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Christine de Pizan

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Illustration from *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 1405

CHRISTINE DE PIZAN

By Aurora Brown

In the late medieval period, there lived a woman named Christine de Pizan. She wrote a book called *The Book of the City of Ladies*. This was a book about women. It was a book about all the amazing things women brought into the world. Her book focused solely on the women and the infinite splendor that they brought into the world. In building this City of Ladies, she created a refuge for women to flock to in the future during a time when the world was dangerous for women.

France, during the time Christine de Pizan lived, was in turmoil. The end of the 14th century and the beginning of the 15th century saw the tail end of the Great Schism and the beginning of the Reformation. The Hundred Years War was still going strong, and France itself was engaged in a complicated and tumultuous civil war¹. Pizan, born the daughter of the court astrologist and later wife to the royal notary, was surrounded by political intrigue.² While the Great Schism and the Hundred Years War were very influential and intertwined with the events in France, Christine de Pizan focused her writing on the situation in France; therefore the civil war will be the main focus in this exploration of the context surrounding her work.

Charles V, King of France, was seen as one of the greater kings at the time. Pizan herself wrote a book called *The Book of the Deeds and Good Practices of the Wise King Charles V* memorializing him after his death. She also crafted the piece in the hopes of influencing the current leaders at the time of publication.³ She made comments about the state of France using this biography. “France, which Charles V had left restored and prosperous when he died in 1380, soon fell upon evil

¹ William T. Waugh. *A History of Europe 1378-1494*. A History of Medieval and Modern Europe, 4. London: Methuen, 1949: 7.

² Katharina M. Wilson and Nadia Margolis. *Women in the Middle Ages : An Encyclopedia*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2004: 188.

³J. H. Burns. *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought C. 350-C. 1450*. The Cambridge History of Political Thought. Cambridge Cambridgeshire: Cambridge University Press, 1988: 489.

days.”⁴ This was due to many reasons but began with the regents. His son was only eleven at the time and Charles V left clear instructions for who was to be regent. The Duke of Anjou, the eldest of Charles V’s three brothers, rightly claimed this role until Charles VI turned 14 and came of age. During this time, the three brothers, the Duke of Anjou, the Duke of Burgundy, and the Duke of Berry, placed high taxes on the people ignited severe unrest and several uprisings.⁵

When Charles VI came of age, he used his uncles’ advice until he could retain some of his own freedom. When he was 23 Charles VI began to have violent hallucinations. His brother, Louis, the Duke of Orleans, became a paramount advisor to the king as the times of lucidity became shorter and shorter. One scholar noted [f]or France it had been better if the King had died at the time of the first crisis. Nothing could have been worse for the country than the situation created by the character of his disorder.”⁶

Throughout the initial failings of Charles VI’s mind, France experienced several rebellions and consistent inconsistency with the English, fluctuating between war and peace for many years. The two factions vying for power over Charles VI’s regency were the Orleanists, under Charles VI’s brother, Louis, and the Burgundians, under his uncle, Philip the Bold and after his death in 1404, his cousin Jean the Fearless. Charles VI’s wife, Queen Isabel Bavaria, held some sway among the factions for regency. This is why when Philip the Bold died and Isabel’s favor turned toward Duke Louis and the Orleanists, Jean the Fearless took some extreme measures to reduce their power.

In 1407, “Duke Louis was set upon in the streets of Paris by a gang of armed men, who stabbed him to death.”⁷ Jean the Fearless, Duke of Burgundy confessed to the Dukes of Anjou and Berry, his uncles, that he had ordered the murder and promptly fled Paris. This began the period

⁴ James Westfall Thompson. *The Middle Ages, 300-1500*. 2d ed. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1932: 976.

⁵ William T. Waugh. *A History of Europe 1378-1494*. A History of Medieval and Modern Europe, 4. London: Methuen, 1949: 10-11.

⁶ William T. Waugh. *A History of Europe 1378-1494*. A History of Medieval and Modern Europe, 4. London: Methuen, 1949: 24.

⁷ William T. Waugh. *A History of Europe 1378-1494*. A History of Medieval and Modern Europe, 4. London: Methuen, 1949: 30.

