AT: Welcome to the Infinite Women podcast. I'm your host, Allison Tyra. And today I'm joined by Dr. Beth Hubble, professor of women's gender and sexuality studies at the University of Montana. Regular listeners may recognize Beth from previous episodes about transgender histories, and the French medieval writer Marie de France. And if you want to know how those two things are connected, you will have to go listen to those episodes. But first, stick around because today Beth is back to tell us about Christine de Pizan.

Listen to our episode on trans histories or read the transcript.

Listen to our episode on Marie de France or read the transcript.

BH: I teach at the University of Montana. But I also did my undergrad studies at the University of Montana. And I started as a history major. And then I found out if I declared a French major, it was easier to do the study abroad program. So I had a major in history and French. And one of my professors at the University of Montana was a woman named Maureen Curnow. And she wrote a dissertation in the 1970s at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee. And it was the first modern critical edition of Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies*. She was virtually forgotten, from her lifetime, she would have died around 1430, until Dr. Curnow published or never got published. And there's finally a good modern English translation that's out there. But for decades, we were just using Dr. Curnow's unpublished dissertation as the critical edition for it. And I would meet people around the country who would be like, “Oh, my God, you're at the University of Montana. Do you know Maureen Curnow? Can you get her to publish that?” Her life just went in a much different direction than going the publishing way. And so my first exposure to Christine de Pizan was really early on. That would have been in the early 1990s when I had classes with Dr. Curnow.

And so Christine has always been in my head. When I was in grad school, the outside reader on my dissertation committee was an art historian named Elizabeth Sears. And she did an entire class in art history, a grad class at the University of Michigan on a manuscript known as the Harley 4431, because it had just been digitized by the British Library. Harley is the name of someone who along the years ended up owning this manuscript and then giving it to the British Museum. I don't know how many Harley manuscripts there are. This is just one of them. But Harley 4431 is important because Christine was the, I want to say mistress instead of master of her own career. She knew how to get her name out there. She knew how to work the system, which I think is part of the reason she was then forgotten because I think she made enough people mad, or made the right people mad. One of them was not the Queen of France, Isabeau of Bavaria, Queen of France. Christine decided that she would take all of her books. This would have been like 1410. She was going to make her own manuscript, illustrate it, and not give it to the king like you usually did, give it to the Queen of France. And it's known as *The Book of the Queen*. And it is one of the most beautiful manuscripts. If you see a picture of Christine de Pizan in a blue dress, white wimple, that's this manuscript. And some of it is almost positively in Christine's handwriting. And so this is a little bit of a circular story. It was on display at the British Library from November to March of this past year. And I went to London just to see it. I went three times. The guy taking tickets the third time said, “oh, you're back.” And I said, “oh, yes, I am!”

So to tell her story for people that don't know, she was born in the late 14th century outside of Venice. Her father, Thomas of Pizan, Thomas Pizzano, because they were Italian. She was born in Italy, her dad was the astrologer to the Venetian doge. And I said astrologer, I did not say astronomer. He was really good at his job. And when Christine was five, he was hired by the King of France to be the court astrologer of France. And so dad goes, rest of the family goes, they moved to Paris. And so the king at the time, I'm pretty sure it's Charles V, he loved books. And so like the beginning of the Bibliotheque Nationale, the French National Library is his collection of books from the late 14th century. One thing that my students and that people now often say is, “oh, so you're talking about a super noble rich lady.” And so it is going to be her social class that intersects with her gender that allows her to do what she does. But there's some interesting things to her story here. So five years old, ends up in Paris. Dad recognizes how smart his daughter is. And so he starts teaching her. Mom is not happy. Christine has a semi-autobiographical book called *Christine's Vision* about how her mom was

always mad that Christine was working on reading and writing instead of learning to sew and things like that. And so it's the mom enforcing these norms, dad's all great. The mom knows Christine has to make a good marriage. And so it's a whole thing. And I say Christine because de Pizan is just the town in Italy where they're from, but French-ified, because it's Pizzano.

