Surrogate selves: the *Rolin Madonna* and the late-medieval devotional portrait*

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The *Madonna of Chancellor Rolin* (fig. 1), painted by Jan van Eyck about 1435, has long attracted great interest, not only for its spellbinding realism and glowing color, but also for the chancellor’s apparent temerity in having himself depicted as prominently as the Virgin and Child, kneeling in their presence unaccompanied by the usual patron saint. Indeed, Georg van der Paele, a canon of St Donat in Bruges, was depicted kneeling before the Virgin with St George and Donatian in Jan van Eyck’s painting of 1436 (fig. 2). Adding to Rolin’s supposed effrontery is his apparent lack of spirituality. A contemporary, Jacques du Clerque, said of him that he was “reputed to be one of the wisest men in the kingdom, to speak temporally; with respect to the spiritual, I shall remain silent.” The Burgundian chronicler Georges Chastellain said that he “always harvested on earth as though earth was to be his abode for ever.” For modern viewers, the chancellor’s reputation has not been improved by the discovery that he originally had attached to his belt a fat purse trimmed with gold, which van Eyck omitted in the final painting, for what reason we can only speculate. Hence, it has been generally supposed that Rolin’s pious demeanor, his prayer book, and his audience with the Queen of Heaven and her Child represent little more than an elaborate effort at self-promotion designed to counter the negative reputation he had acquired at court.

This reading of the picture was advanced long ago by Johan Huizinga, who asked rhetorically: “are we to suspect the presence of a hypocritical nature behind the countenance of the donor of *La vierge, Chancellor Rolin*?”5 And later writers have occasionally voiced similar opinions. Craig Harbison, for example, has suggested that Rolin is shown in the act of confessing his sins (whose particulars are symbolized by various details in the painting); however, although “other patrons were portrayed receiving priestly forgiveness, Rolin feels powerful enough to receive absolution directly from Christ.”6 The Christ Child indeed raises his right hand in benediction, a gesture, as Craig Harbison notes, ren-

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* Some of the material in this study was presented by Walter Gibson at the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference in Cleveland, November 2000, and in a seminar conducted by John Onians at the University of East Anglia in April 2001. We are indebted to the students and colleagues present on these occasions for their valuable comments and suggestions and, not least, for their encouragement. We would also like to thank Charity Cannon Willard, Corine Schleif, Gregory T. Clark and William W. Clark for their thoughtful critiques of earlier versions of this article.


2 Quoted in C. Harbison, *Jan van Eyck: the play of realism*, London 1991, p. 118. Chastellain seems to have disliked Rolin not only for his worldly greed but also for his lowly social origins; see E. Kieser, “Zur

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3 A good illustration in Harbison, op. cit. (note 2), p. 109, fig. 71. For Dhanens, the purse perhaps recalls Rolin’s function as moneylender to the dukes of Burgundy, and she compares it with the large purse carried by Dino Rapondi in his sculpted effigy in the Church of Notre-Dame, Dijon; see E. Dhanens, *Hubert and Jan van Eyck*, New York n.d., p. 279 and fig. 174. John Ward notes that Rolin carries his purse in other portraits of him; see J.L. Ward, “Disguised symbolism as enactive symbolism in Van Eyck’s paintings,” *Arta* *Arts Historiae* 29 (1994), pp. 9-53, esp. p. 37. However, he is without it in his portrait on the Beaune *Last Judgment* by Rogier van der Weyden.


dered more prominently in the final painting; originally the hand had been in a lower position. Elizabeth Dhanens suggests that while the inscriptions on the Virgin’s robe (of which more later) contain honorific words and phrases usually applied to her, “it is possible that here the power and elevation of Chancellor Rolin is intended... here is a strong implication that the man kneeling before the Virgin has just read these texts and is aware of his own importance in the scheme of things.” In a wide-ranging analysis of the painting, Bret Rothstein considers it to be “a carefully orchestrated display of piety,” one that “allows Rolin more or less publicly to verify an intangible—and for his contemporaries, questionable piety.”

None of these proposals is implausible, and Chancellor Rolin may indeed have been a proud and worldly man. Nevertheless, any attempt to discern the motives that led to his commission of the Rolin Madonna must take into account more fully than hitherto the tradition of devotional portraiture that developed in the late middle ages. From the fourteenth century on, people who commissioned religious images increasingly had them-

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7 Ibid., pp. 116, 117, fig. 76.
8 Dhanens, op. cit. (note 3), pp. 266-81, quotation on p. 274.
9 Rothstein, op. cit. (note 1), quoted on pp. 105 and 96 (in the abstract preceding the article), respectively.
selves depicted in close proximity to holy personages and sacred narratives. The prominence of their portraits varied from what has been called “minimally intrusive,”\(^\text{10}\) to something closer to Rolin’s panel, in which the devotional figure occupied equal pictorial space with the sacred personages. Such devotional portraits occur in several forms,\(^\text{11}\) of which two basic types are immediately relevant to our understanding of the Rolin Madonna. These are the donor portraits that occur in so many altarpieces, and the owner portraits that were included in books of hours.\(^\text{12}\) This essay considers some of the ways in which these “surrogate selves” functioned within late medieval systems established to negotiate the perilous road in the hereafter. We hope to show that rather than seeing Rolin’s portrait exclusively as a manifestation of his hypocrisy or his vainglory, we might more correctly understand it as an active and engaged surrogate working efficaciously toward his soul’s salvation.

In the case of altarpieces and other works intended for public view (figs. 3, 4), donor portraits served various purposes simultaneously. Several of these functions

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11 For the devotional portrait in general see B.G. Lane, The development of the medieval devotional figure (diss.), University of Pennsylvania 1970.

12 Another important group of devotional portraits occurs in the so-called devotional diptychs, treated comprehensively by L.D. Gelfand, Fifteenth-century Netherlandish devotional portrait diptychs: origins and function (diss.), Case Western Reserve University 1994. The present article will, we hope, cast light on their function, but this is a complex subject that must be deferred to another occasion.
have been studied by a number of scholars, most notably Barbara Lane and Truus van Bueren, but a brief review of their conclusions is necessary for us to approach the *Rolin Madonna* in accordance with the donor’s intentions. First, donor portraits identify the person, family or confraternity responsible for the altarpiece (and often for the chapel or church in which it was situated); such portraits proclaim their wealth and social position—

their “naam ende faam,” to use the old Netherlandish expression,¹³ no less than their generosity. In this respect, they resemble the epitaph, which a sixteenth-century English writer defines as “a memorial to show the life, with the acts, of a noble man.”¹⁴ And even when, after a generation or so, the faithful could no longer identify the donors from firsthand knowledge, identification was assured through inscriptions, coats of arms, and the

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like, that had been placed on the frame of the altarpiece or on the wall nearby.15

This practice is unmistakably evident in the patronage of Nicolas Rolin.16 His two best-known foundations, the hospice at Beaune and the collegiate church of Notre-Dame du Châtel in Autun, ensured that the identities and beneficence of Rolin and his wife would not be forgotten by future generations. Not only do their portraits, together with their patron saints Sebastian and Anthony,17 appear prominently on the outer wings of Rogier van der Weyden’s Last Judgment triptych (fig. 4), which was placed in the hospice chapel, but their coats of arms and other identifying devices decorate the foundation’s floor tiles and other parts of the building, as well as some of its furnishings.18 Rolin’s practice of marking donations in this way is also found in his family church at Autun, Notre-Dame du Châtel, which began as a small parish church and, thanks to the chancellor’s donations, became a collegiate church of greatly enlarged dimensions and increased importance within the city.19 The chapel of St Sebastian in this church originally housed Jan van Eyck’s Madonna with Rolin’s portrait in prayer. Even if Rolin kept the panel with him during his lifetime,20 it ultimately ended up in his church, for which it was probably intended from the start, and thus joined a number of other donations that clearly identify the man who gave them, providing a visual testament of his pious generosity.21 This may also be true of the elaborate crown that van Eyck suspended above the Virgin. While the crown was a traditional attribute of the Queen of Heaven,22 Dhanens has plausibly suggested that it also alludes to the gem-encrusted crown of gold that Rolin gave to the Notre-Dame du Châtel, and that the angel thus offers the crown on the part of the donor.23