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of violent civil war in France. The name of the opposing faction changed from Orleanists to Armagnacs when the son of the murdered Duke, Charles, was married to Count Armagnac's daughter. They declared a need for revenge upon the Burgundians and violence commenced. Both sides sought the aid of Henry IV, King of England and invited the foreign army to pillage the French countryside along with their own soldiers when they were not fighting battles.⁸

Once Henry gained a foothold in France for himself, the French tried to stop his advancing further but the two factions could not work together well enough. This led to the infamous battle of Agincourt in 1415. The French sustained high casualties even though they were the larger and better equipped force. Eventually, Henry took further steps into France. Both sides tried to create a truce with Henry and each other but it repeatedly failed. Queen Isabel had been exiled by Charles VI during one of his moments of lucidity which promoted her to ally herself with Jean the Fearless against her son, the Dauphin and the Argamac. Together they seized Paris and the king while the Dauphin escaped. She declared herself regent and appointed Duke Jean to be the governor. He made himself the hero of France, repelling the English.⁹

Once again, the two factions tried to work together when they could not displace the English by themselves. This never happened because the Argamacs tricked the Duke of Burgundy into a trap meeting with the Dauphin where then killed him. The new Duke of Burgundy, Philip, gave all his efforts and allegiance to the English, along with Isabel and her daughter Catherine. The two made a Treaty with Henry that upon his marrying Princess Catherine, he would be declared regent and heir of Charles VI. He married Princess Catherine in 1420 and began to institute his own rule. This created a third faction; a piece of the Burgundians broke off, remaining independent of the English. Henry remained in power until he died in 1422. Charles VI died not long after and little Henry VI became king with his regent, John the Duke of Bedford. In the southern part of France, Charles VII was declared king, although he did not have much power at all. The English under Bedford

⁸ William T. Waugh. *A History of Europe 1378-1494*. A History of Medieval and Modern Europe, 4. London: Methuen, 1949: 33.

⁹ William T. Waugh. *A History of Europe 1378-1494*. A History of Medieval and Modern Europe, 4. London: Methuen, 1949: 48.

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continued to conquer more of France until Joan of Arc began her campaign to regain her country with Charles VII.¹⁰

Christine de Pizan lived through these events in the French court as a professional writer. She engages in a diverting debate in the middle of it over a famous book among the nobility, *Romance of the Rose*.¹¹ Written by two authors separated by 40 years, the two parts are very different. David Hult remarked in his book, “Guillaume de Lorris composed the initial four thousand verses about 1235, and Jean de Meun added about seventeen thousand verses, more than four times the original--about 1265.”¹² Lorris’ portion of the book fits squarely in the court romance genre, which well known at the time. Noble women were wooed and admired by court knights who had to face opposition in order to earn the hand of the beautiful lady. In this story, the poet dreams he has fallen in love with a rose because he has been pierced by an arrow of the god of love, but he cannot reach her through the thorns. The rest of the story is about the poet’s attempts to reach the rose but each time was unsuccessful.

Jean de Meun’s addition created more characters who gave long monologues and speeches. The themes were no longer in line with court romance as they created a satire about women and their behavior. He wrote his female characters to be greedy, lustful creatures who will manipulate a man to receive his wealth and portrayed marriage as a miserable fate only the dumbest of men get tricked into. He writes a woman, Reason, who tries to seduce the poet/Lover away from the rose he has been seeking and the book ends with an obscene, barely masked by metaphor, sex scene.¹³

Christine de Pizan read the book but did not make a comment until Jean de Montreuil enthusiastically endorsed the book and the author. She quickly makes her sentiments of horror and disgust towards

¹⁰ William T. Waugh. *A History of Europe 1378-1494*. A History of Medieval and Modern Europe, 4. London: Methuen, 1949: 69.

¹¹ Jean de Meun and Guillaume de Lorris. *The Romance of the Rose*. 1st ed. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1962.

¹² David F. Hult. *Debate of the “Romance of the Rose”*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010: xv.

¹³ Jean de Meun and Guillaume de Lorris. *The Romance of the Rose*. 1st ed. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1962.