And so when Christine was 15, her dad arranged a marriage with one of the king's secretaries, his name's Etienne du Castel. He was only 25. That's not that bad. And it was it ends up being a love match. They were really happy. Three kids. And as far as anyone can tell, he continued supporting the learning and all of that, because we know later, after his very early death, that she has a library in her own house. But Christine at age 25, so 10 years into the marriage, three kids, mom's living with them now, because dad has passed and his estate is tied up back in Italy. And then her husband, away on a trip for the king, dies of the plague or something like that. 14th century was not a fun time in Europe. Okay. And so her husband's dead and his family starts fighting her over the estate. And so she's got three kids, a mom and a whole household to support. And all of her money is tied up in court cases. And so we're pretty sure that she was making her living as a copyist, maybe as an illustrator, illuminator. By the 1380s, 1390s, she's getting a reputation for the mourning, M-O-U-R-N-I-N-G, poems that she's writing about her husband. And so she's getting patrons now. People want to hire her to write things. And so King Charles's brother hires her to write his biography. She writes a book about chivalry because someone paid her to do so. She's got really interesting books because, she has the Book of the *City of Ladies*, and then she's got a book of arms and chivalry. Whatever would pay the bills, is how I like to think of it.

Around the year 1400, there is kind of a controversy going on in the scholarly circles in Paris about a book known as *The Romance of the Rose*. It is for sure what's known as a medieval bestseller. There are dozens of manuscript copies of it, which when you have to hand copy things, that's a lot. Christine, there's one. So *The Romance of the Rose* is this hugely popular book. And Christine, along with a fair number of other people, think it's obscene. But Christine's other argument, and I think it's the one she cares more about, is how misogynistic it is. And so her allies are mostly everyone she's fighting with and everyone on her side. They're all connected to the church, because you had to be in the church to go to university, so only men. And so Christine gets involved in what comes to be known as The Debate of *The Romance of the Rose*. And so that's one of the ways that her fame goes up, is that she exchanges letters with these really prominent scholars in Paris and then takes all of their letters back and forth, publishes them, and gives them to the queen. Because they're so awful to her. I have a whole article about it, about Gontier Col, C-O-L. The Col brothers are two of the ones really involved in it. And the article is called *Medieval Trolls, Mansplainers, and Bullies*. He does all of those things to her.

AT: And we are going to get more into the correlations there later. But in the interest of staying on track and telling us about her life and her work, we're going to focus just on that for now.

BH: Absolutely. So she goes through this literary quarrel with these prominent men, and that gets her even more renowned, in part because she's allied with some really important church figures and things like that. The understanding with it is that she's not super happy with the outcome of that quarrel. She never gets them to engage with her on her own arguments. And so in 1405, she comes out with what's absolutely her best known work, and it's *The Book of the City of Ladies*. And I'm going to say right now it's one of my favorite books of all time. Students love it. And it appears to not have been super popular until the late 20th century, when American feminists started to find it. But it is this amazing book in which Christine, she's the narrator in the story, but it's a character. And she kind of plays the straight man, is how I always say it. And these three allegorical women, Lady Reason, Rectitude, and Justice are their names, come down to her. And she's lamenting how awful things are. She's like, “oh, it sucks to be a woman.” And they're like, “really?”

And then it is three books. Because obviously three is the Middle Ages and the Trinity. The first one is

important women and goddesses from antiquity. The second book is like queens from what they would have considered modern times up to the medieval period. And book three focuses on virgin martyrs within the church. And it's just amazing. Christine had the misfortune to be living during the Hundred Years War. Charles V dies, Charles VI thinks maybe astrologers are heretical. (AT: Uh-oh.) And so he doesn't support Christine in the way that his father did. So Charles V is dead. Dad's out, all those things. Her daughter's already gone to a convent. Christine then goes to the same convent as her daughter and spends the rest of her life there.
But an amazing, amazing thing that happens is that somewhere around 1430, 1431, Christine comes out of retirement and writes a poem called *The Song of Joan of Arc*. And it is about how Joan of Arc embodies everything that Christine was advocating for in *The Book of the City of Ladies*. Here's this girl from her own time period who's the Amazon warrior. The poem is not that explicit. It's pretty allegorical and all that stuff in it. But Christine comes out of retirement, writes this poem for Joan of Arc. And it's how we date Christine's death because Christine writes it before Joan is arrested and executed. And so, pretty sure that by 1432, Christine is dead. So dating it with 1431-32, Joan of Arc's death. Also got to see Joan of Arc's actual signature close to the Christine manuscript at the British Library, in case anyone's wondering. Couldn't write, but she learned to sign her name.
And so, Christine is sometimes called the world's first feminist, a proto-feminist, because in her works, she really is able to express the things that are being held against women. She's able to use scholastic medieval learning and cite the Bible and Greek and Roman folks. She could for sure read Latin. Don't know if she was reading the Greek in a translation or whatever, but she was able to engage with these people on their level and they really didn't like it. But with *The Book of the Queen*, she's like, “then I'm not talking to you men anymore.” And there's this beautiful image in *The Book of the Queen*. In medieval manuscripts, there are a lot of books that are kind of meta. So there's actually an image in the book of the author presenting the book to the king. It's the book that it's in, to the king. And it'll be in the king's throne room and things like that. And Christine represents herself giving Isabeau the book in Isabeau's bedroom. So putting in that personal space instead of the public space. And so she's just, she has a poem called the, it's a really long poem, but it's called *The Mutation of Fortune*, when she says, let me tell you how I, a woman, by the turn of fortune's hand, became a man. Because she had to support her family. And so to my mind, she's just on another level.