However, the desire for family glory and posthumous fame did not constitute the only motive for Rolin and his contemporaries, nor even the most important one.24 In a carved inscription listing his contributions to his parish church, the Englishman John Clapton insisted that “may Christ be my witness, this is displayed not to earn praise but that the soul may be remembered.”25 As Clive Burgess has well expressed it, “properly shrouded and penitent, the Christian might rest assured that he or she could not be damned.”26 But the average Christian, who was not entirely good but not entirely bad, as me-

15 This point is made by Truus van Bueren in, T. van Bueren, ex-
hib. cat. Lecen na de dood: gedeken in de late middeleeuwen, Utrecht (Museum Catharijneconvent) & Turnhout 1999, p. 91.
16 For a detailed study of the various foundations endowed by Rolin to ensure Masses and prayers after his death see H. Kamp, Memoria

17 Ibid. p. 192. While Anthony was a patron of the hospice, Sebasti-
ian was personally venerated by Rolin, who, as we will see, dedicated a chapel to him in the church at Autun.
18 For Rogier’s altarpiece and its commission see S. Nelsen Blum,

Early Netherlandish triptychs: a study in patronage, Berkeley & Los An-
geles 1969, pp. 37-48, esp. pp. 44-45, which deal with the arms and de-
vices of Rolin and his wife within the building and its furnishings. The great hall of the hospital also served as the funerary chapel of the Rolin family, and was the burial site for Guigone de Salins, wife of Nicolas Rolin, see Blum, p. 45. Kamp, op. cit. (note 16), pp. 167-86, discusses the hospice and the iconography of the triptych.
19 One of the best sources for a description of Rolin’s alterations to Notre-Dame du Châtel is in H. de Fontenay, “Notre-Dame; eglise paroissiale et collegiale,” Memoires de la Société Éducative 8 (1879), pp. 296-98. See also L.D. Gelfand, “Reading the architecture in Jan van
20 Rothstein, op. cit. (note 1), p. 121, note 6, observes that the re-
verse of the Rolin Madonna is marbled, “suggesting a rather less fixed or static placement.” Dhanens, op. cit. (note 3), p. 269, notes that local tradition reports that the picture was given to the church by Rolin’s widow, and she plausibly suggests that Rolin kept it for personal use during his life, bequeathing it to the church after his death.
21 B. Maurice-Chabal, “L’Eglise Notre-Dame du Châtel,” in ex-
22 But see C. Hasenmueller McCorkel, “The role of the suspended crown in Jan van Eyck’s Madonna and Chancellor Rolin,” Art Bulletin 58 (1976), pp. 516-20, who suggests that the crown is not the Virgin’s triumphal crown but the corona vitae, or crown of life, alluding to her “merit of salvation.”
24 S.K. Cohn, Jr, The cult of remembrance and the Black Death: six Renaissance cities in central Italy, Baltimore & London 1992, acknowledge-
edges that the desire for salvation inspired the founding of family
chaplins and charitable bequests, but stresses family and dynastic in-
terests as prime motives.
25 E. Duffy, The stripping of the altar: traditional religion in England
c. 1400-c. 1550, New Haven & London 1992, p. 302. This statement occurs at the end of an inscription requesting prayers for the souls of Clapton and his family. Duffy notes that there are similar inscriptions elsewhere.
26 C. Burgess, “Longing to be prayed for: death and commemorata
on in an English parish in the later middle ages,” in B. Gordon and P. Marshall (eds.), The place of the dead: death and remembrance in late med-
The recent literature on Purgatory is too vast to summarize here, but a good starting place is the classic study by J. Le Goff, *The birth of Purgatory*, trans. A. Goldhammer, Chicago 1984. For critical discussions of Le Goff’s book see R. Southern in the Times Literary Supplement, 18 June 1982, pp. 651–52; G.R. Edwards, “Purgatory: birth or evolution,” Journal of Ecclesiastical History 36 (October 1985), pp. 534–46; A. Gurevich, “Popular and scholarly medieval cultural traditions: notes in the margin of Jacques Le Goff’s book,” Journal of Medieval History 9 (1983), pp. 71–90. Various aspects of Purgatory and its descriptions in medieval literature are discussed in S. Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Princeton & Oxford 2001. The concept of souls who were not too good but not too bad, and hence capable of achieving salvation after penance, can be traced back to Augustine in his *City of God*, and was taken up by later writers; see Le Goff, pp. 60, 144, 147, 148. How Purgatory was visualized in the middle ages has been little studied, except for van Bueren, op. cit. (note 15), and the discussion by Greenblatt, pp. 49–61. Good examples of later Purgatory imagery can be found in C. Göttler, *Die Kunst des Fegefeuer nach der Reformation: Kirchliche Schenkungen, Ablass und Almosen in Antwerpen und Bologna um 1600*, Mainz 1996. Göttler is currently working on a comprehensive survey of Purgatory imagery from the middle ages on.

28 Suffrages and other elements of the reciprocal system developed to aid the souls in Purgatory are concisely discussed in Burgess, op. cit. (note 26), pp. 48–50, together with further references. For the altar wing illustrated here, and the related panel depicting the Damned and the Blessed, see P.M. Halm, “Ikonographische Studien zum Armenseelen-Kultus,” Jahrbuch München 12 (1922), pp. 4–7; K. Löcher, ex-

29 On chancies see P. Binski, *Medieval death: ritual and representation*, Ithaca 1996, pp. 115–22. Many stories circulated in the middle ages of the dead returning to complain to the living (generally family members or fellow monks) that they are still in Purgatory because the proper number of Masses had not been said; see J.C. Schmitt, *Ghosts in the middle ages: the living and the dead in the middle ages in medieval society*, trans. T. Lavender Fagan, Chicago & London 1998.

30 For the terms kapelanie and vicarie see van Bueren, op. cit. (note 15), p. 25, and p. 37 for the expression “ten eeuwigen dage.” Just what donors expected in return for their generosity can also be seen in the charter drawn up by Boudewijn van Zwieten for the convent he established at Marienpoel near Leiden in 1431. It stipulates the number of Masses to be said for him and his family, as well as the prayers to be said by the nuns; see ibid., nr. 91, pp. 241–42.

