Dear Lisa,

Your first chapter is exciting and provocative. You do a great job of introducing some complex theoretical ideas about the mystic, mystical writing, the courtly love tradition, and Dante’s incorporation of these two traditions in the *Commedia*, particularly in *Paradiso*. Based on this excellent draft of chapter I, I can write a very detailed and vastly updated letter of recommendation for you for the dissertation fellowship. I have spent about four hours today reading this and thinking it through and what follows are responses to your questions, with some questions of my own. If I have an overall criticism it is that Catherine got a little lost in all this, and I would like you to bring her to the fore in the chapter and keep the focus on her—in other words make it clear that you are bringing up certain topics for the light that they can shed on understanding Catherine and her work.

You asked, “Which parts of the chapter need fleshing out?” To which I would add, “Which parts need to be reorganized?” I answer both at the same time.

I felt that I needed to know more about Catherine’s writing, her overall output—including her letters, which you refer to, but also her *Dialogo* and *Orazioni*. So, the first part of Chapter I, which is a brief life of Catherine (pp. 1-4) , needs to include this. In fact, I found it somewhat off-putting to read the part on mystics and mystical writing (pp. 4-25) in between the life of Catherine (pp.1-4), and the section on Catherine as writer (pp. 25-33). I felt that the issue of her status as a writer needed to be confronted upfront. So, I would suggest bringing the material about Catherine as a writer (pp. 25-33) right up the end of the brief bio on p. 4. And within this section you should give an account of her works and how we have received them. This would allow you to introduce the need to see to see Catherine in the context of the tradition of the mystic and her writing in the tradition of both mystical writing and courtly love poetry.

Within pp. 1-4, I wanted to know what the mantellate were saying about Catherine What were they accusing her of? Or did I misunderstand something? How does Raymond prove her sanctity against her detractors. We need to know more about what the detractors were saying. Dates of original writing in parentheses for all of the sources on p. 4 would be helpful—Legenda major, Legenda minore, Macconi’s and the pope’s letters (beginning and end dates for these series of letters). The last sentence of this section on p. 4 perplexes me. Are you saying that she is not a mystic or not a particular kind of mystic. This is unclear as is. Please explain. I think that if you were to describe Catherine as a writer and explain her works, then the need for talking about the tradition of the mystic and how she embodies that tradition in a unique way the blends the mystical with the social would make more sense.

Within the section “Catherine as Writer” I wanted to know the source for the story (on your p. 26) about Catherine’s learning to write from Alessa de’ Seracini. This is important. The passage should, I think, be quoted and contextualized. Also, what exactly does Tommaso Caffarini says about her “intellectual pursuit of Latin.” Where does he say this? What is the evidence? These are really important points and should not be glossed over. You need to point out the sources of this evidence and for what purpose the sources are making these points. The part on why Catherine wrote in the vernacular is wonderful. You make this point extremely well. The sentence at the top of p. 32 is confusing. You might simplify it to make it clearer: “Concluding that Catherine has little or no control of her dictated texts based on little evidence while assuming that men who used scribes had full control is a problematic stance.” You make an extremely important point in bringing out the point about our not having autograph manuscripts for many male writers. Examples would make your argument stronger. For example, we have no manuscripts in Dante’s own hand. Do we, for example, have anything in the hand of Francis of Assisi?

Following this longer section on Catherine, I would then have you introduce the theoretical material about “the mystic” and about “mystical writing.” The sentence on p. 33 (The mystics, master practitioners of shifting subjectivities, are not alone in this impulse” reads as if it should directly follow the section on mysticism that now ends on p 25. Before launching into the mystic section, make it clear that this tradition is crucial for understanding Catherine’s writing.

In the section “The Figure of the Mystic,” I wonder if on p. 5, you might add after state of loving,--“and even eroticism,” since later you bring up the erotic. On p. 6 you bring up Dante as one who combines the mystical and the erotic in the Song of Songs tradition. Here you should cite some of the Dante scholarship on this David Meconi, “Travelling without Moving: Love as Ecstatic Union Mediterranean Studies 2009); Marguerite Chiarenza, “Dante’s Lady Poverty” *Dante Studies* (1993); Carolynn Land-Mead “Dante and Androgyny” *Dante: Contemporary Perspectives* (1997) and the classic J. A. Mazzeo, “Plato’s Eros and Dante’s Amore” *Traditio* (1956). Here you might bring up the question of why we need to read Dante in relationship to this tradition of mystical writing—to see the relationship between Dante and mysticism and later mystical writers ( including Catherine) and Dante.

