



DISCIPLINING THE TONGUE: ARCHBISHOP ANTONINUS, THE OPERA A BEN VIVERE, AND THE REGULATION OF WOMEN'S SPEECH IN RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

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Abstract

In circa 1454, the Florentine Archbishop Antonino Pierozzi (later St. Antoninus) composed a spiritual guidebook, called Opera a ben vivere (A Work to Live Well by), for an elite Florentine laywoman, presumed to be Dianora Tornabuoni. Contained within this book are instructions to his female reader for how to protect her soul from vice and, therefore, 'live well' by controlling her sensual appetite, especially her desire for speech. In this text, Antoninus singles out three types of speech as particularly harmful if performed by his female reader. These sinful types of speech are excessive talk, idle talk (i.e. gossip), and intemperate laughter. This article analyses Antoninus's argument for the regulation of his female reader's sensual appetite for speech by contextualising it within early renaissance penitential culture and relative to Aristotelian and Christian notions about the nature of women.

Key words: women, sin, speech, senses, penitential literature, Antonino Pierozzi (St Antoninus), renaissance, Florence, Tornabuoni, gossip, laughter

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Biographical note

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So as to take comfort in your charity, that with your strength you accustom yourself to speak little; and when you feel something pulsate within you that you know is not necessary, and even more so when you know that it is damaging, strengthen your sensual appetite (*sensualità*) and keep silent ... When you are in company to converse with others and you feel like talking to some of them, take care not to desire to respond to every proposition; take care, my daughter, to be wiser of the world ... Converse with people as little as you can, and make a good wall around your soul; so that the infernal beasts cannot destroy the good seed that God has planted in the garden of your soul. And at the gate of your mouth place a good custodian, so that, as says a Saint [Bernard?], you do not lose in short time [by] laughing, that which in much time you have acquired [by] crying. Believe me, my daughter, believe me, that these idle words, and this chatter (that which man nowadays does not seem to know how to do anything else, and has no conscience of it) these are things that dry up our souls in such a manner that no sweetness of God is left to sense.

Antoninus [c.1454] 1858, *Opera a ben vivere*, pp.132–4.

These lines that prescribe control over one's sensual appetite for speech appear in *Opera a ben vivere* (*A Work to Live Well by*), a spiritual guidebook composed in circa 1454 by the Observant Dominican friar Antonino Pierozzi (1389–1459, later canonised as St Antoninus).¹ When *Opera a ben vivere* was written, Antoninus was Archbishop of Florence (1446–59), a powerful position that placed him in charge of religious life in the city.

¹ For Antoninus' biography see: da Bisticci [d. 1498], 1859, pp.3–29; Morçay, 1914; and Peterson, 1985.

As Florentine Archbishop, Antoninus' mission included the pastoral care of Florentine souls (*cura animarum*). This comprised the moral and spiritual education of Florentine citizens, carried out primarily through sermons, penitential rites, and spiritual guidance, such as *Opera a ben vivere*.²

Antoninus' *Opera a ben vivere* consists of a prologue and three parts, each containing a series of chapters that are written in vernacular Italian. Part one summarises the didactic intent of the book, which is to instruct its reader on how to live well by eradicating vice, performing good works, and seeking to maintain peace within the soul. Antoninus compares his reader's soul to a garden that must be well guarded, seeded, and well-tended in order to bear fruit. In part two of *Opera a ben vivere*, he provides specific guidance for the cultivation and protection of this metaphorical garden. This includes recommendations for control over the senses, the enclosed garden's 'gates', through which vice might enter and harm the soul, thereby preventing his reader from attaining a good life on earth and in heaven. The third and final part entitled 'Regola' contains rules for the conduct of one's daily life that recall the daily rituals followed by those professed to religious orders, a comparison that Antoninus makes explicit in the text when he tells his reader 'you have taken up the religious life, not through the wearing of a habit but through the manner of that life' (Antoninus, 1858, p.181; Bryce, 2009, pp.46–7; Paoli, 1999, pp.26–7).³ As a whole, Antoninus' concept of the art of living well (*bene vivere*) prescribes a balance between the contemplative life of prayer and an active life, consisting of the regulation of one's conduct and the performance of good works (*buon opere*) for the spiritual benefit of oneself, one's family, and one's neighbours; and thus for the city's 'communal well-being' (*bene comune*).⁴

According to the prologue of the *Opera a ben vivere*, it was composed upon request and for the 'health of the soul' (*salute dell'anima*) of a woman, who is addressed throughout the text as 'my daughter'

² The *cura animarum* was a central mission of the Dominican order, as indicated in the prologue to the Dominican Constitution (1215–37) and in Antoninus' *Summa theologiae*, III, XVI, VI, part I, col. 905. See discussion of these texts in Howard, 1995, esp. pp.50–4; and Howard, 2001, pp.495–509.

³ For monastic ritual see: Lehmijoki-Gardner et al, 2005, pp.46–58; Bianchini, 1996, pp.189–204.

⁴ For Antoninus and the concept of *bene vivere* see: Paoli, 1999, pp.27–31; and Paoli, 2008, pp.90–103. For Antoninus' sense of civic responsibility for the well-being of Florence (his 'civic ethics') see: Howard, 1995, esp. pp.220–2; and Gaughan, 1950. On the relationship between the *bene vivere* and the *bene comune* see: Paoli, 2008, pp.90–4; and Howard, 1995, pp.241–6.



Figure 3.1: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Birth of the Virgin*, 1485–90, fresco, approximately 450cm wide, approximately 450 cm wide, Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

(*figliuola mia*), signaling Antoninus' pastoral role as his reader's father-like spiritual teacher (*maestro di spirito*).⁵ An inscription identifies the book's original recipient as a wife of Tommaso di Lorenzo Soderini (1403–85), head of one of the most prominent families in Florence. This unnamed woman was likely Tommaso's second wife Dianora di Francesco Tornabuoni (c. 1422–62; married in c. 1441–6), a Florentine laywoman from the ancient and elite Tornaquinci-Tornabuoni clan. A contemporary second copy of *Opera a ben vivere* is believed to have been made for Dianora's sister Lucrezia Tornabuoni (1425–82), who was wife of Piero de' Medici (1416–69; married 1444), the heir apparent to the wealthiest and most powerful family in renaissance Florence.⁶

Images of these significant Tornabuoni women likely appear in the Tornabuoni Family Chapel at Santa Maria Novella painted by Domenico Ghirlandaio between 1485 and 1490. These frescoes depict events from the lives of St John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary as if witnessed by contemporary Florentines. They were commissioned by Dianora and Lucrezia's brother Giovanni Tornabuoni, an affluent banker, whose own image appears in the fresco cycle, along with the documented portraits of prominent male friends and relatives of the Tornabuoni family (Simons, 1985, v.1, pp.266–327). Unfortunately, the identities of

the mature Florentine women who appear in these scenes are not likewise recorded, leading to a variety of interpretations based on a comparison with other presumed portraits of Lucrezia and on a fifteenth-century description of the features of her son, Lorenzo de' Medici. There are no similarly confirmed portraits of Dianora, who likely shared certain features with her sister, making their images even more difficult to discern (Simons, 1985, v.2, pp.121–2, nt.210; Pernis and Adams, 2006, pp.151–3). Both women, however, may appear together as the older females to the far left in the foreground of the *Birth of the Virgin* scene (Figure 3.1). The taller woman in a red dress and blue mantle with an long neck, oval face, thin nose, and short chin has been variously identified as Lucrezia or Dianora (more likely); while the woman in black beside her has been identified as Dianora, Lucrezia, or their sister Selvaggia, who was a nun (Simons, 1985, v.1, pp.298–301 and v.2, pp.121–2, nt.210).⁷ A similar black-clad woman with a white veil and wimple appears in the far right foreground of the *Visitation* scene on the opposite wall (Figure 3.2). This figure, wearing either the garb of a nun or a widow, has also been variously identified as Lucrezia (more likely, as she was a widow) or Dianora (never a widow), both of whom were dead when these frescoes were painted, making these images – if they are in fact portraits – commemorative.⁸

This essay presents an analysis of Antoninus' instructions in *Opera a ben vivere* concerning speech, which Antoninus treats as a sixth sense akin to the

5 For Antoninus' role as a pastor and spiritual teacher see: Calzolari, 1960, pp.23–34; Paoli, 1999, pp.83–139; Paoli, 2008, pp.85–130; and Bryce, 2009, pp.11–53.