AT: So I find it interesting anytime a woman is described as the first whatever, because sometimes we can prove that, right? Like the first woman to graduate from a given university. (BH: Yes.) But particularly calling her like the first feminist…

BH: I don't necessarily agree with that. I don't agree with calling her that, because that notion didn't exist. You look back over time, lots of women have stood up for women's positions and things like that. If you want to look at Hildegard of Bingen, if you want to look at someone like Eleanor of Aquitaine. And I think we've erased a lot of women that have held a lot of power. I'm down a rabbit hole of early medieval English and French queens who have been just vilified. And so what some people call her that, she essentially says in one of her books that she does not think that women should have her life and that she doesn't want her life. In her ideal life, her husband would still be alive and she wouldn't be having to support herself. So there are things she says where you're like, “well, that's…” And she says stuff like, “well, of course, men should be the ones to argue court cases. They are physically stronger than us.” And I'm like, “yeah, because you've been forced to wear tight fitting clothes all your life. What are you talking about?” And so she's got issues. But nonetheless, she expresses and really clearly sees misogyny for what it is and calls it out and advocates for women's education and things like that in her works.

AT: Yeah, internalized misogyny aside, she is being revolutionary for her time. And when it comes to how we villainize women in power, I would definitely encourage people to go check out my episodes on Wicked Women

with Grace Beattie and Queenly Image with Ellie Woodacre. But while she is almost certainly not the first feminist in history, that's just kind of an absurd claim to make ever. (BH: Oh, 100%) Even when we have more concrete examples of reasons to call people that I'm always very careful to say, she is **believed** to have been the first. (BH: I say things like "some people like to call her.") We're going to be very careful with that phrasing and the disclaimers. But with that said, she is still an early and very important person in this field. So where do you see her sitting in broader feminist history? Because I know a lot of women, even if they're influential in their time, it can be very easy for them to get lost later.

Listen to Grace Beattie on Wicked Women or read the transcript.

Listen to Ellie Woodacre on queenly image or read the transcript.

BH: And that's largely what happens to her. She's a footnote until the 1970s. But she's rediscovered. She's inspired a few really amazing art installations that have gotten a lot of press. Like Christina de Pizan's Table is one of them, where it's like the women that would be at the table, kind of a dinner party kind of thing.

AT: So that's Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, (BH: Yes, yes.) where it's a bunch of women from history all have place settings. I love that work.

BH: And I know for me, in terms of how to engage students with the study of history, how to engage students with literature and things like that, I've always taught her in what I consider a great books by women class, to counter the dead white men classes that we teach. The Plato, Aristotle, Bible, Augustine, Homer classes. So I have her in that class. And then at the end of the semester, I always let students write on their final exam, to get some extra credits, which book stood out to you the most and why. And she features on those a lot because her book is so easy to engage with, because it is literally short. It's like your book! Oh my god, it's like your book. It's so much like your book. I need verbal processing to figure these things out. It's these little short biographies of all of these different women. And you're the modern-day Christine de Pizan.

AT: OK, that's a bold claim that I am never going to claim for myself, but I am going to put it on the cover of my next book.

