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Response:  
Women in Command,  
Women in Demand

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Nadia Margolis

It has become quite fashionable in recent years to theorize about the role of the book--as material object as much as text--in the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> Just as we used to focus entirely on authors, we now enlarge our inquiry to encompass scribes, illuminators, printers and other producers, to define their equal importance in communicating a work to the reader-patron. If there is one thing we have learned from the papers at this session, it is that women patrons and book owners can be seen to exert an influence over their commissioned authors and artisans distinct from that of male patrons. This influence translates itself still further in the case of those women book owners who also wrote their own works, drawing upon their libraries for inspiration and authority, and how those female author-owners were read in turn. Finally, sometimes the mere fact of ownership of a work or edition of a work by a certain patron, as signaled by a bookplate or more pervasively by annotations to the text, could affect the book's posterity, perhaps especially if that patron or owner were a woman. Just as ownership of certain books could increase the prestige of the owner, certain owners could increase the value of the book, as with any other work of art. In the case of women bookowners and authors, such prestige assumes another level beyond that of a book's material worth and appeal to patrons' tastes: that which we might label gender interest, affecting both male and female owners.

The examples of Alice Chaucer, Christine de Pizan, Margaret of Austria and Anne Malet de Graille all illustrate the relationship between author-producer and reader-patron in various stages and dimensions. More subtle but equally real was the historical

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<sup>1</sup> One of the first works in this mode is by Gellrich, though that by Brown approaches the question more pertinently to our needs.

context of most of these women, already noteworthy figures in their own right. The Hundred Years' War and later crises fomented much misery for women and thus tested their strength, as sudden widows of all ranks throughout Europe learned to cope with their lot as single mothers, heads of households and solitary rulers. These women came to comprise a reading public seeking not only consolation but vindication.

Bolstered by this steadfast female contingent, the French collective psychology deployed its yearning so powerfully during the Hundred Years' War that it produced exceptional female visionaries who involved themselves in key political and military conflicts, particularly St. Colette of Corbie, and before her an avenging *anima* figure in the flamboyant--if fleeting--presence of Joan of Arc. The literate public had much to do with her unprecedented effectiveness throughout her mission. Joan's first success, the Orléans victory of May 1429, transformed her from cipher to savior; from weirdo to Worthy--thanks to theologians like Jean Gerson citing scripture to defend her opportunity to ride with the army. Joan's impact also would have diminished had a certain female author, Christine de Pizan, not prepared her northern French public both psychologically and ideologically for Joan's advent. In her *Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc (Tale of Joan of Arc)* of July 1429, Christine fostered and sustained Joan's post-Orléans credibility as a true female military hero sent by God and not Satan.<sup>2</sup>

I wish to reinforce this position by adding that it was Christine's unique synchronizing of prolific literacy, feminism, and cultivation of political-patronage connections, that made her so effective in defending Joan in particular, and women in general. Twenty-five years before the *Ditié*, Christine was paving the way, at least within the aristocratic consciousness, by composing the *Cité des Dames (City of Ladies)* and other works honoring female virtue and heroism while decrying misogyny and resultant forms of injustice toward women. She not only penned such works but promoted them among her patrons, several of whom were women who actually read her works. Just as Joan was not the first woman visionary but the first one to implement

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<sup>2</sup> My thanks to Prof. Deborah Fraioli for showing me a draft of her book manuscript in progress, tentatively titled *Joan of Arc: The Early Debates*, in which she makes this assertion.

her visions to remedy her compatriots' misfortune, so Christine was not the first literate woman but the first to employ her learning actively. Each knew how to command her public's attention by giving it what it implicitly demanded.

Karen Jambeck touches upon many of these elements and invites us to notice additional ones in her study of Alice Chaucer's books and literary connections. She defends Alice's accomplishments on their own merits in the face of traditional assessments that such achievements derived mainly from happenstance. Indeed, Geoffrey Chaucer's granddaughter could not have survived in such tumultuous times, much less ruled, first as countess of Salisbury then as duchess of Suffolk, were it not for her own political astuteness and strength of purpose. Jambeck finds evidence of Alice's learnedness and forceful character in the titles of books she possessed, most of which deal with history, philosophy and devotion and their active engagement of these disciplines as a remedy for social ills.

