"Fortify the City with Your Tempered Pen": Building Agency in the "City of Ladies" Through Text, Paratext, and Media

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“FORTIFY THE CITY WITH YOUR TEMPERED PEN:” BUILDING AGENCY IN THE “CITY OF LADIES” THROUGH TEXT, PARATEXT, AND MEDIA

By

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This Thesis is dedicated to Christine and Karlyn.
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ABSTRACT

In an effort to enhance disciplinary understanding of agency especially for women, recover evidence of women exercising agency historically, and shed light on current debates concerning the interaction between word and image in rhetoric, I explore the extent to which Christine de Pizan, a medieval woman writer, invented and articulated her rhetorical agency. For Christine, the text, the image, and the medium of the manuscript are significant in the development of rhetorical agency; the focus of this thesis is on the nature of that agency, particularly how rhetorical agency is invented within the “City of Ladies” folios from her collected works in Harley Ms. 4431. I frame my study of Christine de Pizan and rhetorical agency with Karlyn Kohrs Campbell’s work on agency, a particularly powerful construct for my project, because it provides space for both text and paratext and it grapples with the postmodern moment while simultaneously retaining its applicability for historical studies.

I begin by examining how Christine’s agency emerged through the dialogic between conventions of textual forms. In particular, I consider Campbell’s definition that rhetorical agency occurs in texts, because “texts have agency” and are “effected through form” (Campbell 3). Rhetorical agency emerges as Christine complies with cultural expectations concerning the different conventions of form and then subsequently subverts those same conventions to create a space of resistance for women.

I explore how Christine reveals her artistry or rhetorical skills when she manipulates the visual aspects of the manuscript page or paratexts, the incidentals and the miniatures, so that they demonstrate her agency. According to Campbell, artistry occurs when “heuristic skills…respond to contingencies…for which there are no precise or universal precepts, although skilled practitioners are alert to recurring patterns” (Campbell 12). Christine complies with the traditional patterns of the paratext, but subverts those patterns, when she repeats traditional paratext with differences. These differences gesture to the text, other elements of the page, and beyond and, in the process, layer new meaning into the manuscript.

I then follow with an examination of the manuscript as a medium, where text and paratext function together to communicate meaning. Though both text and paratext have their own rhetorical agency, Christine invents her agency as the “point[s] of articulation” for the
manuscript (Campbell 3). Christine executed a great deal of control over the production of her manuscript, which means her rhetorical agency occurs when she articulates her meaning through her authority and negotiation of the materiality and cultural significance of the medium.

Because Christine’s rhetorical agency emerges from the text, paratext, and manuscript, an examination of Christine’s manuscript, Harley Ms. 4431, provides a new look at postmodern agency and the rhetorical agency of medieval manuscripts. Interestingly, Christine wrote at a significant transitional period for ideology and technology and instead of articulating a traditional historical or humanist theory of agency, she performs a complex agency, which is reminiscent of postmodern agency and raises some questions regarding the nature of agency during the medieval era. In addition, the complicated agency created within medieval manuscripts as the verbal and visual texts came together within the medium will contribute to questions of agency and media.
“For it seems to me that, for now, the walls I have built for you to enclose that City of Ladies must suffice, and they are all finished and plastered. Let my other sisters come forward, and with their aid and counsel may you complete the remainder of the edifice” (97). Here, Lady Reason, an allegorical figure in the “City of Ladies,” states the nature of an endeavor by three allegorical figures (Reason, Rectitude, and Justice); the character, Christine; and a community of honorable women to work together through textual and visual discourse within the fifteenth century text the “City of Ladies” to construct a utopian city, where women can live safely away from misogynist attacks. In an era where misogynist powers—who, because of women’s “sinful state,” sought to deny women access to language—the author of the “City of Ladies,” Christine de Pizan, wrote prolifically and argued on behalf of women and their right to language. Without a doubt, the text and paratexts of Christine’s work—from the logic of the arguments to the visual artifacts she employs—contribute to her rhetorical agency, her ability to use language to act in the world. For Christine, text, image, and the medium of the manuscript are significant in the inventing and articulating of rhetorical agency; the focus of this thesis is on the nature of that rhetorical agency, particularly how rhetorical agency is invented and articulated within the “City of Ladies” folios from her collected works in Harley MS. 4431.

Christine constitutes an extraordinary moment in rhetorical history and warrants scholarly interest on the basis of her construction of agency as a fusion of language and image. Because of the extent to which Christine controlled the writing and production of her manuscripts, her work provides an opportunity to consider how a medieval woman writer constructs her agency through the relationship between text and paratext (particularly the images) in her illuminated manuscripts. Therefore, I examine Christine’s rhetorical agency, especially how it is enacted through the medium of the manuscript. I address two specific questions: How is agency “invented” by Christine as the author, who is the point of articulation of both text and image? How does agency emerge from Christine’s negotiation between rhetorical artistry and visual artistry (text and image) in her collected works in Harley MS 4431, especially those folios containing the “City of Ladies”? This project is valuable in three ways: it will a) enhance disciplinary understanding of agency especially for women, b) recover evidence
of women exercising agency historically, and c) shed light on current debates concerning the interaction between word and image in rhetoric.

With its focus on Christine de Pizan and the invention of rhetorical agency, this study contributes to the ongoing conversation in the history of rhetoric aimed at ending the silence surrounding women rhetoricians by either recuperating those who did speak (but never became a part of the rhetorical canon) or investigating the cultural context that made silence into a transitive verb: the silencing of women (Belenoff 401). The origins of this silence in the field of rhetoric occur because “rhetorical history has replicated the power politics of gender, with men in the highest cultural roles and social rank” (Glenn 2). Yet some women throughout history have managed to manufacture an agency even with limitations placed on them, and, through this agency they have, if only for a brief time, been heard. New work, like this study, seeks to investigate women, like Christine de Pizan, who despite “carefully circumscribed roles” were able to invent and articulate agency, even in a culture that demanded their silence (Warren 62).

I frame my study of Christine de Pizan and rhetorical agency with Karlyn Kohrs Campbell’s work on agency, a particularly powerful construct for my project because it provides space for both text and paratext and because it grapples with the postmodern moment while simultaneously retaining its applicability for historical studies. In “Agency: Promiscuous and Protean,” Campbell defines agency as “the capacity to act, that is, to have the competence to speak or write in a way that will be recognized or heeded by others in one’s community” (4). She proposes that

agency (1) is communal and participatory, hence, both constituted and constrained by externals that are material and symbolic; (2) is “invented” by authors who are points of articulation; (3) emerges in artistry or craft; (4) is effected through form; and (5) is perverse, that is, inherently, protean, ambiguous, open to reversal (3).

Rhetorical agency occurs when these five definitions work together. Yet they can each be examined separately to determine how rhetorical agency is produced within a rhetorical situation.

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1 Even though Campbell’s definition of agency comes from a post-structuralist context, I believe this definition can be extended to the early modern period, because I, like Campbell, “reject the view that there is a vast chasm separating classical, modern, and postmodern theories” (15). Instead, I believe that “reading and rereading earlier works in light of the insights of more recent theorists, reinventing, if you will, the legacy of the past in ways that fuse these traditions” fits this study (15).
First, rhetorical agency occurs in texts, because “texts have agency” and are “effected through form” (Campbell 3). In part, texts have agency through “symbolic action” which “presupposes others who know the words and syntax of a shared language and how to use them—when it is considered appropriate for whom to say what” (6). A text contains symbolic actions through form, which acts as a guide for “the process of ‘uptake’ for readers or listeners enabling them to categorize, to understand how a symbolic act is to be framed” (13). The reader or listener is able to pick up on signals within the textual forms utilized by an author. These forms are “related to generic conventions, to allusion, to the pleasures of repetition in alliteration and assonance, to the transformations effected by tropes” (13). Since “form is the foundation of all communication,” a study of textual forms enables a reader to identify how rhetorical agency emerges from a text (13). Rhetorical agency develops through the cultural expectations and values placed on the different textual forms in a text, so that an audience is able to understand the construction of meaning taking place within the text.

Besides form, rhetorical agency “emerges in artistry or craft” (Campbell 3). In her explanation of this trait, Campbell elaborates that rhetorical agency forms from “artistry or craft,” when “heuristic skills. . . respond to contingencies. . . for which there are no precise or universal precepts, although skilled practitioners are alert to recurring patterns” (12). These heuristic skills which respond to contingencies include “stratagem, flair, subtlety, and the like as well as the habits of mind learned through practice” (12). This artistry is not the providence of the “masterworks,” but can be found in “apt vernacular speech and everyday talk” (12-3). Therefore, the appropriate response to a rhetorical situation does not have to be the highly formalized and traditional response of a trained rhetor, but can also be the everyday speech response of an untrained rhetor. These responses are repeated and over time skilled scholars can identify emerging patterns. The emerging patterns become “stylized repetition,” which are then appropriated and altered (13). Repeated responses to rhetorical situations are also performative, which means they are “repeated, fix meaning through sedimentation. Agency equally emerges in performances that repeat with a difference, altering meaning” (13). Rhetorical agency emerges through a rhetor’s performative and appropriate response to a rhetorical situation, specifically when the performative response is iterated with a difference.

In addition to form and artistry, rhetorical agency “is “invented” by authors who are points of articulation” (Campbell 3). An investigation of an author reveals how she acts as an
“inventor in the rhetorical sense,” by linking the past and the present to “find means to express those strata that connect the psyche, society, and world, the forms of feeling that encapsulate moments in time” (9). Further, “authors/rhetors are materially limited, linguistically constrained, historically situated subjects” (9). So rhetorical agency is created and contained by cultural expectations regarding materials, linguistics, and history, specifically in the uses of these elements in the construction of meaning by an author. And rhetorical agency is “communal and participatory, hence, both constituted and constrained by externals that are material and symbolic” (3). According to Campbell’s definition, this communal contribution to the invention of agency must occur through “ongoing cultural conversations and is the sine qua non of public participation” (4). For Campbell, the author does not “invent” agency in isolation, but through “cultures and collectivities,” where the author “must negotiate among institutional powers and are best described as ‘points of articulation’ rather than originators” (9). Therefore, authors and rhetors both construct and are constructed by their material, linguistic, historical, social, and cultural positions. I frame my analysis concerning Christine’s agency in “The City of Ladies” with this definition of agency described by Campbell and so I examine form, artistry, the community, and Christine, as a point of articulation, in “The City of Ladies” folios of Harley Ms. 4431.

Christine de Pizan and her work contributes to the study of rhetorical agency, through the “new rhetorical identity” she forged “for the woman writer—one that enables her to speak ‘as a woman,’ but with pride, learning, and a trenchant eye for the unfair treatment of her sex” (Bizzell 543). She is a rare example of female authorship during the late medieval period, since she was a famous woman writer during her own time, but also because she was a famous woman writer, who received sufficient patronage from her writing to support her family. Because of the increasing fame of her work and the generosity of her patrons, Christine wrote and published a

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2Christine voiced political and social concerns in her work, such as “Letter from the Goddess Othea,” which has been discussed by Charity Willard in Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works and others. And, Christine wrote works which have garnered attention for proto-feminist qualities (Gottlieb; Blumenfeld-Kosinski; Willard). Maureen Quilligan concentrates in The Allegory of Female Authority: Christine de Pizan’s Cite des Dames on Christine’s literary sources and her personal experiences as the sources for her authority in “City of Ladies.” Essays such as “The Political Significance of Christine de Pizan” by Eric Hicks and “Christine de Pizan: From Poet to Political Commentator” by Charity Willard examine Christine’s literary career, which focuses exclusively on her texts. Jenny Redfern’s essay “Christine de Pisan and The Treasure of the City of Ladies,” the most famous and widely cited essay on Christine de Pizan and rhetoric, discusses Christine’s use of rhetorical tropes and emphasis on language for her female audience. Heather Arden’s essay “Women’s History and Rhetoric of Persuasion in Christine de Pizan’s Cite des dames” also describes how Christine used language and her sources to form a new language for speaking about women’s experiences.
wide range of illuminated manuscripts, including Harley Ms. 4431. In composing her own texts, Christine has a unique rhetorical identity, through the degree to which she exercised control over the design and images of her manuscripts.

This study contributes to the conversation concerning the (re)historization of women in rhetorical history, because while Christine was famous during her lifetime, she was later silenced through various practices. According to Nancy Warren in The Sword and the Cloister, the English appropriated Christine’s works and, in the meantime, made “strategic manipulations of the figure of Christine, combined with targeted transformations of her works” in order to provide “opportunities for retroactive revisions of the very things Christine and her countrywomen [Joan of Arc] destabilized” (60). She was fictionalized and made into a nun. “Christine is put into the secure enclosure of a religious foundation, so conveniently removing her from the role of active, knowledgeable participant in the politico-military sphere” (69). A. E. B. Coldiron argues that “her powers end up not deauthorized…but decontextualized” (40). While not all of her translators silenced her voice, there are instances where “her voice was masculinized and her manuscripts were described as filtered through the hands of her learned male scribes” (46). Many of her works were later published without her name attached. But her work still was read by her own generation and later, so her voice continued to be heard though it became muted. A resurgence of interest in her began in 1982 when Earl Jeffrey Richards translated her work into English. This new interest allows for Christine to re-enter the history of rhetoric as a medieval woman who can provide insight into her own exercise of agency.