31 O. Cartellieri, *The court of Burgundy*, New York 1972, p. 29. Monks are the most efficacious, the charter continues, because they “for love of God, of their free will choose poverty and shun all the vanities of the world.”

said in perpetuity “pro remedio et salute anime sue,” that is, for the healing and salvation of his soul, and for the souls of his family and friends.33

The presence of donor portraits, like Rolin’s near the altar, thus reminded chantry priests of their obligations long after the death of those represented.34 Donor portraits also reminded the faithful to include the departed in their prayers. In this way they functioned much like tombs, which could include effigies or other representations and coats of arms intended not only to identify

33 P. Lorenz, “Nouveaux repères chronologiques pour ‘La Vierge du chancelier Rolin’ de Jan van Eyck,” Revue du Louvre et des Musées de France 49 (1992), doc. 1. See also Kamp, op. cit. (note 16), pp. 330-37, doc. 6: for the phrase quoted here see p. 331; for a similar phrase, see p. 325, doc. 4. Our thanks to Samuel Edgerton for reminding us that in proper Latin, the phrase should end “animae sue,” but it is “anime sue” in Kamp’s transcriptions.

their occupants and often their social status and achievements in life, but also to elicit prayers from the priest and lay faithful alike for the comfort of their souls in death. This was one of the reasons that the wealthiest and most important patrons strove to have their tombs located as close to the high altar as possible. The desire for such a burial place and the reasons for it are often stated explicitly in the instructions that medieval men and women left for their executors. One French ecclesiastic, Cardinal Guillaume de Chanac (d. 1384), stipulated that he wanted his tomb placed before the altar in the choir of Siena Cathedral, specifying further in his will: “I wish and order that an honorable alabaster tomb be built for my remains and... that my statue, my arms, and other necessary ornaments be placed upon it, so that my relatives and friends and those whom I have known, when passing by it, will remember me and will take care to implore the Most High on behalf of my soul.”35 Medieval tombstones and tomb slabs, even the simplest, almost invariably entreat the viewer to “ora pro nobis,”


8 Margaret of Cleves kneeling before the Virgin, ca. 1400, fols. 191–20r in the Hours of Margaret of Cleves. Lisbon, Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, Ms. L. A. 148
that is, to “pray for us.” similarly, the foundation charter, which survives, of the hôtel dieu at beaune expressly instructs those who worked in the hospice, as well as the poor who received help, to pray for the soul of the founder. in his chapel in notre-dame du châtel in autun, rolin’s tomb slab, above which jan van eyck’s painting hung, carefully documented his pious donations and asked viewers to pray for him and his wife. as van bueren has suggested, such inscriptions must have been thought efficacious, at least in part because the viewer in effect recites the prayer in the very act of reading it.

the manner in which rolin shares the same space with the virgin, without benefit of a saintly intercessor, finds parallels in many devotional portraits in books of hours. owners of such volumes liked to have themselves depicted kneeling in prayer at one or another strategic place, sometimes before a patron saint, less frequently before christ or a scene of sacred narrative. most owner portraits, however, occur at one of two places. one of these is at the beginning of matins for the hours of the virgin, also known as the little office (officium parvum) of the blessed virgin (figs. 7, 8). the text for matins opens with the words “domine, labia mea aperies”—“o lord, open my lips,” and goes on to

36 this plea occurs innumerable times, for example, in the surviving inscriptions on the 442 gravestones inventoried in b. van den berg, de pieterskerk in leiden, utrecht 1992, pp. 59-76.
37 this document is transcribed in t.h. feder, rogier van der weyen and the altarpiece of the “last judgement” at beaune (diss.), florida state university 1975, p. 96.
38 the complete inscription reads: cy gisent nobles personnes messire, nicolas rolin chevalier seigneur dauhume, et dame guigonne de salins sa femme, patrons de leglise de caens et lesquels y ont fonde les sept heures canoniaux, messe, et autre divins offices et trespasserent assavoir ledit messire, nicolas le xviii jour de janvier mil, quatre cent soixante et ung et ladite dame, guigonne le...jour du mois de...lan mil cccc et lxx..., pries dieu pour eux. the inscription is reproduced along with others found in the church of notre-dame du châtel in h. de fontenay, autun et ses monuments, marseille 1982, (ed. pric. autun 1889), p. 27. rolin was buried beneath this slab in the chapel of st sebastian, as he had wished.
40 we are grateful to margaret goehring for pointing out some of the various places where owners of books with themselves depicted. an interesting variant occurs in the hours of gysbrecht van brederode, where a prayer to st peter is accompanied by a scene of the owner kneeling before the gate of heaven under the patronage of peter himself (fol. 127v); see van bueren, op. cit. (note 15), cat. nr. 17, p. 146, and fig. 3. for owners portrayed with other subjects in books of hours see also l. freeman sandler, “the wilton diptych and images of devotion in illuminated manuscripts,” in d. gordon, l. monnas and c. elam (eds.), the regal image of richard ii and the wilton diptych, london 1997, pp. 137-54, 318-20. in some books, the owner is depicted repeatedly throughout the volume; two instances are discussed by r.s. wieck, “the savoy hours and its impact on jean, duc de berry,” yale university library gazette 66, supplement (1991), pp. 159-80. even more lavishly marked is the hours of marguerite of angouleme (paris, bibliothèque nationale de france, ms nouv. acq. lat. 83), executed ca. 1522-24, in which marguerite appears in every illumination, armed each time with her prayer inscribed on a banderole (and, in one miniature, importuning even the dying saint martin!), for a total of 22 times.
41 we are grateful to myra orth for letting us read her catalogue entry on this manuscript before its publication. in the hours of veronica von neidegg, done some time after 1500, the volume opens not with an owner portrait, but with a prayer to st veronica, beginning “ich veronia dein arme creator” (“i veronia, your poor creature”) and then goes on to address god; see u.m. schwob, “formen der laienfrommigkeit im spätmittelalterlichen brixen,” in p. dinkelbacher and h.-d. mück (eds.), volkskulturen in dem europäischen spätmittelalter, stuttgart 1987, pp. 159-75, esp. p. 168.

9 bruges, ca. 1450, patron kneeling before the virgin at the “obsecro.” baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, Ms. 220, fol. 138
praise Christ and the Virgin, interspersed with pleas for the latter’s intercession with Christ.41

Owner portraits may also appear in conjunction with the prayer “Obsecro te,” or “I beseech thee,” placed sometimes before an Annunciation scene, but more usually before an image of the Virgin and Child. It was a very popular prayer, often occurring just before Matins of the Little Office (fig. 9). The Virgin appropriately illustrates this prayer, which is addressed to her, raising her at length and concluding with the plea that “at the end of my life [you] show me your face and reveal to me the day and hour of my death. Please hear and receive this humble prayer and grant me eternal life.” Sometimes this is followed by a second prayer, “O intemerata” (“O immaculate Virgin”), which follows much the same path as the “Obsecro te,” and similarly ends in a plea for her intercession after death.43 In both Matins of the Little Office and the “Obsecro te,” the owner may be placed in the margin outside the image of the Virgin; an early instance occurs in the Hours of Jeanne d’Evreux executed about 1325-28 (fig. 7). Very frequently, however, he or she shares the same space with the Virgin. In these locations, the owner often appears alone at a prie-dieu bearing a book, presumably a book of hours, and frequently without the mediation of a saint (fig. 9). In the case of the Hours of Margaret of Cleves (fig. 8), as James Marrow has observed, Margaret’s portrait combines these two traditions, suggesting both separation and conjunction.44 The same is true of the first owner portrait in the Hours of Catherine of Cleves (fig. 11).

Such owner portraits may well have directly inspired the general figural composition of the Rolin Madonna.45 Indeed, the phrases from the text of Matins of the Little Office are present in the painting, embroidered in gold around the hem of the Virgin’s robe, and in the opened book on the chancellor’s prie-dieu, which shows an ornamental and highly legible letter “D”, the beginning of “Domine labia mea aperies.”46 It is evident, thus, that


42 For some owner portraits associated with the “Obsecro te” and the “O intemerata” see Wieck, Painted prayers, cit. (note 41), pp. 94-95; Wieck, op. cit. (note 40), pp. 113-14. This subject will be treated at greater length in our study in progress on the surrogates selves.

