁶

Katherine's story is told by a narrator whose presence is so conspicuous and whose personality is so vivid that he might be considered a character in his own right.¹⁷ Like the narrator of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, he dithers and descants, interrupting even the most solemn moments of Katherine's mystical marriage (for example, when Christ slips a chalcedony wedding ring on Katherine's finger in book 3, chapter 24, he lectures readers about the properties of chalcedony). More surprising than his obtrusiveness is his untrustworthiness, for his assertions of scholarly scrupulosity are at crucial moments undercut by inconsistencies. For example, in the prologue to book 3, he reminds readers who might "doubt" his unfamiliar account of Katherine's marriage that he is translating a long-lost source, "as I said earlier in the prologue"; yet in chapter 1 he begins reconstructing the story of Katherine's conversion from various "old books." With characteristic fussiness, he interrupts his account of Katherine's reception in heaven to wonder where her escort, the hermit Adrian, is—"My author doesn't say" (book 3, chapter 22), he complains—yet he declares Adrian the sole source of information about Katherine's experience, "for how else would it have come to our ears? How would we have learned about it?" (book 3, chapter 23). By interpolating a narrator of dubious sincerity and competence between himself and his readers, Capgrave befores the issue of responsibility, allowing him to risk startling, even offending, readers with his unusual narrative.

After Katherine

In his later English writings—a chronicle, a pilgrim's guide to Rome, and lives of Augustine of Hippo and Gilbert

of Sempringham—Capgrave further cultivated some of the themes he explored in *Katherine*. A fascination with women's experience pervades his oeuvre, and he consistently stresses the importance of an informed, intellectual Christian faith. However, his later works are notably more conservative than *Katherine*, in both form and content: they are written in prose and usually stay closer to known sources; their characters are less quirky, their narrators less obtrusive; though they praise an intellectualized Christianity, they contain few extended discussions of doctrine.

If Capgrave retreated to a more conservative approach to writing saints' lives, it is not because readers did not appreciate *Katherine*. The text survives in four manuscripts produced shortly after its composition, suggesting that there was a demand for it. Capgrave's fellow Augustinian friar Osbern Bokenham alludes to it in the prologue to his own verse life of Saint Katherine, composed about a year later.¹⁸ Capgrave's *Katherine* may also have had an unacknowledged influence on other hagiographers who developed complex plots and characters, perhaps beginning with Bokenham. Though Bokenham's life of Katherine seems to be a conservative reworking of Capgrave's *Katherine*, with a vastly simplified debate with the fifty scholars and no account of Katherine's conversion or mystical marriage, his verse life of Saint Barbara features a psychologically complex heroine and includes extended discussions of dogma; Bokenham also composed the only English life of Apollonia that presents the saint as a preacher.¹⁹ Bokenham's Audrey and Winifred are torn between spiritual yearnings and familial responsibilities. George Barclay's *Life of Saint George* (ca. 1516), an elaborate narrative much like Capgrave's, contains an unusual discussion of spiritual baptism reminiscent of that found in *Katherine*, book 5, chapter 5.

Regardless of Capgrave's actual influence, his work deserves recognition by students of English literary, cultural, and religious history. With its complexity and bold transgression of generic conventions, it is truly a monument of hagiographical

writing. Its subtle characterizations and its experimentation with narrative voice make it a masterpiece of medieval English literature. Katherine's debate with her lords anticipates the arguments for and against female rule that would be made in Tudor England, when the ascensions of Mary I and then Elizabeth I made gynecocracy a political reality;²⁰ Katherine's debate with the fifty scholars is a daring exercise in vernacular theology that flouted attempts at censorship. The story of her fall is a minatory example to kings. Above all Capgrave's *Life of Saint Katherine* is powerful testimony that creative intellectualism may thrive even amid political turmoil and repression.

Note on the Translation

Capgrave wrote his *Life of Saint Katherine* in rhyme royal, that is, in seven-line stanzas following an *a-b-a-b-b-c-c* rhyme scheme. To achieve a more accurate translation, and also for the sake of readability, I have translated his verse into prose. For those who wish to cross-reference this translation with a verse edition, I have included Capgrave's frequent and rather haphazard chapter numbers, followed by the range of lines covered in each chapter and indicated in parentheses. The descriptive titles of each book, as well as the subheadings within books, are my additions, intended to help readers navigate the complicated narrative. The translation is based on the version of the life preserved in Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson 118, which is generally considered the closest to Capgrave's original.

In translating Capgrave's verse into prose, I have occasionally dropped superfluous words and phrases whose only function is to pad the line. I have also regularized the tense where random shifts that would not have bothered medieval readers would jar us. Otherwise I have sought to preserve the cluttered style of his rambling narration, including the sometimes bewildering syntax, the odd grammatical lapses, and the jolting shifts in tone—features that medieval readers *would* have noticed. In

short, I have aimed to capture the reading experience, often fun, often frustrating, that Capgrave offered his original audience. For readers wishing to sample the original Middle English, the appendix presents two passages from Capgrave's narrative with a more literal line-by-line translation into modern English on facing pages.

NOTES

1. For more information on Katherine's popularity in England, see Katherine J. Lewis, *The Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2000). For studies of facets of Katherine's cult, see the essays in Jacqueline Jenkins and Katherine J. Lewis, eds., *St Katherine of Alexandria: Texts and Contexts in Western Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003). For the cult's origins and early development, see Christine Walsh, *The Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria in Early Medieval Europe* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007).

