



LORI J. WALTERS

Mother-Daughter Conflicts and Their Resolution in the Works of Christine de Pizan

Overview

The early fifteenth-century French writer Christine de Pizan had personal conflicts with both her mother and her daughter, as we know from the „autobiographical‘ passages included in works she composed from 1402 to 1405. My focus in this paper is on Christine’s mother’s well-known disapproval of her daughter’s desire to pursue serious study. In the first part I consider, however, Christine’s relationship with her own daughter Marie, which was also originally marked by disagreement. It thus provides a framework for understanding Christine’s occasionally conflicted relationship with her own mother, which is the proper focus of the second part of my paper. In the third part I examine the author’s elaborate staging of the conflict with her mother, as well as its implicit resolution, as worked out in her „Cité des Dames“ of 1405. In the fourth part I speculate about how the mother-daughter conflicts could have been resolved. In the fifth part I consider how the resolution of these mother-daughter conflicts fits into the ‚generational consciousness‘ of the time. My conclusion is that Christine’s examples of mother-daughter conflict resolution were models for the spiritual kinship and emotional bonding that she, following the thinking of the theologian Jean Gerson, believed was needed to mold the nascent French nation into one big Christian family.

Christine's conflict with her daughter Marie and its resolution

Christine's daughter was Marie de Castel, who in 1397 became a Dominican nun at the royal abbey of Saint-Louis-de-Poissy. In the first work in which Marie appears, Christine's „Dit de Poissy“ of 1400, there is no indication of any conflict between mother and daughter. However, a passage in the „Advision Cristine“, which she composed several months after the „Cité des Dames“,¹ indicates a conflict that predated Marie's entry into Poissy. Dame Philosophie says to the protagonist Christine:

Ton premier fruit, qui est une fille donnée a Dieu et a son service, rendue par inspiration divine de sa pure volonté et oultre ton gré en l'Eglise et noble religion de dames a Poissy, ou elle en fleur de jeunee et tres grant beauté se porte tant notablement en vie contemplative et devocion que la joie de la relation de sa belle vie souvent te rendt grant reconfort, et quant d'elle mesmes tu reçois les tres doulces et devotes lettres discrettes et saiges qu'elle t'envoie pour ta consolacion, esuelles elle jeunete et innocent t'induit et amonnesta a haïr le monde et despriser prosperité.
(„Advision“ 3, 17)

„Your first offspring, who is a daughter consecrated to God and to his service, entered the Church by divine inspiration, of her own will and against your wishes, and joined the convent of the ladies of Poissy. There, in the flower of youth and very great beauty she conducts herself so nobly in a life of contemplation and piety that the joy of hearing about her beautiful life often brings you great comfort, as when you receive the very sweet and pious, judicious and wise letters, which she sends to console you, in which she in her youth and innocence encourages and instructs you to despise the world and disdain prosperity.“

Here Dame Philosophie reveals that Marie made her vows entirely against Christine's wishes.²

The dialogue between Dame Philosophie and the protagonist gives us some clues as to how the conflict was resolved. Christine tacitly acknowledges being misguided in her attempts to discourage Marie's dedication to a life of contemplation and devotion. She has even learned from the example set by her daughter, as is

1 CHRISTINE DE PIZAN, *Le Livre de l'Advision-Cristine*, ed. Christine RENO/Liliane DULAC, Paris 2000. All references will be made to this edition.

2 In her „Dit de Poissy“ she describes herself walking hand-in-hand with her daughter during the visit she made to the abbey. CHRISTINE DE PIZAN, *The Love Debate Poems of Christine de Pizan*, ed. Barbara K. ALTMANN, Gainesville/Florida 1998, v. 237, p. 211.

evident in Dame Philosophie's comment that „the joy of hearing about her beautiful life often brings you great comfort.“ Marie sends sweet and pious letters to console her mother, exhorting her to despise the world and its riches. Marie exemplifies the contemplative life of the cloister, which Christine in her „Trois Vertus“ 1, 6 acknowledges to be the highest form of human existence.³ But in that same work (1, 7) she also shows a high regard for the mixed life of contemplation and action, which is the life chosen by herself and her mother.