6 For ownership of these two versions of the *Opera a ben vivere*, see: Antoninus, 1858, pp.xxxv–xliv; Paoli, 1999, pp.25–6; Paoli, 2008, pp.110–3; for these Tornabuoni women see: Lowe, 1993, pp.9–12; Clarke, 1991, pp.30–2 and 123–53; Plebani, 2002, pp.51–7 and 250–1; Pernis and Adams, 2006 (pp.25–6 for Dianora).

7 Instead, Pernis and Adams (2006, p.152) suggest that the woman in light blue in the middle row might be Dianora.

8 For her identification as Lucrezia see: Simons, 1985, v.1, pp.305–6 and v.2, p.12–2, note 210; Pernis and Adams, 2006, p.153; as Dianora see: Plebani, 2002, p.75; Salucci, 2012, p.35.



Figure 3.2: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Visitation*, 1485–90, fresco, approximately 450cm wide. Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

traditional senses of vision, hearing, taste, smell, and touch. In particular, it addresses the social and ethical implications of Antoninus' prescriptions for women's speech as they relate to his mission to care for the temporal and spiritual well-being of his elite female readers, namely Dianora and Lucrezia Tornabuoni, and by extension their families and the Florentine community that Antoninus was called to serve as archbishop. In addition, it will be argued that the Tornabuoni women who appear in the Tornabuoni Chapel frescoes provide exemplars of Antoninus' prescriptions for female speech behaviour in fifteenth-century Florence.

Guarding the senses, protecting the soul

The focus of this essay is part two of *Opera a ben vivere*, which begins by describing the soul as a garden in need of protection, cultivation, and constant care in order to produce the fruit necessary for a good and virtuous life (Antoninus, 1858, pp.93–4). Antoninus identifies four things his female reader must do to attain these fruits of a good life. First, she must seal well and protect the garden of her soul. This is achieved, he tells her, if you 'build a good wall around your soul, and [so] that you care for yourself, [by] making a scarcity of yourself. And keep yourself in the house as much as you can: and guard you senses, as much as you can' (p.98). In order to protect her soul, therefore, his female reader must both limit her public presence and regulate her senses, which Antoninus compares with openings or gateways in the soul's enclosure wall that have the potential to allow external stimuli to enter and affect the moral state of her soul. At the gateways of her senses she is told to place a trustworthy and discrete gatekeeper 'who will not open [the gate] if it is not to one who

is known [or] who comes to be useful and reward the owner of the garden' (p.95). In addition, Antoninus tells his female reader that she must hire a gardener in the form of a pastoral mentor, who is an expert in planting, cultivating, and harvesting, and thus an expert in the care of souls (*cura animarum*), to help her to develop virtue within her garden and keep it free from vice (pp.135–42). Finally, she must maintain personal vigilance over this garden and convey to her gardener (e.g., her pastor through confession) what she believes is bad within it, so that he can root out the bad growth, which is vice (pp.94–6).

After putting forth this easily memorable metaphor of the soul (*anima*) as a garden in need of care (*cura*), Antoninus specifies the particular gateway senses that he considers most in need of protection. He states:

Now thus, my daughter, we must make this wall around the garden of our soul, in which every day we plant the seeds of good deeds; so that the infernal beats do not destroy it, we must, with all of our force guard our senses, and especially vision (*vedere*) and hearing (*udire*); those [senses] which you can never guard well if [you do] not flee the conversation of men.

(Antoninus, 1858, pp.98–9, emphasis mine)

Thus, Antoninus recommends that, in order to protect her soul, his female reader should literally 'flee' from male conversation, thereby prohibiting her from participation in male public discourse, which in fifteenth-century Florence was central to social and political power – a topic that shall be returned to later in this essay.

According to the aforementioned passage, the two senses singled out for particular attention and

regulation are vision (*vedere*) and hearing (*udire*), a prescription that would seem to necessitate control over one's own eyes and ears respectively. There is no comparable instruction in *Opera a ben vivere* for the regulation of taste, touch, or smell. The text that follows, however, makes it clear that it is not his female reader's own eyes and ears that make up Antoninus' primary concern. In fact, ears are not mentioned anywhere in this text. Rather it becomes apparent that Antoninus is most concerned with the damage his female reader might cause to her own soul and to those around her by not regulating her speech and by 'letting herself be seen' (Antoninus, 1858, p.96). Of these two highlighted 'senses' the one that receives the most attention from Antoninus is speech (some four and a half chapters for speech versus two pages for vision). Speech also receives lengthy treatment in his contemporary *Summa theologica* (also called *Summa moralis*, compiled c.1440–54), where an entire chapter is dedicated to this sixth sense. This chapter on speech follows a single chapter that covers all five of the other traditional senses, signaling the importance of the sense of speech in Antoninus' moral theology (Antoninus, 1959, I, II, chs.3–4). In both texts Antoninus discusses at length the virtues and vices associated with speech and its related sensory organ the tongue. His aim in each text is to educate his reader (one clerical and male and one a lay female) on how to identify and practise certain good types of speech and to recognise, detest, and avoid bad speech, all of which would have been considered prudent behaviour and essential for proper penitential performance (Craun, 1997, pp.47–70). When read together, these texts provide a greater picture of Antoninus' views on speech and insight into early renaissance notions about speech in general.

'Sins of the tongue'

Moral discourse surrounding the sins of speech finds its medieval origin in St Augustine's *Contra Faustum* (22.27, emphasis mine), where he defines sin as 'anything said or done, or desired that contradicts the law of God' (as quoted in Wenzel, 1992, p.137 and Craun, 1997, p.11). It also derives its authority from the many scriptural references to sinful speech, including: Psalms 140:4: 'Incline not my heart to evil words' and James 3:6: 'the tongue constitutes a world of iniquity among our members ... inflamed to hell' – both of which serve in Antoninus' *Summa* (I, II, ch.4) as the exegetical bases for his discussion on how 'undue speech causes much badness'. Many of Antoninus' exact arguments and much of his scriptural evidence regarding the morality of speech in both texts can be traced to 'sins of the tongue' literature inspired by the Fourth Lateran Council's

(1215) call to reform penitential and confessional practice. Specifically, many of Antoninus' notions about speech appear to derive either directly or indirectly from the ninth tract of the *Summa de vitiis* (c.1230) by William Peraldus (Guillaume Peyraut/Perault, c.1190–1271), whom Antoninus cites as a source in his *Summa* (I, prologus, cols 5–6).⁹

In this ninth tract, entitled 'On the Sins of the Tongue', Peraldus explains why one ought to guard one's tongue (part I) and he identifies twenty-four specific 'sins of the tongue' (part II). These include (starting with most severe): blasphemy, murmuring, making excuses for sin, making false oaths (i.e. perjury), lying, slander, flattery, cursing, insult, causing controversy (i.e. quarrelling), deriding good people, giving false counsel, sowing discord, hypocrisy, rumor, jactation or boasting (*iactantia*), revelation of secrets, making indiscriminate threats, making false promises, speaking idle words (*otiosum verbum*), talking too much (*multiloquium*), using base or foul talk, scurrility (including: buffoonery, vulgar joking, and inappropriate laughter), and imprudent taciturnity, such as remaining silent when one should speak (Peraldus, c.1230; Casagrande and Vecchio, 1987, pp.116–28). Peraldus' final section provides some remedies for these verbal sins, many of which also appear in Antoninus' writings. These include telling his reader/listener to: evaluate the potential danger when speaking, consider the tongue's 'nobility', make a 'barrier against the gate of the mouth', speak rarely and say few things, speak slowly with much deliberation, entrust the tongue's care to God, and cloistered silence for monks (c.1230). In his study of Peraldus' 'sins of the tongue', Edwin D. Craun has discerned influences ranging from a monastic culture of silence and restraint to Aristotelian discourse on the nature of speech and its 'natural' operation as an instrument of rational cognition and Augustinian sign theory, which considers speech as a cognitive, social, and ethical activity (Craun, 1997, pp.28–9, and ch.2). As will be demonstrated, these influences can also be discerned in Antoninus' texts on speech, likely due to his reliance on this earlier tradition.