43 For these prayers and their importance in late medieval piety see Wieck, Time, cit. (note 41), pp. 94-96, 163-64; idem, Painted prayers, cit. (note 41), pp. 86-90; and Duffy, op. cit. (note 25), pp. 263-65. Cf. Chaucer, who in an extended prayer to the Virgin, asks her “Help that my Fader be not wrath with me. Spek thou, for I ne dar not him ysee,/ So have I doon in erthe, alas the while,/ That certes, but if thou my souorough bee,/ To stink eterne he Wolfe my gost exile;” see “An ABC,” in The Riverside Chaucer, ed. F.N. Robinson, Cambridge 1933, lines 52-56. When the “O intemerata” occurs elsewhere in a book of hours, it may be illustrated with a scene of the Lamentation. Similar in intent is a prayer in the Hours of Jeanne of Navarre. The owner is portrayed at numerous points in the volume; in one telling instance she kneels before a prayer in the Virgin and Child “A very special prayer in honor of Our Lady,” which goes: “I beg you, O Lady, most holy Mary, mother of the Lord Jesus Christ, most full of pity, daughter of the most high king, most glorious mother, mother of orphans, consolation of the desolate... that you intercede for me your handmaid, Jeanne of Navarre, queen, in the sight of your son so that through his blessed mercy and your holy intercession he will grant me that before the time of my death I may be cleansed of my sins through confession and true penitence and that after death I may have eternal life and rest with his saints and elect.” See M.M. Manion, “Women, art and devotion: three French fourteenth-century royal prayer books,” in M.M. Manion and B.J. Muir (eds.), The art of the book: its place in medieval worship, Exeter 1998, pp. 21-66,

44 J.H. Marrow, As Horas de Margarida de Cleves / The Hours of Margaret of Cleves, Lisbon 1995, pp. 28-29.

45 Both Panofsky and Meiss have noted the similarity in composition between the Rolin Madonna and a miniature in a book of hours from the workshop of the Boucicaut Master (Paris, Bibliothèque National de France, lat. 1161, fol. 290), depicting a donatrix presented by an angel to the Virgin and Child enthroned; see E. Panofsky, Early Netherlandish painting: its origins and character, 2 vols., Cambridge (Mass.) 1953, vol. 1, p. 192, and fig. 78; and M. Meiss, French painting in the time of Jean de Berry, 3 vols., London & New York 1967-74, vol. 2, p. 72 and figs. 204, 493. We are not informed what text it accompanies, but judging from its placement in the volume it is most likely not the Little Office. Even the chancellor’s “unfocussed gaze,” often remarked upon, finds counterparts in the devotional portraits in books of hours. See Naughton, op. cit. (note 10), p. 115, but similar contemplative gazes also occur in donor portraits in altarpieces.

46 W.H.J. Weale first recognized the lines of Matins along the hem of the Virgin’s dress in Hubert and John van Eyck, London 1908, p. 186. See also H. Roosen-Runge, Die Rolin-Madonna des Jan van Eyck: Form und Inhalte, Wiesbaden 1972, pp. 26-32. The identification of the letter D on Rolin’s book was first suggested by Purtle, op. cit. (note 41), pp. 67-68. Rothstein, op. cit. (note 2), p. 125, note 35, observes that the book is opened toward the middle of the volume rather than the beginning, where the Little Office was usually placed, but that may be artifices license on van Eyck’s part. Also, as Ward observes, every open book depicted by van Eyck is open near the center; see Ward, op. cit. (note 3), p. 40, note 61. Both Purtle, op. cit. (note 41), pp. 69-72, and Kamp, op. cit. (note 16), pp. 160-61, suggest that the Matins text inspired various details in the painting, including the landscape. Lorenz, op. cit. (note 33), p. 45, doc. 14, publishes a papal dispensation granted to Rolin in 1434, allowing him to hear Matins before daybreak, thus circumventing the canonical rule that forbade the practice. It is likely that with his busy schedule, the chancellor needed to say Matins and hear Mass
Rolin was particularly devoted to the Virgin, a circumstance remarked on by Louis xi when he visited Rolin’s church at Autun, and this Marian devotion is reflected in the various prayers and Masses Rolin endowed at both Beaune and Autun.47

Roger Wieck tells us that if the book of hours “can be compared to a Gothic Cathedral, the Hours of the Virgin would be its high altar, placed at the center of the choir,”48 and its most important text, it seems, may well have been Matins of the Little Office.49 The frequency with which the owners of books of hours had themselves portrayed kneeling before the Virgin, whether at Matins of the Little Office or at the “Obsecro te,” testifies, of course, to the Virgin’s traditional role as the major intercessor between the sinner and Christ at the time of death. This is acknowledged in at least one book of hours, in which the Matins text of the Little Office is prefaced by a deathbed scene.50 Thus, given the chancellor’s special devotion to the Virgin, it should occasion no surprise that he chose her as his only intercessor in the Rolin Madonna.51

The phrase “Domine labia mea aperies” is a formula occurring elsewhere in the book of hours,52 but it must have had a particular significance in Matins of the Little Office. For one thing, it may well have been the one text in a book of hours that its owner read or recited daily.53 This may also explain why so many owners had their portraits included in this location, it was the one seen most frequently. Further, we suggest that the surrogate self often present at the phrase “Domine labia mea aperies” was intended to function as a perpetual ‘stand-in’ for the owner, a surrogate who “opens his or her lips,” repeating an endless plea to the Virgin and Child.

The same is most likely true of the “Obsecro te,” particularly as it seems to have gained efficacy through daily repetition.54 In some printed books of hours, at least, the “Obsecro te” is prefaced by a rubric that tells us that for those in a state of grace who said the prayer every day, the Virgin, as we read in an early sixteenth-century printed English hours, “will shewe them her blessyd visage and warne them the daye [and] the owre of dhe, [and] in theyr laste ende the angelges of God shall yeльd theyr sowles to heven.”55 This is no innovation of an enterprising publisher, for similar rubrics appear before this prayer in French manuscript hours of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and might explain why

before eight in the morning and such dispensations were awarded to other nobles of the time; see E. van Ottenholt, Regulae cencellariae apostolical: die püstlichen Kanzleiregeln von Johanes XXII. bis Nicolaus V, Insbruck 1888, p. 251, note 95. For reasons that are not clear, Lorenz connects this papal dispensation with the lines of Matins found in the painting.