Christine's conflict with her mother and its resolution

Christine's mother, who remains unnamed throughout her *oeuvre*, was the daughter of Tommaso Mondino da Forlì, who had studied at the University of Bologna with Christine's father Tommaso.⁴ In her „Advison Cristine“ the author has Dame Philosophie lavish praise on the way that her mother's devotion to the contemplative life fuels her life in the world.⁵

Que diray je de ta tres noble mere? Sces tu point de femme plus vertueuse? Remembre toy depuis sa jeunesse jusques au jour d'ui se vie contemplative constamment ou service de Dieu, quelque occupacion que elle oncques eust, l'a nul jour l'aissee? Je croy que non. O quel noble femme! Comme sa vie est glorieuse, comme de celle qui nulle tribulacion oncques ne suppedita ne brisa par impacience son tres bon corage! Et quel exemple de vivre! en toute vertu pour toy, se tu bien t'y mires! Avises combien grant grace Dieu te fait encore, avec tout, de si noble mere laisser vivre en ta compaignie en sa vieillesce, plaine de tant de vertus. Et quantes fois elle t'a recomfortee et ramenee de tes impaciences a congnoistre ton Dieu! Et se tu te plains que peine seuffre ton cuer pour ce que vers elle te semble ne pues faire comme il appartient, je

3 CHRISTINE DE PIZAN, *Le livre des trois vertus*, ed. Charity Cannon WILLARD/Eric HICKS, Paris 1989; Christine de Pizan. *A Medieval Woman's Mirror of Honor. The Treasury of the City of Ladies*, ed. Madeleine Pelner COSMAN, trans. Charity Cannon WILLARD, New Jersey/New York 1989.

4 Mondino da Forlì was perhaps related to the famous anatomist at the University of Bologna, Mondino de Luzzo. He helped establish Christine's father in Venice. Charity Cannon WILLARD, *Christine de Pizan. Her Life and Works. A Biography*, New York 1984, p. 18.

5 She first has her describe Christine's mother as a *femme de si parfaite honneur et si noble vie et bel estat, comme elle est et a toujours esté* („woman of such perfect honor and of such a noble life and good station, as she is and has always been“, „Advison“ 3, 14). Then she devotes a large part of Dame Philosophie's subsequent lecture on the gifts Fortune has given her („Advison“ 3, 17) to the extended encomium to her mother that I give above.

te dis que ce vouloir avec la pacience est meritoire a toy et a elle, et d'elle sans faille la digne conversacion et vie eslevé la fait estre clere entre les femmes; c'est chose notoire et tres beneuree. („Advision“ 3, 17)

„What can I tell you about your very noble mother? Do you know a more virtuous woman? Have you forgotten that from her youth to this very day, she has never abandoned the contemplative life, constantly serving God, whatever she was doing, never abandoning it, not one day? I don't believe you have. Oh what a noble woman! How praiseworthy is her life! No trial has ever overwhelmed her, nor has impatience ever made her lose heart. What an example her virtuous life is for you, were you to take it for your model! See what other great grace God gives you, along with that one, by allowing such a noble mother to live in your company in her old age, full of so many virtues. How many times has she comforted you and made you less impatient, helping you understand God's wishes! And if you complain that your heart suffers because it seems to you that you cannot do as much for her as you would like, I tell you that this wish, accompanied by patience, is meritorious for you and for her, and that without a doubt her worthy conduct and her noble life make her illustrious among women. This is a piece of common knowledge and a very good one at that.“

The important line begins with „Have you forgotten?“ Christine's mother sets a good example for her daughter, for whom patience was a difficult virtue to acquire. Dame Philosophie tries to convince the protagonist that she is indeed fortunate to have such a mother living with her. She makes special praise of the advice and comfort Christine's mother gave her. The dialogue between Dame Philosophie and the protagonist lets the reader in on the kind of reasoning that must have taken place in the mind of the real person Christine as she struggled to appreciate a mother who had originally been dead set against her desire for learning.