The tongue as a 'noble member' in need of protection and regulation

In *Opera a ben vivere* Antoninus prefaces his discussion of speech with the following statement:

Now I say this spiritually ... so that with his
[God's] help we depart from the bad and we

9 For Fourth Lateran Council's reforms see: Barratt, 1984, pp.413–4; Boyle, 1985, pp.30–43; for the significance of Peraldus see: Wenzel, 1992, pp.135–63; Craun, 1997, pp.15–7; Casagrande and Vecchio, 1987, pp.103–40, esp. pp.128–35,

begin to do good; to be able to always grow in said goodness, and to never fall back into badness, and to be able to arrive at some taste and sweetness of God; [we must] *establish good custody and a guard at the gateway of our mouth; and not open it to speak at every thought that pulses our sensual appetite (sensualità)*, but to think with much discretion before we proffer a word whether it will cause damage or usefulness.

(Antoninus, 1858, pp.99–100, emphasis mine)

It is, therefore, necessary to learn to control one's senses and one's sensual appetite for speech in order to achieve spiritual fulfillment and 'goodness' or virtue.

'Antoninus follows this preface with a chapter entitled: 'How, for many reasons, we must guard our tongue well, [so as] not to offend God', in which he addresses the spiritual significance of the human tongue and the justification for its special care, with the aim of convincing his reader of the need for her tongue's protection and control. His reasons consist of a series of 'considerations' sustained by quotations from religious authorities (mostly scripture and scriptural commentary). In general, Antoninus' reasons are intended to support his argument that the tongue is a 'very noble member' capable of causing 'much good and much bad', an idea found in Peraldus' *Summa* and based on the authority of Proverbs 18:21: '*death and life are in the hand of the tongue*' (Antoninus, 1858, pp.103 and 108). He argues that the tongue's control or lack thereof could lead one to either salvation or damnation, making its regulation instrumental to the care of one's soul.¹⁰

Antoninus begins by asking his reader to consider the positive aspects of speech. He starts with its divine origins, namely how God 'singularly honoured man' above all of his creations by giving him a tongue that allows him to speak intelligibly, a notion that has its roots in Aristotelian natural philosophy (*Generation of Animals*, 5.7 and *Politics*, 1.2). It is a dishonour to God, therefore, if one does not use man's unique gift of speech to laud Him or if one uses the tongue to speak offensive words (Antoninus, 1858, pp.101–3, considerations 1–3). In his *Summa* (I, II, ch.4, cols 78–80), Antoninus expands upon this consideration by attributing the human tongue's unique ability to speak intelligibly to 'the very nature of the disposition of the mouth and of the tongue'. He, thus, follows an Aristotelian model of analysis that considers the

materiality, form, and (in this case, physiological) circumstance of these two body parts (see Craun, 1997, p.29). Antoninus explains:

[I]t is well-known that the [matter of the] tongue is very fleshy, and ductile, and does not offer a lot of volume here and there, and thence by the mouth, in order that you may intellectually comprehend from its speech, there [must] be nothing hard and pertinacious, but it [must] be properly flexible ... the form should [also] be noted; if the tongue is long and broad and thick, but is more long than wide and more wide than thick, then you may understand, [and] you are able to speak properly, and in length with good endurance

(Antoninus, 1959, I, II, IV, cols 78–80).

In his *Summa* (I, II, ch.4, col.80) Antoninus describes the tongue as naturally guarded on all sides except for one, which is the opening of the mouth. This he interprets as proof that God desires that the tongue be protected. Antoninus also claims that this God-given natural opening is evidence that complete silence would be sinful – a conclusion not expressed in *Opera a ben vivere*.

In *Opera a ben vivere* Antoninus lists the 'natural' or proper functions of this gift of speech, which, he claims, was given solely to man so that he can give God thanks and praise, teach what is right, and preach in God's name (Antoninus, 1858, p.114). This interpretation of speech has its roots in Augustine's assertion that 'God created and gave man the gift of the tongue so he could speak, that which to no animal was conceded; with it one must not speak if not for three things, these are: to praise God, preach to others, and accuse the same; and every other word that we make with it, is bad' (as quoted by Antoninus, p.114). Later, Antoninus points out that another divine use of the tongue is to convert others to Christianity, for he claims 'the Holy Spirit above all comes in the tongue more than in [any] other member; and this is elected for the most instrumental act [that is] to convert people' (p.107). In its performance of these divine offices, the tongue has the potential to become an instrument for his reader's personal salvation and for the salvation of others who hear her speak divinely-sanctioned words. The tongue, however, can also be an 'instrument of sin' if improperly used (Antoninus, 1959, I, VII, ch.1, col.515).

As further evidence of the tongue's 'nobility', Antoninus highlights its 'natural function' (in the Aristotelian sense) as the primary organ for multiple senses (Antoninus, 1858, pp.102–3, consideration 3). In addition to its role in speech, the tongue has the

¹⁰ This is quite similar to Peraldus' arguments as analysed in Casagrande and Vecchio, 1987, pp.103–40; Craun, 1997, pp.26–37.

ability to taste, which is central to eating, and thus the nourishment and sustenance of the body. As such, the tongue is the only sense organ that both touches and tastes Christ's body and blood through the Eucharistic sacrament, making the tongue's proper function in both speech and taste necessary to the salvation of the soul (Bynum, 1987, p.56). It is, therefore, especially important that the tongue remain 'clear of any blight of sin' because any such 'uncleanliness' or 'pollution' by sinful speech makes the tongue unworthy to receive this sacrament and causes God great displeasure (Antoninus, 1858, p.103, consideration 5).

As a sense organ, the tongue permits external stimuli to enter the body and access the soul's internal senses, which are responsible for emotions, imagination, cognition, judgment, and memory.¹¹ Guarding the tongue is, therefore, also necessary for protecting the soul's intellectual and psychological faculties, as supported by Proverb [21:23], '*He who guards the tongue, guards his soul*' (Antoninus, 1858, pp.104–6). Antoninus asserts that the tongue's highest office is to manifest the thoughts produced by the intellect that would otherwise remain hidden within the body, which he calls 'the illumination man has within' (p.103). The tongue is, thus, an 'organ of reason', which Antoninus considers the highest power given to man alone of God's creatures; therefore, he says, one should never speak without or against reason, for every word spoken must be justified to God on judgment day (pp.117–9).

Antoninus also identifies the tongue as an instrument of the heart because it allows for the external expression of emotions (or passions). Thus, Antoninus claims that 'good guardianship of the tongue is also great guardianship of the heart'. In his *Summa* (I, II, ch.4, col.79) Antoninus attributes this idea to Aristotle, claiming that 'the Philosopher [Aristotle in *De Physiognomonica*, 806a] says that those things which are in the voice are the signs of those which are in the soul, [in other words,] the passions'. Speech is, thus, an aural expression of one's internal emotional state. It also signifies one's moral character (or *ēthos*), making speech an ethical activity, worthy of surveillance, judgment, and control. According to Augustinian semiotics, speech is also a social activity because it necessarily involves a speaker who signifies and a hearer who comprehends what is being signified (Craun, 1997, pp.26–37, esp.30–2). This is why sins of speech affect both the speaker and her community.

Next, Antoninus asks his reader to consider the potential dangers caused by the tongue. These dangers, he claims, are revealed by the multitude of sins caused

by the tongue and the severity of penalties received in hell due to its misuse. Antoninus states: 'So this [tongue] is something by which man sins and for which he is punished, according to divine justice; since the tongue is singularly given penalty we conclude that with the tongue one singularly sins' (1858, p.106). Antoninus cites abundant scriptural evidence to demonstrate that we sin more with our tongue than with any other bodily member and, therefore, the tongue must be the hardest member to control (from James 3:7–8). Rational control over the tongue is essential because 'due to the immediate and unconsidered word man falls many times into anger and intrigue' (Antoninus, 1858, p.109). The importance of controlling one's tongue is further demonstrated by God's commitment to assisting us with the particularly difficult task of guarding this 'noble member', something that can happen only if we ask Him for help. God is, therefore, the 'key to the guardianship of our tongue; thus for us, we cannot guard it without his help' (pp.106–7).