BH: That's what she's doing in this book is that she frames *The Book of the City of Ladies* in this just amazing way that shows how she gets it. She's in her library. So you're like, yeah, rich much? Especially in the Middle Ages, where a book cost about as much as a house, at least a fancy Bible cost about as much as a house. And she's like, "I was just going to pick up this one book before, at the end of the day, to kind of break my thinking on this other stuff." And she picks up this book by this guy named Matheolus, speaking of footnotes, and he says all the horrible misogynistic stuff, Eve and Mary Magdalene and things like that. And she's lamenting she's a woman. And as she's doing this, she says in the text, "but before I could finish, my mother called me down to dinner." And I've always thought with that, I've always contrasted that, and they're separated by like 150 years. But the French philosopher Michel de Montaigne, he also had a library and a tower. I've been to it. He never writes about his daily life interrupting his essays, because he invented the essay. And he kind of really did on that one. Because his book, he wrote, there are three volumes called The Essays. Essie in French, to try. And I contrasted that with that, because here's this woman trying to get her work done, but she has to go and do her family life stuff. And so she interrupts it.
The next day, she comes back, and as she's lamenting women's lot, God's daughters, Justice, Reason, and Rectitude appear to her like a mystical vision to tell her, "look at all these amazing things that women have done." And so the book is an allegory. Each woman is a stone of the city, a play on Augustine's *City of God*. Just to flex on how much she knows, but it's based largely on Boccaccio's *On Famous Women*, because his are negative, and she takes the positive view on them. And so with the students, like with your book, you don't

have to read the whole thing to appreciate it. You can go, “oh, today I want to read about this person.” And you can go there. And so when I assign it to my students, we do it over three days. Day one, they have to pick two or three women from part one that stand out to them, and then part two, and then part three, with the warning in part three that they're virgin martyrs, and it's really bloody and awful. But they see this, they see her. And then what I have them do, and they do this for their major projects for the class if they want to, and tons of them choose this, is I say, what would your city of ladies today look like? Who would be in your city of ladies? And so I'll get ones that are trans, where it's really looking inclusive, and things like that. But sometimes we'll start it in class, and we'll have Michelle Obama, and Amelia Earhart, and Beyonce, and those on the board. So for me, she resonates with students looking for positive examples from history. Hence my comparison to your book. These forgotten women, and for Christine, it's women that we don't necessarily know about, or women whose stories she thinks have not been told in the right way.
So she's got the Amazons. She’s got Medea, and then somehow doesn't tell us how Euripides tells the story, which is that she kills her kids. Christine doesn't think that's the important part to focus on, and I happen to think that Euripides does that, I had to teach Euripides in a great books class, and I have many opinions. Although it's one of my favorite plays ever, but it's really messed up because he changes the story and makes it way darker than it was. And so Christine, she's not being historically accurate because no one was in the Middle Ages. And she does this amazing thing where when she tells the stories of Greek goddesses, she says, none of them were goddesses. That would be pagan. That would be heresy. These were just regular women who were really good at science, and the only way men could give them credit was to say they were goddesses. I'm like, yeah. And so students love her because, easy to read, you can pick and choose, and they love making their own city of ladies. And so that to me, I think she lays the groundwork for those 1970s, first women's studies professors trying to teach women's history and things like that. Hence, Maureen Curnow doing her dissertation on this really overlooked text that had never been published in a modern edition.

AT: I do love the idea that your students are also playing on The Dinner Party, the artwork that we mentioned earlier as well. What do you think Christine de Pizan would have thought of Barbie Land?

BH: Christine didn't have a problem with femininity or anything like that. She also knew how to play the system. You can see that in how she writes her letters to these men, that she knows the way that a scholastic academic person in the Middle Ages would write a letter. She does it in the right way. She cites the right thing. She knows how to play the game, and she knows how to push at those boundaries. But, trying to do math right now, 300 years before with Marie de France. To do kind of queer and feminist readings with Marie, you actually have to do interpretation of her text. Christine is just doing it. But she also knows how to play the game. She's saying it. She's calling people out for misogyny. She's doing those things. But at the same time, she knows how to work the system, bringing the Queen of France into her argument. So I'm thinking in terms of like Barbie Land, and this is me wildly imagining things. But when Christine is fighting these legal battles, she's going and dressed in her best clothes, looking as best she could with as many servants as she could take with her to show that she was important. And so I kind of see her as someone kind of like Hildegard of Bingen, a woman who was smart enough to understand the system and to work it for herself.

AT: I would just love to see someone do their thesis project on like Christine de Pizan and Greta Gerwig's interpretation of a feminine utopia.