Christine expresses her mother's disapproval of her desire to study in her „Cité des Dames“. As has been noted by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, it is in this work „that the mother appears in the most negative light as the prime obstacle to Christine's education“.⁶ Dame Raison touches upon the conflict in a discussion with the protagonist:

6 Renate BLUMENFELD-KOSINSKI, Christine de Pizan and the Misogynistic Tradition, in: The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, trans. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski/Kevin Brownlee, New York 1997, p. 297–311, at p. 306, reprint: *Romanic Review* 81.3 (1990).

*Ton pere qui fu grant naturien et philosophe n'oppinoit pas que femmes vaulsissent pis par science, ains de ce que encline te veoit aux lettres, si que tu scez, y prenoit grant plaisir. Mais l'oppinion femenine de ta mere qui te vouloit occuper en fillasses, selon l'usage commun des femmes, fu cause de l'empeschement que ne fus en ton enfance plus avant boutee es sciences et plus en parfont. Mais, si que dit le proverbe ci devant ja allegué, 'Ce que Nature donne, nul ne peut tollir', ne te pot ta mere si empecher le sentir des sciences que tu par inclinacion naturelle n'en ayes recueilli a tout le moins des petites gouttelletes. Desquelles choses je tiens que tu ne cuides pas pis valoir, ains le te repputes a grant tresor. Et sanz faille tu as cause.*⁷ („Cité“ 2, 36)

„Your father, who was a great scientist and philosopher, did not believe that learning reduced a woman's worth. Indeed, as you know, it gave him great pleasure to see that you took so readily to your studies. But your mother's feminine opinion that you should spend your time spinning, as women usually do, was the reason that you did not advance more during your childhood. But, according to that proverb that we've already quoted, 'What Nature gives cannot be taken away', your mother could not prevent you from picking up a few little droplets of knowledge here and there, thanks to your own natural inclination for learning. It's evident to me that you do not think you are less worthy for having this knowledge. Instead you seem to consider it to be a great treasure, and quite rightly so.“

Whereas her father encouraged her studies, Christine's mother wanted her to devote herself to more traditionally feminine occupations such as sewing. Although Christine's mother was initially opposed to her daughter's desire to acquire an education, she could not extinguish Christine's natural inclination for learning. As we know from Christine's description of her in the „Mutacion de Fortune“ of 1403, her mother represents Nature: *On l'appelle dame Nature. / Mere est celle a toute personne: / Dieu freres et seurs tous nous sonne* („She is called Lady Nature, / she is the mother of every person; / God calls us all brothers and sisters“; vv. 366-67). As Dame Nature, Christine's mother is a figure of natural motherhood. We can infer that she recognized that since Christine inherited from both parents, as do all children, she would be unable to quell her daughter's natural inclination to become a scholar like her father.

That recognition is expressed, I believe, in the symbiotic relationship Christine's mother has with her daughter in the opening scene of the „Cité des Dames“. Whe-

⁷ Ibid., p. 306, adds that in the „Chemin“ (vv. 1670–1680) Christine specifies that her mother's objections to her early childhood education will forever prevent her from reaching the highest rungs of learning.

reas Christine fills the role of scholar and family breadwinner formerly occupied by her father Tommaso, her mother acts like the traditional housewife who prepares the evening meal. The conflict between mother and daughter has been tacitly resolved. The narrator who greets readers in the text's opening lines has undergone the learning processes experienced by an earlier self, the text's protagonist. By this time the pursuit of knowledge has become Christine's daily occupation, with her mother playing an ancillary but important role by preparing the dinner that will fortify her hardworking daughter against the antifeminist slings she will read about the next day. This provides an explanation for the elaborate praise that Christine lavishes upon her mother in the „Advision“.