Antoninus concludes this chapter with the following highly suggestive analogies: 'a man with his tongue unguarded is somewhat like a city without a walled fortress and somewhat like a house without a door' and an unguarded tongue is also like 'a vessel without a cover, so that every unclean thing can fall into and enter inside you ... and [it is] as a boat without steering and without a rudder, so that it conducts and leads man to great danger' (Antoninus, 1858, pp.105–6). These analogies suggest that speaking leaves one vulnerable to enemies, 'pollution' by sin, and misdirection. After these lessons Antoninus lists a series of exemplary quotes from scripture, the lives of saints, and the Church Fathers as examples of good guardianship of the tongue (p.109). Such 'copious' and 'striking' visual and textual analogies serve both as exemplars, defined by Larry Scanlon as 'enactments of cultural authority', and as mnemonic devices, intended to capture the reader's attention and make Antoninus' advice stick in the reader's memory for future practical application (Scanlon, 2007, pp.27–36, esp.34–5; Craun, 1997, pp.63–69; Carruthers, 2008, pp.153–94).

The sin of idle talk

After arguing for the importance of the tongue and its protection, Antoninus dedicates a chapter to each of three types of sinful speech about which his female reader must be aware. These are the sins of idle talk (i.e. gossiping), talking too much (or indiscretion), and intemperate laughter (i.e. giggling) – three negative types of speech that are still associated primarily with women today. Antoninus' rationale for choosing to concentrate on these seemingly trivial types of speech

¹¹ For Antoninus's discussion of the internal senses see: Antoninus, 1959, I, II, ch.5.

is explained as follows:

So, I thought to place here in this second part the danger that one incurs spiritually due to incautiously speaking. And I do not intend to speak of things that are very grave, such as blasphemies, or perjury, or the like, which every man knows are the gravest of sins; but [rather] I intend to speak of those things [by] which men every day give us much offence and make little of it with their consciousness. And this is a bad habit: and I intend to show how much the saints make of these offences that we make with the tongue, [and] of which we are not even conscious.

(Antoninus, 1858, pp.99–100)

Antoninus, therefore, chooses not to spend time on major sins of speech, such as blasphemy (defined as speaking against God) or perjury (a type of lying by swearing false oaths) because such grave sins should be obvious to his reader already. Instead, he desires to instruct her on seemingly lesser sins of speech, about which she might be ignorant or which she may consider too small to be dangerous. Ignorance of any sin and its potential dangers, he states, is in itself sinful. One also must guard against minor sins because even they ‘impede spiritual profit and divine grace’ and weaken the soul. Moreover, he claims that several small sins can add up to a grave one and all sins, even small ones, must be accounted for on judgment day (pp.117–21). Thus, it is precisely the seeming triviality of these particular sins of speech that makes them significant.

Antoninus begins with idle talk, which (citing St Gregory) he defines as ‘that which man utters without any necessity or without any intention of good use’ (p.112). The association of idle words with sin derives from the Gospel of St Matthew (12:36–7): ‘But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned’ (Casagrande and Vecchio, 1987, pp.425–39, quoted on p.425). In his commentary on this passage from Matthew, St Jerome (bk. IV, 12:36) defines an idle word as ‘one that is spoken without benefit to both the speaker and the hearer, for example, when we speak about frivolous things to the neglect of serious matters, or when we tell old wives’ tales’ (Jerome, 2008, p.146). According to these scriptural authorities, words are judged based on their degree of utility, necessity, seriousness, or lack thereof.

Idleness (*otiosum*) is related etymologically to leisure (*otium*), which is the opposite of work (*opera*) or doing

(*facere/faciendo*). According to Genesis (3:17), man is divinely obligated to perform work because God commanded that Adam and Eve work as punishment for original sin. Idleness, therefore, becomes a sin akin to the capital vice of sloth. Work, on the other hand, has the potential to produce both material and spiritual fruitfulness and hence profit. Idle talk, therefore, becomes speaking without fruitful purpose or spiritual profit (Antoninus, 1959, I, II, ch.4, col.81; Casagrande and Vecchio, 1987, p.428). According to Susan Phillips’ study of gossip (a type of idle talk), words were profitable only if spoken with the intent of contributing to the moral and social good of the community. Idle talk was morally unprofitable because it stole time away from spiritually profitable activities, such as prayer, contemplation, confession, and penitential self-examination (Phillips, 2007, pp.63–5; for profit see Olson, 1989, p.285). In fact, in part three of *Opera a ben vivere*, Antoninus instructs his reader to fill almost every moment of her day with spiritually profitable talk, including confession and endless audible and silent prayers, which she is instructed to recite continuously to keep her mind always on her soul’s salvation and her mouth occupied, with little opportunity for idle talk (pp.151–99).

Antoninus, however, does little to educate his reader about what exact types of speech constitute idle talk, which, according to Peraldus, might include any or all of the following sub-categories (many of which overlap with other ‘sins of the tongue’): gossiping or whispering about others, betraying secrets, creating and spreading rumors, telling tales, talking too much (i.e. chattering), vain talk, talking without reason, and talking purely for the sake of amusement (Phillips, 2007, pp.65–6). Antoninus’ vagueness has the potential to make the reader anxious about any speech that does not have a clear spiritual, moral, or social purpose. Instead, Antoninus enumerates the reasons his reader ought to avoid idle talk, backed by scriptural exemplars, almost all of which are commonplaces in ‘sins of the tongue’ literature influenced by Peraldus’ *Summa de vitiis* (see Craun, 1997, pp.26–37).

First, Antoninus states that ‘the soul of the righteous is a heaven, in which God can live willingly ... and consequently one’s mouth and tongue is the gate, which ought not to be opened without grand occasion. As we do not read [in Psalms 77:23] that the heavens were ever opened without grand occasion and usefulness’ (Antoninus, 1858, pp.113–4). In his *Summa* Antoninus claims that determination of the proper ‘occasion’ for speech requires an analysis of the following ‘circumstances’: ‘it is proper to observe in our speech a multiplicity of circumstances ... that is to say, so that

I may know when to speak and when one ought to be silent, when one has to be silent, when it is expedient to speak, when it is sinful to speak, and when it is grievously worse' (Antoninus, 1959, I, II, ch.4, cols 83–4). One also must consider: to whom one speaks, where one speaks, when one speaks, how much one speaks, to what end, and the manner in which it is said (See also Craun, 1997, pp.54–6). In *Opera a ben vivere* Antoninus (partly quoting Augustine) tells his female reader that the only good circumstances for her speech are 'to praise God, preach to others, and accuse the same, and to give comfort to the troubled, or for similar such good occasions' (Antoninus, 1858, p.114). It should be noted that these good types of female speech do not qualify as conversation, which Antoninus tells his reader to avoid. Instead, her words are to be directed at God or another person without intellectual exchange.

Antoninus (citing Psalms 44:2) also says that the tongue must be a 'pen of the Holy Spirit to [be used to] write and speak that which He offers us'. Therefore, one should consider before speaking whether one's words might be offensive to God or against His wishes (pp.114–5). Third, one needs to consider that for all of our words 'we agree to render reason on judgment day' (based on Matthew 12:36, Ecclesiastes 12:14, and Ecclesiasticus 33:14). Antoninus compares the soul to a castle of God with 'the tongue as its gate', therefore, 'as in castles and guarded places nothing can enter you or exit without singular license, thus the tongue must not exit or talk if not commanded and preceded by much reason, as if by a lord and a king' (p.115). The quality and value of all words, therefore, must be rationally considered before they are spoken 'so that they are not later judged in the strict and terrible examination of God' (p.115). Since idle words are those spoken without reason they cannot be justified and, therefore, should never be spoken.

