Dear Lisa,

I want to start by thanking you for sharing your innovative work on Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) with us. To start with you give us some great digital tools for the understanding of the reception of Catherine’s Letters. The first geographical chart analyzing the location of the people to whom her letters were addressed was excellent—it expresses the breadth of the readership of her letters. The second circular chart analyzing receivers (including multiple receivers of individual letters), dates, and numbers of letters is particularly inventive. This is a creative way to display this information. My only problem was that I had trouble reading the entire circle at one time on my screen. Perhaps the size could be adjusted.

I really applaud your attempt to situate Catherine in the larger context of what you call her “Italian and English networks.” First, let me start with the first section on the “Italian network.” As a reader, I feel I need some more orientation on the transmission of the text of her Letters. How many are there? When were they gathered together and how were they disseminated? How would you characterize the Italian of her letters? You hint at this along the way but you need to give your reader a fuller description of her language. What are the topics that she writes about? Before launching into the digital analysis, I think you need to give more narrative context. Explain what is at stake in the writing of the letters: What are they about? Why should we be concerned about who the recipients of these letters were? With this contextual background concerning the text established, then I think you can go on to doing this wonderful digital analysis and representation of the time, place, and recipients of the letters. What I am asking for would add something like 8 pages to the chapter.

Hats off to you for this very complex visualization of the network of the recipients of Catherine’s letters. As I said, I think it works very well. It raised some questions for me. I found I wanted to know more. So, I would suggest that either following or as part of this digital analysis in which you lay out the range of people, places, and the time of her letters you give us more context on how people relate to place, and also on how the letters relate to the trajectory of Catherine’s life.

What you call her Italian network could even more broadly could be described as her trans-European network, since she wrote to people beyond Tuscany, not just in Rome, but also in Avignon, and to some individuals who were not native speakers of Italian. Since there is no Italian nation, it is more useful to think of the geography as being one from city to city, polity to polity, rather than just “Italian.” Your focus on the topic of dissemination allows us to think about Catherine on the cultural map of Europe. In some ways this reminded me of the geographical approach to literary history by David Wallace in his recent *Europe: A Literary History 1348-1418* which was just published by Oxford. Since your chapter II is now a rough draft, and your are looking for ways to open up this material and uncover further layers of meaning, I thought that following this section mapping the overview of the letters, it would be useful for you to add more first, about those geographical contexts in which Catherine’s letters were circulating. Here you could look to David Wallace’s edited anthology. His book includes a great section on Siena by Tom Luongo, in which he points out that along with Bernardino of Siena, Catherine was one of the two most celebrated writers of the entire period. It would be helpful if you could situate Catherine and her Sienese correspondents within the context of Sienese historical, political and social life. How if at all do her interlocutors’ families relate to the ruling group the Dodici, or to the various “monti” and “new men”? Or do her interlocutors in Siena range among a wide group of people with different allegiances, or are they part of one clear group? Either way, this would be significant. I know you talk about Siena somewhat in your first chapter, but I think that it would be helpful to give a “local habitation and a name” to Catherine and her interlocutors.

As for her letters to the Pope, were other people reading those too? Was this a way for Catherine also to represent her local community? Or at least in terms of the later dissemination of the text, is this a way to represent Catherine as a public figure? Would it not be useful to have a section on her political letters or letters on issues of public concern, especially those written to popes Urban VI and Gregory XI, as well as the Queen of Naples. You mention Catherine’s “political involvement” on p 4, but one wants to know more about what her political allegiances or affiliations were. This is a period of huge religious and political strife (1373), the plague (1374), and controversy over the foreign French antipopes.

I also wanted to get more of a narrative sense about the trajectory of the letters. More commentary on why certain letters come first and others later might be helpful. For example, you tell us on p. 2, you tell us that the first letter is to Agnesa Malavolti and the last to Raymond of Capua. In other words, did she start writing letters to women first before writing to Raymond? I was hoping to find more about Catherine’s letters to women within Siena. What if any was the relationship among the women to whom Catherine wrote? You write on p. 5, “she is more often writing to recipients who were already connected to each other? The reader wants to know “what were the connections among these recipients”? Was this a community of a sort? If so, how would you characterize it? Most interesting is your point on p. 7 that Alessa dei Saracini taught Catherine to read Italian. How do we know this? This suggests a reciprocal relationship, a dialogue between Catherine and her interlocutors? I wish that I did not have to wait until p. 11 to get to the point about Giovanni Tantucci to whom she entrusted her writings and letters.

Similarly when it comes to her scribes, you mention that Cristofano di Gano Guidini was “active in politics”—in what way ? What kind of politics?

Other specific questions include what do you mean when you say that letter T151b is “overwritten” (p. 6)?

Is it really true to say that the majority of Italian spiritual women were considered “witches”? If you are going to say this then you need to give some examples rather than just cite Margaret King.

In part III, I would like to know more about how Catherine’s text got to the Convent at Syon. On p. 15, you say that the text “does not provide much available information and data regarding its provenance.” Do we know anything about this, or have scholars speculated about it? p. 14—what do you mean by “a conventional saint”? Are you suggesting the English were against saints?

p. 15—English is not really the environment for Catherine of Siena, the community at Syon Abbey is.

p. 16: You mention the great output and preservation of texts at Syon Abbey. What was that? Please describe this further.