Thus, this project contributes to the interrogation of women’s historical place in rhetoric through a close analysis of one “authorized” woman’s invention and exercise of agency. I draw on three bodies of scholarship for this work: work on Christine de Pizan; work in agency, particularly Campbell’s definition; and work on the relationship between text, image, and medium. To begin, I choose to focus on one of Christine’s most significant works, Harley Ms. 4431. Harley Ms. 4431 is important because, according to Earl Jeffrey Richards and the University of Edinburgh research team, this manuscript text is the last version of many of her texts and, therefore, the most ornate and carefully composed (Richards xlviii-xlix, “Research Context”). In the preface to his translation, Richards writes that this manuscript, Harley Ms. 4431, “should correspond to the final version Christine proposed” (Richards xlix). Harley Ms. 4431 contains “thirty texts...decorated with 130 miniatures” and “constitutes the most complete
extant collection of Christine’s work” (McGrady 195). The University of Edinburgh research team also states that “scribe X has been identified with Christine herself” indicating that Christine’s involvement with the construction of her manuscript extended from the actual copying of the text into the carefully designed produced her agency, in part because of the combination of Christine’s unusual control over the text and the evidence of her involvement in the artistry of the text and paratext. Sandra Hindman describes the relationship between image and text in Christine de Pizan’s manuscript: “the frontispiece is conceived as an emblem wherein the process of writing and the product of the book are conceptually merged in the images of the author and the city” (“Ink” 466). To further narrow my analysis, I explore “The City of Ladies,” Christine’s version of women’s history and her argument for women’s right to rhetorical agency and language, which is set off by images and careful design within Harley Ms. 4431. On the surface, Christine strives “to write a universal history of women in The City of Ladies,” which “is further proof of her sensitivity to historical problems” (Richards xxxi). Yet Christine provides “a detailed discussion of the causes of anti-feminism and the outlining of women’s special contributions to society with further reference to their potentialities, which they are not always able to realize because of prejudices of society” (Willard 136). Within the text, she “debated in a public, written arena with royal secretaries who were all male,” she “names herself as female author,” and her “text explicitly redeploy an essentialism that now works to undermine the authority of males, who have no certain basis for their (derogatory) knowledge about women” (Quilligan 8, 15, 55). Currently, The Making of the Queen’s Manuscript research group at the University of Edinburgh is doing a codicological study on the manuscript. On the
The research team describes Harley Ms. 4431 as “produced by her scriptorium in Paris between 1399 and 1408” (“Research Context”). “The City of Ladies” lends itself to a study of agency, since Christine, as she re-wrote history, engaged in an on-going debate regarding the articulating or inventing agency not just for herself, but for other women of her era.

In addition, and perhaps even more significantly, I argue that Christine’s articulation of her agency does not occur in her text alone, but also in the paratext within her manuscript. Her paratext consists of additions to the manuscript beyond the text, such as miniatures and headings. I focus primarily on the paratext as graphic images because, as Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Tayler in *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence* state, “images, too, are constructions, whether conscious or not, of the artists who made them; and in turn they may be constructors of the worlds they profess to record” (16). Since Christine’s manuscript is ornately illuminated for Queen Isabeau, the graphic images and design as paratext pay an important role in the overall construction of agency within the manuscript.

In recovering Christine’s contributions to the field of rhetoric, her work needs to thoroughly be explored, not just the context of her text, but the full experience of Christine’s rhetorical agency in her manuscripts. Her manuscripts are a complex dialogic experience, and a study of Christine’s work contributes insight not only into the role of women in the history of rhetoric or historical women and the articulation of rhetorical agency, but also into the “materiality” of media composition (Albers 11-12). Like multimodal digital compositions and new media, Christine’s manuscripts demonstrate awareness “of the range of materialities of texts” (Wysocki 15). In particular, this project demonstrates how rhetorical agency is articulated and invented in a multimodal approach, which acknowledges “that language is only partial, and that many modes are involved in meaning-making” (Albers 11). Thus, Christine as a historical woman rhetorician contributes to discussions concerning rhetorical agency in both medieval and contemporary media.

Though in reality image, text, and medium all work together rhetorically, I am artificially separating each element in this project at least initially in order to determine how image, text, and medium play a role in the development of agency. In the end, the separate parts will be united in order to determine the characteristics of Christine’s agency. Chapter Two focuses on the emergence of agency from the textual content of “The City of Ladies.” I am able to consider addition, if I find a crucial area of contention between the two, I work to translate the section myself or I work with
how agency emerges within the dialogue between the multiple forms of the text. Through this
dialogue, I analyze the extent to which Christine appropriated and subverted the conventions of
the forms in order to shape and reshape cultural expectations. In Chapter Three, I analyze how
agency emerges through Christine’s artistry and the paratext, particularly the images. In regards
to artistry, Christine demonstrated her rhetorical skills through her manipulation of the visual
texts. For Chapter Four, I investigate how rhetorical agency is formed through the mediation
between text and paratext within the medium of the manuscript. Since this is an illuminated
manuscript, Christine and her scriptorium did not just write the text on the vellum. Instead, the
manuscript has color, rubrics, headings, images, and even some corrections made by a scribal
hand attributed to Christine herself. Much like interplay between color, font, text, and images
studied as part of the rhetorical context in our digital age, the illuminated manuscripts must also
be studied as the medium, where text and paratext interact. Lastly, through a reflection of my
analysis, I have considered how this study of Christine’s illuminated manuscript might provide
further insight into the development of agency through the mediation between text, graphic
image, and the negotiation of the two through a medium.

a translator in order to clarify the passage for my work.
CHAPTER 2
BUILDING THE FORM

“Thus, fair daughter, the prerogative among women has been bestowed on you to establish and build the City of Ladies” (11). This line spoken by the allegorical figure, Reason, hints at several conventions of form found in the text of “The City of Ladies:” personifications (the speaker), architectural metaphors (the City), and dream vision (the setting of this speech). The audience’s familiarity with these conventions allows Christine to negotiate the culturally determined social roles and values associated with these conventions in order to convince her reader of the need for change. As Christine manipulates the values established by her cultural community, she conveys her ideas and demonstrates her rhetorical agency. Specifically, her agency is rooted in an external community’s acceptance of her as a credible and valid authority, because of her compliance with traditional medieval conventions. With the authority she receives from her audience for complying with traditional textual conventions, Christine gains affirmation as a member of her cultural community, who is validated by history and authorized by God to speak. With this affirmation, Christine, then, appropriates and subverts the traditional conventions in order to extend her agency and create a place of resistance where her audience can change their social roles and values regarding women. This chapter focuses on the way in which Christine employs form to enact this layered rhetorical agency. I begin with a review of form as a tool of agency by turning to Karlyn Kohrs Campbell. I then concentrate on Christine’s three moves of compliance, appropriation, and subversion, which she uses to navigate allegory, historiography, and hagiography, the conventions of form in “The City of Ladies,” that reveal a rhetorical agency rooted in the cultural expectations of a community external to Christine.

Agency is affected in two ways through form: the repetition of culturally and communally significant conventions, and the subversion of those communal expectations to create a space of resistance. According to Campbell, the conventions are “related to generic conventions, to allusion, to the pleasures of repetition in alliteration and assonance, to the transformations effected by tropes” (13). These components of form are familiar to an audience and so act as “the signals of ‘uptake’ for readers or listeners [to enable] them to categorize, to understand how a symbolic act is framed” (13). However, this definition relies on two assumptions concerning form. First, Campbell associates form with genre, which Sharon Crowley in “Response to Karyln Kohrs Campbell” derogatorily calls “sacred categories” (3).
Instead, Crowley argues that agency can occur without form and suggests instead that “agency may be affected through style, tone, or delivery” (3). I argue that rhetorical agency does occur through form, but is not limited to literary tropes or general aspects of style. The community views an author who navigates textual conventions as a credible, valid, and authoritative speaker. When the author negotiates these textual conventions, he gains the agency to speak. Once an author obtains the authority and agency to speak from his cultural community, he is able to revise the textual conventions in order to express new meanings, which subvert and resist the values of the community. Second, the use of conventions relies on the accessibility of forms to the text’s audience. Campbell addresses this concern when she writes, “symbolic action presupposes others who know the words and syntax of a shared language and how to use them—when it is considered appropriate for whom to say what” (6). According to Campbell, this same concern actually enables a space of resistance (6). Campbell discusses how a marginalized group such as women can have a rhetorical agency which resists cultural expectations by avoiding essentialism, the treatment of women as “identical based on socially constructed categories,” by recognizing the “force of external constraints, such as subject positions constituted by power,” and by incorporating “the possibility of resistance into their formations” (6). So rhetorical agency occurs when an author or rhetor complies with traditional conventions of form, which are potentially accessible for an audience. Even if the audience is not authorized to understand or use those conventions of form themselves, the author or rhetor can appropriate these conventions to create shared meaning by identifying problems (repression through socially constructed categories) with those conventions and then subverting them to create spaces of resistance.

In this chapter, I investigate the text as the product of Christine’s manipulation of external sources of meaning in order to develop her rhetorical agency in the “City of Ladies.” In “The City of Ladies” text in Harley Ms. 4431, Christine arranges the components of form within her text to create kairotic moments for her text to speak to her audience: to defend women against misogynistic attacks through a re-interpretation of women’s roles in history. “The City of Ladies” is the longest prose section of the manuscript and occupies folios 290a-374a. Like the other texts in Harley MS. 4431, “The City of Ladies” is ruled in two columns. Written in red (a rubric) and set off as a heading for the rest of the piece, the text begins with the statement “Here begins the Book of the City of Ladies, whose first chapter tells why and for what purpose
this book was written” (3). Then Christine begins the main body of the text with a description of her study and her interest in reading a book, “The Lamentations of Mathéolus.” This book made Christine “wonder how it happened that so many different men—and learned among them—have been and are so inclined to express both in the speaking and in their treatises and writings so many devilish and wicked thoughts about women and their behavior” (4). To respond to this concern, the text is divided into three major sections: Part 1, the opening, contains 48 chapters; Part 2, the building of the city, contains 69 chapters; and Part 3, populating the city, contains 19 chapters. The main sections are labeled with rubrics, for example, the beginning of the text, in red: “Here begins the second part of the Book of the City of Ladies, which tells how and by whom the City inside the walls are constructed, built, and peopled” (99). And each new subsection begins with a rubric describing the section: “Here Christine tells how she dug in the ground, by which would be understood the questions which she put to Reason and how Reason replied to her” (20-1). From this construction of the text in the “City of Ladies,” agency emerges through different aspects of form in two ways: (1) the compliance and appropriation of organizational structures and textual dynamics of traditional forms in the medieval era (2) the disruption of those forms, which alters cultural expectations and through those alterations insists on the right of women to speak for and of themselves. I turn to three major conventions of form in order to track her compliances with traditional aspects of the form so that her audience will accept her subversion of these conventions: allegory, historiography, and hagiography.

Allegory

Defined as a genre, or, more specifically, a traditional element of medieval form where abstract and metaphorical ideas are made into concrete imagery, allegory functions in “The City of Ladies” as a component of agency because it evokes the authority of the larger cultural community external to Christine. As Campbell states, “agency is communal, social, cooperative, and participatory and simultaneously, constituted and constrained by the material and symbolic elements of the context and culture” (5-6). As a component of the form, allegory signifies community values by acting as the “signifier of another conceptual content selected from correspondences set up in a cultural encyclopedia” (Irvine 262). In other words, the abstract ideas and the methodology for making those abstract concepts into concrete imagery familiar to a reader are culturally determined and constructed. An examination of three specific elements of allegory—dream vision, allegorical figures, and the metaphor of architecture—demonstrates
how Christine’s rhetorical agency emerges externally from her as she complies with textual conventions that lend her credibility with her audience.

One strategy, which allowed a medieval author to gain agency, involved a demonstration of his credibility as a speaker, when the author took on the role of hero in a dream vision. In a traditional dream vision, the narrator, who is usually a character representing the author, falls asleep and, in his dream-like state, he goes on a quest to find enlightenment with a female allegorical figure as a guide. This quest represents both the “dreams of the inner life, of spiritual exploration and progress, perhaps an overcoming of mental stress” and “the process of learning from a divine source or other higher being or, more mundanely, from a book” (Davenport 193). In addition, the traditional form of a dream vision, framed narratives…offer the reader two related but separate states of understanding, the waking consciousness of a first-person narrator figure, often given an apparently autobiographical identity, and the reporting of a dreamer figure, who sometimes adopts the stance of a camera eye simply recording what is seen in the dream, but sometimes an active participant in dramatic scenes of debate and question. (193)

So an author who complies with the tradition of the dream vision signals that he has the agency of a dream vision hero, who engages in a journey for enlightenment in which the audience can accompany him. His rhetorical agency occurs as he takes on this culturally expected role of a hero, who is authorized to act and find enlightenment for his audience through his journey.

By complying with this traditional textual component of the dream vision, Christine conveys to her audience that she, as a credible speaker for the cultural community, has agency, because her character, Christine, acts as a hero of a dream vision as well. “The City of Ladies” begins with Christine, the character, stating, “I was sitting in my study, surrounded by books on many different subjects, my mind grew weary from dwelling at length on the weighty opinions of authors whom I had studied for so long” (3). Then, she “suddenly saw a ray of light fall on her lap,” and the character, Christine, begins her quest to build a city where women can be honored for their contributions to society without the stigma of misogynist writings (6). Since Christine, the author, frames her narrative with dream vision motifs, her agency develops from the authority invested in the author-hero by the cultural community, who authorizes the dream vision hero to engage in a quest to find social, cultural, and religious truth.
But Christine pushes her agency beyond these cultural expectations to open up a space for change by subverting the hero position. Because of this framework, Christine has the authority to write about subjects, which might otherwise be considered inappropriate, since the author as the hero of the dream vision can mix different traditions and styles as he engages in his quest for truth (Davenport 193). Thus, Christine begins with a convention accepted by her audience as a versatile framework, which allows specific shifts in communal and cultural meaning external to Christine to produce agency. Using this versatility and the authority she gained as a dream vision hero, Christine subverts the traditional dream vision to open a space of resistance in two specific ways. First, contrary to the traditional dream vision where the narrator is a man who is guided by an allegorical figure as he travels to find answers to his dilemmas, Christine’s narrator is a woman, who engages in an active discourse with allegorical women in order to find a solution to her complex questions. So rather than only having “a troubled, first-person narrator and an authoritative teaching figure,” Christine has three women as allegorical figures, who not only answer her questions and guide her, but also actively work with her to construct the city (Davenport 194). Second, Christine negates the fictionalized world of a dream vision by not having her characters interact in a dream-like realm. Instead, there is no separation between the dream and a waking state (Quilligan 46). This literal iteration of the dream vision legitimatizes Christine’s agency, because her authority as a hero on a quest for enlightenment is not based on a fictitious account, but indicates a realistic event. This rhetorical agency comes from Christine’s authority as the hero of a dream vision, who now has the authority to question an actual social situation in the real world.