Finally, one should consider that the heart is a 'noble enclosure', like a treasure chest, that contains the treasures of virtue, wisdom, and hope (based on 2 Corinthians 4:7). '[F]rom this we can conclude, that the mouth must never open to display the treasure of wisdom and virtue inside without great occasion: moreover, one must not open it to speak frivolous (*truffe*) and idle words' (Antoninus, 1858, pp.115–6). All words, therefore, are interpreted as natural signs (as in Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*) because they express externally the otherwise invisible 'treasures' housed within the speaker's heart and soul. Sinful words, such as idle ones, signify their speaker's lack of reason and moral virtue housed within her soul.

The sin of talking too much

Antoninus' next chapter addresses 'How even good words are those that are spoken with discretion.' In this chapter he describes as the 'sin of talking too much' or garrulity (Antoninus, 1858, p.123).¹² Here, Antoninus informs the reader of the *Opera a ben vivere* that once this type of sinful speech is identified 'our tongue can be more cautiously restrained by us' and he instructs her to practice temperance for good words as well as bad ones because 'even too much good talk is reprehensible' for 'it generates disgust in the listeners', as is figured in Leviticus 'the vessel that has neither cover nor legitimate covering is reputed to be unclean' (Antoninus, 1858, pp.123–4). According to Craun, 'an unrestrained tongue during social exchanges is dangerous and irritating for the listeners because if they do not judge it carefully they may become complicit in it and their emotions might be moved by its force, words can also cause loss of life or reputation (tongues as swords), and may prompt others to evil' (Craun, 1997, p.51). Moreover, a 'loose tongue' was the opposite of Pentecost, when it functioned to bring truth and salvation to others (p.51).

Antoninus does not explain how much talk is too much, which has the potential to leave his reader anxious about speaking more than a few words. Instead, his brief chapter merely lists exemplary quotations from scripture (mostly Wisdom texts, including Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiasticus, and Job), all of which are commonly used to demonstrate the spiritual dangers of verbal incontinence (see Craun, 1997, pp.51–3). For example, Antoninus portrays excessive speech as another sign of a speaker's impoverished moral character, as is figured in Proverbs (10:19), which reads: 'Where there are many words one finds often times a poverty of the spiritual sense' and by St Gregory's statement that 'too much talking is a sign of soul empty of spiritual virtue' (Antoninus, 1858, p.124). Antoninus also suggests that verbosity in itself can impoverish the intellect because it causes one to miss an opportunity to hear the wisdom of others, as is demonstrated by Psalm 139:12: 'The verbose man will not be addressed on the earth'. Moreover, garrulity also impedes the accomplishment of good and profitable works, as indicated in Proverbs 14:23: 'if man desires to have the grace to do the best things, he must say few words' (Antoninus, 1858, p.124). Too much talk, therefore, is

12 On the sin of 'talking too much' see: Casagrande and Vecchio, 1987, pp.407–23; Craun, 1997, pp.51–3. This sin of the tongue also appears as a vice of women in Antoninus' *Summa* (1959, III, I, ch.25, col.119), under the letter G, where he claims that woman is a 'garrulous gullet' (*garrulum guttur*).

both spiritually unprofitable and another sign of a soul lacking in virtue and wisdom.

Antoninus ends his list of quotations with Ecclesiasticus 19:5: 'He who hates much talk, extinguishes in himself and others much malice' (Antoninus, 1858, p.124). This passage appears to recommend detestation for verbosity, a remedy for sin proposed by Thomas Aquinas (*Summa*, I, II, q.113, a.5), who defines detestation as an aversion to sin based on rational judgment and willful avoidance in order to change one's behaviour from the bad and towards the good (as recommended in Psalms 33:15).¹³ As stated by Antoninus in the preface, the intent of *Opera a ben vivere* was to instigate in his reader such a movement of the will from a desire for the bad towards a desire for the good in order to achieve a more virtuous life and, therefore, to live well (*ben vivere*).

According to Craun, such movement of the will from bad to good was 'crucial to penitential practice' and for the care of one's soul (*cura animarum*) (Craun, 1997, pp.56–71). Ecclesiasticus' words imply that such detestation of 'much talk' has the potential to also cure the souls of 'others' through its ability to extinguish 'much malice', which could cause familial or societal discord, making the detestation of excessive talk instrumental in maintaining personal, familial, and civic well-being. In fact, in his *Regulae Pastoralis* (XIV), St Gregory describes how quickly one can slide down a sinful path from talking too much (*multiloquium*) to speaking idle words (*verba otiosa*) to speaking hurtful words, such as backbiting, and slander (*verba noxia*), all of which have the potential to lead to societal unrest. He concludes: 'Hence are sown thorns, quarrels arise, the torches of hatred are kindled, [and] the peace of the hearts is quenched' (Casagrande and Vecchio, 1987, pp.407–8).

Antoninus concludes this chapter on the dangers of talking too much with a lengthy and entertaining story (itself bordering on verbosity) from the 'Legend of St Dominic'. In this tale St Dominic tours his monastery with a demon, who points out the spaces where he profits the most at the friars' expense due various types of intemperance. This includes: too much sleeping in the choir and dormitory, too much eating in the refectory, and too much talking in the parlor (*parlatorio*), which is the space where the demon claims he earns the most. When Dominic asks the demon why he profits so much in this space, the demon replies: 'in this place nothing is said except for idle words, and mundane things, or some whispers; those things that in other places the friars do not have the freedom to

say due to their order of silence'. Finally, they arrive in the chapter room, about which the demon says: 'As much as I can earn in the entire house, I lose it here for confession or for humiliation' (Antoninus, 1858, pp.124–6). The moral of this story is that one gains more spiritual profit from confession or silence than from idle speech, which results in the greatest spiritual loss. It is interesting to note that all of the behavioural models in this narrative are male monastics, not lay women like his reader, suggesting that the story is intended to make a memorable point more than to provide his reader with any direct behavioural role models. This tale might be considered an example of entertaining idle talk if not for the moral lesson at the end. It, therefore, also may have been included to provide the reader with a model for non-idle story telling.

The sins of laughter and jesting

In the final chapter on speech Antoninus states: '[T]o conclude with the sins that one can commit with the mouth, I say that we must flee too much laughter and also certain *giuladri* that are wont to induce others to laugh ... those which the Holy Scripture calls profane; [and] St Paul blames and forbids' (Antoninus, 1858, p.127). This is a reference to St Paul's letter to the Ephesians (5:3–5), which reads: 'But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not so much as be named among you, as becomes saints: Or obscenity, or foolish talking, or scurrility, which is to no purpose; but rather giving of thanks. For know you this and understand, that no fornicator, or unclean, or covetous person (which is a serving of idols), hath inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God'. In his commentary on St Matthew, St Jerome (book IV, 12:36) further condemns laughter, stating that 'for the one who repeats scurrilous things and makes people's mouths drop open with loud laughter, and who brings forth anything disgraceful, he will be indicted not for an idle word, but a criminal one' (Jerome, 2008, p.146).

Laughter and the provocation of laughter are typically classified in 'sins of the tongue' literature under scurrility (*scurrilitas*), which is often interchanged with jocularity (*iocularitas*) and associated with lasciviousness, obscenity (*turpiloquium*), and foolish talking or nonsense (*stultiloquium*).¹⁴ Antoninus' term *giuladri* seems to be his play on the term *giullari* (jongleurs or travelling comedians), who often appear in literature on 'sins of the tongue' as synonymous with *stulti* (fools), *scurrae* (buffoons), *mimi* (mimes), *ioculatores* (jesters), and *ystriones* (play actors) (Casagrande and Vecchio, 1979,

¹³ For detestation see: Wenzel, 1992, p.138; Craun, 1997, pp.56–71.

¹⁴ For these sins see: Casagrande and Vecchio, 1987, pp.393–406.

pp.913–28). Antoninus warns his reader to ‘guard against *giuladri*’ (which translates literally as ‘thieves of sadness’) by comparing their behaviour to that of actual thieves (*ladri*) because they ‘steal (*furano / furtano*) and make one lose time: which is the most precious and the most necessary thing there is, as is said above; so that who loses time, loses himself’ (Antoninus, 1858, p.128). In addition, such ‘thieves’ might cause one to ‘lose the fruit of our holy compunction’ (i.e., one’s desire for penance and grieving for one’s sins) by provoking one to laughter and distracting one from one’s spiritual obligation to remain focused on one’s eternal salvation (Resnick, 1987, p.94).