47 See Kamp, op. cit. (note 16), pp. 153-54.
49 Several Netherlandish paintings, Campin’s Mérode Annunciation, Rogier van der Weyden’s Annunciation in Paris (Louvre) and Quinten Massys’s Moneychanger and his wife (Paris, Louvre), show volumes, presumably books of hours, open at pages marked by a prominent “D”. It is tempting to suppose that they are opened to Matins of the Little Office, although this must remain speculation.
50 V. Reindburg, Popular prayers in late medieval and Reformation France (diss.), Princeton University 1985, p. 124, and fig. 15; van Bueren, op. cit. (note 15), cat. nr. 50.
51 See Kamp, op. cit. (note 16), p. 163, who also notes that the Virgin is referred to as the “tresorier de grace” (“the treasurer of grace”) in a document of Louis xi dated 1480.
52 For the repetition of this formula, sometimes shortened to “Domine labia mea,” see F. Gorissen, Das Stundenbuch der Katharina von Kleve: Analyse und Kommentar, Berlin 1973, pp. 72, 88, 95, 102, 106, 110.
53 There is little information on which texts in the book of hours were read most frequently, but the accounts of the lives of two particularly devout women, Cicely, Duchess of York, and Lady Margaret Beaufort, suggest that both read the Matins section of the Hours of the Virgin every morning; see A. Taylor, “Into his secret chamber: reading and privacy in late medieval England,” in J. Raven, H. Small and N. Tadmor (eds.), The practice and representation of reading in England, Cambridge 1996, pp. 41-61, esp. pp. 49-57. Even the frivolous and pleasure-loving wife of Reynaud de Trie, Admiral of France at the turn of the fifteenth century, went every morning with her ladies-in-waiting, each with her book of hours, into a grove where they said their prayers, and, one assumes, read the Matins texts of the Hours of the Virgin; see G. Diaz de Gamez, El Victorial, the unconquered knight: a chronicle of the deeds of Don Pere Nino, Count of Buena, trans. J. Evans, London 1928, pp. 134-38.
54 It is well known that certain images, including those of St Christopher, the Holy Face of Christ and the Wound of Christ, if viewed daily, were thought to protect one during that day from sudden death or some other evil, or in the case of death, to guarantee divine protection from the pains of Hell. Less familiar are the various prayers and other texts that possessed a similar apotropaic function. One was the prayer “Deus propicius esto,” supposedly given to St Augustine by the Holy Ghost; see Duffy, op. cit. (note 25), pp. 272, 294-70. Another comprised a group of eight verses from the Psalms that St Bernard of Clairvaux, so it was claimed, had obtained from the Devil himself, a story that often introduced these verses in books of hours; see Thomas a Kempis’s prayer book: a facsimile reproduction of the annotated pages, ed. L. Martz and R. Sylvester, New Haven 1969, p. xxvii.
the “Obsecro te” was so often favored for owner portraits. Another prayer of this type is the Paternoster, or Lord’s Prayer. A fourteenth-century text, for example, claims that whoever wore Christ’s name on his person, and recited a Paternoster daily for God’s honor, “would be treated kindly by God, who would give him grace on his final journey.” The Paternoster, incidentally, occurs in many texts in the book of hours, including the First Nocturne of Matins in the Hours of the Virgin. In this connection, it is significant that the scroll held by Margaret of Cleves (fig. 8) carries part of this prayer: “Our Father, thy kingdom come.” In view of this importance attached to the repetition of prayers and other religious texts, we must consider the possibility that Margaret’s portrait, and by extension other devotional portraits in books of hours, were understood to engage in endless prayer, even when the people they represented were unable to do so.

It is an age-old belief found in many societies that images of the gods are inhabited in some manner by their divine prototypes, who thus interact with the faithful. Although this use of pagan idols was vigorously condemned through the centuries by Christian theologians, a similar understanding, even if unspoken, underlies the traditional veneration of relics and cult images of the Virgin and saints. Robert Scribner has aptly described such images: “first, they were believed to be potent, to have some kind of sacred power or ‘virtue’ contained within them. Second, they were participatory, they entered into a relationship with the viewer, usually in the form of a response to devotion offered by a pious devotee. Third, they could have an indwelling personality, they could manifest the sacred person they represented.” Scholars have begun to appreciate the basic and vital role that such beliefs had in medieval devotion. But that the faithful, in turn, could communicate with the divine through their own likenesses, and continue to do so even after death, is a subject that, to our knowledge, has not been investigated in depth, although it has been frequently suggested in passing. Both Barbara Lane and Truus van Bueren have proposed that, by means of their portraits and coats of arms, the deceased were present to receive the benefits of Masses, prayers and the power of relics. Lucy Sandler Freeman has written that the

56 Reinhart, op. cit. (note 50), p. 124, who observes that some rubrics for this prayer include an indulgence: “Pope Innocent and Pope Boniface grant to all those who say this prayer 300 days of pardon,” a promise repeated in a slightly different form in the English printed hours cited by Duffy, op. cit. (note 25). In many respects, the “Obsecro te” has much in common with the type of prayer that Jeffrey Hamburger has aptly characterized as “prayer formulas reiterated so often that the words took on the character of an incantation,” see J.F. Hamburger, Nuns as artists: the visual culture of a medieval continent, Berkeley, Los Angeles & London 1997. A comparable example appears in the Hours of Veronika von Neidnagl, executed about 1500, in which one prayer to “unserlieben frauen” on fol. 10a promises “we das spricht alle tag mit andacht der wirt von ir gewert alle gepet was van ihre y[e] begeret” (“who speaks this prayer every day with devotion will receive all that is prayed for”); see Schwob, op. cit. (note 40), p. 168. Similar assurances of divine assistance, incidentally, were occasionally offered by the books of hours themselves: some contain a rubric asserting that if the volume is always borne on his or her person, it will protect the owner from disaster; see P. Saenger, “Books of hours and the reading habits of the later middle ages,” in R. Chartier (ed.), The culture of print: power and the use of print in early modern Europe, trans. L.G. Cochrane, Princeton 1989, pp. 141-73, esp. p. 156, with some examples cited in note 118.

57 Quoted in J.F. Hamburger, The visual and the visionary: art and female spirituality in late-medieval Germany, New York 1998, p. 266. This claim was made by Eibert Stagel, a follower of Heinrich Suso, who sewed the name of Christ in red silk on a small piece of cloth. She made and distributed many of these items. In a manuscript of Suso’s works, a fourteenth-century reader added a marginal note repeating the instructions and then the Paternoster itself (ibid., p. 268). Objects inscribed with protective prayers are common. In Byzantium, people wore rings with protective prayers; one is inscribed “Theotokos, protect your servant Gioria,” see A. van Dijk, “The angelic salutation in early Byzantine and medieval Annunciation imagery,” Art Bulletin 81 (1999), pp. 420-69, esp. p. 429. In 1506, Willibald Pirckheimer’s sister sent him an excerpt from the Gospel of St John wrapped in a nutshell as a charm against dangers and demons of all kinds. She apologizes, but begs him not to despise her gift. The document is still preserved. See Hamburger, op. cit. (note 56), p. 197.


59 For the text see Marrow, op. cit. (note 44), p. 29.


61 R. Scribner, “Popular piety and modes of visual perception in late-medieval and Reformation Germany,” Journal of Religious History 15 (December 1981), pp. 448-69, esp. p. 457. Concerning the “indwelling personality” of medieval images, Scribner goes on to say that “there was no notion of a ‘spirit’ inherent in the matter of the image; rather, it was as though the sacred person could at will inhabit the image representing him or her in the profane world.” Our thanks to Erin Webster for this reference.

Wilton diptych served, among other things, to “re-enact his [Richard’s] own devotion whether he was present or not.”63 These perceptive observations introduce us to a very important function of donor and owner portraits that parallels the common use of surrogates in other types of pious activity.

Pilgrimages, especially, provided many opportunities for vicarious journeys and substitute pilgrims. Medieval writers often condemned pilgrimages not only for the dangers involved, especially travel to distant lands, but also for their expense (the money spent on pilgrimages, they argued, was better employed for almsgiving) and the opportunities they afforded for sinful behavior.64 Devout individuals, however, could achieve the equivalent of a pilgrimage by tracing the route of a cathedral labyrinth on their knees, or by reading pilgrim guides and imagining themselves praying at the various sacred places.65 Conversely, people could hire others to make pilgrimages in their place. It has recently been suggested that Jan van Eyck was employed in this capacity by Duke Philip the Good.66 Furthermore, wills often stipulated that after the testator’s death, people be engaged in his or her name to go as pilgrims to Santiago de Compostella, Rome or the Holy Land.67 It was understood that, whether living or dead, the person paying for the substitute received the indulgences normally dispensed at pilgrimage sites. Thus, for example, a bull of Julius II promulgated in 1506 forbade women to go to the Grand Chartreuse in Dijon on pilgrimage, but they could nonetheless earn the indulgences offered there by sending intermediaries.68

Under certain circumstances, people could also engage others to perform their penance for them.69 This practice informs several exemplary stories of the middle ages. In one tale, a son does penance for his mother, in another, a monk dies before completing his penance, but is saved when his brothers fulfill the rest of it.70 Even the wish to perform some pious act occasionally certainly hoped for an heir.