A second strategy by which medieval male authors acquired rhetorical agency through allegory was by creating allegorical figures who participated in guiding the hero of a dream vision. These allegorical figures were traditionally personifications, who act as the “translation whereby things absent, abstract, inanimate, are made human and present” (Griffiths 1). These personifications represented the values of the external community. By evoking and humanizing these abstract ideals into characters for the narrative, an author demonstrated his recognition of these values, which lent him credibility as a member of the community. Christine, by employing this same rhetorical device, creates personifications in “The City of Ladies,” who personify, symbolically represent, and enact the qualities of reason, rectitude, and justice and thereby
demonstrates her own credibility as a member of the community, who shares these cultural values with her audience.

After establishing her agency through her credibility as a member of the cultural community, Christine subverts the role of the personifications in her text to broaden her agency. Rather, then symbolically re-present traditional misogynist values from medieval society, Christine’s three allegorical figures (Reason, Rectitude, and Justice) participate in the building of a city, where good women can go and be protected from the malicious speech of misogynist writers. The personifications of the text do not simply act out their names, but instead engage in a discussion with the narrator in an effort to explain, justify, and ultimately, change social values. For example, an exchange might begin with Christine saying something like “such is the case as far as women’s mind are concerned, it is a proven fact that women have weak bodies…these things, in men’s judgment, substantially reduce the degree and authority of the feminine sex” (36). The allegorical figures respond to this articulated cultural value with a refutation. Here, Reason states, “My dear daughter, such a deduction is totally invalid and unsupported, for invariably one often sees that when Nature does not give to one body…as she has given to another…she makes up the difference with an even greater boon than she has taken away” (36). Thus, Christine furthers her rhetorical agency beyond the ethos and authority created when she expresses shared cultural values with her audience through her personifications. By having the personifications provide new views on cultural expectations, Christine creates a rhetorical agency rooted in women or figures representing women shaping and reshaping cultural values through discourse.

A third strategy for creating agency in allegory is the manipulation of culturally constructed images. In medieval culture, one such image was the use of the architecture metaphor to construct meaning in many medieval texts. Traditionally, this metaphor functions as a mnemonic device designed to help a reader mentally categorize, build on, and evaluate knowledge (Curruthers 237-41). One version of this metaphor involves the use of a castle or some other building to represent the female body. In this metaphor, the architecture symbolizes the protection or destruction of a woman’s body, particularly in religious tracts on sex and virginity. The castle as woman’s body has walls to be scaled (overcoming a woman’s inclination to protect herself) or the castle can be entered with a battering ram (sex) (Kellogg 135). Because this metaphor is a familiar mnemonic device for an audience, the metaphor allows the audience
to access the author’s meaning. Therefore, rhetorical agency occurs when the author uses communally valued images, such as the metaphor of architecture, to shape knowledge for his audience.

Christine develops additional rhetorical agency as the community confers on her the authority to shape and impart knowledge because she complies with this traditional convention and uses the metaphor of architecture in “The City of Ladies.” She writes, “for now, the walls I have built for you to enclose the City of Ladies must suffice, and they are finished and plastered” (97). The three allegorical figures and Christine go to the “Field of Letters” to clear a space to build the City of Ladies (16). Christine writes:

Now take your tools and come with me, and go ahead, mix the mortar in your ink bottle so that you can fortify the City with your tempered pen, for I will supply you with plenty of mortar, and thanks to divine virtue, we will soon finish building the lofty royal places and noble mansions for the excellent ladies of great glory and fame who will be lodged in this City and who will remain here perpetually (99).

This metaphoric city represents the body of a woman or “the defensive castle of the soul (or indeed the body)” (Cowling 147-8). So Christine’s rhetorical agency occurs as she appropriates this traditional convention by an architectural structure to symbolize the treatment of women in society. Specifically, she acquires agency to arrange and create knowledge.

With the authority and agency of a culturally accepted constructor of knowledge, Christine proceeds to expand her agency by subverting this traditional convention of form; she constructs a building founded on the discourse of women, which means she creates women’s knowledge. Christine is a woman writing about the assault on women, and, in this task, she does not build alone. The founding of the City occurs through the discourses between the women in the text as they construct and reconstruct social values as discussed earlier in this chapter. When Christine, the character, asks “But please tell me why and for what reason different authors have spoken against women in their books, since I already know from you that this is wrong” (16). The response contributes to the construction of knowledge and the building of the City. “Then she replied, ‘Daughter, to give you a way of entering into the question more deeply, I will carry away this first basketful of dirt’” (16). This subversion of the metaphor of architecture changes Christine’s rhetorical agency. Her agency comes not just from complying with traditionally
accepted constructions of knowledge, but through a new architectural metaphor where women build knowledge about women and for women as they enter into culturally meaningful discourses.

Because of her use of allegory, Christine has an agency rooted in external cultural expectations, which she adheres to in order to gain credibility with her audience. She then shifts these cultural expectations in order to broaden her own rhetorical agency and, in the process, constructs a space of resistance for women. Her ability to develop and broaden her agency through the manipulation of cultural values in allegory indicates that she and other women have agency as authorities on ongoing cultural concerns, as shapers of social values, and as constructors of knowledge.

**Historiography**

Rhetorical agency during the middle ages was rooted in historiography, the textual convention involving the writing of history, because the outside community confers on the rhetor the identity of a historically validated speaker, who articulates his historical moment. As Campbell states, this use of history indicates that the author is aware of important “ongoing cultural conversations and is the *sine qua non* of public participation” (4). In addition, history serves a rhetorical function by providing a context, where an author can “confer identities related to gender, race, class, and the like on its members and by so doing not only determine what is considered to be ‘true,’ but also who can speak and with what force” (5). Therefore, an author who uses historical knowledge rhetorically can “connect the psyche, society, and world, the forms of feeling that encapsulate moments of time” (9). By using historiography as a convention of form, an author indicates that he is a valid speaker for the community concerning ongoing cultural issues and their historical contexts. In medieval society, an author shapes his rhetorical agency when history functions as a convention of form to validate an author’s capacity to speak from his historical moment and justifies changes to history in order to create new historical precedents for cultural values. “Medieval social life was governed by custom, that is, historical precedent, so much so that even innovations in social and legal practices were given the force of custom” (Spiegel 84). These histories came from compiling the works of other authors, principally those scholars who lived closer to the time of the events and so had more authority about the issues (Spiegel 88). In addition, historiography did not have to be completely accurate or free of fable and invention (Davenport 93). In order to make a
belief, social behavior, or custom legitimate, it had to be incorporated into history. These historical narrations explained “every deviation from tradition” (Spiegel 85). By complying with the traditional application of historiographies, a medieval male author makes it known that he has the authority to shape and reshape history in order to create and legitimatize cultural beliefs, values, and behaviors. In shaping and reshaping his historical moment, he honors this convention and certifies his own identity as a speaker through his historical knowledge, specifically his recognizable representation of a concept and his establishment of his historical roots as a speaker. His rhetorical agency emerges as he reveals his authority to reconstruct history to serve his own intended meanings. As I analyze Christine’s historiographies, especially her use of exempla and mythic genealogies, I track Christine’s construction of agency through historiography as a convention of form.

Christine acquires the same rhetorical warranting when she complies with the conventional use of historiographies as she strives “to write a universal history of women in The City of Ladies.” She provided “further proof of her sensitivity to historical problems” (Richards xxxi). Christine clearly establishes early in her text that she has the historical experience concerning the treatment of women needed in order for her to write an authoritative and credible text.

I discussed this with other women whose company I frequently kept, princesses, great ladies, women of the middle and lower classes in great numbers, who graciously told me of their private experiences and intimate thoughts, in order to know in fact—judging in good conscience and without favor—whether the testimony of so many famous men could be true (4). By complying with the traditional convention of historiographies, Christine communicates to her audience that she has a rhetorical agency rooted in her own historical validity, which is based on her background as a speaker. Through her own identity as a representative of her historical moment, Christine has a rhetorical agency that authorizes her to speak about history and redefine historical knowledge. The appropriation of this traditional convention of form allows Christine to (re)historicize women’s place in society, when she validates the significance of women in history “that for centuries had denied women narratives in which they figured as protagonists” (Kolsky 22). Just as she extends her agency through the subversion of different aspects of
allegory, Christine further expands her agency to open a space of resistance for women by subverting two different aspects of historiography: exempla and mythical genealogies.

With exempla, rhetorical agency occurs as an author uses his authority as a historian to lend validity to his role as a speaker for his historical moment, especially concerning social roles. Traditionally, exempla are textual conventions, which illuminate “universal moral realities” and determine “modes of behavior” (Spiegel 91). Through this component of historiographies, an author develops a historical text, which dictates a historical precedence for particular social behaviors. Christine complies with this aspect of exempla as she appropriates Boccaccio’s histories of women so that she can assume his authority as a historian in order to highlight proper behaviors, specifically, the way women and men ought to behave with one another. Christine, the character, states, “I am surprised that several authors claim that men who believe or lend credence to their wives’ advice are despicable and foolish” (137). The figure, Rectitude, responds “for Brutus had believed Portia, his wife, and not killed Julius Caesar, he himself would not have been killed, nor would the resulting evil have occurred” (137). These different stories provide insight into a variety of expected social and cultural behavior for women. Through these exempla, Christine establishes her agency and authority as a woman who shapes cultural behaviors through her appropriation of history.

After establishing herself as an authoritative speaker concerning the history of women and the social behaviors, Christine subverts the exempla to validate new social behaviors in two ways. First, Christine writes exempla as a woman for women, which is unusual. Second, Christine develops narratives of women, who take an active role determining their behaviors in certain situations like rape. “When the women saw this, they took counsel among themselves and resolved that it would be better to die defending their chastity than to be dishonored, for they knew well that, following martial custom, they would be raped” (163). As Christine subverts the exempla, these women take control of their situation because “they preferred to kill themselves rather than be raped” (164). Thus, Christine opens a space of resistance for women through her subversion of exempla, where she indicates that women have the capacity to change the social behaviors expected for women. This subversion of exempla pushes her agency further by taking the authority as a historian she has established by complying with traditional exempla and extending that authority into new social situations. In these new situations, Christine refutes previously held misogynistic beliefs concerning the behavior of women by promoting her own
beliefs regarding the roles of women, so that a woman historian has the agency to historically validate new precedents for women.

A medieval male author’s rhetorical agency proceeds from his creation of a mythical and communal history, where the author validates his own historical significance through his association with the formation of the genealogy. Mythical genealogies, another traditional type of historiography, occur when an author traces the history of a group of people, usually monarchs to demonstrate the “temporal durability of a people” (Spiegel 96). Since these genealogies are “expressions of social memory,” which “preserve for future generations images of society in the record of history,” an author, who complies with this aspect of historiography, creates a shared history between himself and his audience. In particular, these mythical genealogies or “mythography” are “a thoroughly ‘male’ genre” (Blumenfeld-Kosinski 171). The male author constructs a mythical heritage to explain why and how a male ruler has dominion over other men in order to uphold a patriarchal power structure.

Christine complies with this type of historiography by constructing a mythical genealogy of women. In the “City of Ladies,” Christine creates her genealogy of women by linking the different exempla stories together to demonstrate a historical relationship which extends from the women of ancient Greece and Roman to the women of medieval France. These stories act as the historical and mythical tales, which accompany a mythical genealogy. Christine creates this genealogy of women from the exempla stories in order to validate her own identity as a speaker. More specifically, Christine appropriates this traditional convention of historiography as she shapes a genealogy not of men, but rather a family tree out of women, including herself, who have actively participated in history. For example, Christine describes the ancient Greek goddesses as actual historical women, who helped society. Minerva “invented a shorthand Greek script,” “numbers and a means of counting quickly,” presses for olives, flutes, and armor and metal works (73-5). Some of the narratives are of historical Greco-Roman women: “The Roman woman, Proba, wife of Adelphus…so loved and devoted herself to study that she mastered all seven liberal arts and was an excellent poet” (65). Christine also names mythical women from ancient Greek’s history: “Semiramis was a woman of great strength—in fact, of strong and power courage in enterprises, and undertakings in deeds of arms” (38). These women come from her appropriation of historiographies from Boccaccio’s De mulieribus and from myths, which are created from historical legends or oral tradition in order to explain the
customs of medieval society. By creating a lineage of historically significant women, who extend from ancient Greece to her own era, Christine conveys an agency derived from her identity as a historical woman situated among other historically significant women. Christine uses the agency and authority she has established by complying with the conventions of genealogies to create a genealogy of historical women, which extends from ancient Greece to contemporary France. But Christine subverts this traditional convention of historiography, because mythography or myths in genealogies were traditionally used to bolster the political advantages of men in society. In “The City of Ladies,” “ancient mythology is now subservient to the new myth of a society founded and determined by feminine achievement” (Blumenfeld-Kosinski 205). Rather than focusing exclusively on women from ancient Roman and Greek history, she adds women who represent medieval French history such as “virtuous Queen Blanche, mother of Saint Louis, who governed the kingdom of France while her son was a minor so nobly and so prudently that it was never better ruled by any man” (34). She mentions women from France’s historical past, “Clotilda, daughter of the king…and wife of the strong Clovis, king of France, who first brought and spread the faith of Jesus Christ?”(151). By appropriating and subverting these genealogies, Christine’s text invents and articulates rhetorical agency by creating a direct relationship between noteworthy historical women and medieval French women, which by its “very existence determines the shape and the interpretation of what comes later” (Spiegel 92). Christine complies with the standards of a historiography by connecting historical women of the past (women who have set a historical precedence) with women from her own time. In linking the past and present, Christine demonstrates that women have a place in history, have a significant role in the formation of not just ancient society but contemporary as well, and have a right to speak about their significant role in society as she does.

**Hagiography**

Hagiography or saints’ lives are textual conventions where rhetorical agency is rooted in another external source of agency: God endows the author with the authority to speak. Sharon Crowley defines this rhetorical agency as human agency which “reflects God’s agency, a claim which characterized some strains of ancient thought and most of medieval philosophy” (4). Rhetorical agency from God occurs in two different types of hagiographies: “the passions of the martyrs” and “the lives, properly speaking, of ‘confessors’ of various types—holy men and women who died natural deaths, following years spent in contemplation of God and combat with
the devil” (Robertson 11). The saints of these stories receive the rhetorical agency to speak on behalf of God and, by extension, the author who uses these stories indicates that he also has been authorized by God to articulate the proper spiritual behavior of men and women.