Antoninus, however, does not condemn all laughter. Instead, he proscribes only excessive laughter, inappropriate laughter, and laughter at profane things. Following Aristotle’s notion that laughter was an essential part of human ‘nature’ and that the ‘lack of mirth is more sinful than excess thereof’, Antoninus’ Dominican forebears Albertus the Great and Thomas Aquinas allowed for laughter in moderation as long as it was governed by reason and performed according to the appropriate ‘circumstances’, which involved an assessment of aspects such as when, where, with whom, and for what intent (Classen, 2010, pp.33–4; Resnick, 1987, p.98; Olson, 1989, pp.280–4). Scripture itself provides examples of both good and bad types of laughter, as exemplified by contrasting the laughter of Sarah (in incredulity of God’s word) with that of her husband Abraham (from joy and wonderment), both of whom laughed when informed of the miracle that Sarah would bear a son at her advanced age. Biblically sanctioned types of laughter include: laughter in joy, amazement, or scorn of evil. While biblically condemned types of laughter include: laughter in incredulity or pride, in scorn or humiliation at a good person’s expense, as assertion of power or deception, or in pure levity.¹⁵

Antoninus (citing Ecclesiastes 2:2) claims that sinful laughter is a vain, erroneous, deceptive, and ‘empty joy’, suggesting that it is another form of speech devoid of spiritual profit (Antoninus, 1858, p.127). Moreover, he interprets a smile, decadent laughter, and a ‘tongue that utters vain and foolish things’ as other natural signs of a person’s foolish character and dissolute soul. Specifically, Antoninus characterises *giuladri* that induce laughter as ‘vile and mischievous’ creatures that, when they incite us to laugh resemble ‘ugly’ monkeys, ‘fetid’ goats, and demons, which ‘defile people into their

dissolution’ and displease the sight of God (Antoninus, pp.127–8; see also Casagrande and Vecchio, 1979, pp.913–5). Such an unflattering description would help foster the reader’s detestation for and avoidance of such beast-like people and behaviour. This notion that one could read the state (or matter) of the soul through the form the body takes when laughing relates to Aristotelian physiognomic ‘science’, according to which character was interpreted based on physical appearance. By the fifteenth century, physiognomic analysis was widely recommended by philosophers, political advisors, preachers, and pastoral mentors as a means to interpret the state of one’s soul or character, a skill considered necessary for penitential practice and for prudent interactions amongst individuals, especially those of power.¹⁶

Antoninus also contends with the ancient and popular notion of laughter as a therapeutic instrument (for example, ‘laughter is the best medicine’). According to the therapeutic theory of laughter, laughter was thought to ward off emotional distress and the dangers of melancholy, to which women were considered more prone than men. (Olson, 1989, pp.276–80; Classen, 2010, pp.3 and 23–4). Antoninus condemns such therapeutic use of laughter (even in moderation) because he sees it as a distraction, claiming that *giuladri* are:

comforters of the afflicted in the service of the devil, provoking one to laugh and to lose time; so that one doesn’t feel fatigue and the remorse of the conscience for their bad life; and with their songs, in the manner of the sirens, that causes the miserable sinners to fall sleep in the tempest of the sea of this miserable world, so it happens to them when they fall into the inferno. And as happens mostly to many who are infirm, those who must think of the health of the soul and put themselves in order and cry for their sins, to them have come *giuladri* and singers and ballerinas, to pass the time and make their thoughts of death flee; and thus they move the miseries of their sins, and they go from these songs to eternal abandon.

(Antoninus, 1858, pp.128–9)

Antoninus thus interprets bodily infirmity, including ‘fatigue’ (a possible reference to melancholy), as a sign of a sinful life. Therefore, according to Antoninus, instead of wasting time on profitless laughter, one should spend one’s valuable time contemplating the

¹⁵ On the sin of intemperate laughter see: Casagrande and Vecchio, 1987, p.396; Resnick, 1987, pp.90–1; LeGoff, 1997, pp.40–53; Casagrande, 2000, pp.77–105; Classen, 2010, pp.10–11.

¹⁶ On the late medieval practice of physiognomy see: Schmitt, 1989, 129–47; Ziegler, 2001, pp.159–82; for Dominican practice in particular see: Denery, 2005, pp.19–38.

'miseries of this world', including Christ's sacrifice for man's salvation, and prepare oneself for one's own death and judgment by God, for 'a great fool is one who laughs at a time of danger' (pp.129–30; Resnick, 1987, p.94). Instead of laughter, he claims, tears are more appropriate for this world because '[a]gainst such laughter, many examples are provided by Christ, of whom, as says St Bernard [*Liber de modo bene vivendi ad sororem*, LXV], we never read that he laughed, but only that he cried' (Antoninus, pp.129–30).¹⁷ The notion that Christ never cried had become a commonplace in pastoral literature by the fifteenth century. It appears to have originated with St John Chrysostom, who claims that we do not read anywhere that Christ laughed. Rather, he only cried when he looked upon Jerusalem and when he was about to raise Lazarus. (Resnick, 1987, pp.94–100) Such continuous self-reflection and mourning over one's sins were essential to proper penitential practice and to the care of one's soul. Inappropriate laughter, therefore, becomes an impediment to the *cura animarum*.

Finally, Antoninus condemns spiritually disruptive laughter, asserting that it is truly despicable when it occurs in sacred and devout places and when jesters distract from or pervert holy words in order to make others laugh, for this both disrespects God and impedes both the delivery and receipt of his holy office. To make this point memorable, Antoninus narrates a story (which might itself induce laughter) attributed to St Gregory in which a mass was interrupted by an entertainer with a monkey, who played his cymbals and begged for food during the divine office. Upon exiting the church, God struck the monkey dead, an event interpreted as a sign of God's displeasure at such a disruption. Laughter and foolish behaviour, therefore, are especially sinful if they disrupt mass, impede the transmission of the divine word, and threaten clerical authority. Antoninus advises his reader to detest and avoid such spiritually disruptive people, stating: 'if by chance you bump into similar people, who are caught by you as bad thieves ... You must strive [instead] to remain and converse with people who always lead you to contrition and repentance as Christ said (Luke 6:21 and 6:25): *'the blessed are those who cry here,'* however, they laugh in perpetuity' (Antoninus, 1858, pp.131–2).

The trouble with women's speech in renaissance Florence

Idle talk, garrulity, and intemperate laughter, such as gossiping, tale-telling, chattering, and giggling, were

(and still are) often negatively associated with women (i.e. 'gossip girls', 'chatty Cathys', etc.).¹⁸ The origin of woman's association with transgressive talk is located by Antoninus in his *Summa* at the moment of the serpent's verbal deception of Eve (Genesis 3), who in turn, deceived Adam by verbally persuading him to eat the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Wisdom. This resulted in man's expulsion from Paradise, the introduction of original sin, and the physical death of all mankind (Antoninus, 1959, III, I, ch.25, cols 116–7).