The most noteworthy title in her library might be the copy of Christine de Pizan's *Cité des Dames*, since it is the only authoritative work composed by a woman to document women's history. It presents famous women's virtues and contributions as proof of contemporary women's right to respectable, active status in the world. As such the *Cité's* pantheon is a more developed manifestation of the cult of the Nine Worthies and Nine Worthy Ladies that had flourished steadily since the previous century. More than simply possessing one of Christine's most important books, Alice lived her life, as Jambeck shows us, very much in accord with Christine's precepts for women, as stated in her *Livre des Trois Vertus*, which teaches them to function as wise managers of household and estate. Alice's copy of the *Cité des Dames* also seems to have lived its own life among several distinguished owners.

Jambeck notes the significance of Alice's seal depicting St. Catherine's wheel, stressing that Catherine combined the attributes of literacy and martyrdom. But this is not the passive martyrdom typical of so many women saints. Catherine was a kind of transvestite (because of her manly level of learning) warrior saint who fought to protect her Christian city, Alexandria, from a pagan tyrant's ravages, by verbally defeating his learned propagandists and thereby converting them to Christianity. She also incurred the tyrant's wrath by refusing to

marry him. Catherine thus used her learnedness in an active way, for the good of her people. Toward the same end she wields her more conventional womanly weapon, that of marital eligibility and sexuality, by withholding it, since marriage to the tyrant would have resulted in an unholy alliance for her people as well as a loss of her virginity. When Maxentius then condemns her to be tortured and mutilated, God sends an angel to destroy the flesh-tearing wheel. When Maxentius finally has Catherine beheaded, milk, the transcendent maternal fluid--not blood--gushes forth from the wound. Christine describes all of these symbolic events and their meanings in her chapter on Catherine, beginning Book III of the *Cité des Dames*.<sup>3</sup> Might her account have led to Alice's choice of Catherine's Wheel as personal insignia, or vice-versa? Such a conclusion would of course require chronological analysis of the details, if available, as a first step. Whatever the case, Catherine's hagiographical life as glossed by Christine, when read against Alice's biography, helps us to understand this self-martyrologizing as an act of defiance rather than a resignation before fate. If Fortune's wheel were inevitably to wound her at times, Alice nevertheless would refuse to be a martyr to it. She was finally able, for instance, to make peace with York *without* marrying him, and to weather many other difficulties.

I would also recall St. Catherine's role as one of the guiding voices identified by Joan of Arc--who, like Catherine in the *Cité*, was labeled a valiant *puelle* (maiden) by Christine in her *Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc*--and the associations generated by this fact in Alice's life. However, Alice herself might not have been pleased with this connection for political reasons. For example, her two "real" husbands--Salisbury and Suffolk--both encountered the Maid of Orleans directly on the battlefield, resulting in death for the former (1428) and imprisonment for the latter (1430). How ironic it must have seemed to Alice that "the bravest woman in the world"<sup>4</sup> should emerge from the *Cité des*

<sup>3</sup> Catherine's story is in ch. 3, preceded only by the chs. on the Queen of Heaven and Our Lady and Mary Magdalene. Along with E. J. Richards' well-known trans., see his new ed. of the original French in Christine de Pizan, *La Città delle Dame*, 434-38.

<sup>4</sup> According to the Clerk of the City Hall of La Rochelle's account of Suffolk's surrender at Jargeau, in Quicherat, "Relation" 343. However, the Herald of Berri claims Suffolk surrendered to a Frenchman whom he knighted on the spot

*Dames'* author's adoptive people, the enemy. Yet the circumstances had not always been so simple, since earlier, in 1398, we find Christine sending her young son, Jehan de Castel, to England in the service of Alice's father-in-law, the third earl of Salisbury.<sup>5</sup> The widowed poet obviously felt her son's future would be secure at the English court, though she would later change her mind after Salisbury's death. More colorfully, a fanciful account, arising during the eighteenth century, claiming that Christine actually had a love affair with Salisbury,<sup>6</sup> leads us to conclude that even the most self-deterministic women cannot control their posthumous destinies.