In the final section of “The City of Ladies,” Christine complies with the traditional applications of hagiography as she demonstrates to the reader that her agency comes not only from the cultural community and history, but also from God. She writes, “And may I, your servant, commend myself to you, praying to God who by His grace has granted me to live in this world and to persevere in His holy name” (257). With statements such as these, Christine establishes that she has been authorized to speak by God. Because of the agency and authority given to her as a spokesperson for God, Christine compiles the lives of famous women saints to act as exempla for the appropriate spiritual behavior of the women who participate in the construction of the City of Ladies. In the text, she includes short narratives on the lives of saints: Saint Catherine of Alexandria (219-22), Saint Margaret (222-3), Saint Lucy (223-4), and Saint Martina (224-7). Christine places the saint for whom she is named, Saint Christine, in the middle of the section. She begins her hagiography on Christine in the traditional manner. “She [St. Christine] spent the greater part of the night at this window, watching the stars, and sighing, piously praying to God to help her against her enemies” (234). In response to her prayers to God, St. Christine’s father has her stripped, beaten, and subjected to other bodily tortures. St. Christine preaches, “I scorn your tortures and will repel all the Devil’s assaults with God’s strength” (236). The story of St. Christine holds significance in a text written by a woman named Christine. These saints have the power to overcome the circumstances of their lives because of the agency they have from God, and the author in comparison has this same level of agency and authority to speak about her own concerns.

Through her subversion of the traditional hagiography, Christine broadens her rhetorical agency, so that her agency does not come only through God, so that her agency is not just spiritual, but secular and earthy. Even in the quote above, Christine does pray directly to God, but makes an appeal to her audience of women. She states “And may I, your servant, commend myself to you.” This “you” refers to an earlier reference in the text “my most respected ladies” (257). Many of Christine’s references to God are not direct prayers or address to him, but are rather references to her audience concerning their behavior. “Therefore you are right, my ladies, to rejoice greatly in God and in honest mores upon seeing this new City completed” (254).
Through these statements, Christine indicates God’s authority and yet she indicates that her authority to create the City extends beyond God to include her community of women. In addition, this subversion of hagiography relies on the strength of women as they contend with culturally sanctioned violations of a woman’s body during the course of religious persecution. The female body is viewed as a source of sin for men as well as women and the virgin is elevated precisely because she denies the innate vileness of her body. Women who used the saints’ lives as a source of empowering models in their own lives surely also had to internalize an extremely negative view of women’s bodies (Gaunt 196-7).

Despite the rhetorical agency bestowed on these women saints by God, their bodies are broken and their speech silenced, “whereupon they ripped out her tongue and cut it off at the root” (239). Through these saint stories, Christine reveals the fallacy of an authority granted by God alone. The women of the stories are still subjected to violence, silencing, and death, so that the emphasis with the hagiographies continues to be placed on the women, their authority, and their agency and not on God. Lastly, rather than adhering to the traditional form of praying to the saint and then to God for guidance, Christine speaks directly to her audience. “My ladies, see how these men accuse you of so many vices in everything. Make liars of them all by showing forth your virtue, and prove their attacks false by acting well” (256). Thus, Christine’s agency comes from not only God, but from other women who must work together to manifest virtuous behavior in the face of misogynistic slander. For her, God’s agency grants authority to speak, but that authority must be subverted for an earthly audience of women before it will gain her the authority to speak for the women who are harmed bodily and silenced in the name of God.

**Conclusion**

“Texts have agency,” argues Karyln Kohrs Campbell, and the vehicle of agency is “effected through form:” the arrangement of conventions from the genres to specific tropes (13, 3). In this regard, a reader can identify traditional conventions of form in “The City of Ladies:” allegory, historiography, and hagiography. As Christine navigates between adhering to cultural expectations for the traditional conventions and subverting those conventions to open as space of resistance, her rhetorical agency emerges within the traditional convention of the text from three external sources: the affirmation of cultural community, the validation of history, and the authority from God. Christine appropriates these external sources of rhetorical agency in order
to make her meaning accessible to her audience and to make her changes to the cultural expectations more acceptable to her audience. Rather than be silenced, Christine caters to the male traditions even as she undermines them. As Christine subverts the traditional textual conventions, she extends her agency beyond the agency granted to her by her external sources. Rather, she demonstrates that women, though a marginalized group, have the capacity to change cultural values, when they gather to reconstruct knowledge and socially expected behaviors. She uses history to reveal that women have a place in history and therefore, are valid participants in society. She even distorts the agency endowed to humans by God as she divulges that not only does God give women agency as well as men, but that these women have an earthly agency, which is not rooted exclusively in God. Through the text, women have agency in their ability to redefine cultural symbolism, revise their place in history, and manipulate social conventions regarding their behavior. Yet Christine’s text does not appear in isolation, nor does her agency manifest itself exclusively through the influence of externals or appear only in the text. To facilitate the reading of the text and the persuasiveness of her message, Christine uses paratext, which communicates a rhetorical agency rooted in artistry.
CHAPTER 3
PERFORMING THE CITY

On the first page of “The City of Ladies” section in Harley Ms. 4431, a miniature occupies the top portion of the page. Set off by a frame, foliated margins and bright colors, the miniature depicts Christine, signified by her blue gown and white headdress, as she sits surrounded by books before three crowned women, who each hold a different symbolic item. In the second half of the miniature, Christine builds a white wall with the aid of one of the women from the previous image. Together, these two images symbolically represent Christine as both a scholar and a craftsman, specifically of the City of Ladies and by extension, the manuscript. Even the act of painting this miniature reveals the extent to which Christine crafted the text and paratext of the manuscript page. Though she did not paint the image herself, Christine as a scribe for her own manuscript designed and planned the layout of the page even before she inscribed the text. Because she dictated how each component of the page would perform, Christine’s rhetorical agency is rooted in her skill as a craftsman of the manuscript page, where she deploys her artistry or, rather, her rhetorical skills to create meaning. In particular, she demonstrates her artistry as she arranges her paratext (visual and verbal components of the page that are not the text), so that they initially comply with their traditional rhetorical function as a visual guide, which facilitates a reader’s navigation of the text. Once she has established her rhetorical skill through this compliance, Christine extends the agency she has acquired as a skilled rhetorician by strategically appropriating and subverting the paratext to alter and layer additional meaning. This chapter centers on the way in which Christine articulates this complex rhetorical agency through her artistry. I begin with a synopsis of Karlyn Kohrs Campbell’s discussion concerning the role of artistry in the shaping of rhetorical agency. I follow with an exploration of Christine’s three moves of compliance, appropriation, and subversion, which she uses to reveal how her rhetorical agency is rooted in her own artistry, when she skillfully implements two types of paratext found in “The City of Ladies:” incidentals and miniatures.

Agency emerges in three ways through artistry: the rhetor’s performance as an appropriate response to a rhetorical situation, the repetition of those performances with differences, and the sedimentation of meaning created by repeated performances. Karyln Kohrs

4 Evidence of Christine’s control over the production of her manuscripts has been discussed in Deborah McGrady’s article “What is a Patron? Benefactors and Authorship in Harley 4431,” in James Laidlaw’s “Christine and the
Campbell states that artistry is “craft learning…learned stochastically through trial and error under the guidance of mentors that merges ideally as an ability to respond well and appropriately to the contingencies of circumstance” (4). As a rhetor learns the craft of responding well to circumstances, she develops “heuristic skills. . .for which there are no precise or universal precepts, although skilled practitioners are alert to recurring patterns” (Campbell 12). These responses are style choices that are repeated, and over time skilled scholars can identify emerging patterns. The emerging patterns become “stylized repetition,” which are then appropriated and altered (Campbell 13). As these patterns are repeated, they “fix meaning through sedimentation. Agency equally emerges in performances that repeat with a difference, altering meaning” (Campbell 13). Therefore, a rhetor who demonstrates her skills as a rhetorician through her strategic responses to different circumstances reveals her rhetorical agency. She must first respond to the situation appropriately with traditional and repeatable style choices. Once she has established her skill, she can make changes to the style choices she repeats in an effort to layer new meanings, which gesture to the text and beyond.

In this chapter, I examine how Christine’s rhetorical agency proceeds from her artistry, specifically her actions as a skillful rhetor in crafting the paratext of the “City of Ladies” folios. Like the performative function of language, which “does something that makes a material, physical, and situational difference,” the paratext perform a specific function in the manuscript, which makes a difference to the meaning of the text (Madison xvi). In his book Paratexts, Gérard Genette introduces paratext as the threshold of the text; it acts as a guide for the reader and are “productions, such as the author’s name, a title, a preface,” which “are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to present it” (Genette 1). The paratext is “a series of first order illocutionary acts in which the author, the editor, or the prefacer are...informing, persuading, advising, or indeed exhorting and commanding the reader” (Maclean 274). In other words, the paratext has a rhetorical and performative function in the text, since the author uses them to direct, persuade, or command the reader to do something with the text, which ultimately makes a concrete difference to the meaning of the text itself. In “The City of Ladies,” Christine articulates her agency as she deftly arranges the paratext through three moves within a folio page: (1) she complies with traditional functions of medieval paratext (2) she appropriates the traditional use of paratext in order to
disrupt them or repeat them with a difference to alter the meaning of the paratext (3) she ultimately subverts the paratext so that she layers new meaning through the dialogue between the text and the paratext. For the purpose of this project, the paratext are divided into two categories: incidentals, text-based visual cues and the miniatures, small paintings depicting narrative scenes.

Fig. 1. Examples of Folio Pages from “The City of Ladies” from London, British Library, Harley MS 4431, f. 322r and 293v (1413-4).

**Incidentals**

For a medieval author, rhetorical agency occurs when he skillfully reveals his artistry as a rhetorician through his shaping of the incidentals on the page: decorative initials, rubrication, marginalia, and script. These incidentals traditionally act as rhetorical devices to visually guide the reader through the manuscript. Just as a rhetorician uses verbal cues like repetition to indicate to the listener what is important, the strategic rendering of the incidentals allow the readers to identify what text they are reading and what is significant in each section. Since the incidentals appear together on a page and with the text, they do not function alone. Each component is a repeated rhetorical style choice made by the author, which affects the audience’s
experience with the text. Some of the incidentals are only repetitions, while others are repetitions with a difference that contribute new interpretations of meaning onto the other paratext and the text.

Fig. 2. Two Decorative Initials from “City of Ladies” from London, British Library, Harley MS 4431 (1413-4).

In “The City of Ladies” Christine expresses a rhetorical agency rooted in artistry, when she makes careful use of the incidentals as the appropriate response to the rhetorical situation, thus affirming her abilities as a rhetorician and guiding her reader through the text. She begins by showing that she knows how to make proper style choices in regard to the incidentals. Some of Christine’s incidentals are repetitions of previous rhetorical performances by other medieval authors and by repeating them, Christine uses some of them to authenticate her role as a medieval author. In “The City of Ladies,” Christine repeats the traditional performances of the decorative initials and the rubrication so that she complies with their traditional functions as rhetorical style choices. For example, in a medieval manuscript, a scribe typically would leave space at the beginning of each section so that a large decorative initial would be painted to “signal major divisions of a text” (Watson 20). The scribe could leave a large amount of space or a small amount of space depending on the desired size of the initial, since medieval manuscripts had a “hierarchy of initials within any book to designate sections, chapters, paragraphs and other breaks” (Watson 20). Christine chose to follow the traditional style in medieval manuscripts of beginning each text with a large decorative initial, which is used to indicate for a reader the beginning of a new section of text. In “The City of Ladies,” these large decorative initials are gold and blue with “ivy and foliate motifs, sometimes combined with a full
border with acanthus and flowers (f. 3), with gold ivy and flowers (ff. 4, 390), or with a partial border (f. 2v), or with a few foliate ink tendrils” (“Detailed Record”). The smaller initials are called “smaller ‘champ’ initials” and they sometimes have “foliate ink tendrils,” “‘Champ’ paraph marks,” “line-fillers in red, blue and gold,” and “cadels with scrolls wrapped around the ascenders” (“Detailed Record”). In another example, a medieval manuscript frequently has red writing known as a rubric, which acts as “a title, chapter heading, or instruction that is not strictly part of the text but which helps to identify its components” (Brown “Rubric” 111). A rhetor would strategically use the rubric in order to indicate for a reader not only what is going to occur in the text, but also what should be regarded as significant. Christine chose to adopt the rubric as a guide specifically for the “City of Ladies.” As discussed in the previous chapter, the text in each section begins with a statement in red such as “Here begins the Book of the City of Ladies, whose first chapter tells why and for what purpose this book was written” (3). The rubrication in the “City of Ladies” is different from other manuscripts, because it titles and labels the text of the “City of Ladies” rather than some other text. They speak for Christine as she informs her reader of what they will encounter in each new section. In other words, these two incidentals are just two examples of how Christine complies with the traditional applications of incidentals on the page and by doing so, repeats their previous rhetorical function in the manuscripts. Through this compliance with rhetorical style choice, Christine affirms her knowledge of artistry and rhetorical skill, which further reveals her own capacity to create her agency.