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the book known. Thus this paved the way for the Debate of the Romance of the Rose. For several years, the French high society watched as Pizan and her college Jean Gerson wrote letters back and forth with Montreuil and Gontier Col. Christine criticizes the work for its false portrayal of women, its obscenity and encouragement of lascivious behavior, and its potential danger for an innocent reader.¹⁴

Pizan collected the letters and created a pamphlet which she presented to Queen Isabel and the ladies at court. It quickly became the hot topic that distracted everyone from the civil strife. It was because of this debate and other authors with similar views of women that Christine de Pizan wrote her two books, *The Book of the City of Ladies* and *Treasury of the City of Ladies*. A summary of *The Book of the City of Ladies* will be explored more later. Pizan made it her personal goal to combat these misrepresentations of women and their virtues.¹⁵

In doing this she tunes in to an ongoing argument that has been called “The Woman Question”. Authors and philosophers from, Aristotle to Augustine to Aquinas to Boccaccio and Chaucer, have expressed on it. Either in support for women’s good attributes or believing that women are only defective men, these authors gave Christine de Pizan plenty of material to combat even before Jean de Meun’s misogynistic story.

Christine de Pizan’s life and writings were dictated by the state of France around her. She wrote in response to the characters of the French court and their interests. Many of them were her patrons and requested some of her poetry or stories. Many of her other books were directly in response to the civil war ripping the nation apart. Who was Christine de Pizan though?

Christine de Pizan would have never become the well-known and prolific writer she is today without the unfortunate set of circumstances that befell her shortly after tragedy struck the nation. Pizan was born in Italy but moved to France with her family when she was three years old. Her father was to be the court astrologist for Charles V. Her father educated her, against her mother’s wishes, the same as he did his sons. She loved learning. She learned to read Latin and the vernacular languages. This proved vital for her survival once her father

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Jean de Meun and Guillaume de Lorris. *The Romance of the Rose*. 1st ed. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1962.

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and her husband died. Then she began reading and learning every topic she could get her hands on.¹⁶¹⁷

She was married to a court notary when she was young and lived happily with him as a housewife until his death when she was 23 years old. In 1389 her father died and the very next year, her husband was killed by the plague. She was given sole caretaker responsibilities of her mother, three children and niece when her two brothers abandoned her to live on their property in Italy. She was left to find her own source of income as well as fight for the money she was owed by the French court after her husband's death. This is when she picked up her pen and began writing.¹⁸

The first decade of her works is made up of poetry and ballads. She collected her pieces and published *One Hundred Ballads* for the French court. This work was filled with poems about court love, loneliness, and grief.¹⁹ She added to the genre of court love by giving the women in her stories a stronger air. In one of her poems, she expresses "alone am I, to feed myself with weeping./ Alone am I, suffering or at rest./ Alone am I, and this pleases me the best."²⁰ This was different from the forms of court love found in Boccaccio's writings in the *Decameron* and the *Filostrato*²¹ or in Chaucer's writings, like *The Parliament of*

¹⁶ J. H. Burns. *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought C. 350-C. 1450*. The Cambridge History of Political Thought. Cambridge Cambridgeshire: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

¹⁷ Bell, Susan Groag. "Christine De Pizan (1364-1430): Humanism and the Problem of a Studious Woman." *Feminist Studies* 3, no. 3/4 (1976): 175.

¹⁸ Katharina M. Wilson and Nadia Margolis. *Women in the Middle Ages : An Encyclopedia*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2004.

¹⁹ David F. Hult. *Debate of the "Romance of the Rose"*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010.

²⁰ Christine de Pizan and Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski. *The Selected Writings of Christine De Pizan : New Translations, Criticism*. 1st ed. A Norton Critical Edition. New York: W.W. Norton, 1997.

²¹ Giovanni Boccaccio. *The Filostrato of Giovanni Boccaccio*. Translated by Nathaniel Edward Griffin and Arthur Beckwith Myrick. New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1967.

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Birds.²² She was greatly influenced by these writers and references back to them in several of her later works, including *The Book of the City of Ladies*.

Her career really took off when she became engaged in the Debate of the Romance of the Rose in 1399. In an effort to distract the French court, Christine de Pizan published a series of letters she exchanged between herself and a scholar of Jean de Meun misogynistic views of women. Queen Isabel and the French court had access to these letters. After the publishing of the *Debat de la Roman de la Rose*, Christine de Pizan was commissioned to write the biography of Charles V.²³ It is used in history books when they mention the “Wise King Charles V”. It was during this period that she also wrote *The Book of the City of Ladies*.