63 Sandler, op. cit. (note 40), p. 154. By inference, this would also include the owner portraits in books of hours, to which she devotes considerable discussion. Similarly, Corine Schleif also suggests that donor image portraits in effect “allowed the faithful the unique opportunity to continue in devotion, striving for divine benevolence even after death!” See C. Schleif, “Hands that appoint, anoint and ally: late medieval donor strategies for appropriating approbation through painting,” Art History 16 (March 1993), pp. 1-32, esp. p. 2; cf. C. Schleif, Donatio et memoria: Stifter, Stiftungen und Motivationen an Beispielen aus der Lorenzkirche in Nürnberg, Munich 1990, p. 235. Conversely, Wieck, op. cit. (note 40), p. 172, sees the repetition of owner portraits in both the Savoy Hours, executed in the 1330s, and the Petites Heures et Très Belles Heures of Jean de Berry as examples of “self-aggrandizement.”

64 See G. Constable, “Opposition to pilgrimages in the middle ages,” in S. Kuttner and A.M. Stickler, Mélanges G. Fransen (Studia Gratiana, vol. 19), Rome 1976, pp. 125-46; W. Williams, Pilgrimage and narrative in the French Renaissance: “The undiscovered country”, Oxford & New York 1998, pp. 94-131. As early as the fourth century, Gregory of Nyssa urged against pilgrimages to the Holy Land, arguing that “change of place does not effect any drawing nearer unto God, but wherever thou mayest be, God will come to thee, if the chambers of thy soul be found of such a sort that He can dwell in thee and walk in thee”; see Williams, p. 98.


66 See P. Howell Jolly, “Jan van Eyck’s Italian pilgrimage: a miraculous Florentine Annunciation and the Ghent altarpiece,” Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte 61 (1998), pp. 386-94, esp. pp. 384-88. In 1426 Jan was paid to make a “certain pilgrimage” for the duke, and Jolly suggests that on this or some other occasion, Jan visited the fresco of the Annunciation in the Church of SS. Annunziata, to be discussed later, an image whose miracle-working powers included successful conception and childbirth. The duke at this time was negotiating for his third wife, and

67 On surrogates pilgrims see J. Sumption, Pilgrimage: an image of medieval religion, Totowa 1975, pp. 298-99. Nor did this practice end with the middle ages. In 1556 Felix Platter encountered Caspar Fry, a professional pilgrim from the Swiss canton of Zug (whose inhabitants were still Catholic) who had already made 15 round trips to Santiago de Compostella for people who paid him to take their place; see E. Le Roy Ladurie, The beggar and the professor: a sixteenth-century family saga, trans. A. Goldhammer, Chicago & London 1997, p. 217.


69 See M. McLaughlin, Consorting with saints: prayer for the dead in early medieval France, Ithaca & London 1994, pp. 220-22, for vicarious penance for both the living and the dead, and pp. 221-22 for penance for the dead. See also A. Gurevich, Medieval popular culture: problems of belief and perception, trans. J.M. Bak and P.A. Hollingsworth, Cambridge & Paris 1990, pp. 28-29. Gurevich notes that in early penitentials, a sinner could hire a man to fast for him; the surrogate was called a justas. See also ibid., p. 231, note 66: a killer had to finish his victim’s penance, above and beyond his own penance for homicide.

70 F.C. Tubach, Index exemplorum: a handbook of medieval religious tales, Helsinki 1969, nrs. 3666 and 3668 respectively. See also nr. 3666 for a story about a man who agrees to do part of a long penance for a monk, but dies before it is completed and is tormented in the afterlife, not for his own sins, but for the unfinished penance. Jeffrey Burton reports the charming old folk tale, without giving a source, about a faithful wife who agreed to do her husband’s penance in his stead, but he broke the bargain when he discovered that she was going to Heaven instead of him; see J.R. Burton, A history of Heaven: the singing silence, Princeton 1997, pp. 112-13. St Bridget recounts how she was informed by Christ himself that penance could be performed on behalf of those who had died in a state of grace, see Saint Bride and her book: Birgitta of Sweden’s revelations, trans. J. Bolton Holloway, Newburgport 1992, p. 62.
served as an efficacious substitute for the actual deed. The English mystic Margery Kempe, for example, tells us, concerning her rosary, that Christ assured her that “as many beads you would wish to say, I will count them as said,” because, as he tells her elsewhere, “I take every good intention as if it had been acted upon.”

Margery may have been eccentric, but she was not alone in this belief. The fourteenth-century boy-cardinal Peter of Luxembourg, who died at the age of 17, wanted to perish as a martyr for the peace of the church. His earliest biographer says that this desire had earned him a martyr’s crown, just as if he had actually been martyred. Rolin, incidentally, was probably familiar with this story, since Peter was one of the saints whom he specially venerated. Good intentions, it seems, could pave the way to Heaven no less than to Hell.

One could even pray by proxy. Surrogates, for example, could be hired to say the rosary for those who we may suppose, were too busy to say it for themselves—a practice condoned by Marcus van Weida in his rosary manual published in 1515. The thirteenth-century nun Gertrude of Helfta, not having access to a crucifix in a certain part of the convent, had someone pray for her, requesting a mystical experience that was ultimately granted. Similarly, Rolin instructed the nuns at Beaune to say the “De profundis” in his name; since it addresses God in the first person: “Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications” (Psalm 120:1-2; emphases added). The nuns in effect acted as his surrogates.

While Gertrude and the chancellor employed other persons as their proxies in prayer, other people employed effigies of themselves for the same ends. Charles VI of France, during an illness in 1389, had a wax bust of himself placed in the presence of an image of St Peter of Luxembourg, presumably to entreat his intercession for divine aid. Better known is the case of Lorenzo de’ Medici. After he had been wounded in the Pazzi conspiracy of 1478, his friends and family had effigies of him, one garbed in the clothes he had worn when wounded, placed in several churches to render to God the thanks that he could not offer in person. One effigy was dispatched to the church of S. Maria degli Angeli in Assisi; it was believed that whoever visited the shrine in the lower church would receive an indulgence pardoning him or her of all sins committed up to that moment. As Hugo van der Velden observes, “thus Lorenzo’s substitutes gave substance to the fictional truth that he would forever abide in the presence of his holy patrons and worship them, and that he would remain under their protection, safe and sound.”

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71 M. Kempe, *The book of Margery Kempe*, trans. J. Skinner, New York 1998, p. 293 (ch. 88) and p. 288 (ch. 86) respectively. Christ also grants Margery’s request that he give Master Robert, probably her confessor, half of her tears, prayers, pilgrimages, and other good works, “just as if he himself had done these things;” see ibid., p. 43 (ch. 8).


73 Kamp, op. cit. (note 16), pp. 151-52, who notes that Rolin endowed a side chapel in the Celestine cloisters at Avignon, the site of Peter’s grave.


75 The surrogate’s prayer was as follows: “By your wounded heart, most loving Lord, pierce her heart with the arrow of your love.” See Hamburger, op. cit. (note 56), pp. 102-03; see also pp. 125-27. Another example occurs in the 11th tale of the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles*, in which a man, jealous of his wife, sends a servant to say prayers and make offerings in his place to cure her jealousy; see *The one hundred new tales (Les cent nouvelles nouvelles)*, trans. J. Bruskin Diner, New York & London 1900, p. 455.