However, Christine broadens her agency when she performs as a rhetorician by appropriating some of these incidentals and modifying them through her skill as a rhetorician, her artistry, so that they are repetitions of proper rhetorical style choices, but at the same time, they gesture to the other paratext and the text. First, in a medieval manuscript, the text is surrounded by marginalia that often covers the part of the page left unfilled by the text. Because the vellum used to make the manuscripts was expensive, scribes and illuminators often filled the whole page with text and images, so as not to waste any part. The marginalia that decorates “The City of Ladies” is made of “fine foliate tendrils with small gilded leaves” (Brown “Border” 25) and is produced through the ornamental flourishing of the lines of a pen moving into the margins (Watson 30). This type of marginalia was commonly done by illuminators in Paris during Christine’s era (Watson 33). For Christine, the marginalia perform as ornamental accents
to the page, but they also perform a rhetorical function, as they draw the eye of the reader and place continuous emphasis on important elements of the page. For example, in the case of the margins, Christine expands this rhetorical function, because it is not the margins, which are a performative response to a rhetorical contingency, but their absence. In an expensive illuminated manuscript designed for a Queen, Christine left large marginal spaces blank. Instead of filling the free space with marginalia, she leaves the reader with the text, her words, alone. Second, the script is another incidental where Christine repeats its rhetorical function, but with a difference that layers new meaning onto text. A medieval manuscript was typically written by one or more scribal hands. Each scribe’s script is identifiable because the decorative style of the writing changed over time, and each scribe executed the script differently (different handwriting). For “The City of Ladies,” the script is Gothic cursive. Yet Harley Ms. 4431 is identified as an autograph manuscript because, according to Gilbert Ouy and Christine Reno, who examined 20 presentation copies, Christine’s manuscripts were written by three scribes P, R, and X. “The X hand is encountered most often and R and P are found less frequently” (Laidlaw, “Manuscript Tradition” 241). Because scribal hand X is encountered frequently and, at times, appears to make corrections to the other two, Ouy and Reno believed the scribal hand belonged to Christine (241). Even though this is inconclusive (not enough direct evidence), Ouy and Reno demonstrate that Christine appropriated a script familiar to her readers, but, through the difference of her own hand, left behind evidence that these manuscripts are her voice, her ideas, and her design, which most likely have not been disrupted by other voices or hands. Thus, Christine not only complies with and repeats the incidentals as traditional responses as guides on the page, but she proclaims an agency rooted in her artistry, which means she has the rhetorical skill to change those rhetorical style choices to create a difference that layers new meaning.

**Miniatures**

The miniatures of medieval manuscripts participate in the invention of agency in a different manner than the incidentals. While the incidentals have traditional rhetorical functions as visual guides for the reader, the miniatures can potentially occupy any part of the manuscript page and may or may not have anything to do with the meaning of the text. Because of their wide ranging functions, a rhetor must make rhetorical choices regarding how the miniature might comply with the meaning of the text rather than considering how a miniature might conform to
some specific traditional rhetorical function. Through these choices, the rhetor makes evident his artistry as he skillfully incorporates the miniature into the layout of the page so that the well-executed miniatures can depict a wide range of scenes that gesture to the text or beyond the text, which indicates additional layers of meaning for the text and other miniatures in the manuscript. Specifically, miniatures are “independent illustration[s], as opposed to a scene incorporated into another element of the decorative scheme such as a border or initial” that take their “name from the Latin miniare, meaning ‘to color with red’” (Brown “Miniature” 86). In the “City of Ladies,” Christine designed the manuscript pages to have four miniatures: one that introduces the manuscript itself and three that introduce each section of the “City of Ladies.” According to Sandra Hindman, an art historian who writes extensively on Christine de Pizan, “each miniature provides an intelligible visual summation of the book that it prefaces” (“Ink” 469). So for Hindman, these miniatures as “aids to the reader, helping him to picture—to imagine—what he is in the very process of reading” (“Roles of Author” 28). Yet I argue that Christine did not choose to have these miniatures comply only with meaning in the text, but rather she decided to appropriate and subvert the symbolic elements of the miniatures in order to create differences between the text and the images so that they gesture to one another to acquire new meanings. As Christine crafts the paratext to make new meaning, she also changes the traditional rhetorical function of many of the images, so that their new meaning creates a space of resistance for women.
Fig. 3. Dedication to the Queen, miniature from London, British Library, Harley MS 4431, f. 3r (1413-4)

_Dedication to the Queen_

The first miniature occurs at the beginning of Harley Ms. 4431. In the scene depicted, “Christine de Pisan offers her work to Isabel of Bavaria, Queen of France, observed by ladies-in-waiting dressed in the Burgundian manner with very wide and flowing sleeves for their costumes” (Gathercole 13). As the six ladies-in-waiting look on, Christine as the writer kneels on the floor before the seated Queen Isabeau and offers the queen a large red velvet book with gold trim. Because of the large red bed and the presence of the fleur-de-lis as decorations on the wall, the setting appears to be the Queen’s bedchamber.

By opening his manuscript with a dedicatory miniature, a medieval male author would typically use the image to rhetorically illustrate how he has received affirmation and authority as a writer from a patron. The author’s strategic use of the opening image of the miniature proclaims his skillful artistry, since it demonstrates his ability to make choices which highlight his own agency for his audience. In these presentation manuscripts, the traditional rhetorical performance of the miniatures depicts the writer (usually with indeterminate features) presenting the manuscript to the patron (also symbolically rather than realistically rendered). By using this
traditional dedication miniature, the author would choose for the image to visually introduce the writer, the patron, and the historical context of the work the reader.

As she complies with the practice of introducing herself to her reader using a dedication miniature, Christine makes claims to an agency rooted in her artistry. First, Christine uses this first miniature of the manuscript to confirm her ability to make the skillful rhetorical choice to have herself depicted in the manuscript offering up her manuscript to her patron, which promotes her authority and reveals her agency. Yet, even as she expresses her own rhetorical agency through her compliance with the traditional function of a dedicatory miniature, Christine executes her artistry to appropriate and subvert the image in order to expand her agency. Second, instead of depicting a generic (usually male) author presenting to a patron (usually a figure wearing a crown), the dedication miniature of Harley Ms. 4431 performs for the reader as a historically accurate representation of the actual historical presentation of the manuscript by a woman to a woman. Christine artfully portrays herself as a historical woman invested with authority by the Queen, and she creates a visual text which gestures beyond the image itself to her audience, who can now witness a dedication ritual where a woman patron bestows authority onto a woman author. The image (though painted before the actual presentation would have taken place) enacts the actual moment, when the two women met to perform a ritual, where the patron gives authority to Christine by accepting and paying for the manuscript. As Hindman in “With Ink and Mortar” states, “one of the extraordinary features of this exquisite miniature is the degree of historical accuracy that it preserves” (462). The image also gestures to historical facts beyond the manuscript itself and humanizes both the Queen and Christine into actual historical figures. For example, the Queen is depicted with surprising historical accuracy; she sits before Christine in a red and ermine trimmed gown with gold embroidered and her hair is up in a horned headdress. Though the description of her dress and hair may not seem relevant, they reflect how realistic and historically accurate the miniature was rendered. “These headpieces may appear two-pointed in a turban-like effect, or be of the high steeple-type variety with a light scarf material trailing down from the top” (Gathercole 15). The Queen is painted surrounded by furnishings described in the Queen’s household reports, two dogs in the scene are her favorite animals, and the women with her are dressed just like the historical descriptions of her attendants (Hindman, “Iconography” 103). In this regard, Hindman “confirms the accuracy of Isabeau’s likeness” (”Iconography” 103). Christine’s rhetorical agency exists through her artistry, when
she was able to subvert the traditional role of the dedication miniature into one that acknowledges the author’s authority. Specifically, the miniature exhibits the author as a real woman and the dedication ritual as an observable moment for the audience, so that they can witness the authorizing of a woman author to speak.

Fig. 4. Christine building the City, first miniature in the “City of Ladies” from London, British Library, Harley MS 4431, f. 290r (1413-4).

Building the City

On the first page of “The City of Ladies,” a miniature the width of two columns occupies the top of the page. In this miniature, the image of Christine appears in two scenes. On the left side of the miniature, Christine sits within a small architecture structure surrounded by books. By her table stand her new guides, who are three crowned women holding different objects. On this side of the miniature, the viewer sees “Christine in the familiar milieu of her study, surrounded by her books” and “it is easy to understand her as author, and, indeed, the left scene in the miniature is a variation on the standard author portrait, the conventions it borrows” (Hindman, “Ink” 465). On the right side of the image, the standard depiction of an author at work has changed into one where Christine and one of the crowned ladies engage in the construction of a wall in the midst of a field.
With this miniature, Christine communicates a rhetorical agency that emerges from her skillful use of a miniature to layer new meanings between the image and the text. The reader is able to visualize the setting, characters, and events taking place in the text, because the image performs the actions described within the text. The character, Christine, is depicted sitting at a table in an enclosed structure surrounded by books, which the narrator describes: “one day as I was sitting in my study, surrounded by books on many different subjects, my mind grew weary from dwelling at length on the weighty opinions of authors whom I had studied for so long” (3) and “I suddenly saw a ray of light fall on my lap…I shuddered then, as if waking from a sleep… and as I lifted my head I saw three crowned ladies standing before me, and the splendor of their bright faces shone on me” (6). These allegorical women appear in the miniature with a traditional symbolic crown on their heads, which represents their royal significance and the importance of their guidance in the text. And each bears a symbol of their allegorical nature, which is also a traditional reiteration of iconography for allegorical figures: a round loop, a vessel and a ruler. The text describes the women: “for the three ladies resembled each other so much that they could be told apart only with difficulty, except for the last one…she had so fierce a visage that whoever…looked into her eyes would be afraid to commit a crime” (8). In the text, each allegorical figure describes what she is holding in her hands, which explains the objects held by the figures in the miniature. For example, Reason states, “you see me holding this shiny mirror which I carry in my right hand in place of a scepter. I would thus have you know truly that no one can look into this mirror, no matter what kind of creature, without achieving clear self-knowledge” (9). Initially, this miniature appears to represent Christine’s choice to use the miniature to literally present these three women with objects to signify the cultural value they personify. By appearing to have the miniature adhere to the text, Christine has the image perform the text, so that her audience can participate in the actions occurring within the text; the reader can be part of the scene.

However, Christine enhances her agency through her own artistry as a skillful rhetorician through her subversion of this miniature by not having it comply exclusively with the meaning in the text. Instead, some of the symbolic elements of the miniature gesture to the other miniatures and to the text, which create new meanings. These three symbolic elements can be identified as strategic rhetorical choices made by Christine to represent different meanings throughout the manuscript: Christine, the character; the book; and the architecture.
First, the figure of Christine appears in all of the miniatures in “The City of Ladies.” Her visual representation performs the actions described for Christine, the character, within the text. But a reader who began with the dedication miniature at the beginning of the manuscript would immediately identify a relationship between the two images of Christine. In fact, in all four miniatures, Christine is identifiable by her garments. She wears a traditional blue and white gown over a violet underrobe and on her head is a white headdress. The two images of Christine from the dedication miniature and from the first miniature of “The City of Ladies” gesture to one another and to the other images of Christine throughout the manuscript, which layers new meaning onto all of the images by signaling Christine as a significant character within the manuscript, who is not only the author, but a participant in the construction of the City of Ladies in the narrative of the text. The image of Christine in different miniatures signifies a relationship between each of the images for the reader, where the figures of Christine in the miniatures enact the text.

We three ladies whom you see here, moved with pity, have come to you to announce a particular edifice built like a city wall, strongly constructed and well founded, which has been predestined and established by our aid and counsel for you to build, where no one will reside except all ladies of fame and women worthy of praise (10-1). Through her expert artistry, Christine designated the image that represents her to symbolically depict a woman breaking with traditional roles. Christine’s crafting of this image as a representation of a woman resisting her culture gestures to the other images of Christine in the manuscript and to the text in order to layer new meaning. This gesture even extends beyond the text to other depictions of women in miniatures as well. While the iconographic images of women working in the fields are present in medieval manuscripts, the function of their performance in the miniature here is different. “Women of the lower classes are shown in the medieval illuminations engaged in all sorts of field work: harvesting, cutting wheat with sickles, tossing hay, building haystacks, and busy in other agricultural activites” (Gathercole 34). Christine is not a woman of the lower classes and neither is the allegorical figure who is helping her build. In fact, Hindman states that the performance in this miniature of women building is exclusively an image of the “City of Ladies.” She states that the performance of “women builders or, if you will, women construction workers—women who, in their fancy clothes, long
dresses, and fine hats, carry heavy stones, mix cement, and spread mortar” was extremely unusual (“Ink” 472). So, when Christine has the miniature allude to the meanings of the text, she overlays new meaning onto the text, the image, other images of Christine, and beyond the manuscript to images of women depicted elsewhere.

Second, the image of the book connects the presentation of Harley Ms. 4431 in the dedication miniature to the books in Christine’s study. Through their presence in the different miniatures, the images of the book add new meaning onto the miniatures. Within the text, the book symbolically represents the assault on the community of women as well as the manuscript as a medium of resistance. “Let Mathéolus and all the other prattlers who have spoken against women with such envy and falsehood go to sleep and stay quiet” (127). In addition, the image of the book gestures to the text to indicate that women can and should be educated: “Quintus Hortensius. . .had a daughter, named Hortensia, whom he loved for the subtly of her wit. . .her had her learn letters and study the science of rhetoric” (153). In other words, “the material of the City of Ladies is thus a metaphor for Christine’s book, which champions the cause of women. And the frontispiece is conceived as an emblem wherein the process of writing and the product of the book are conceptually merged in the languages of the author and the city” (“Ink” 466). The symbolism of producing the book indicates the artistry necessary to construct the City of Ladies and the text of the “City of Ladies.”

Now take your tools and come with me, go ahead, mix the mortar in your ink bottle so that you can fortify the City with your tempered pen, for I will supply you with plenty of mortar, and thanks to divine virtue, we will soon finish building the lofty palaces and noble mansions for the excellent ladies of great glory and fame who will be lodged in this City and who will remain here perpetually, forever more (99).

As described in the introduction to Women and the Book, “she is to ‘build’ a textual city of women on the Field of Letters, a city of which every stone, every brick, every tower is an exemplary remarkable woman—and thus manuscript 607, which the reader is holding in his or her hand, is the City of Ladies in a material, textual, and metaphorical sense” (Smith 14). Christine used her artistry, when she had the image of the book appear throughout the manuscript, so that the images of the book gesture to the other miniatures and the text to layer
new meanings associated with authorship, education, and the construction of a space of resistance for women.

Third, the book and the image of architecture represent the act of building The City of Ladies described in the text. In this case, architecture functions in the miniatures as a frame to indicate a scene (like the dedication miniature) or a separation in the narrative (like the first miniature of “The City of Ladies”). The image of architecture also layers new meaning onto the miniature, the city as defense, by enacting the description from the text: “therefore you are right, my ladies, to rejoice greatly in God and in honest mores upon seeing this new City completed, which can be not only the refuge for you all, that is, for virtuous women, but also the defense and guard against your enemies” (254). This city performs as “a political sphere that afforded the most fluid social possibilities for its citizens” (Kellogg “Le Livre de la cité des dames” 137).