Moving on to Meradith McMunn's elucidation of which of Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose* (*Romance of the Rose*) manuscripts might have triggered a particularly unfavorable response, we again find Christine de Pizan, though from an earlier phase of her career, exercising her verbal heroism against the Parisian male humanistic establishment in the Debate of the *Romance of the Rose*.<sup>7</sup> The Debate constitutes another first in Christine's career and in the history of literature as the first documented *Querelle des Femmes* (Debates about Women). McMunn enriches our understanding of the implications of this gendered cultural tension when she avers that certain manuscripts of the *Rose* were not only produced by women, which would strike us as distasteful enough given the work's content in regard to gender, but that some of these manuscripts contained decidedly pornographic images. McMunn thereby envisions a "porno-iconographical" reception history of Meun's *Rose* in particular. She also acknowledges a key problem for her argument: that Christine's epistles only target Meun's words--his "mots et termes artisans et enflammans" (16)--and never any manuscript's illustrations.<sup>8</sup>

I leave the final proof of Christine's possible access to such "poisoned Rose" manuscripts within the chronological confines

to avoid the disgrace of being captured by too lowly a foe (Quicherat, *Procès* 4:45).

<sup>5</sup> See J. C. Laidlaw on this topic and its relevance to some of Christine's works.

<sup>6</sup> Gianni Mombello's able dissection of the origins of this account debunks its veracity.

<sup>7</sup> All references from Eric Hicks' critical edition.

<sup>8</sup> On the inflammatory language in the *Rose* and Christine's reaction to it, see Helen Solterer.

of their production and dissemination versus the date and place of Christine's *Rose Debate* epistles to McMunn's expertise. Whether or not one agrees with McMunn's demonstration, it raises many provocative points about fifteenth-century textual-visual rivalries in representation. It also warrants a reconsideration of what Huizinga has labeled the decline of symbolic imagination of the later Middle Ages, which, along with the imaginative-pictorial tensions he discusses, I perceive to be at work here.<sup>9</sup> To summarize very simply, Huizinga believed that while we can observe much congruence between image and word at this time, there were also significant divergences. Painting, as successful as it was in representing highly detailed, static, surface qualities, could not equal, much less surpass, literature in the depiction of more complex situations such as irony and states of mind (ch. 13 *passim*). The only exception to Huizinga's richly-documented generalizations--and one he seems to invite--might be seen in miniatures illustrating treatises on the arts of love, whose verbal code was so heavily emblemized that the psychological intricacies could be graphically re-created. Now for Huizinga, as for many medieval scholars, the *Roman de la Rose* served as the pioneering allegorical fountainhead for centuries because of its seductive verbal crystallizations of abstract concepts, especially the erotic and naturalistic, and their abundant enumeration. Against these "masculine-weighty fantastic reflections and colorful dress" (360) Huizinga favorably contrasted Christine's "clean, simple talent" (358) and "tender, spontaneous femininity" (360). Although he also admiringly invokes Christine's writing in the *Rose Debate* (137-38), he applauds in the freshness of her love lyrics a weapon as potent as her epistolary polemics in combatting the influence of Meun's anti-art of love.

With this in mind, how might we interpret the "poisoned *Roses*"--the obscene manuscripts possibly consulted by Christine? If copies of this clever invitation to libidinous anarchy were

<sup>9</sup> This especially in light of the new English trans. of *Herfsttij der Middeleeuwen* by Payton and Mammitzsch, now the most complete version of Huizinga's 1919 work in any language. For Huizinga's embattled history--worthy of anything endured by Christine or her patrons--see Wessel Krul, "In the Mirror of van Eyck: Johan Huizinga's *Autumn of the Middle Ages*," and Willem Otterspeer, "Huizinga before the Abyss: The von Leers Incident at the University of Leiden, April 1933," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27:3 (October 1997): 352-384, 385-444, resp.