BH: Oh, and you could throw some Charlotte Perkins Gilman *Herland* or something. For me, I have a research project that part of it is how to engage today's students and anyone with these topics. It was never for me a question of how am I going to get people to engage with Christine? Here's Christine. Do with her what you will because she invites it. She's got these little short stories of these women. And so I get these projects turned in

to me where they've included people, often people I've never heard of. Sometimes it'll be their mom or sometimes it'll be their favorite teacher from high school. Next to Lady Gaga, next to Michelle Obama, next to Beyonce, next to Laverne Cox. And a study like that, I think Christine gives both the comparative thing and some of the theory to look at it. And all those things in this book that to me just speaks to how Christine can resonate with people. It's not forcing my interpretation of Christine onto them. Christine allows for that herself.

AT: Well, it's always funny when we're talking about what books deserve to be in the canon, what works are so well-written that they're universal. And I think that Shakespeare gets overblown a lot, and there's actually some really interesting background as to how Shakespeare became Shakespeare. There's a great book called *Shakespeare Was a Woman and Other Heresies* that I highly recommend if anybody wants to dig more into that. But my criteria personally for “is this a work that should be highlighted?” shall we say, is how universal it is based on how much of this still resonates with people (BH: Yes.) centuries or even millennia later, and it sounds like that's her.

BH: That's been my experience with teaching her. Getting students interested in Marie or in Hildegard, that's a slog. Marie can be fun. The werewolf story is amazing, but these courtly stories and if students aren't into knights and things like that, Hildegard, I mean, her mystical writings are incomprehensible.

AT: Also, for anyone who hasn't listened to Bess's earlier episodes, one of my favorite parts of those is when she talks about how she really wanted students to focus on one of Marie's works, and instead all anybody wanted to talk about was the werewolf. So, for better or worse.

BH: A hundred percent. I wanted them to look at these stories and how the gender was weird. I had to write a whole article about a werewolf. Yeah. And I loved it. (AT: You didn't have to. (laughter)) I didn't have to. It is my favorite thing I've ever written. And I didn't write it myself. It's co-authored by all the students in the class. It's one of the favorite things I've ever produced. But it was also this eye-opening thing. I've never had to do that with Christine. I've never had to convince them. They're kind of all in. First of all, they realize they don't have, to do even 20 pages of Hildegard of Bingen is hard, because you've got no idea. Even for me, it's hard. And I know all the medieval religion imagery. But Christine isn't that. And so I've never had a hard time selling the students on an interest in Christine, saying to them, who would be in your city of ladies? They just love that activity. But I think that's how I've always felt. I had a colleague years and years ago when I first started teaching this, what we consider great books class, which, we start with Homer, and we do Plato, and we do Sophocles, and we do all those things. But I remember him saying, “classics are books that still speak to us today.” And I wanted to say, “really?” about some of the books we assigned in that class. I was like, these are only speaking today because I'm forcing these students to read them. They do not want to be reading this Plato. But with Christine, I feel that because it does resonate with students. And there are texts like that, because I teach Sappho. Sappho will be another person who they mention, and that “who's your favorite thing from this class?” It'll be Sappho. It'll be Sappho and Christine de Pizan. And then 20th century Muslim feminist, Fatema Mernissi, and her memoir, *Dreams of Trespass*. Those are the three authors from that whole semester long class that they cite most often. And Christine may be the most cited, but those are the three that stand out to them the most. And so if anyone doesn't know Fatema Mernissi, her memoir, *Dreams of Trespass*, about growing up in 1940s Morocco in a family harem is one of the best books I've ever read. It's so good.

AT: Well, I do think that so much of that comes from this very institutional idea that the grownups, the experts, whoever that may be, because this goes like all the way through K-12 education as well as college, is this idea that the people who “know” what you “should” be reading are making these decisions without necessarily talking to the students. Because I loved reading. I was that kid who would spend lunch in the library. And I still,

almost every single one of those books that I had to read in high school and probably earlier as well, I hated everything except *To Kill a Mockingbird* was the only one that I remember enjoying. And I think that very much came from the fact that the people setting the curriculum weren't talking to the people who were supposed to be reading this. And they were saying, “well, this is what you **should** be reading.” And I really like that you're saying, “no, I know Hildegard is a slog, but I also know that, Marie and Christine are works that are more accessible, that students are going to enjoy, that they're going to engage with.” And I just think that's so important because this is how you teach kids to hate reading is by forcing them to read things that they don't want to read.