She used what she had learned from Chaucer’s *The Legend of Good Women*²⁴ and Boccaccio’s *Decameron*²⁵ to write the first history of women. *The Book of the City of Ladies* is a collection of stories about women throughout history up until the early 1400s. She used the storytelling device first prolifically used by Dante in *The Divine Comedy*²⁶ of truth told through dreams. The French court and nobles would have been well-versed in these authors’ styles and using them gave Christine de Pizan credibility as an author.

She also began to write pieces about morality. She wrote *The Three Virtues* (also called *The Treasury of the City of Ladies*) as a sequel

²² Geoffrey Chaucer. *Chaucer's Lesser Poems Complete, in Present-Day English*. Edited by James J Donohue. Dubuque, Iowa: Loras College Press, 1974.

²³ J. H. Burns. *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought C. 350-C. 1450*. The Cambridge History of Political Thought. Cambridge Cambridgeshire: Cambridge University Press, 1988: 489.

²⁴ Geoffrey Chaucer. *Chaucer's Lesser Poems Complete, in Present-Day English*. Edited by James J Donohue. Dubuque, Iowa: Loras College Press, 1974.

²⁵ Kevin Brownlee. "Christine De Pizan's Canonical Authors: The Special Case of Boccaccio." *Comparative Literature Studies* 32, no. 2 (1995): 244-61.

²⁶ Dante Alighieri. *The Divine Comedy*. Translated by Geoffrey Langdale Bickersteth. Oxford: Published for the Shakespeare Head Press by Basil Blackwell, 1965.

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to *The Book of the City of Ladies*. Then she wrote *Moral Teachings to Her Son, Moral Proverbs, Book of Human Integrity* and *The Book of Prudence* between 1400 and 1405.²⁷ This was most likely in response to the civil conflict at the time. There were rebellions occurring among the peasants and then betrayal among the two factions vying for power. Some scholars question if Christine de Pizan's writings about women were written specifically to support and advise Queen Isabel while she tried to mediate between the two Dukes.²⁸

The next portion of Pizan's writings directly relate to the civil conflict of the time. Her political career transitioned from talking about morality among the common folk and nobles to morality within the military. She wrote *Book of Feats of Arms and Chivalry* and *Book of Peace* to expand on some of the comments she made in her biography of Charles V. She also wrote a book on body politics. Many of her ideas are similar to Boccaccio's *Corpus*²⁹ but she takes some of them a bit further when she explores the necessity of the feet of the body or the peasants.^{30,31,32}

Author and scholar, Tracy Adams, believes that it was this belief in the body politic that influenced all of Pizan's books. Christine de Pizan is known to be a monarchist as well as a strong supporter of the

²⁷ Katharina M Wilson and Nadia Margolis. *Women in the Middle Ages : An Encyclopedia*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2004.

²⁸ Tracy Adams. *Christine De Pizan and the Fight for France*. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014.

²⁹ James C Kriesel. *Boccaccio's Corpus : Allegory, Ethics, and Vernacularity*. The William and Katherine Devers Series in Dante and Medieval Italian Literature, Volume 15. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019.

³⁰ Karen Green and C. J Mews. *Healing the Body Politic : The Political Thought of Christine De Pizan*. Disputatio, V. 7. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2005.

³¹ Stephen H Rigby. "The Body Politic in the Social and Political Thought of Christine De Pizan (Abridged Version). Part I: Reciprocity, Hierarchy and Political Authority1." *Cahiers De Recherches Médiévales Et Humanistes*, no. 24 (2012): 461–83.

³² Sandrine Berges. *A Feminist Perspective on Virtue Ethics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015: 76.