illuminated by women artists with depictions of sex, nudity and violence, might such illustrations constitute an attempt to sabotage the *Rose*'s popularity by exaggerating the ugly side of its verbal imagery and thus strip Meun's discourse of its seductive nuances? Even pious male illuminators could have done the same, since Jean Gerson was not the only man to despise the *Rose*'s insidiously deft allegory. Would Christine have approved of such subterfuge by man or woman? Not if she were to remain true to her riposte to Meun's defender, Jean de Montreuil, when he tried to justify the *Rose*'s profanity and misogyny by citing its purpose as a negative didactic "mirror" designed to teach positive virtues: ". . . nature humaine, qui de soy est encline a mal, n'a nul besoing qu'on lui ramentoive le pié dont elle cloche pour plus droit aler. . ." [human nature, which is innately inclined toward evil, has no need to be reminded of its lame foot in order to walk more correctly] (22). As a final thought on this subject: whatever the intent of the obscenely-illustrated manuscripts, Christine may have seen them, but must also have had equal access to at least one of the elegantly-illuminated ones carefully listed by McMunn. Given the poet's aptitude for spotting the "subtile raisons" [subtle rationale] of Meun's poem and its advocates, one wonders whether she found the "nice" manuscripts even more perfidious, in that they beautified repugnant concepts.

Mary Beth Winn's analysis of the *Complainte* of Margaret of Austria returns us to the arena of women in power that we have visited with Alice Chaucer. Like Christine, whose books she owned (as Christine Reno also informs us) Margaret composed lyric poetry, especially *rondeaux* and this *complainte*. Treating themes of widowhood and women's other misfortunes, Margaret's known poems appear to remain within the mood primarily characterizing Christine's earliest verses. The regent and nurturing aunt of the future Holy Roman Emperor Charles V never attempts what we might call Christine's later positivism.

It is always more intriguing to read *complaintes* composed by women from this time since this genre evolved as a stylistic liberation from the so-called *formes fixes*. For if male poets first found their expressivity challenged, then later constrained, by versificatory rules, women poets, after the initial rush of "writing like a man" subsided, must have equated courtly-poetic strictures with courtly-social ones, and all their attendant misery and

hypocrisy. The elegant circularity of these forms eventually resembled yet another structure of confinement. Whereas male poets often cultivated melancholy as a poetic topos, even privileged women like Margaret actually suffered it in the politics of survival: whether in love--jilted as the "petite reine" by Charles VIII--or, twice widowed in untimely fashion. Intriguing at this juncture is the fact offered us by Christine Reno, that Charles' preferred consort, Anne of Brittany, owned a copy of Christine de Pizan's *Livre des Trois Vertus*, whose fundamental conjugal morality she disobeyed while perhaps profiting by its practical teachings.

The painted portraits of Margaret commemorate her attributes with even more lapidary solemnity than her poetic self-portraits. One of the paintings clearly calls to mind the French School's late-fifteenth-century "*Dame aux pensées*" ("Lady of Thoughts"), depicting a rather homely--to underscore her intelligence--noblewoman surrounded by *pensées* ("thoughts"/"pansies"), and as in Margaret's portrait, she is framed by an unfurling scrolled banner inscribed with "quoilque non vede yo my recorde" [Whatever I no longer see, I still remember].<sup>10</sup> The banner also reminds us of author portraits of Guillaume de Machaut,<sup>11</sup> to mark him as the most productive and influential *littérateur* of the later medieval centuries. Other topoi found in Margaret's portraits are the Ship of Life and Fortune's Wheel, both also found in Christine's work, notably the *Mutacion de Fortune*. The smaller motifs of arrows, torch and scales are also present. Such symbolic devices betoken the late-medieval tendency signaled by Huizinga (chs. 10-13, *passim*):

. . .to explain images through images, and to hold up mirrors to mirrors.

<sup>10</sup> This painting, housed in the Louvre, can for example be found reproduced and discussed in Galienne and Pierre Francastel, pl. 18, who cite it as the first case in which "une vertu d'intelligence et de réflexion est accordée à une femme, cela compense un manque de beauté" [a quality of intelligence and thoughtfulness is accorded a woman, which compensates for a lack of beauty].

<sup>11</sup> Several portraits of both the author-as-writer and author-as-poet, with a paper banner rolling out from beneath his pen, can be found in Paris B.n.F. fr. 1584 and 1586, both complete-works mss. most likely executed under Machaut's supervision.