76 See Kamp, op. cit. (note 16), p. 167. This is one of the Seven Penitential Psalms.

77 Meiss, op. cit. (note 45), vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 74; see also vol. 3, pt. 1, pp. 1, 267, for other examples of the practice. Wax seems to have been a favorite material for votives. While these were often in the shape of the part of the body healed, they sometimes represented the complete figure of the person cured; see G. Verhoeven, *Devote en negoie: Delft als bedevaartplaats in de late middeleeuwen*, Amsterdam 1992, pp. 142-43. Occasionally the gift consisted of a quantity of wax weighing as much as the person seeking divine aid; Margaret Paston wrote, probably in 1443, to her husband John, at that time lying sick in London, that her mother “hath bestyd a-nodery ymage of wax of the wayte of you to Oyur Lady of Walsyngham,” where she planned to go herself on pilgrimage to pray for him. It is unclear whether the “image” represents a portrait, however stylized, of John Paston. See N. Davis (ed.), *Paston letters and papers of the fifteenth century*, 2 vols., Oxford 1971-76, vol. 1, p. 218.

This distribution of life-sized effigies of Lorenzo to various churches was not unique, but reflects a custom of long standing. Some of the churches of Florence were filled with full-scale portraits of her citizens in wax, terracotta, and papier-mâché.79 Many effigies were constructed with a wooden framework covered with a waxed cloth, the head and hands modeled carefully in wax and painted in lifelike colors. Their startling realism was often enhanced with real hair and, like one of Lorenzo’s images, sometimes dressed in their owners’ clothes. The Church of SS. Annunziata, in particular, attracted hundreds of these images, given in veneration of its famous miraculous fresco of the Annunciation.80 Nor was this practice unique to Florence. Wax effigies were sent to S. Maria degli Angeli in Assisi, as we have seen; and they were placed by the faithful in the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, and other churches and shrines across Europe.81 Few of these images have survived, but some idea of their original appearance can be gained from the wax figures still preserved in S. Maria delle Grazie in Mantua.82 Like the devotional portraits in northern altarpieces and epitaphs, these surrogate selves preserved the physical likeness of their donors for later generations. But their most important function has been well expressed by Rupert Shepherd in his discussion of another famous cult image, the Madonna delle Carceri in Prato, which also attracted effigies of the faithful: “I would propose that just as miraculous images seem to have embodied something of the figures they represent, so these effigies were also believed in some way physically to embody those they depicted. The use of life-sized, three dimensional and fully clothed effigies suggests that likeness—the closest similarity between the effigy and the person represented—was particularly important in the ‘substitution’ of image for beseecher.”83

Lorenzo’s effigies were votive images, offered chiefly in thanks for help given in the past, but also for future benefits in the case of the image sent to Assisi. Offerings and petitions could thus involve pleas for the future as well as thanks for favors granted in the past. That surrogate selves offer their mute but urgent prayers on behalf of those they represent is suggested by the testament of Andrea Pellegrini, which describes in detail the funerary monument that he wanted in the church of S. Anastasia in Verona, made by Michele dei Firenze ca. 1335-36. It includes the sculpted effigy of Pellegrini kneeling in prayer, facing the altar in his family chapel. According to his will, “I order that my body be buried in the church of S. Anastasia... there where my father is buried.... I order that after my death... for three years continuously the Mass of St Gregory shall be said for my soul... I want to be sculpted... in this chapel... kneeling [and] praying.... I want this to be done and completed within three years of my death.” Geraldine Johnson remarks, and we think correctly, that the time sequence stipulated in the will implies that Pellegrini intended the Masses of St Gregory, considered particularly effective in freeing the soul from Purgatory, to be said continuously until his praying effigy could take over, after which the Masses would no longer be needed.84 Hence, according to Johnson, his effigy represented “a cost free


80 For a full account of SS. Annunziata, its miraculous image of the Annunciation and the cult that it inspired, see L.M. Balman, Artistici patronage at SS. Annunziata 1440-c.1520 (diss.), London University 1971, pt. iv, on wax images, pp. 1-40.

81 For a good survey of the use of wax ex-votos since antiquity see J. von Schlosser, “Geschichte der Porträtbildnerei in Wachs,” Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses 29 (1910-11), pp. 171-258, esp. pp. 207-21. F. Lemée, Trésor de statues, Paris 1688, p. 57, records that Pope Innocent IX (1227-41) and his nephew had wax effigies placed at Notre Dame, where they still were in the sixteenth century; see von Schlosser, pp. 210-11.

82 For two good illustrations of the interior of Santa Maria delle Grazie see von Schlosser, op. cit. (note 81), pp. 208-09.

83 R. Shepherd, “Art and life in Renaissance Italy: a blurring of identities?” in M. Rogers (ed.), Fashioning identities in Renaissance art, London, Aldershot & Burlington 2000, pp. 63-73, esp. pp. 67-68. For a general discussion of such images see H. van der Velden, The donor’s image: Gerard Loyet and the votive portraits of Charles the Bold, Turnhout 2000, pp. 191-285. Van der Velden argues (pp. 223-45) that the proximity of the effigy to the miracle-working image was more important than its verisimilitude, but the attention so often paid to realistic detail suggests that the latter could be an important factor as well.

means of ensuring that prayers would be said for his soul in perpetuity."

It is in this context that we can appreciate the tomb that was ordered in the 1430s by Alvaro de Luna (d. 1453), first minister under King John II of Castile. Installed in the family chapel in Toledo Cathedral, the tomb included the lifesize bronze effigies of Luna and his wife, Juana Pimentel, Countess of Montalbán. Although it was destroyed in a riot against Luna in 1441, we know from a later description that this remarkable monument featured a mechanism that facilitated the raising and lowering of the bronze figures into positions of prayer directed toward the Mass at the high altar. Here again is strong evidence for the belief that kneeling effigies placed in significant locations were understood to function as surrogate selves, repeatedly in attendance at Mass or praying for the men and women who had commissioned them. And what was true of sculpted effigies was surely true of the painted variety, as well, that appears on altarpieces and epitaphs. This is suggested by the occasional inscription that has survived on panels showing devotional figures, such as a Netherlandish panel of about 1455 (fig. 10). Here, Geertrui Haack kneels before St Agnes, and the inscription on the banderole, "Sancta Agnet, ora pro me"—"St Agnes, pray for me"—asks for her intercession with the Virgin and Christ.

Sometimes, too, as in the Rolin Madonna, the supplicant receives assurance that his or her prayers have been heard and will be granted. In the Hours of Margaret of Cleves, for example, in response to Margaret’s prayer,

85 Johnson, op. cit. (note 84), p. 112. The Gregorian Masses was a Mass cycle of 30 days, hence also called Trentals, whose efficacy for the dead had been revealed to St Gregory by an angel, see J. Root Hulbert, "The sources of St. Erkenwald and the Trental of St. Gregory," Modern Philology 16 (1918-19), pp. 149-57; C.M.N. Eire, From Madrid to Purgatory: the art and craft of dying in sixteenth-century Spain, Cambridge 1995, p. 225, with further references. In Chaucer’s Summoner’s tale, the summoner tells us that “Trentals... deliveren fro peneance/ Hir frendnes soules, as wel olde as yonge;” see The Riverside Chaucer, cit. (note 43), p. 113, lines 1724-25 (fragment iii); quoted in Greenblatt, op. cit. (note 27), p. 267, note 26.