Susan Phillips has demonstrated that idle talk in particular was often identified in medieval literature as 'women's work', a correlation supported by scripture. (Phillips, 2007, pp.61–69; Phillips, 2007a, pp.13–64) In fact, St Paul (1 Timothy 5:13) advises that younger women (especially widows) should be avoided because: 'And withal being idle they learn to go about from house to house: and are not only idle, but tattlers also, and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.' St Paul (1 Timothy 4:7) also advises his addressees to: 'avoid foolish and old wives' fables', thereby associating idle tale-telling with 'old women'. (This is repeated in Jerome, 2008, p.146). Anxiety over social unrest due to women's gossip is made explicit in the chapter of Antoninus' *Summa* entitled 'On the Diverse Vices of Women Alphabetized', where he paraphrases St Paul: 'For [young] women, although they have the appearance of holiness, they have learned to go about from house to house and are not only idle, but also gossips, speaking things which they ought not' to support his claim that behaviours, such as the revelation of secrets, murmuring, and gossip by women can cause a 'chaos of calumny' (*Kalumniarum chaos* [sic]) (Antoninus, 1959, III, I, ch.25, col.120). According to Craun, 'deviant speech', such as idle talk or intemperate speaking, 'disrupts the community' by 'violating the fundamental and divinely sanctioned compact on the function of speech it threatens religious teaching and all honest communication between all human beings – all basic social institutions which depend upon trust in the social world' (Craun, 1997, p.45). Phillips, who focuses on gendered speech, further suggests that medieval gossip, especially gossip by women, was considered socially dangerous in part because it built extra-familial kinship bonds and communities amongst women that

18 Sandy Bardsley (2006, pp.45–68 and pp.147–9) has shown that late medieval texts on the "Sins of the Tongue" typically contain gendered language in that they construct differing roles for men and women, which continue to influence gender stereotypes in the present day. For the gendering of idle talk (especially gossip) as feminine see: Dalarun, 1994, pp.40–1; Phillips, 2007, pp.61–94 ('janglynge' is the Middle English equivalent for gossip); and Phillips, 2007a. For women's laughter see: Trokhimenko, 2010, pp.243–64.

17 For St Bernard on laughter see: Casagrande and Vecchio, 1987, p.396; Resnick, 1987, pp.95–7; Le Goff, 1997, p.43; Casagrande, 2000, p.77.

had the potential to undermine the status of men and their public reputations, particularly if women revealed secrets about their husbands or families, or encouraged each other to resist male authority. Phillips also suggests that gossip amongst women may have been perceived as a threat to pastoral authority due to its capacity to take over the male pastor's exclusive role as the hearer of women's confessions. This was both a moral and social threat because unlike other women, pastors were technically bound by vow not to reveal confessed secrets that might cause familial shame or societal discord. (Phillips, 2007, pp.61–9; Phillips, 2007a, pp.119–46) As a preacher and pastor concerned with confessional practice (he wrote a manual on confession), Antoninus would likely have been very sensitive to such a perceived usurpation of pastoral authority.

St Paul (1 Timothy 2:11–14) provides a scripturally sanctioned preventative for such societal chaos, namely women's silence and subjugation. He states: 'Let the woman learn in silence, with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to use authority over the man: but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed; then Eve. And Adam was not seduced; but the woman being seduced, was in the transgression'. This idea is repeated in Aquinas' *Summa* (the model for Antoninus' *Summa*), where it is combined with Aristotelian notions regarding male versus female 'nature'. Aquinas (I, q. 92, a.2) states: 'For good order would have been wanting in the human family if some were not governed by others wiser than themselves. So by such a kind of subjection woman is naturally subject to man, because naturally in man the discretion of reason predominates.' During the medieval and renaissance periods women's propensity for sinful speech was often attributed their 'natural' condition as imperfect men, as defined by Aristotle.¹⁹ Scriptural evidence for women's relative imperfection also could be found in Genesis (2–3), the letters of St Paul, and in St Peter's (1, 3:7) characterisation of women as 'weaker vessels'. These pagan and Christian

notions of women's inferiority were interpreted to suggest that women more vulnerable to the sway of their passions than men and less intellectually capable of rationally judging, and therefore, making prudent decisions regarding sinful behaviour – as Eve misjudged the serpent's deceptive words and lacked faith in God's divine order.²⁰ In his chapter 'On the Diverse Vices of Women', Antoninus explicitly links intemperate speech with female nature, claiming that woman 'by her own nature is a chattering animal' (Antoninus, 1959, III, I, ch.25, col.120, under K). Under the letter B, which stands for woman as a 'beastial barathrum' (*bestiale baratrum*), Antoninus asserts that women are 'beautiful and foolish', 'dull' (*insipidum*), and intellectually shallow 'almost [like] children light as a sentence'. Moreover, he comments that '[f]or a woman the practice of philosophy is unknown ... And the natural reason is because woman is in fact more carnal in spirit and spirituality than man, who can be less [carnal]. This is also the case of the women who converse with men for they appear as it were of another species than men, in the amount of their intellect' (Antoninus, 1959, III, I, ch.25, col.118, emphasis mine). It is no surprise that such derogatory sentiments about woman's inferior intelligence and its expression through speech appear in a text written for male clerics, however, this does not exclude the possibility of a much wider dissemination through sermons and pastoral instruction.²¹ Such negative ideas about the female intellect are not stated overtly, however, in *Opera a ben vivere*, which was written at the request of Dianora Tornabuoni, a powerful Florentine noblewoman. Nor do they appear in the copy written for her well-educated sister Lucrezia, who wrote poetry in both the vulgate and Latin and was known to have been a favored conversational partner of the humanist scholar Agnolo Poliziano (Tornabuoni de' Medici, 2001). They do, however, appear to have influenced Antoninus' rules regarding speech contained in part three ('Regola') of *Opera a ben vivere*.

Due to their perceived 'natural' weaknesses, women were often barred from speaking much in general, but especially in church, where they had the potential to undermine male clerical authority and distract from the transmission of the divine word of God (like the cymbal-clashing monkey in the exemplar cited earlier). Again, St Paul advises (1 Corinthians 1:34–5): 'Let

19 Aristotle (*Historia Animalium*, 608B; *Politics* 1.2 / 1252B, *Generation of Animals*, 729 A 25–34; 728 A 17ff, 766 A 19–35; and *Physics*, I) characterises women as incomplete males because matter (equated with women) is perfected by form (equated with men). This rationale for female inferiority is repeated in Antoninus, *Summa*, III, I, cap.25, col.118. In addition, Aristotle (*Politics*, 3.4 / 1227b 20) claims that 'silence is a woman's glory', thereby providing a model for the moralising notion of silence as a female virtue. For discussion of the Aristotelian roots of the medieval and renaissance ideas about women's natural inferiority see: Bullough, 1973, pp.485–501; Commo McLaughlin, 1974, pp.213–66; and Maclean, 1980, esp. pp.15–46.

20 See, for example, Antoninus, 1959, III, I, ch.25; see also: Bullough, 1973, pp.485–501; Commo McLaughlin, 1974, pp.213–66; Payer, 1977, pp.2–14; and Maclean, 1980, esp. pp.15–46.

21 For the intended practicality and 'preachability' of Antoninus' *Summa* see: Howard, 1995, pp.43–78.

women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted them to speak, but to be subject, as also the law saith. But if they would learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is a shame for a woman to speak in the church'. In his *Summa* Antoninus quotes this same scriptural passage when discussing the appropriate conditions for speech (i.e. when, where, about what, to whom, and in what manner):

Second to be considered is where one speaks, for in the Church, which is a place of prayer, it is unbecoming to speak of the things in the world ...It is said that here one ought not to dispute one's mind (*parlamenta*), and the apostle at I Cor. 14 [says]: *Women should be silent in church. For it is not permitted unto them to speak*: and afterward Paul [says]: *it is a shame for women to speak in the church*.

(Antoninus, 1959, I, II, ch.4, ss.2 'Where one speaks', col.83)

In fifteenth-century Florence church would have been one of the few public spaces where noblewomen of Dianora and Lucrezia Tornabuoni's status might have been seen and heard on a regular basis.²² In order to avoid the sins associated with such spiritually necessary yet public exposure, Antoninus instructs the reader of the *Opera a ben vivere* to:

place oneself in that place where you believe that you will give the least scandal, with your vision or by being seen by others. Guard yourself, my daughter, as much as is possible, that in church you do not say any word that is vain or idle; and as much as you are able, guard your heart from all vain and useless chatter (*spargimento*).