The whole world was capsulated in independent figures...Thought had become too dependent on figures; the visual tendency...was now overpowering. Everything that could be thought had become plastic and pictorial (248).

I would temper this assessment, based on the images Winn, Jambeck and McMunn have shown us, by replacing the notion of the visual arts "overpowering" the verbal with that of a *merging* or fusion of verbal and plastic expression, only to have the two diverge again, each imparting traits to the other in oddly tautological fashion.

Margaret was nowhere nearly as prolific a poet as Christine, probably for both financial and socio-political reasons. Born of and married into prestigious noble families, she had no need to write for a living, but wrote rather for consolation. Because she did wield power as a noblewoman, Margaret could and did function in a more direct way in Christine's ideal literate women's capacity as *moyenneresse* ("mediatrix") between conflicting social groups than even our proficient poet could by her pen. Margaret's birthdate caused her to miss Joan of Arc by fifty years. Yet she knew and supported the canonization of Colette of Corbie, an important negotiator among the interests of France, Savoy and Burgundy and thus a mystical-visionary, militantly virginal projection of Margaret herself. Like Christine de Pizan as poet, Colette as advisor was respected by duke Philip the Good of Burgundy, Margaret's maternal grandfather.

Christine Reno begins her article by surveying the dissemination of Christine de Pizan's works among a vast array of famous women--a real-life "City of Ladies" of the sixteenth century--as testimony to the versatile author's posthumous renown. Reno then focuses on the lesser-known but deserving figure of Anne Malet de Gravelle as book owner, annotator and author. Reno's meticulous codicological investigation, together with literary-stylistic comparisons, reveals that Honoré d'Urfé's great-grandmother never allowed her talents to be led, one might say, *Astrée*. Anne's handwritten emendations to the lacunae of her copy of Christine's *Mutacion de Fortune* according to a better manuscript, and her revamping of Boccaccio's *Teseida* with an eye toward the *Mutacion's* central allegory, as Reno convincingly argues, add a new dimension to Christine's cherished term, *antypgraphe*: one who records or writes after the

fact (*Avision* 77).<sup>12</sup> I would supplement these remarks by observing that Anne also emulates Christine first in imitating male authors like Chartier, then in summoning the self-confidence to rework Boccaccio. For just as Christine transformed the Italian's *De Mulieribus claris* (*On Illustrious Women*) and *The Decameron* in tone and substance to create the *Cité des Dames*, so did Anne with the *Teseida*--using Christine's work as her model. Reno is cautious in affirming that Anne did not openly use Christine as a model in the same way as she did Boccaccio and Chartier. Yet even by tacitly incorporating the *Mutacion* to, in a sense, improve Boccaccio, Anne recognizes Christine, however timidly, as a true *auctor*. And again another irony, this time signaled by Reno: that a later hand should ascribe the *Mutacion* to Anne!

Reno also mentions Anne's connection with Joan of Arc, through her father's ownership of what is now called the Orléans manuscript of Joan's trial. I would add here that in many ways this manuscript's most important vestige of the Maid's true words is in her trial's complex codicological history. Indeed, although it is a clumsy, later French translation of the official Latin transcript (itself a politically-corrupt translation done after Joan's execution by Anglo-Burgundian notaries of the trial record, originally in French), this Orléans ms. belonging to Gravelle remains the closest to the original proceedings, since the original French minute was lost soon after the Orléans copy was made.<sup>13</sup> Like Christine's *Ditié*, then, Gravelle's manuscript of Joan affords us one of the few contemporary glimpses of a female figure soon enveloped in myth.

In conclusion, if the interrelated presences of Christine de Pizan and Joan of Arc recur fortuitously across the textual, iconographic and political arenas witnessed and at times entered by our noble bibliophile patrons, they also arise propitiously, not

<sup>12</sup> Christine uses this term in her autobiographical vision, the *Avision* 77.

<sup>13</sup> For the most recent complete account of this ms., see Pierre Tisset's introduction to his ed. and trans. with Yvonne Lanhers, *Procés* 3:20-21.

only for them but for these papers, since our honoree, Charity Cannon Willard, has contributed major studies on both "commanding women."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Though never published, Prof. Willard's M. A. thesis is an impressive work for its time and still rewards consultation.