The act of building the city does not exclusively perform the text, but rather performs the writing process of composing the text. Both city and manuscript are spaces where women can create a new social order and protect themselves from misogynist attacks. Christine’s rhetorical agency emerges from this bridging of performances between the images and the texts. The reader can visualize the actions occurring within the text as well as the actions occurring during the production of the text.

Fig. 5. Ladies entering the City, second miniature in the “The City of Ladies” from London, British Library, Harley MS 4431, f. 323r (1413-4).
Staffing the City

At the beginning of the second section of “The City of Ladies” text, the miniature depicts the city as almost completed. This miniature is framed in a smaller square than the first miniature of the text and only occupies one column instead of two. To the forefront of this image, one of the allegorical figures dressed in orange again heads a group of ladies. The allegorical figure gestures towards the city and appears to be leading the women in. She wears a gold crown on her head as she had in previous images. They all wear traditional gowns and headdresses from Christine’s time period.

Again, the miniature alludes to the actions in the text and the other miniatures, because of the presence of Christine and the now repeated presence of the allegorical figure. As with the other miniatures, Christine reveals her rhetorical agency through her artistry by demonstrating her rhetorical skill in designating this miniature to at once symbolize the text and articulate new meanings for both text and image through their relationship with one another. In this image as described in the text, the women are entering a city, which is still under construction, but is close to being finished.

It seems to me at this point, most dear friend, that our construction is quite well advanced, for the houses of the City of Ladies stand completed all along the wide streets, its royal palaces are well constructed, and its towers and defense turrets have been raised so high and straight that one can see them from far away. It is therefore right that we start to people this noble City now, so that it does not remain vacant or empty, but instead is wholly populated with ladies of great excellence, for we do not want any others here (116).

Interestingly, by complying with the description of the scene in the text, Christine creates additional layers of meaning for the image as well as for the text. The relationship between the image and the text becomes complicated when the gestures of the allegorical figure indicate that the reader and all women from every class may enter: “the women are variously dressed in garments traditionally worn by individuals of the middle and upper classes” (Hindman “Ink” 467). However, the texts states, “they shall all be women of integrity, of great beauty and authority, for there could be no fairer populace nor any greater adornment in the City than
women of good character” (117). Rather than allow all women to enter, the text gestures to the miniature and modifies its implications, because according to the text only women who are judged virtuous and good can enter into the city and be protected from misogynist writings.

By appropriating and subverting the meaning of the text, Christine broadens her agency as she changes the meanings in the miniature through this miniature’s relationship with the text, the other miniatures and beyond to contribute additional meaning. In a text that focuses on misogynist attacks on women and visually depicts a city where women are the sole inhabitants, the presence of a small man in the second miniature of the “City of Ladies” is noteworthy. This little image is not normally discussed in articles on the “City of Ladies” or about its miniatures. In the same article, where she states that the miniatures are literal representations of the text, Sandra Hindman mentions “a workman still labors with a pulley, hoisting materials needed for the final touches,” but does not question why a man would appear in any of the images (“Ink” 467). While there is no direct evidence that Christine directly dictated the presence of this little man, he still exists, which means that even if the illuminator took it upon himself to add this random male figure, Christine allowed it to remain. So I argue that this image symbolically represents the communal participation of both men and women in the construction of both the manuscript and the City of Ladies within the performance of the miniature. Because most references to men in the text are negative, the presence of the little man working places additional emphasis on the presence of men in the narrative, specifically when Christine refers to a few stories where men and women work together to build community. For example, “the queen went in the lead, followed by this piteous procession, and they arrived at the battlefield exactly at the hour when the armies were poised to fight, positioning themselves between the two armies so that the enemies would have to fight in the midst of the assembled women…and both sides were forced to throw down their arms, embrace one another, and make peace” (149). She makes mention of a queen who organizes “certain men to perform field work” and this queen “made it possible for so many cities and towns to be populated” (79). So, this image of man gestures beyond the miniatures and the text as he participates in the building of the city and performs as a representation of the human community coming together to construct a city where women will be safe from misogynist writing.
Greeting the Queen

The last miniature of “The City of Ladies” depicts the completed city. In this scene the allegorical figure and the other ladies stand at a gateway to the city to welcome Mary, the Queen of Heaven, and the saints. The allegorical figure at the door wears a red-orange gown, a gold crown, and has her arms extended in a gesture of welcome. The saints are distinguishable by the presence of aureolae. Mary has a crown, is dressed in blue, and has a rose attached like a brooch to her gown just as she is frequently represented in medieval manuscripts (Gathercole 71). One of the other saints also wears a crown. The saints each carry an object just like the allegorical figures in the first miniature, which indicates for the viewer who each figure is. Mary carries a book and what looks like a long gold scepter. Hindman points out that the “woman who is second in importance in Christine’s text, Mary Magdalene, who carries the ointment jar as her attribute, because she anointed Christ’s feet” (“Ink” 468). One of the other women “holds a palm, the standard symbol of martyrdom, while perusing a volume” (Gathercole 83). This miniature performs as a narrative and an introduction to the section, because the viewer can clearly see that the city is completed, populated, and the holy women are arriving.

Again, Christine exercises rhetorical agency occurs when she chooses to design the manuscript page so that the miniature performs the actions of the text: “let princesses, ladies, and all women now come forward to receive her with the greatest honor and reverence, for she is not only their Queen but also has lordship and dominion over all created powers” (217). Just as
Christine emphasizes new points by complying with the text, she subverts the miniature, so that it complicates its relationship with the text and contributes more meaning to both image and text. For example, the gateway entrance to the city performs as a place of entrance into the City of Ladies, but with the additional meanings provided by the text, the entrance reminds the reader of Mary’s role in the opening heaven. “Oh how could any man be so heartless to forget that the door of Paradise was opened for him by a woman? As I told you before, it was opened by the Virgin Mary” (142). Though the viewer may be aware that the first figure going towards the city is Mary, she can only be certain because of the actions described in the text. The iconography of the other saints does not clearly identify them or their actions in the miniature until the text provides clues to their identity as well. The reader learns from the text that the saints perform the function of keeping Mary company and the “women who are crowned in glory and whose fair lives serve as excellent examples for every woman above all other wisdom” (219). By creating a relationship between the text and the miniatures, which is complicated by their relationship with each other and with images beyond the text, Christine certifies her artistry as a skilled rhetor who knows how to design her manuscript page in order to nuance and layer meaning in complex and diverse ways.

**Conclusion**

Unlike the more external agency she has through form, Christine acquires agency from her artistry, her own innate ability to skillfully craft her meaning through her rhetorical choices. Each decision she makes dictates the design of the manuscript and the relationship between the paratext has with the text and other paratext. Since the paratext traditionally functions as cues for reading the text and experiencing the miniatures, Christine initially complies with the traditional rhetorical applications of the various paratext to capitalize on her audience’s familiarity with the design. Yet Christine takes advantage of this familiarity to repeat the performance of the paratext in order to layer on new meaning. Her agency emerges as she facilitates the reader’s ability to interpret each layer of meaning within the text. She invents her agency as she alters the paratext to create new guides, such as her specific use of the rubrication. Since rubrications are familiar to her audience, she makes use of them to guide the reader through the text on her own terms. In the case of the miniatures, Christine’s rhetorical agency is complicated by the relationship between the different miniatures and the text. The miniatures gesture to one another, to the text and beyond in order to change the meaning of different
symbolic acts occurring within the images and the text. These gestures open new venues for spaces of resistance for women by complicating the pre-existing meanings of different symbolic images: book, architecture, and author. Ultimately, the paratext perform as gatekeepers or guideposts for the reader to participate in the construction of meaning within the manuscript. Christine’s agency emerges through her careful repetition of familiar paratext, her tailoring of those performances to fit her meanings, and the new layering of meaning which occurs as the visual and verbal texts allude to one another within the space of the manuscript.
CHAPTER 4
THE ENTRY POINT

“Lady Justice, then turned to me in her sublime manner and said, ‘Christine, to tell you the truth, it seems to me that you have worked extraordinarily well at building the City of Ladies, according to your capacities and with the aid of my sisters which you put to excellent use’” (217). Justice’s compliment to Christine could just as easily refer to the author’s extraordinary work with creating her manuscript, “The City of Ladies.” Christine used her capacity to appropriate and subvert the cultural expectations of form in the text, her rhetorical skills to craft the paratext, and her unprecedented control over the production of the manuscript to complete “The City of Ladies” and develop her rhetorical agency. Ultimately, Christine’s rhetorical agency is rooted in her ability to bring together the text and paratext within the medium of the manuscript because, unlike many other medieval women writers, she was able to determine how the text and paratext would take shape within the manuscript in order to create meaning. This capacity to dictate the production of her own manuscript indicates a potential for articulating a unique rhetorical agency, and yet the manuscript as a medium imposed its own limitations on Christine’s ability to construct her agency. This chapter explores how the ability to design her own manuscript contributed to Christine’s rhetorical agency as she navigates between the manuscript as a medium; the text, an agency of cultural expectations; and the paratext, an agency of artistry. I begin with Karlyn Kohr Campbell’s explanation of an author’s role in the creation of agency as the point of articulation even as his agency is constituted and constrained by its own materiality and cultural significance. I subsequently analyze how Christine articulates an agency rooted in the dialogue between the text and paratext constituted and constrained by the medium of the manuscript in “The City of Ladies.”

According to Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, an author acts as the point of articulation for his agency by maneuvering between her own identity and that of her cultural community (3). An author’s agency comes from her position as a “materially limited, linguistically constrained, historically situation subject,” whose “heuristic skills” allow her to respond to rhetorical situations and to speak despite her limitations (9, 12). In addition, the cultural community shapes an author’s agency by conferring “identities related to gender, race, class, and the like on its members and by so doing not only determines what is considered to be ‘true,’ but also who can speak and with what force” (5). In order to resist the identities conferred by the community,
an author must “negotiate among institutional powers” and his own limitations. Thus, an author is an “inventor in the rhetorical sense” and an “articulator who link[s] past and present and find[s] the means to express those strata that connect the psyche, society, and world, the forms of feeling that encapsulate time” (9). So an author becomes the point of articulation for his own rhetorical agency by navigating between her artistry, her own material limitations, and the expectations of his cultural community.

In this chapter, I examine how Christine’s rhetorical agency occurs when she acts as the point of articulation by utilizing the manuscript as focal point for the dialogue between the text and the paratext. For the purposes of this project, the manuscript is a medium in the sense that it is an object that is manufactured to communicate meaning through a “dynamic interplay…between visual and verbal texts” (Hocks 1). So the author must negotiate the dialogue which occurs between the visual and verbal texts as well as the materiality and cultural significance of the medium in order to express her agency. Through her actions as the author, she acts as the point of articulation for her agency within the medium of the manuscript, which functions as a space of resistance for women. In “The City of Ladies,” agency emerges through the dialogue between the text and paratext in two different ways (1) the manuscript as the physical result of the interplay between the text and paratext (2) the author as the point of articulation when she brings together the text, paratext, and medium. Therefore, I explore how Christine’s rhetorical agency occurs when she acts as the point of articulation for that agency within the medium of the manuscript.

The Medium

Part of Christine’s rhetorical agency is rooted in the production of the manuscript as a medium. This rhetorical agency develops as Christine mediates between her ability to make meaning within the confines of the manuscript and the limitations placed on the manuscript by its materiality and its significance as a medium in medieval culture. Unlike other women authors of the medieval era, Christine had an unprecedented amount of control over the layout, production, and dissemination of her work. So she was able to fully utilize the manuscript as a space for bringing together multiple sources of meaning and agency. An examination of how Christine navigated between the manuscript’s materiality and cultural significance explains how the medium served as a space for the mediation between multiple elements, which create agency: the text and paratext.
Materiality

Christine’s agency, which is rooted in the dialogue between cultural values and her rhetorical skills, is constituted and constrained by the materiality of the medium, in which the dialogue occurs. In Harley Ms. 4431, the materiality of the medium consists of ink and vellum, a traditional medieval paper, where “care was taken to arrange these skins according the hair-side to hair-side, flesh-side to flesh-side alternation followed through the volume” (Hindman “Composition” 105). Vellum allowed an author to create a permanent record. An author, therefore, had a medium which he could rely on to hold meaning beyond the temporary moment. Christine most likely made use of this permanence in part because it was one of the most predominant media for written communication during her lifetime.

Yet this materiality of the manuscript constrained Christine’s agency by placing two very distinctive limits on her agency even as it gave her the means to create her own record of women in history. First, Christine had to have the money and resources to complete her project, especially Harley Ms. 4431 because it was to be given to the Queen. Christine had to have a lot of the money at the beginning of her project, because even a well-made manuscript made of vellum tended to have a few flaws including holes and a good manuscript maker had to take care with constructing the manuscript from similar skins to make the book consistent. Christine and her scriptorium had to on occasion patch the manuscript with vellum, which matched in consistency to the page with the hole (Hindman, “Composition” 105). In addition, scribes could make errors and frequently did, which means Christine had to monitor and correct her scribes to be sure that the work was done accurately (Laidlaw “Publisher” 38). While these flaws does not undermine Christine’s agency, it did mean that her project was dependent on the quality of her scribes and, more specifically, her economic resources. She had to have the resources to fund her scriptorium, her staff of scribes and illuminators, and pay for the materials to make the manuscript (Laidlaw, “Publisher” 42). This situation indicates that economics played a role in the construction of Christine’s agency. She had to establish herself early as not only a good author, but a skilled scribe and publisher of her own manuscripts in order to receive the money necessary to complete her projects. In other words, she had to establish a rhetorical agency authorized by her cultural community (the patrons giving her the funds) so that she could later use that agency to develop other projects.
Second, in the case of Harley Ms. 4431, the material context of the manuscript gives rise to questions regarding whether the manuscript was constructed as whole (Laidlaw “Publisher” 61-6) or was the result of previously constructed parts brought together to create a new collection (Hindman, “Composition” 111). Though modern readers are unlikely to resolve this issue, the problem does point to the potential for the material context to restrict Christine’s rhetorical agency. If Sandra Hindman is correct, Harley Ms. 4431 consists of different manuscripts created over time, which Christine took apart, altered, and put back together again to make her collection. According to this premise, Christine’s agency could not possibly be rooted in her artistry, because the paratext would not have any relational elements outside of the texts they surround. If James Laidlaw is correct, the manuscript was created as one completed entity, and so Christine dictated the relationship between the text and paratext throughout the whole of the manuscript. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the paratext gestures to other paratextual elements throughout the whole manuscript, so I am inclined to agree with Laidlaw. Yet this dilemma does focus attention to the issues of materiality for “The City of Ladies.” While the medium of the manuscript gives Christine a permanent place to create her meaning, it also creates constraints on Christine’s agency and a modern reader’s understanding of that agency.