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idea of the body politic. Therefore, when Charles VI loses the ability to rule, the rightful regent is his brother, the Duke of Orleans, not his uncle, the Duke of Burgundy. The Duke of Orleans had enough power that Pizan would have simply wanted an end to the conflict. Adams believes this is why Pizan's writings begin with advice to the Queen for mediation, like in *Epistle to the Queen*, and books about peace. However, later in Pizan's writings, when she does not seem to have as much hope for reconciliation, she writes more about Just War and comments on the turbulent state of France. She wrote her own autobiography as well.³³

After the battle of Agincourt in 1415, she wrote some of her last few pieces. Pizan's consolation to the widows of the battle can be found in her *Epistle of the Prison of Human Life* and *Hours of Contemplation*. Once the English overtook Paris in 1420, Christine de Pizan was not heard from for a decade. Perhaps she wrote for herself but there are no records of any of her writings during this time period.³⁴

The last time Christine de Pizan is heard from she had taken refuge in a convent where her daughter was a nun. Her final piece is one of hope for the future of France. In 1429, she wrote the first piece ever written about Joan of Arc: *The Tale of Joan of Arc*. She never found out about the eventual fate of Joan of Arc since she most likely died in a convent in 1430. It is fitting that the woman who wrote the first history of women was also the first person to write about the great female heroine of France. In her tale, she calls for all of France to return to the rightful king, staying consistent with her support of the body politic, as well as blessing the young woman who brought France to deliverance.³⁵

Throughout Christine de Pizan's life, her patriotism stands out. She was a strong woman who was put in a difficult situation and rose above her circumstances. She was the first woman to write professionally in order to support herself and her family. Many scholars call her a proto

³³ Tracy Adams. *Christine De Pizan and the Fight for France*. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014.

³⁴ David Wallace. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*. Edited by Carolyn Dinshaw. 1st ed. Cambridge Companions to Literature. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

³⁵ Christine de Pizan and Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski. *The Selected Writings of Christine De Pizan : New Translations, Criticism*. 1st ed. A Norton Critical Edition. New York: W.W. Norton, 1997.

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feminist, as she advocated for education and equality for women before it was possible or accepted. Her most famous work is *The Book of the City of Ladies* because of its feminist implications. In this book she ardently opposes the misogynistic views and ideologies towards women at the time.

In 1405, Christine de Pizan wrote *The Book of the City of Ladies*.³⁶ Written six hundred years ago, in the Late medieval time period, its relevance may superficially seem inconsequential but it still inspires conversation today within the ongoing puzzle of the “Woman Question”. Pizan’s book begins a new chapter in this ancient discussion by writing the first collection of women’s history.

She begins the book in the first person, having picked up a book to read as a break from her writing. She expected it to be amusing as it was said to be one of the few books she could find that praises women but she quickly became appalled by its misogynistic and false claims about women. The author, Matheolus, described them as deceitful, lustful creatures. Her mind listed all the other authors who had written similar things about women and she regretfully concluded that with so many well educated and respected authors writing the same thing, it must be true. She was horrified and expresses, “this thought inspired such a great sense of disgust and sadness in me that I began to despise myself and the whole of my sex as an aberration in nature.”³⁷

At this point she fell into a distressed sleep. In her dream state, she described three women coming to her to soothe her and build her back up. They told her she had been chosen to build a great city for ladies with their help. The three women were Lady Reason, Lady Rectitude, and Lady Justice. They scolded her despairing and doubting of women: “my dear girl, what has happened to your sense? Have you forgotten that it is in the furnace that gold is refined, increasing in value the more it is beaten and fashioned into different shapes? Don’t you know that it’s the very finest things which are the subject of the most

³⁶ Christine de Pizan. *The Book of the City of Ladies*. London: Penguin Books, 1999.

³⁷ Christine de Pizan. *The Book of the City of Ladies*. London: Penguin Books, 1999: 7.

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intense discussion?”³⁸ She thought back to all the reputable authors who had written horrible things about women and they countered her thoughts by saying, “believe me, despite what you’ve read in books, you’ve never actually *seen* such things because it’s all a pack of outrageous lies.”³⁹ This sets the scene for the rest of the book.

Lady Reason took Pizan away from her sitting room where she had fallen asleep to an area where they would build the City of Ladies. She called this area “The Field of Letters”.⁴⁰ They were there to flatten the ground so the city would have a sturdy, fertile space to build upon. The tool Lady Reason gave to Pizan was the spade of intelligence. While creating a solid foundation, Pizan asked Lady Reason a series of questions about women. She asked why men seem to hate women, are women aberrations of God’s beautiful Nature, and many questions concerning why God created women as he did. She asked why God created women to weep, talk and spin. Are there women gifted with the highest form of knowledge and learning? Can they be leaders and warriors? Have women invented new knowledge? Or displayed good judgement?