BH: Oh, my spouse falls into it. You and I kept reading, but he was so turned off by what he had to read in high school that he goes through spurts where he does tons of reading. It's all fantasy and science fiction because he was so turned off by the classics in high school. And so my mother was my high school English teacher, for what it's worth, because I lived in such a small town. So I also, in this great books class, have the last few times I've taught it thrown in these two 10th-century English works. One is the Life of Saint Eugenia, which is by Ælfric of Eynsham, a man, and the other one is an anonymous Life of Saint Euphrosina. And these two saints are important in what I do because they were cross-dressing saints. And so they both dressed as to escape bad marriages, dressed as men, to go to convents, and different things happen in their lives. So that's not the point of my story. My point of my story is I had a student two years ago in a class who had grown up Catholic, gone to Catholic school for her entire schooling, and then was going to a public university, who wrote in a paper, “I wish someone had taught me about these saints before. I wish someone had talked to me about Hildegard before.” Because these models of Catholic womanhood and strength and/or just different genders with the cross-dressing saints and stuff. And I just remember almost wanting to cry when I read that student's thing, saying I was so alienated from this religion. And I'm not trying to make it religion, but she's writing this going, “I might not feel quite so negatively if I'd been exposed to these figures that speak more to my own experiences.” Hence, I'm like, “oh, wow, I have to write something about this,” hence getting permission from students to use their work and research. Sometimes it is important to know who they're responding to. You need to have some, who's Christine mad at, knowing the Bible a little bit, knowing the people she's quoting, Thomas Aquinas, people like knowing them a little bit, even if it's just a YouTube video. So that you could have that context, but then which ones really speak to you? I think too often we misunderstand and try to force feed what we were taught, which in my mind I'm going, “it's not like I liked reading these things when I was their age. Why am I forcing them to?”

AT: Now, speaking of papers that you've written, let's come back to Christine and *Medieval Trolls, Mansplainers, and Bullies*. Please elaborate.

BH: This paper I have coming out about Marie de France is probably my favorite thing I've written. That's my favorite title. I came up with it and went, oh my God, that's the best title I've ever come up with. Because Medieval Trolls and people are like, “yeah! Yeah.” So I just, I'm so proud of that title. And I just read for the first time. I'm sometimes very late to things. I just read Rebecca Solnit's *Men Explain Things to Me*.

AT: Which for anyone who's not aware is the essay that inspired the term mansplaining.

BH: Yes. And so I just read that and then I believe I'd been asked to review a new edition, and I can't remember if it was a new English edition or a new modern French translation edition of *The Debate of the Rose* that Christine was involved in. So I'd just been rereading those letters. And I'm pretty sure it's a newer English one that I really like, because that's the one I cite throughout that article. And so because I'd been reviewing this book, and I'd just read Rebecca Solnit. And it was the height when people were talking about

trolling, people were getting doxxed, all those things were happening. And I'm reading these letters going, “dude, what the hell?” Because Gontier Col writes to her and is like, “I haven't read what you wrote about *The Romance of the Rose*,” which was written about a century before when they're writing these letters. “I haven't read it, but I've heard you said some bad things about it and about the men that wrote it. Will you send me your little invective,” he calls it in French, which is attack. “Will you send it to me?” And so she does. I don't know if she had to hand copy it really quickly. Messengers were going across Paris fast because they're all dated. She sends it to him and he writes back almost immediately saying to her, “how dare you be so angry?” And I'm like, “dude, you're so angry!” And so he is so angry at her while accusing her of being too emotional. And then threatens her with, if she doesn't retract this, he's gonna write another stern letter. And then he threatens her with going to hell. And he says, “you cannot possibly have understood it. The part you think are obscene and misogynistic is because you don't understand it.”
And I was like, “oh my God, no, no, no, no. He's mansplaining to her.” And this is him: “And as I was told by those who recounted these matters to me in your new work, you attempt to contradict the author and to accuse him of errors. I am very much astonished by this because from what I have heard about you, I cannot believe that you have read and understood this book or his other works in French, nor those written by several other masters, authors, and poets.” She writes back and is like, “dude, could you maybe address the specific arguments, with citations, that I gave you?” And he writes back like, “if you don't do this, you're going to hell.” And she's like, “could we just debate this?” And he just, “you're too emotional,” all those things in these letters. And I'm like, “oh wow, he's doing the same things we do today to try to shut her down.” It really resonated with me. And one of the things that I talk about in the article, I talk a lot in this about authority and who has the authority to write. And in the Middle Ages, that was a legit thing, is auctoritas in Latin, which gives us our word author: auctor. But in the Middle Ages, you could be an “author,” which means your writings were authorized. They were important. Christine was considered a writer, not an author. And so these men who've gone to university, who hold these positions as secretaries and things like that, they're the authors who get to decide what good literature is. And so they're gatekeeping Christine within this. That idea of who has the authority to decide what works are important, who has the authority to interpret them and just these accusations. Col very much writing to Christine understands an author is masculine. An author is a man. Christine can write stuff, but the Latin word auctores is for men. He doesn't say that explicitly, but it comes across really clearly. So he calls her writings new, nouvelle. And no, authorized writings have to be based on ancient texts. It can't be these new high-falutin ideas. I can't tell the whole story of *The Romance of the Roses*, but it's really problematic. And basically a lover gets told how to trick a woman into bed. But evidently it's a religious allegory according to these 14th-century men. She hasn't gone to university, so she's on the outside. And so an education-based privilege that then bleeds over into her being a woman. That Rebecca Solnit thing, a man assuming that a woman couldn't possibly understand this topic. That's what mansplaining is. A really famous one that I cite in the article is that an actual astronaut is corrected by a guy who literally went to space camp once.