The quotations we have viewed from the „Advision“ and the „Cité“ reveal that Christine comes to consider devotion more important than study or the active life. We can assume that Christine learns, either through inner debate, advice given by a spiritual advisor, or both, to appreciate the value of contemplation, to practice it, and to propose examples of her persona engaging in contemplation to her readers. The contemplative process is represented by the structure of these two texts, each featuring a protagonist who undergoes a learning process by means of a vision or a series of visions and a narrator who recounts her visions in order to effect change in the world. The author Christine writes down what she has conceived in her mind and then accomplishes the actions that the writing otherwise calls for. This can entail the presentation of the book to her patrons, which Christine figures explicitly in other texts exhibiting a similar two-part structure of narrator and protagonist such as the „Chemin de Lonc Etude“.

Christine also gives us to understand that people engage in contemplative devotion, study, and the active life in varying proportions. Her daughter Marie becomes a ‚pure‘ contemplative, whereas her mother employs contemplative devotion to sustain her life in the world. As a married woman with three children Christine was originally given over to the active life. The deaths of her father and her husband changed all that. Christine became more contemplative, undoubtedly through the influence exerted by her mother and daughter. The two generations come together in their regard for contemplative devotion, which theologians like Jean Gerson believed to be superior to intellect but which intellect could reinforce through study. Christine's contemplation, however, assumed a more studious dimension than it had for her mother. (We cannot say anything about Marie, since we have scant information about her activities at Poissy, although we do know that many of the nuns

there took part in the translation of Latin texts and in book production.⁸) Christine's mother also apparently underwent a learning process by which she came to appreciate her daughter's imitation of her father Tommaso's studious inclinations, especially after Christine had combined study with greater devotion to prayerful contemplation.

Christine's staging of the resolution of mother-daughter conflict in the „Cité des Dames“

In her „Cité des Dames“ Christine implicitly resolves the conflict she had with her mother through an elaborate staging of gender identity in which biological lineage becomes symbolic of mutual understanding between women and indeed among all people.⁹ Christine opens the work by creating an image of herself as the contemplative, studious *seulette* („solitary little woman“) in her reader's mind's eye: *Un jour comme je fusse seant en ma cele, environnee de plusieurs volumes de diverses matieres* („One day, I was sitting in my study surrounded by many books on various subjects“).¹⁰ Christine evokes a picture of her past self to assist her reader in following her mental processes in order to arrive at the same conclusions that she, as the text's narrator, has already drawn from them. Otherwise said, we see her learning how to respond to the problem of antifeminism in literature and in life through the process of contemplation, a process in which she represents her mother as helping her out. We see her in her study as she picks up a book by Matheolus, which, she has heard, is generous in its praise of women, to thumb through it rather distractedly in the belief that it will lift her spirits after the hard day she has spent in her study weighing *la pesanteur des sentences de divers auteurs* („the weighty sayings of many authors“). When her mother calls her to dinner, she puts the book aside, vowing to return to it the next day.

8 Joan Margaret NAUGHTON, *Manuscripts from the Dominican Monastery of Saint-Louis de Poissy*, Ph.D./The University of Melbourne 1995, p. 120 and 133.

9 For a different view of the figure of the mother in Christine's works, see Bernard RIBÉMONT, *Christine de Pizan et la figure de la mère*, in: Christine 2000. *Studies Offered to Angus Kennedy*, ed. John Campbell and Nadia Margolis, Amsterdam 2000, p. 148–161.

10 CHRISTINE DE PIZAN, *La Città delle Dame*, ed. Earl Jeffrey RICHARDS/ trans. Patrizia CARAFFI, Milan 1997, p. 40. All citations from this text will be taken from this edition.