86 For a description of this fascinating tomb project and the tomb that was finally erected see F. Leneghan, “Commemorating a real bastard: the chapel of Alvaro de Luna,” in Valdez des Alamo and Prendergast, op. cit. (note 34), pp. 129-30.

87 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. nr. sk 13926. See van Bueren, op. cit. (note 15), cat. nr. 93, pp. 243-44, here dated ca. 1450-60. Van Bueren suggests that the panel may have been done after Geetrui’s death. She also notes that images showing donors praying to a patron saint were relatively rare at this time, but she cites two church murals showing this subject (ibid., figs. 4, 98). In a mid-fifteenth century French Mass of St Gregory, the unidentified man kneeling at the left holds a banderole that says “Jesu Criste, fili Dei vivi, misere me” (“Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me”). See J. Dupont, “La Messe de Saint Grégoire,” Gazette des Beaux-Arts 6e ser., 6 (November 1931), pp. 284-88, who identifies it as school of Amiens, ca. 1440; G. Ring, A century of French painting, 1400-1500, London 1949, p. 219, cat. nr. 167 (no ill.), concurs in the attribution, but dates it “not before 1450.” There is a color illustration in C. Jacques [C. Sterling], Les peintures du moyen âge, Paris 1941, pl. cxxiii.
“Our Father, thy kingdom come” (fig. 8), the Christ Child writes on a scroll, adding his fiat, or “so be it.”

The first owner portrait in the Hours of Catherine of Cleves (fig. 11), executed about 1435, shows Catherine kneeling before the Virgin and Child at the beginning of Matins of the Little Office. The banderole hovering before her is inscribed “O mater memento me” (“O Mother remember me”). The Christ Child dips a pen into the ink-bottle held by the Virgin to compose his answer, but his scroll is too abraded to make out his response; however, it was most likely favorable.

A rather different situation occurs in Catherine’s second portrait, placed in this case at the beginning of the Saturday Votive Mass of the Virgin (fig. 12). As we read in the banderole...
deroles, Catherine’s prayer for redemption is relayed from the Virgin through the crucified Christ to God himself, who in turn responds: “Son, your request is heard.” In some cases, however, the Christ Child signifies his granting of the supplicant’s prayer by raising his hand in blessing, such as we see in the illumination preceding Matins of the Little Office in the Carew-Poyntz Hours, an English manuscript of ca. 1390 (fig. 13). Another example is the “Obsecro te” miniature in the Flemish book of hours of ca. 1450 mentioned above (fig. 9). Donors receive similar divine assurance in hours, and the types of illustrations accompanying it, see B. Lane, “The symbolic Crucifixion in the Hours of Catherine of Cleves,” Oud Holland 87 (1973), pp. 4-26, esp. pp. 6-10. The traditional association of Saturday with the Virgin has frequently been noted, but to our knowledge never really explained. It may have originated in the belief that on the Sabbath (Holy Saturday) after the Crucifixion and burial of Christ, only his mother had faith in his resurrection. See J. Ragusa and R. Green, Meditations on the Life of Christ, Princeton 1961, p. 349. This belief was repeated in various texts inspired by the Meditations. It was also on Saturday that the Virgin often intervened on behalf of the souls in Purgatory, a subject that we hope to address in the future, although it should be noted here that Rolin ordained that the “Salve Regina” be sung and other prayers recited on his behalf at Notre-Dame du Châtel in Autun on Saturdays and all feast days; see Kamp, op. cit. (note 16), p. 154.

91 The inscriptions are quoted in J. Plummer, The Hours of Catherine of Cleves, New York 1969, p. 96; and Lane, op. cit. (note 90), p. 4. This set of appeals up the chain of command, so to speak, is a prime example of the so-called double intercession, a subject frequently depicted from the later middle ages on, as Barbara Lane and others have demonstrated; see Lane, op. cit., (note 90), and J.B. Knipping, Iconography of the Counter Reformation in the Netherlands: Heaven on Earth, 2 vols., Nieuwkoop 1974, vol. 2, pp. 263-68. An unusual variant of the double intercession, in which the Virgin appeals to the Man of Sorrows, occurs in an early sixteenth-century portable altarpiece; see A. Monballieu, “Het Antonius Tsgrooten-triptieke (1507) uit Tongerlo van Goossen Van der Weyden,” Jaarboek Antwerpen 1967, pp. 13-36.

92 Sandler, op. cit. (note 41), p. 142, fig. 80.

93 Other instances of the blessing Christ Child in “Obsecro te” illuminations occur in two French books of hours. The first was executed ca. 1420 (Baltimore, Walters Museum of Art, w. 219, fol. 86v); see L.M.C. Randall, Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the Walters Art Gallery, 3 vols., Baltimore & London 1989-93, vol. 1, pp. 280-85, cat. nr. 100, described but not illustrated; the second dates from ca. 1470 (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M.73, fol. 13r); ill. in Wieck, Painted prayers, cit. (note 41), p. 88, nr. 68. It is in this context of plea and assurance, perhaps, that we can understand a remarkable illumination in the Grandes Heures of Jean of Berry (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. lat. 919, fol. 96), in which Berry, accompanied by his guardian angel, kneels in an initial below a larger illustration in which he and some companions are ushered through the gates of Paradise by none other than St Peter. See Meiss, op. cit. (note 49), vol. 1, pt. 1, pp. 69-71, for a discussion of this illumination, and the color-plate in pt. 2, fig. 231.
panel paintings as well, all of which suggests that Rolin was not as presumptuous as sometimes thought when he had himself depicted being blessed by the Christ Child. Indeed, a prayer in Matins of the Little Office entreats, “May the Virgin Mary with her loving child bless us.”

The above observations hardly exhaust the subject of devotional portraits and their several functions in the late middle ages, and we plan to address other aspects of this subject in the future. Nevertheless, we hope to have demonstrated that while Rolin may well have been concerned with the “self-fashioning” of an image of himself to be admired by posterity, he probably also had more fundamental matters in mind. Since the Rolin Madonna was destined for display in the family chapel of a church to whose restoration and upkeep the chancellor himself had generously contributed, it helped to remind the priests celebrating Mass of their obligations to him, and it reinforced the plea inscribed on his tomb slab below for prayers from the faithful in general. His surrogate was also present at the Mass and continued to pray to the Virgin in his absence. These functions would have been fulfilled all the more effectively because of Jan van Eyck’s almost uncanny ability to recreate the visible world in paint. While earlier donor portraits often seem generalized, bearing, we may assume, only a vague resemblance to their prototypes, it must have seemed to visitors to Rolin’s family chapel that it was not Rolin’s effigy but the chancellor himself, in person, who kneels in the sacred space depicted in the panel. And when he in turn gazed upon this image, the chancellor must have taken great comfort in the thought that long after his own body had been consigned to its grave, to await the Resurrection and Judgment, his surrogate self, so miraculously immune from mortal decay, would continue to praise the Virgin and entreat her intervention on behalf of his soul, and from the Child receive the promise of its salvation.

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94 Among panel paintings in which the donor is blessed by the Christ Child, the Museo Correr (Venice) alone contains the following examples: one of the early fifteenth-century Venetian school, a second attributed to Pietro Duia (doc. 1520-1529), and a third attributed to Marco Basaiti, late fifteenth to early sixteenth century.
96 Purtle, op. cit. (note 41), p. 71, and note 38, where she notes that this prayer can be found in many copies of the Little Office made in Flanders in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.
97 That Rolin’s portrait had this function has also been suggested, albeit tentatively, by Dhanens, op. cit. (note 3), p. 269; and O. Pacht, Van Eyck: die Begründer der altniederländischen Malerei, ed. M. Schmidt-Dengler, Munich 1989, p. 86.