AT: (laughter) My favorite is a woman scientist at a conference and a younger male attendee tells her, I think it was that she didn't understand the human factors driving fire, something like that. And he says that she really should read McCarty et al. And she pulls her long hair back to show off her name badge and says, “I am McCarty et al.” Thank you, Dr. McCarty. (laughter)

BH: Right? I just had someone say, not about me, and it might've been even like in a YouTube video where, “oh, I expected you to be a man.” It wasn't about me, but it was, it was a situation where I'm like, “really? We're still doing this?”

AT: Yeah, there are examples from my book as well. There's a whole section on no assumption of credibility. There's a great book called *The Authority Gap* by Mary Ann Seighart, because I love telling you what else to

read, that gets into this assumption that women do not have the right to speak on topics, even that they may be an expert in. And on the topic of, “well, we thought you were a man.” There's a great example from my book where I think her name was Etheldred Bennett, was an English scientist and the Russian Academy of Sciences basically made her a member because they thought that she was a man because it's such an unusual name. And I believe there's a male Ethelred that, because of the cultural difference, they just assumed that this person was a man. And so I refer to it as like, “they accidentally admitted a woman.” Apart from the fact that this guy clearly was a forerunner of Twitter, (BH: Yes.) many, many centuries before Twitter. What do you think that, particularly young women and other marginalized genders, what do you think that they can learn from Christine, either from her writing or her life?

BH: I use her because even today in the U.S., when we look at our census data, the group in the U.S. that experiences the most poverty are female-headed households. So single moms. And even in the Middle Ages, being a widow put you in a really hard place. And so Christine obviously had education and she was nobility, but she didn't have any money. She had the status, but the money was all tied up. So she, to me, provides this example of what a woman does to get by when she has to. She was copying books and things like that. So that part. But I don't ever want to get in a pull yourself up by your bootstraps thing because she already knew the Queen of France. That makes it easier to make your, you know, if I knew Michelle Obama. But when I think about that message for today and I look for me, Christine turning to the queen was Christine turning to people who understood it, looking for mentors and for support from people who may understand some part of what you're going through, is one of the things that I take from Christine. And she's like, “okay, the men aren't going to take me seriously. I'm going to talk to the queen. I bet she gets it.” So I'm seeing like saying to students, “where can you find kind of support?” I think that's one of the messages, but something that keeps people from advancing in careers that are outside their genders or things like that. We talk about STEM fields, science, technology, engineering, and math, and things like that that are, and one of the things that keeps people out of those careers, keeps women and other marginalized groups out of those positions is that they can't see themselves in it. And so I think Christine, to me, this list of this lady is having students reflect on who are their heroes, who would be in their city of ladies, to me gives this feeling of, “oh, there are heroes for me. There are people for me to look up to today and in history.” And so I think that might be one of the reasons why she resonates with students is that you come away with this more hopeful feeling because you're like, “there have been a lot of badass women throughout history and there have been these cross-dressing saints that no one ever taught me about.” I think that is one of the reasons that she resonates and one of the reasons that she's still important.

AT: Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast and remember, well-behaved women rarely make history.