Cultural Significance

In bringing together multiple elements such as the text and paratext in order to create meaning, Christine had to expand on her rhetorical agency by not only adjusting for the complexity of meaning brought by the text and paratext, but also the already existing social significance of the manuscript as a medium. A medieval audience already familiar with the manuscript as a medium both shapes and reshapes an author’s authority based on these preexisting cultural concerns. Christine had to cope with the potentially constraining social requirements for her manuscript, such as the authoritative presence of a patron, who could dictate whether the author could complete the manuscript, what should be in the manuscript, and whether anyone would ever read it. The author’s intended audience, if separate from the patron, would also constitute and constrain an author’s ability to create meaning. So another part of Christine’s rhetorical agency results from her ability to appease and subvert her patron and audience in order to express her views regarding the treatment of women.
In the medieval era, an author’s patron served to provide agency for a medieval author and his manuscript, since the author acted as a writer-for-hire with the patron often authorizing the writer’s texts by dictating what the text, paratext, and meaning should be occurring in the manuscript. The patron would traditionally give the author living wages or allowing him to live in the patron’s home (McGrady 197). Because of the patron’s culturally significant role in the production of the manuscript, he served both to promote and to restrict the productions of their writers-in-residences. In “The City of Ladies,” the patron does not appear to constrain Christine’s agency as might have been the case for other medieval writers; instead the role of patron is subverted by Christine so that it constitutes her agency. In the manuscript, the text and a miniature demonstrate the extent of Queen Isabeau’s culturally significant role in the production of the manuscript. In the miniature, “the writer subordinates herself to the queen, and the patron functions as inspiration for and judge of the creative enterprise” (McGrady 195). However, Isabeau’s role as patron in the production of the manuscript does not limit Christine’s agency since it does not completely follow the cultural expectations of that time. “For although Isabeau may figure as judge of the anthology, she cannot claim to be the inspiration, the subject, or the original recipient of the works found in the collection” (McGrady 196). Most importantly, Christine never wrote for one particular patron, but instead exchanged “her books for the services of various royal figures…King Richard II of England, Philip, duke of Burgundy, King Henry IV of England” (McGrady 199). So in “The City of Ladies,” her patron, Queen Isabeau, served two roles. First, the Queen lent her earthly authority to the text by accepting it, and, second, the Queen gave money, which allowed Christine to construct an expensive and carefully illuminated manuscript, which gave further authority and agency to the creation of a space of resistance in “The City of Ladies” manuscript. Queen Isabeau does not appear to constrain Christine like a traditional patron might, since Christine is able to articulate cultural concerns regarding women, because of her relationship with her patron.

Christine’s rhetorical agency is shaped and reshaped by an audience who also places cultural significance on the medium of the manuscript. In particular, the audience lends credibility to the construction of meaning in the manuscript by evaluating Christine’s message. Christine provides evidence of the importance of an audience’s evaluation, when she indicates that her rhetorical agency was constituted through her consultation with other women. “I discussed this with other women whose company I frequently kept, princesses, great ladies, 55
women of the middle and lower classes in great numbers, who graciously told me of their private experiences and intimate thoughts, in order to know in fact—judging in good conscious and without favor—whether the testimony of so many famous men could be true” (4). The women characters in the “City of Ladies” symbolically represent the women of Christine’s community who can contribute to this ongoing cultural discussion. “Christine’s women are not simply able and active participants in maintaining their community; they are responsible for creating the technological and institutional foundations of civilized life” (Kellogg, “Le Livre de la cité des dames” 136). The allegorical figure, Reason creates a community of women who must create a new rhetorical situation for women when she states, “which you will learn from our speeches in fact we have come to vanquish from the world the same error into which you had fallen, so that from now on, ladies and all valiant women may have a refuge and defense against the various assailants” (10). Throughout the “City of Ladies,” women are brought together into the space of the city and into the space of the manuscript to lend credence to this ongoing cultural issue and to provide a refuge against the misogynist attacks. “Most excellent, revered, and honored princesses of France and of all lands…all women who have loved and do love and will love virtue and morality…rejoice and exult in our new City which, thanks to God, is already formed and almost finished and populated” (214). Thus, Christine depicts an audience of women who evaluate and contribute to the cultural significance of the manuscript. Since many of the women in her text metaphorically represent her actual audience, their participation in the evaluation of meaning indicates Christine’s need to have her audience accept the cultural significance of her work. Through this acceptance of the importance of the manuscript, Christine receives cultural validation of the manuscript itself and, thus, authority and agency for the manuscript as well.

An audience of women also places some constraints on Christine’s agency within the manuscript. Through the dialogue between the verbal and visual texts, a reader becomes aware that Christine appears to be speaking primarily to an audience of women, who are under attack. While all four of the miniatures discussed in the previous chapter depict communities of women engaging with one another, these women can only work together within the medium of the manuscript, “The City of Ladies.” Yet the women gather together to build, populate, and govern a city designed to protect them against misogynist attacks. The manuscript as well as the City then becomes the space for resistance, where the community of women can join together to counter and participate in the ongoing cultural discussions concerning the role and behavior of
women. Thus, the audience constitutes and constrains rhetorical agency by placing cultural significance on different aspects of the manuscript. Christine creates a community of women in her manuscript to be the audience, who can only participate within the protected confines of the manuscript, the manuscript, through the cultural significance placed on it, still operates as a space of resistance.

In the Medium

Finally, Christine acts as the point of articulation for her own agency when she takes control of the publication of the manuscript. Through her control over the production of the manuscript, Christine is able to craft the dialogue, which occurs between the verbal and visual texts within the medium of the manuscript. Specifically, in her role as writer Christine develops her authority over the verbal texts with her role as a medieval auctor or compilator. In her role as a producer of manuscript, Christine reveals her authority over the production of the visual texts. By being both a writer and a creator of manuscripts, Christine can fully enact her role as a point of articulation for her agency, when she brings together the visual and verbal texts within the medium to produce meaning.

Auctor vs. Compilator

Through her role as an auctor, Christine reveals how she has control and authority to act as the point of articulation for her own agency by controlling the production of the text within the manuscript. This authority over the text extends beyond that of an author manipulating textual forms; instead, Christine demonstrates that she has the authority and agency necessary to even put pen to vellum to create the manuscript in order to produce meaning, which will be heeded. In medieval literary studies, there exist at least two distinct types of writers who have the authority and agency to create a manuscript: the compilator who compiles the work of others, and the auctor who writes an original work.

By enacting the role of either a compilator or an auctor, Christine demonstrated that she had the authority to create the manuscript. Because “The City of Ladies” comes from a combination of different sources, Christine appears to have established her authority and agency as a writer by following the role of a compilator. In medieval society, a compilator does not generate a text, which can act alone. According to A. J. Minnis, a compilator was someone who combined quotes from various sources and did not add his own opinion (94). A text compiled from the work of previous authoritative auctores was considered a source of truth not on the
merits of the compiler, but rather, on the authority of the combined *auctores*. Instead, the text of a *compilator* functions as an “an orderly arrangement of materials” from the work of *auctores* (Minnis 97).

Christine’s agency is constituted within the manuscript as she acts as the point of articulation when she compiles or brings together the voices of previous scholars to lend credence to her meaning. While Maureen Quilligan calls Christine the “motivating agent of the text,” she also states that Christine’s “activities” are “a complicated amalgam of compilator’s written practice and author’s responsibility to both a lived experience and an oral tradition of communal female speakers” (Quilligan 37). The process of creating her authority begins when Christine compiled the texts of St. Augustine’s *City of God* and “Boccaccio’s *De Mulieribus Claris* (Concerning Famous Women)” in order to create her own work (Willard 135). From St. Augustine’s *City of God*, Christine borrowed the title and textual form of allegory, which was discussed in Chapter 1. And Christine appropriated the historiography form of Boccaccio’s text, when she composed her text through the compilation of his historical biographies of women, which was also discussed in Chapter 1. Besides these two prominent texts, Christine produced her manuscript by compiling the work of additional *auctores*. “And let no one say that I am telling you these things just to be pleasant: they are Boccaccio’s own words, and his credibility is well-known and evident” (78). These men are examples of male scholars, who wrote negative treatises on women, who Christine mentions by name in the text in order to include their ideas regarding women to which she responds throughout the “City of Ladies”: “If Cecco d’ Ascoli spoke badly about all women, my daughter, do not be amazed, for he detested all women and held them in hatred and disfavor” (22). Christine also mentions Ovid, Cato Uticensis, and other writers with misogynistic messages: “I know another small book in Latin, my lady, called the *Secreta mulierum*, *The Secrets of Women*, which discusses the constitution of their natural bodies and especially their great defects” (22). Christine even borrows scholarship from the Bible: “there Adam slept, and God formed the body of woman from one of his ribs, signifying that she should stand at his side as a companion and never lie at this feet like a slave” (23). By compiling the work of *auctores*, Christine indicates to her reader that she is aware of what previous scholars have said on the subject, acknowledged male scholars who would have been perceived as having more authority than her, and discussed commonly held ideas promoted by those male scholars within her community.
However, a compiler traditionally was someone who combined quotes from various sources and did not add his own opinion (Minnis 94). So rather than simply compile other scholars work into her manuscript, Christine acted not as a compiler, but as an auctor. In medieval society, God was the ultimate auctor, and human auctores were the ancients, because history is the source of wisdom (Minnis 95). An auctor had to be an ancient, who was concerned with moral as well as literary activity and was quoted by others in order to have any recognition of authority (Minnis 5, 9). The question about whether Christine is a compilator or auctor is complicated and significant, because the auctor becomes “the agent responsible for the generation of the text,” who “was believed to have brought the text’s formal cause from potentiality to act” (118). In order to be an auctor, Christine must write “de suo,” which means she writes her own opinions, but quotes other auctores to support her views (Minnis 95).

So in compiling the work of previous male scholars to produce her manuscript, Christine acts as an auctor by making use of their authority and agency to create her own authority and agency over her manuscript. For example, while Christine clearly appropriates the compilation and historiography forms and content of Boccaccio’s De Mulierbus Claris, she exhibits her own agency and authority by taking control over the content of the text by writing “The City of Ladies” in the vernacular of her adopted country, France (Philippy 330). Both Christine and Boccaccio claim to be writing their text to discuss women and their role in history, but Boccaccio chose Latin as the vehicle for his text. Latin was the language of the learned male clerics and not the language of a more general populace. The use of Latin in his text undermines Boccaccio’s intention of telling women how to behave, since they would have been limited in their ability to read it. Instead, the vernacular language creates a space of shared meanings with Christine’s audience. By using the vernacular language as the vehicle for the text, Christine controls the production and content of her manuscript so that she can oppose “the blasphemous charges of male writers” by subverting the “language of the male tradition” (Philippy 330). Therefore, Christine’s rhetorical agency emerges from her ability to construct her own authority and control over the manuscript by compiling the works of other auctores. She further extends her agency by shifting the authority she acquires as a compiler into the authority of an auctor, when she crafts the manuscript in the vernacular, a language accessible by a wider reading audience, and subverts the content of the text.
**Director of the Scriptorium**

In addition to developing her agency through her control over the act of writing (her role as an *auctor*), Christine produces her agency as she directs the creation of her manuscript. This manuscript is the site where the text and image dialogue to create agency. The material manuscript as a medium was not just constructed by Christine de Pizan alone, though there is evidence that she oversaw a great deal of its construction. The presence of additional though nameless people in the process of constructing the manuscript both constitutes and constrains Christine’s authority and agency over the manuscript. And while there is evidence of Christine’s unique control over the production of her manuscript, the presence of her scribes and illuminators during the production process makes the manuscript a particularly unique communal space for rhetorical agency to be articulated and invented.

According to Sandra Hindman and James Laidlaw, the process for producing a manuscript began with a scribe designing the layout of the entire manuscript. After the scribe lays out where the texts, initials, rubrication and miniatures will go, the scribe would proceed to fill in the text. Another scribe or the same scribe would add the rubrics. Then the manuscript would go to an illuminator or other artist to create the initials and miniatures.⁵ Laidlaw describes the scriptorium as “the work of transcribing the text or texts had to be allocated: where one scribe might copy a single work or a small collection as a unit, it might be more convenient, in the case of a large collection, to use more than one scribe and to divide the material into sections to be copied separately” (“Publisher” 38). As discussed in the previous chapter, Christine’s manuscripts were written by three scribes P, R, and X. “The X hand is encountered most often and R and P are found less frequently” (“Manuscript Tradition” 241). The presence of the three scribal hands indicates that Christine and two other scribes worked together in a common space as they designed the manuscript. And as was discussed in the previous chapter, there is evidence that Christine was scribe X, so she was present during the production of the manuscript and could (potentially) dictate how she wanted the manuscript to present her ideas. In the last stage of producing the manuscript before the manuscript was bound, the manuscript was handed

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⁵ Sandra Hindman in her articles, “With Ink and Mortar: Christine de Pizan’s *Cite des Dames* (An Art Essay),” “The Composition of the Manuscript of Christine de Pizan’s Collected Works in the British Library: A Reassessment,” and “The Roles of the Author and Artist in the Procedure of Illustrating Late Medieval Texts.” James Laidlaw in his articles, “Christine and the Manuscript Tradition,” “Christine de Pizan: An Author’s Progress,” and “Christine de Pizan: A Publisher’s Progress.”
over to illuminators. Harley Ms. 4431 was “illustrated by the artist known as the Cité des Dames Master, who with his associates formed one of the largest and most prolific groups of illustrators in Paris” (Willard 138). This particular illuminator and his workshop have no recorded names, but instead are labeled by their role in the production of Christine’s manuscripts: “The Master of the Cité des dames, as Meiss calls him, continued to work for Christine until at least 1411. With his workshop, he was responsible for the miniatures in three separate manuscripts of the Cité des dames” (“Manuscript” 238). This evidence indicates that Christine had a staff of scribes and made use of specific illuminators to decorate her texts. Even if she did not explicitly have control over all aspects of the production process, she personally knew and interacted with the people who contributed their talents to making her manuscript. So Christine invented her agency when she managed her own staff and directed the production of the manuscript; she dictated the significance of the dialogic between the verbal and visual texts.