(Antoninus, 1858, pp.165–8, Regola X)

Antoninus also tells his reader that if she must go to church at times other than mass, such as on feast days or for confession, she should 'go [to church] at such a time, when you will find the least number of people' and '[g]o with silence of vain and idle words' (1858, pp.174–6, Regola XII). To further protect her from sinning with her tongue in public, Antoninus tells his reader exactly what she is to say in church. This consists of a lengthy daily meditation and a series of audible and silent prayers (for analysis of the meditation, see Flanigan, 2014). In fact, throughout the third part of *Opera a ben vivere* are 'rules' that instruct

the reader about exactly what manner of speech she is to perform (mostly prayer), when to say it, where to say it, and sometimes even exactly what words to say (i.e. p.157, Regola VI). This includes her speech during her time spent at home, when Antoninus recommends that she recite prayers almost continuously, including while she is chewing her food, 'to accustom yourself to speak as little as you can'. After dinner he tells her: 'retire yourself to your room as soon as you can, and do not attend to anything other than devotions'. While in her room she is told to recite certain silent prayers and examine her conscience until it is time for bed (pp.180–6, Regola XIV). Thus, Antoninus fills his reader's day with spiritually profitable speech and provides her with little chance to speak publically or fall victim to any sins of the tongue.

Outside of the church and home Antoninus recommends silence and avoidance of other people when possible to further escape the temptation of sinful speech. Specifically, Antoninus tells his reader to avoid attending dances, festivals, jousts, spectacles, and other similar entertainments, but if she must go she should prevent scandal by filling her head with thoughts of God and the sound of angels to drown out the sounds of the terrestrial world (pp.170–80, Regola XIII). He also characterises conversational speech as a male activity that Antoninus' reader is instructed to 'flee' in order to protect her soul (pp.98–9). However, if she is tempted to join such conversation she is advised to 'strengthen her sensual appetite and keep silent', but if this is not possible she is to 'take care not to desire to respond to every proposition [...] Converse with people as little as you can, and make a good wall around your soul' (pp.132–4, full passage quoted at beginning of this essay). He, thus, prohibits her from participation in public discourse and intellectual debate, which are gendered male.

The propagation through instructional texts and sermons of negative ideas about certain types of speech associated particularly with women would have functioned as a form of social control by marginalising women's thoughts and words and limiting their ability to participate credibly in oral discourse, which was the primary basis for social, economic, and political power in renaissance Florence. As clearly stated in the passage from *Opera a ben vivere* quoted at the beginning of this essay, Antoninus tells his female reader that in order to live virtuously, and thus to live well (*ben vivere*), she must will herself to avoid the 'sins of the tongue' by keeping silent, refraining from excessive laughter, and if she must resort to speaking, to speak little and judiciously (1858, pp.132–3). Throughout these texts Antoninus portrays a woman's speech as a threat to

22 For women's public visibility in renaissance Florence, especially at church, see: Aston, 1990, pp.237–94; Tomas, 1992; Randolph, 1997, pp.17–41; Brown and Davis, 1998; Gaston, 2006, pp.331–2; for women's visibility in Antoninus' church of San Marco in particular see: Flanigan, 2013, pp.40–60.



Figure 3.3: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Visitation*, 1485–90, fresco (detail of Figure 3.2). Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.



Figure 3.4: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Angel Appearing To Zacharias*, 1485–90, fresco, approximately 450cm wide. Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

her own soul, her family's reputation, and ultimately the communal well-being of Florentine society.

Women's speech in the Tornabuoni Chapel frescoes

Reinforcement for these proscriptions on women's speech, both in public and private, can be discerned in visual images, such as Ghirlandaio's frescoes in the Tornabuoni family chapel in Santa Maria Novella. For example, in the *Visitation* fresco (Figures 3.2 and 3.3) one can see men in the background conversing with each other freely, while the Tornabuoni women in the foreground remain silent as they view the biblical event set just outside the walls of what looks to be fifteenth-century Florence. In the adjacent fresco depicting the *Angel Appearing to Zacharias*, Florentine noblewomen again appear as positive and silent role models (Figure 3.4). They stand behind a large pier, apart from the men, and outside the main spaces of the temple and the piazza, in a place where they will likely 'give the least scandal, with [their] vision or by being seen by others' (Antoninus, 1858, pp. 165–8, Regola X). These women do not participate in the animated discussions that occur amongst the various groups of men in the piazza, especially those to the left of center. The gestures that signal speech portray male conversation as active (or not idle) and, therefore, rational and profitable in nature. The fifteenth-century women who appear in the *Birth of the Virgin* scene are likewise silent (Figure 3.1 and 3.5). They do not engage in either active conversation or idle talk despite their situation within a private domestic space, specifically a woman's bedchamber, where they would have had little chance of being seen or heard by men.

When women in these frescoes do appear to speak, it is not usually women who are identified as mature, upper-class, or members of the Tornabuoni family. Instead, as in the scene of *Zacharias Naming St John*, mature noblewomen tend to serve as positive exemplars to be emulated against the foil of gossiping secondary figures (often unveiled young women or children), who might serve as anti-exemplars that reinforce the moral message (Figure 3.6). Another



Figure 3.5: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Birth of the Virgin*, 1485–90, fresco (detail of Figure 3.1). Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.



Figure 3.6: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Zacharias Naming St John*, 1485–90, fresco, approximately 450cm wide. Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence,



Figure 3.7: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Marriage of the Virgin Mary*, 1485–90, fresco, approximately 450cm wide. Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.



Figure 3.8: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple*, 1485–90, fresco, approximately 450cm wide. Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

example of female speech appears in the *Marriage of the Virgin* fresco in which a mature woman in the left foreground (not identified as a Tornabuoni) has her mouth slightly open to converse with another female figure and the viewer as she gestures toward the main scene (Figure 3.7). Here, this woman performs as a so-called ‘commentator figure’, whose usefulness in engaging the viewer with the religious scene, and thereby instructing the viewer of its significance, is described in Leon Battista Alberti’s treatise *On Painting* (1435/6) (Alberti, 1991, pp.77–8). Rather than being a negative model for women’s speech, this speaking woman may be seen as a positive exemplar because she portrays didactic speech – a type of speech permissible to women, especially if it involves teaching other women or children about God or scripture (Antoninus, 1858, pp.113–4). Her speech, however, remains separate

from that of the male commentator, who performs a parallel action in the distance behind her. In all but one of the chapel’s frescoes, male and female conversation is strictly segregated. The one notable exception is the *Presentation* scene that depicts a conversation between St Joachim and St Anne. Here, however, Anne appears to be listening, or more precisely taking directions from her male counterpart, rather than leading the conversation (Figure 3.8). Thus, in these frescoes, as in Antoninus’ *Opera a ben vivere*, conversation is gendered as a primarily male activity and exemplary women are portrayed as mostly silent.

Sins of speech and female penitential performance

The purpose of the discussion of speech in part two of *Opera a ben vivere*, like much ‘sins of the tongue’

literature, was to alter its female reader's inclination away from behaviours that would have been seen as threatening to her own soul and to societal stability. To help her with this process of behavioural modification, Antoninus recommends that his reader seek out a knowledgeable and trustworthy pastoral mentor in whom she can confide and to whom she can confess (see Antoninus, 1858, pp. 141–2 and 153–5, Regola III). The new spiritual knowledge imparted via pastoral instruction must be used to examine her own conscience for sin, so she can purify her soul by performing self-confession alone in her room every night before bed and prepare for confession to her pastor as soon as she is able (p. 143 and pp. 195–9, Regola XVIII). Antoninus, thus, fills his reader's day with spiritually profitable speech, consisting mostly of prayer and penitence. The only sanctioned conversation with a male is with her trusted pastoral mentor, who is trained to assist her in the care of her soul and is sworn not to reveal her secrets. Her thoughts, feelings, and sensual appetite are, thus, able to be monitored and regulated by the Church in order to prevent the damage they may cause to society.

As a whole, the instruction contained within *Opera a ben vivere* was intended to alter the behaviour of its reader by educating her about sins of speech to help her to judge good from bad in order to inform her future prudential course of action (i.e., silence, avoidance, prayer, confession). It also taught her how to regulate her sensual appetite for speech through the development of detestation for and willful avoidance of sinful types of speech to which women were considered most prone. This new knowledge, especially about types of speech that she previously may not have identified as sinful, also would benefit her penitential practice by helping her to identify and desire to confess sins that might have otherwise harmed her soul and impeded her salvation. In addition, it would have benefitted society by teaching her to detest and avoid speech that might threaten the souls and authority of men and, therefore, upset society's 'natural', male-dominated order.

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