Christine's focus on the female and maternal body is revealed by the seemingly insignificant but ultimately telling detail that her mother's call to supper interrupts her reading. By calling her mother *la bonne mere qui me porta* („the good mother who bore me“)¹¹, Christine emphasizes the physical bond that unites her to her mother, a bond reinforced by the fact that her mother is calling her to refresh her earthly body by eating the dinner she has prepared for her. The mother's gesture has been viewed as intrusive or disruptive.¹² But since Christine makes the comment about her mother in hindsight, after having become the text's narrator, it would appear instead that she approves of her mother's intervention. The gesture has symbolic connotations. It is indicative of a moral symbiosis between Christine's mother who prepares the meal for her daughter who, as we know from „Advision“ 3, 17, is supporting her mother (as well as several other family members) through her writing.

In constructing her arguments against antifeminism in the „Cité des Dames“, Christine stages a debate about whether woman is more properly a vessel of virtue or of vice, a debate grounded in prevailing notions of the female body, a body connecting the female author to her biological mother whom she evokes in the work's opening scene. Over the course of the „Cité des Dames“ Christine transforms her textual persona and her mother's from images of the sinful Eve into images of the virtuous Mary. At the beginning of the work the Christine-character contemplates the judgment that men have passed upon women throughout the ages: *les meurs femenins [sont] enclins et plains de tous les vices* („feminine behavior is inclined toward and full of every vice,“ 1, 1). With her head bowed in shame and her eyes filled with tears, the Christine character is a figure of the remorseful Eve about to be expelled from the earthly paradise.

Then, in a scene that has been appropriately described as an „annunciation to Christine“¹³, the Trois Vertus (Dames Raison, Droiture, and Justice) appear to clear up her misconceptions about women's nature. Thereupon ensues a debate between the protagonist and Dame Raison, which is dependent upon Genesis 3,20, where

11 This is almost identical to the way she had referred to her in her „Chemin de Long Etude“ of 1402–1403 (*De la mere qui me porta*, „Of the mother who bore me,“ v. 6395), CHRISTINE DE PIZAN, *Le Chemin de longue Etude*, ed. and trans. Andrea TARNOWSKI, Paris 2000.

12 BLUMENFELD-KOSINSKI, Christine de Pizan and the Misogynistic Tradition (as note 6), p. 307.

13 V. A. KOLVE, The Annunciation to Christine. Authorial Empowerment in The Book of the City of Ladies, in: *Iconography at the Crossroads*, ed. Brian Cassidy, Princeton 1993, p. 171–196.

the name 'Eve' is said to mean „mother of all the living“.¹⁴ The Christine character undergoes a lengthy period of self-examination. She says: *je pris a examiner moy mesmes et mes meurs comme femme naturelle* („I began to examine myself and my behavior as a natural woman“, 1, 1).

As noted by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, the term „natural woman“ is a key one for Christine. It has, however, an Augustinian sense overlooked in prior scholarship. We know that Christine had St Augustine in mind while writing the „Cité des Dames“ because she mentions his name several times, and her work as a whole shows the marked influence of his „City of God“. The term „natural woman“ in fact refers to the „City of God“ 22, 17 in which St Augustine affirms, and against opinions to the contrary, that woman's body will retain its sex at the resurrection, just as will man's. He supports his argument with the claim that „the sex of a woman is not a vice, but nature“. When Christine calls herself a „natural woman“, she invokes a piece of wisdom that must have been well known in court circles that considered the „City of God“ to be its highest authority after Holy Scripture. Christine's readers were acquainted with the monarchy's hierarchy of authorities because she had stated it outright, in her biography of Charles V of 1404, and she would do so again in her „Livre de Paix“ of 1412.¹⁵

St Augustine not only provides Christine with a defense of women, but he additionally provides her with a method for transforming the natural body into a virtuous one. In „City“ 22, 22 he goes on to add that the natural human body has to be „edified“ to virtue through the efforts of the Church.¹⁶ In St Augustine's eyes, woman's body is equivalent to man's body, both in its initial sinfulness, and in its potential to be edified. For St Augustine, Eve represents the human body that each one of

14 This is connected to the way she describes her mother in „Mutacion“, vv. 366–368. The Holy Bible translated from the Latin Vulgate (referred to as the Douay-Rheims translation), notes by Bishop Richard CHALLONER, preface by William H. McCLELLAN, S.J. 1941/New York 1945.