**Conclusion**

Ultimately, Christine’s agency is rooted in her ability to control the production of the manuscript itself. This agency brings when Christine made choices concerning the materials of the manuscript, so that the materials contribute to her ability to produce a manuscript, which combines verbal and visual texts to create meaning. She also had to negotiate the cultural significance already applied to the manuscript by her patron and her audience. To articulate her agency, Christine had to make the manuscript culturally significant for them. In the production of the manuscript, Christine establishes her agency by bringing together the medium of the manuscript and the verbal and visual texts present. Though her manuscript was created with the help of numerous people, Christine and her scribes designed the layout of the page and thus, designated how the text and paratext would interact on the page. Then, Christine worked with her scribes to add the text and gave the illuminators who worked for her the job of adding the paratext. Through this production, she was able to bring together all of the external sources of agency from the form of the text to the cultural significance placed on the manuscript to contribute to her meaning. In the act of creating the dialogue between the text, paratext, and manuscript, Christine acted as the point of articulation for her own agency. She was able to dictate how meaning would be made through her medium. While this medium placed its own restrictions on her capacity to create meaning, she was nevertheless capable of creating a physical artifact to represent a space for the resistance of women against misogynist attacks and
to be the place of resistance for women as well. She constructed the manuscript to speak
textually and visually about her concerns regarding the position of women in society.
CHAPTER 5
FINAL ADDRESS

“My most honored ladies, may God be praised, for now our City is entirely finished and completed, where all of you who love glory, virtue, and praise may be lodged in great honor, ladies from the past as well as from the present and the future, for it has been built and established for every honorable lady” (254). And this City remains within Harley Ms. 4431 as an example of one woman writing from her historical situation, who had to navigate the cultural expectations and authorities of her time in order to invent her agency and create a space of resistance for women. Christine de Pizan was able to establish her agency despite the limitations of her medium and of her role as a woman in medieval French society. As I stated in the introduction, Christine provides a unique example of a medieval woman acquiring agency. She developed or manipulated a wide range of sources to invent her agency: some to prove her authority and some to demonstrate her rhetorical skill. To fulfill her desire to protect women, Christine remarkably combined these sources to create a dynamic and complex rhetorical agency.

In the “City of Ladies,” the text provides the first layer of agency as Christine complies with cultural expectations and values in order to establish common cultural ground with her audience. Christine’s agency occurs as she makes connections between her own text and the texts of male authors, so that she certifies her authority to write for her community. Christine does not limit her agency to only mirroring acceptable textual forms or their conventions, but instead she appropriates and subverts them in order to reshape her cultural community, specifically in regards to her desire to undermine misogynist cultural values. The next layer of agency occurs as Christine demonstrates her rhetorical skill through her careful use of the visual text, paratext. With the paratext, Christine is able to guide her reader through her text and use the images to contribute additional meaning to the interpretations of the text and the other images. Her rhetorical agency emerges out of her strategic use of the paratext, because, with the miniatures in particular, the paratext participates in the disruption of the culturally significant misogynist values. In addition to the text and paratext, the manuscript functions as medium where a dialogue between verbal and visual text occurs. Christine’s agency emerges as she dealt with the constraints of the materiality of the manuscript as well as the cultural significance already embedded in the idea of a manuscript. Lastly, Christine’s agency ultimately is invented
as she brings together all of these complex sources of agency, when she acts as the point of articulation for her agency. Without a point of articulation, author, the manuscript would not have existed despite the already existing cultural and communal expectations placed on the text, paratext, and manuscript. So, Christine’s rhetorical agency exists because she had the capacity to act as an author and a producer of her own manuscript.

As a complicated example of how a woman, specifically a medieval woman, was able to develop her rhetorical agency, a study of Christine de Pizan provides insight into a variety of issues. First, she was a woman who was able to develop her own agency. Second, she spoke from her own historical era, she can provide an example of a historical woman who crafted her agency. Lastly, Christine creates her rhetorical agency as she produced her manuscript by bringing together verbal and visual texts, which allows for an examination of how such a dialectic texts might contribute to rhetorical agency.

*Agency/Women*

This study of Christine is valuable, because it applies the definition of agency offered by Karlyn Kohrs Campbell to another woman author. This definition is complicated, and Campbell states that “the term “agency” is polysemic and ambiguous, a term that can refer to invention, strategies, authorship, institutional power, identity, subjectivity, and subject positions, among others” (1). And, Christine de Pizan’s invention of her agency fully reveals the extent to which agency is as “polysemic and ambiguous” as Campbell states (1). In this regard, Christine and her different layers of agency demonstrate that agency for women does not come from one source. A rhetor generates her agency by weaving together these different aspects of agency. As she brings together elements such as the text, paratext, and medium, a woman rhetor makes changes to the sources or, like the case of Christine, subverts the source in order to extend or broaden her agency. This insight into the entangled development of agency by a woman is valuable because it indicates that any study of agency requires a detailed examination of not only a rhetorical text or the rhetor, but also the medium, the rhetor’s methodology, and the historical and cultural context of the work.

While the study of rhetorical agency for women is difficult, Christine’s work contributes to our understanding of women and rhetoric in a couple of ways. First and foremost, Christine did not initially create her agency on her own, but had to appropriate the culturally accepted sources of agency, which male authors had established. Like many other women writers,
Christine primarily used these forms to certify her own agency, but in using the values, styles, and materials of the male authors, she sought ways to subvert, undermine, and change the cultural values they promoted. Second, Christine (re)historicized women in an effort to advance her own agency and that of other women. She reshaped history to establish a historical precedent for the cultural significance of women. As she broadened her agency by (re)historicizing women, Christine contributes to our understanding of how a woman might challenge the historical paradigm of misogyny as she augments her agency. Third, Christine further complicates her agency and our understanding of women and agency by her use of a multi-modal medium. Her modern audience does not have to rely on just her words to get a sense of what she said or how she said it. Instead, Christine leaves behind the images and design of the manuscript to provide additional cues for an analysis of agency. In other words, her agency is not the product of linguistics alone, but also captures her capacity to appropriate and subvert images and symbolism to layer more meaning onto the text and paratext. So this analysis of Christine contributes to our understanding of women and agency by complicating our notion of where to look for sources of agency. Rather than depend on the agency and authority granted to her by complying with medieval male writing practices, Christine reshaped them within a multi-modal medium to construct new historical precedent for cultural values.

These contributions to our understanding of agency and women raises some new questions that should be explored: Does her appropriation and subversion of the sources of rhetorical agency from men differ from other women seeking to establish their agency and authority to speak? How have women or how can women use history and the practice of recording history to promote their own agency? Does the choice of medium affect a woman’s ability to create her own rhetorical agency? What role does paratext or images play in the invention of agency for women? What other women have been able to construct their agency from outside of a text?

**Historical Women/Agency**

As Cheryl Glenn states in *Rhetoric Retold*, “rhetoric always inscribes the relation of language and power at a particular moment (including who may speak, who may listen or who will agree to listen, and what can be said); therefore, canonical rhetorical history has represented the experience of males, powerful males, with no provision or allowance for females” (1-2). Since rhetorical history has for the most part (until recently) ignored many of the contributions
of women, a study which explores a woman from history as a rhetorician provides new insight into how women participated in the development of their cultures even when they were systematically denied the right to speak. Christine de Pizan contributes to this study because she found new ways to appropriate the authority needed to speak and she cultivated rhetorical skills, which facilitated her ability to speak about cultural concerns and present ideas for changing those concerns. As well as contributing to our understanding of agency and women, Christine is an example of how women have historically been able to create their rhetorical agency.

Christine contributes to our understanding of historical women who developed their rhetorical agency, specifically during the medieval era, in a number of ways. First, Christine did not dictate to a scribe when she composed her texts. Unlike most other women writers during the medieval period, she was able to act as a scribe for her own texts. Because of her ability to write, her presence in the rhetorical canon requires a shifting of views regarding women’s access to their agency. While she is unusual, she did not have her words filtered to us by a male scribe (or at least, not a male scribe who took over the process of composing the text itself). This indicates that due to Christine’s unique circumstances and her position historically, she was able to invent her own agency and it raises questions about the differences between her agency and those of the women dictated to male scribes. Second, Christine fully participated in the construction of her medium. She knew how to craft the manuscript and knew the potential and limitations of this medium, both materially and culturally. Her level of involvement in the production and dissemination of her manuscripts contributes to our understanding of agency, because her agency was in large part developed through her control over the medium and so, perhaps, other women writers though not as participatory in the construction of their manuscripts might have had at least an awareness of the complexities composing in this medium contributed to their agency. Third, Christine knew the illuminators of her manuscript as is evidenced by the fact that she used them more than once to paint the images of her manuscript. This action on her part indicates an awareness of the importance of the images and their relationship with the text. Her concern over the crafting the images provides insight into the practice of using images in medieval manuscripts as part of the creation of agency as well. Though other medieval women might not have had the access to the illuminators of the manuscript, Christine is evidence that women, when they had access, could potentially cultivate an agency, which is not lodged in the
text alone. Fourth, one source of Christine’s agency came from her patron, Queen Isabeau of
France, which was discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. The agency augmented by this relationship
contributes to our understanding of both the role of the medieval patron in the invention of
agency and the relationship of the rhetor with a figure of authority. As a product of her own
time, Christine used the authority invested in her by multiple patrons throughout the course of
her writing career. She did not have to rely on the authority of only one figure. For Harley Ms.
4431, the patron was a woman in power. Christine’s relationship with this woman provided her
with the authority to write, but also acted as an example of a woman in power contributing to the
construction of another woman’s agency, which raises a question about the nature of women as
patrons and their relationship with the authors they sponsored. Also the presence of the patron
causes some question about extent to which the patron conferred or restricted the agency of an
author. Lastly, Christine contributes to our understanding of medieval woman and the
navigation of misogynistic cultural expectations. In fact, Christine has been called a
‘protofeminist’ for her work to change misogynist views of women. Yet, her work is much more
insightful than just redefining women’s positions, because she indicates that the construction of
rhetorical agency occurs through her negotiation of cultural values in general.

An examination of Christine as an example of a historical woman who articulates her
own agency reveals a number of questions, which would contribute to the defining and
understanding of the agency and women in history: If women did not have access to the
dissemination of their work, how might that restrict their agency? How have women made use
of their medium and paratext to navigate cultural and historical expectations as they craft their
agency? What role did women patrons play in dispensing authority and agency to authors and
how was this relationship complicated when the authors were male? How do women negotiate
cultural values to construct their own agency?

Text/Image

In addition, this project provides valuable insight into the relationship between the text
and image in the establishment of agency. Specifically, the medieval manuscript has been
acknowledged in the rhetoric and composition community as an early example of the
relationship between text and image within a medium. Yet this acknowledgement has not been
explored in any great detail. For example, in Charles Bazerman’s Handbook of Research on
Writing, one article entitled “History of the Book, Authorship, Book Design, and Publishing”
highlights part of the problem. In this fourteen-page article, one and a half pages are devoted to the shift from oral to written communication and twelve pages discuss the history of the book from the printing press to the modern era. But only one paragraph discusses the shift from oral and early written communication to more developed medieval manuscripts. This missing hole in the research regarding the relationship between technology, the construction of communication, and verbal and visual texts needs to be addressed.

Like our digital media today, medieval manuscripts are communally and collaboratively created. They represent cultural, technological, and economic changes. They have verbal and visual components, which an audience can interact with. By examining a medieval manuscript, its production, and usage, we might gain further insight into our own approaches to digital media, especially how text and image dialogue with one another to create nuanced meanings. In fact, a study of Christine’s manuscript and her control over its production reveals that the medieval community knew something about the significance of the manuscript as medium, where text and image interrelate to create meaning. This relationship between text and image is not possible without a medium, which allowed a writer (or her illuminators) to design a specific layout for the manuscript that places the image and text in dialogue with one another. By examining how this relationship works, we can have some basic concept of how we use images to create our agency through the dynamic between image and text. I believe the greatest contribution Christine offers, however, is her production of her manuscript. In her manuscript the relationship between image and text is dependent on the cultural significance placed on the medium by her audience and the possibilities and limitations of the materiality of that medium. In other words, an analysis of agency needs to take into consideration the medium, not just the medium as a manufactured object, but also the medium as an object, which already carries with it social and cultural expectations and restraints.

The relationship between word and image in the medium of the manuscript creates some complex questions as well: How is agency invented within our multiple digital mediums? What cultural expectations constitute or constrain these mediums as sources of agency? How much control over the production and dissemination of the medium does an author need to have in order to construct her agency?

Thus, Christine and her manuscripts offer new and exciting opportunities to discuss how technology plays a role in the construction of rhetorical agency. She also provides insight into
the agency shaped by women despite their historical and cultural limitations. Truly, I learned that there is no one type of agency and agency has multiple sources, which means each example of agency should be studied carefully for its complex and varied layers.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Julia Marie Smith graduated from Texas State University with a B.A. in English literature and a minor in Spanish in August, 2003. Afterwards, she left school for a year to teach English and writing at Msgr. Edward Pace High school in Miami. Following her experiences teaching, she attended St. Andrews University in St. Andrews, Scotland for a graduate diploma in Medieval Literature in Fall 2005. She completed an M.A in Rhetoric and Composition at Florida State University with a special focus on feminist theory, rhetoric, medieval studies, and new media.