2. Seth Lerer discusses one such "fable"—the "fable of patronage"—in *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 57–84. With his obviously fictional accounts of how he came to write his various framed fictions, Chaucer provided a precedent that may well have influenced Capgrave. Closest in spirit to Capgrave's prologue, though, is the prologue to the *Book of Margery Kempe*. If Lynn Staley is right in reading the *Book* as largely fictional, the parallel with Capgrave is strong indeed. For Staley's argument, see her *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

3. For an excellent introduction to the multifaceted genre of hagiography, see the essays and bibliographies by Thomas Head in *The Orb: On-line Reference Book for Medieval Studies*, <http://www.the-orb.net/encyclop/religion/hagiography/hagindex.html>. A fine anthology of important texts in the hagiographical traditions, all translated into modern English, is *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology*, ed. Thomas Head (New York: Garland, 2000).

4. For an overview of the Middle English tradition of virgin martyr legends, see Karen A. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

5. See, for example, Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001); Catherine Sanok, *Her*

Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints' Lives in Late Medieval England (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture c. 1150–1300: Virginity and Its Authorizations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs*.

6. An anonymous Middle English prose life of Katherine, composed circa 1420 and later incorporated into the 1438 *Gilte Legende*, is translated in *Chaste Passions: Medieval English Virgin Martyr Legends*, ed. Karen A. Winstead (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 115–63, 184–201. Another version in Middle English prose was incorporated into one manuscript of the *South English Legendary*, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 779. A mid-fourteenth-century life of Katherine in Anglo-Norman French can be found in London, British Library, MS Addit. 40143. For a partial transcription and translation of a Latin life of Katherine of possible English provenance, see Auvo Kurvinen, “The Source of Capgrave’s *Life of St Katherine*,” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 61 (1960): 268–324.

7. Accounts of Capgrave’s life and works include Jane C. Frede-man, “The Life of John Capgrave, O.E.S.A. (1393–1464),” *Augustiniana* 29 (1979): 197–237; Peter J. Lucas, *From Author to Audience: John Capgrave and Medieval Publication* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1997), 1–18; and Karen A. Winstead, *John Capgrave’s Fifteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 1–17.

8. *The Life of St. Norbert by John Capgrave, O.E.S.A. (1393–1464)*, ed. Cyril Lawrence Smetana (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1977), lines 8–9.

9. For more on *Katherine’s* affinities with Chaucer, especially its Chaucerian narrator and its development of issues raised in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, see Karen A. Winstead, “John Capgrave and the Chaucer Tradition,” *Chaucer Review* 30 (1996): 389–400; and Mary-Ann Stouck, “Chaucer and Capgrave’s *Life of St. Katharine*,” *American Benedictine Review* 33 (1982): 276–91.

10. On Capgrave’s use of romance conventions, see Derek Pearsall, “John Capgrave’s *Life of St. Katharine* and Popular Romance Style,” *Medievalia et Humanistica*, n.s., 6 (1975): 121–37.

11. I discuss Capgrave’s characterizations in more detail in “Piety, Politics, and Social Commitment in Capgrave’s *Life of St. Katherine*,” *Medievalia et Humanistica*, n.s., 17 (1990): 59–80.

12. On Capgrave’s *Katherine* as a political commentary on the reign of Henry VI, see Winstead, *John Capgrave’s Fifteenth Century*, 137–61. For a famous contemporary account that emphasizes Henry’s piety, see John Blacman, *Henry the Sixth*, ed. M. R. James (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 1919). Studies of the reign of Henry VI include R. A. Griffiths, *The Reign of Henry VI* (1981; reprint, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1998); and John Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

13. For influential treatments of the effects of Lollardy on English intellectual life, see Nicholas Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409," *Speculum* 70 (1995): 822–64; and Rita Copeland, *Pedagogy, Intellectuals, and Dissent in the Later Middle Ages: Lollardy and Ideas of Learning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Kathryn Kerby-Fulton argues that religious and secular authorities were more tolerant of spiritually audacious writings in her *Books under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writing in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

14. For more on Capgrave's participation in issues touching on Lollard controversy, see Sarah James, "'Doctryne and Studie': Female Learning and Religious Debate in Capgrave's *Life of Saint Katharine*," *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s., 37 (2005): 275–302; James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution, 1350–1547*, Oxford English Literary History 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 420–29; and Winstead, *John Capgrave's Fifteenth Century*, 51–87.

15. For more on this point, with particular reference to Capgrave's characterizations, see Winstead, "Piety, Politics, and Social Commitment."

16. I discuss the politics of *Katherine* at greater length in *John Capgrave's Fifteenth Century*, 137–61.

17. For more on Capgrave's narrator, see Winstead, "John Capgrave and the Chaucer Tradition."

18. Osbern Bokenham, *A Legend of Holy Women: A Translation of Osbern Bokenham's Legends of Holy Women*, trans. Sheila Delany (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 126.

19. These lives, along with the lives of Audrey and Winifred, are found in a newly discovered collection of saints' lives by Bokenham. This collection is being edited by Simon Horobin for the Early English Text Society. For a discussion of it, see Horobin's "Politics, Patronage, and Piety in the Work of Osbern Bokenham," *Speculum* 82 (2007): 932–49. On the conservatism of Bokenham's *Katherine*, see Paul Price, "Trumping Chaucer: Osbern Bokenham's *Katherine*," *Chaucer Review* 36 (2001): 158–83.

20. See Winstead, "Capgrave's Saint Katherine and the Perils of Gynecocracy," *Viator* 25 (1994): 361–76.

FURTHER READING

Capgrave's *Life of Saint Katherine*

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