Together Lady Reason and Pizan examined each of the false claims about women and Lady Reason gave examples of women throughout time who displayed the characteristics in question. These were the queens of old or noble ladies or the Amazons, the great female warriors of Greece. Greeks, Romans, and Christian women were all listed among those having these virtuous characteristics. Lady Reason countered the false claims and showed that women are not less than men but equal in every way. Then she laid the foundation stone and they began to build the walls. Lady Reason used stories of great women as each stone protecting this beautiful city. She began with a heroic woman who led her people in the defense of the nation. Among the Amazons, she told of some women who were even better in warcraft than the greatest Greek warriors, Hercules and Theseus. In some of her stories,

³⁸ Christine de Pizan. *The Book of the City of Ladies*. London: Penguin Books, 1999: 8.

³⁹ Christine de Pizan. *The Book of the City of Ladies*. London: Penguin Books, 1999: 9.

⁴⁰ Christine de Pizan. *The Book of the City of Ladies*. London: Penguin Books, 1999: 16.

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she told of women who inspired and led men into battle, or governed empires better than men. She told of women who were learned in philosophy, poetry, the sciences, the arts, and inventing. She spent a great deal of time detailing what great things women brought into the world, other than their children. The final stones of the walls told stories of women who were endowed with good judgement, prudence, and cleverness.⁴¹

Then Lady Reason passed Pizan to Lady Rectitude. Together they were going to build the houses and buildings of the city and fill it with people. The finest stones were found to build these houses, women chosen by God to tell the world his truth and honor their parents. Lady Rectitude described Sibyls and prophetesses and their good deeds of speaking prophecy. Christine de Pizan asks why parents want boy children more than girl children. She wondered if it was because boys are more loving or can give back more than girls. Lady Rectitude reassured her this was not so through many stories about women going through difficult struggles because of their love for their parents. It was at this point that the buildings were finished and they were ready to fill the city with people.⁴²

They wanted to fill the city with only the best women. They began with women who loved their husbands immensely. This was to combat all the men who said that women do not love their husbands, especially if they are old and studious husbands. Lady Rectitude filled the city with women who were steadfast, chaste, faithful, and willing to sacrifice anything because of their love for their husbands. She told Pizan about all the women who could hold on to secrets when she was asked if women were capable of holding their tongues. On the other end, she also told stories of men who should have listened to the wise advice of their wives or those who did and succeeded in their endeavors. Lady Rectitude recounted the best stories of women who saved their people and their cities with care, hard work, and willingness to sacrifice themselves. She finished filling the city with women who specifically held virtue, kindness, and generosity as their defining characteristics.

⁴¹ Christine de Pizan. *The Book of the City of Ladies*. London: Penguin Books, 1999: 87.

⁴² Christine de Pizan. *The Book of the City of Ladies*. London: Penguin Books, 1999: 108.

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The final piece of this city of ladies came from Lady Justice. The city needed rulers to create the high towers and fill the palaces. The Queen of the City of Ladies was Mary the mother of Jesus. Then Lady Justice introduced the other women of the New Testament. She told the stories of all the Saints and women who were martyred for Christ or witnessed their children be martyred. Finally, Christine de Pizan addressed all the women of the city. She tells them that the city is built to protect them and defend them if they are worthy of it. If they hear the lies of the world, they must only return back to their city to find the truth again. She advised them not to abuse these truths, they should be humble and servile to their husbands whether he was cruel or kind. She told them to live the virtues found in the city no matter their situation. Pizan challenged that those who are unkind to them will find God's judgement, it is their own virtues they must worry about.⁴³

This book raises some interesting themes as it repurposes the unkind words said about women. Pizan follows the writing trend of the time when her story begins with her falling asleep. She used Lady Reason, Lady Rectitude and Lady Justice to say the things that she herself could not. In one portion of the book with Lady Rectitude, Dream-Pizan asks why men say women are inconstant and Lady Rectitude lists several men who themselves cannot be called constant. She gives many stories of women who are constant as well but this criticism of men was done very delicately and cleverly.