On p. 6, I wanted to know if you had read all of these theoreticians or if you were simply agreeing with Hollywood about them. I think it is important to make the distinction. Do you part company with her analysis at any point?

On p. 7, I wanted to know more about what Beauvoir says about Teresa of Avila, Angela of Foligno. Most importantly what does Beauvoir say about Catherine? This could be an entire paragraph.

On p. 7, I sensed that you needed a sentence or two about Catherine’s self-portrayal that would come first before your mention of Frazier and explain why you are bringing Frazier up in the first place. This new sentence or two about Catherine’s involvement in the vita activa could lead into your account of Frazier’s work, which together could be a separate paragraph.

On p. 8, please explain : Who called Catherine a witch?

You need to make the distinction between Catherine’s public presence in textual form versus the lack of women’s influence in politics clearer. In other words, women had some limited “literary voice” but they had no political power.

On p. 8, your description of the mystic as a religious woman who is twice othered is like Simone de Beauvoir’s description of the woman intellectual as one who is twice alienated—once as a woman and once as an intellectual.

On p 9, you need to revise the sentence that begins “Though some very few women were fortunate enough to successfully escape death: to read “Thou some very few *feminae sacrae*” You aren’t talking about all women, after all.

The second paragraph on p. 9 – p. 10 is very strong . Excellent.

You need to explain which translation of the Bible you are quoting. Then you need to point out that in Gen. 2.22 we read: about the story of woman being made from the rib of Adam. Gen. 5 echoes Gen 1 “male and female he created them.”

On p. 14, I wanted to read the entire quotation from Catherine on “the fragrance of her blood.” Same for the “female Christ,” please give the entire quotation from Catherine.

On p. 15, you could mention St. Augustine’s Confessions for tears: when he converts, and throughout that text. Tears are associated with his mother Monica, too.

On p. 16, you talk about the Virgin and virginity. Should this be a separate section? Explain what Hildegard’s *Scivias* is. Do you mean viridity or virility?

On p. 17, refer to the Song of Songs tradition in a footnote.

Your first use of the term “queer” is on p. 23. You need to foreground this by mentioning if only in a footnote some of the queer theory you are thinking of or inspired by here. Give a theoretical definition of “queer” that you intend to use or put into play in the analysis of Catherine’s writing.

I don’t understand your use of Rosi Braidotti’s posthuman figure. You need to quote Braidotti and define how this applies to Catherine or leave it out. The earlier theoretical part is pretty well fleshed out (although you need to give more examples from Beauvoir on p. 7), but by p. 24, it seems that this part about the non-human is just tacked on. The Donna Harraway connection makes more sense because of the quotation, which makes the connection clear.

I think that the discussion of Catherine’s use of the motifs of the mystical tradition of writing and of the courtly love tradition could be treated separately, one at a time. However, since they come in such close proximity to each other and are often fused in the same piece of writing, then it might make sense to treat the together. So, after you conclude the section on mystics and mystical writing, you could launch into the section on courtly love. Following this or as a concluding part of the section on courtly love poetry, you could have a section on Petrarch, the dissemination of his work and the possibility of Catherine’s encountering it. Are you trying to prove that she read or heard Petrarch? Or that Petrarch and Catherine independently came up with the trope of the oxymoron?

Finally would come the section discussing the mystical and courtly love motifs in Catherine’s work. Here you should then bring up the statistical analysis within the context of close readings of particularly meaningful passages. It will be up to you how to organize this. You could either devote a section to each of her major works; or you could divide the analysis into major leading tropes or linguistic patterns. I notice that on p. 41, you start with a comparison of two passages, one from the *Dialogo* and one from the *Orazioni*. These two examples need much more close reading. From these passages you could branch out to a larger discussion of other examples. At this point you could mention some of the limitations of this kind of analysis as well as its strengths. This statistical analysis of language will help make the case for why these close readings are important: 1) they are part of a general trend that constitute a pattern in her writing and 2) these examples tie her linguistic usage to that of Dante to a certain extent . You could also have in addition an appendix that lists all of your word clusters by work.