In Jill E. Wagner's commentary on *The Book of the City of Ladies*, she analyzes Pizan's use of what she calls a memory palace. This is the idea that in order to help one remember a story or people better, they should imagine them, traditionally, in a specific room in the memory palace. Christine de Pizan expands this idea to help women remember their history by using a city to hold their collective memory. Wagner remarks that "a reader can mentally picture a part of the city and the virtues of the women within it."⁴⁴

⁴³ Christine de Pizan. *The Book of the City of Ladies*. London: Penguin Books, 1999: 239.

⁴⁴ Jill E. Wagner "Christine De Pizans City of Ladies: A Monumental (Re)Construction of, by, and for Women of All Time." *Medieval Feminist Forum* 44, no. 1 (2008): 76.

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This book defends women in the best way possible: telling their stories. It gives women the support they need in a way that cannot be countered. Pizan gives women hope for their own importance and strength in a world that tells them they are hindrances to men, the true creations of Nature, and only have the purpose of creating more men. She encourages women today with her stories of legendary warrior queens and self-sacrifice. But what were her immediate effects? Did she have any?

Christine de Pizan's influence on the rest of history is not as notable as many other philosophers. Her contributions are more subtle. Even within the feminist community, Wollstonecraft, some 300 years later, is considered the trailblazer and originator of the feminist movement among scholars not Pizan. She was also the first woman in the medieval time period to directly challenge the "dominant misogynistic ideology" of the age.⁴⁵ As the first woman to write professionally and the author of the first historical account of women, Pizan has definitely earned a place among the great female scholars of history.

However, after Pizan's death, female authorship disappeared. She did not immediately influence women who continued this conversation nor did she advocate reform. Many critics of Pizan say that she did not go far enough. One author, Rosalind Brown-Grant, defends her lack of initiative for social reform by reminding those critics of the time period Pizan was writing in. Pizan had to first counter the almost universally accepted misogynistic view of women as inferior and sub-human before she could make any moves towards social reform. Christine de Pizan's books were about teaching women morality so they could live lives that would counter those misogynistic thoughts. Her autobiography was a way to show the world that a woman can succeed in a man's field and maintain the virtues of a woman.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Rosalind Brown-Grant. *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women : Reading beyond Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000: 2.

⁴⁶ Rosalind Brown-Grant. *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women : Reading beyond Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000: 6.

Tenor of Our Times

Christine de Pizan's place in history is a preparatory one. She lived at the end of the medieval time period and cleared the way for women to begin taking a strong leadership role in the Renaissance and in her own time. Queen Isabel of France declared herself regent for her husband, King Charles VI. Then, Joan of Arc led the way for France to find their patriotism once again and remove the English from their borders. Only twenty years after Christine de Pizan's death and Joan of Arc's victories, Isabel I of Castile united Spain by arranging her own marriage.⁴⁷

Isabel of Castille raised her daughter to be strong as well. Catherine of Aragon married into the English royalty. Even though she did not remain queen for her whole life due to Henry VIII's obsession with a male heir, she was a strong queen and rallied the troops to resist a Scottish invasion. Elizabeth I is also a well known strong queen. Born a century after Christine de Pizan's death, Elizabeth would have been a Queen fit to live in the City of Ladies. Catherine de Medici and Mary, Queen of Scots were also strong women of this time period. Anne of France wrote a letter to her daughter that was very similar in theme to Christine de Pizan's *Three Virtues*.⁴⁸

While Pizan may not be credited with as much as other trailblazer feminists like Wollstonecraft, she cleared the ground for women in the future to take more action. She advocated for education and equality. She directly defended against misogynistic ideologies of the men at that time. She lived during a civil war and advised the queen to take action in order to save their nation. She was forced to watch as invaders took control. In the face of conflict and opposition, Christine de Pizan was the first person to write about Joan of Arc and usher in the new era of strong women leading the world into the future.

⁴⁷ Sarah Gristwood. "Game of Queens: When Women Ruled Renaissance Europe." HistoryExtra. BBC History, June 28, 2019. <https://www.historyextra.com/period/renaissance/game-of-queens-when-women-ruled-renaissance-europe/>.

⁴⁸ Sarah Gristwood. "Game of Queens: When Women Ruled Renaissance Europe." HistoryExtra. BBC History, June 28, 2019. <https://www.historyextra.com/period/renaissance/game-of-queens-when-women-ruled-renaissance-europe/>