15 Christine tells us so in her description of Charles V's translation campaign, found in „Charles V“ 3, 12, and in her „Livre de Paix“ 3, 18. See Lori J. WALTERS, Constructing Reputations. Fame and Memory in Charles V and L'Advison-Cristine, in: Fame. The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe, ed. Thelma Fenster/Daniel Lord Smail, Ithaca, 2003, S. 118–142. On the „natural woman“, see also BLUMENFELD-KOSINSKI, Christine de Pizan and the Misogynistic Tradition (as note 6), p. 308–311.

16 AUGUSTINE, The City of God, ed. and trans. R.W. DYSON, Cambridge 1998. I develop this argument at length in CHRISTINE DE PIZAN, l'idéologie royale et la traduction, trans. Renée-Claude BREITENSTEIN, in: D'une écriture à l'autre. Les femmes et la traduction sous l'Ancien Régime, ed. Jean-Philippe Beaulieu, Ottawa 2004, p. 31–52.

us must reshape according to the Church's doctrines.¹⁷ Christine plays on his idea when she affirms that human superiority is determined not by sexual difference but by the degree to which one has perfected one's nature and morals, and that human-kind gained far more from Mary than it had lost through Eve („Cité" 1, 9).

Christine emphasizes ‚nature' when in the opening lines of Book 3, she has the Virgin Mary, speaking in the first-person, accept the invitation of Dames Raison, Droiture, and Justice to enter into the highest towers of the „cité". Dame Nature, who tacitly becomes a fourth Virtue, is now included in the group. This follows the Augustinian logic that woman's body is not vice, but nature. As such, it can be transformed into a virtuous second nature that can become, as we say today, ‚second nature'. Christine's exemplary transformation from a figure of an erring Eve into a virtuous Mary is connected to the resolution of her conflicts with her mother, who, as we saw, represents not only Christine's mother but also Eve, the mother of all humanity. By the end of the „Cité des Dames" Christine and her mother have become avatars of Mary. Our examination of the references to Christine's mother in the „Advison" allows us to understand that Christine's transformation was brought about by appreciating her mother's good qualities and by following her mother's example of contemplative devotion. It also indicates that Christine wants her readers to view her mother as a type of the Church. Despite Christine's mother's lack of intellectual pretensions, through her words and good example she was able to raise a virtuous daughter.

Speculation about how the mother-daughter conflicts were resolved

Christine's references to her mother in „Advison" 3, 18 allow us to imagine that their reconciliation was a result of conversations they had with each other. What could have sparked this dialogue between mother and daughter? We can speculate that it was initiated, at least in part, by the deaths of Christine's father Tommaso around 1387, and of her husband Etienne in 1390. The conversations that naturally would have taken place between mother and daughter after these deaths apparently

¹⁷ Christine returns to this point in the opening line of „Le Livre de Policie" of 1406–1407 when she says: If it is possible that virtue can be born from vice, then I am pleased in this to be as passionate as a woman can be, CHRISTINE DE PIZAN, *Le Livre du Corps de Policie*, ed. Angus J. KENNEDY, Paris 1988.

transformed Christine's mother into a person more sympathetic to her daughter's vocation and Christine into a person more appreciative of her mother's good qualities. From her mother Christine learned how to exhibit patience in adversity, which, as she tells us in the „Advisiön“, was not one of her virtues. Christine returns repeatedly to the theme of the need for patience in the midst of tribulation in her „Epistre de la Prison de Vie Humaine“ of ca. 1417 and her „Heures de contemplacion sur la passion nostre seigneur“ of ca. 1420, both texts that Christine addressed to women who had suffered because of the death, wounding, or imprisonment of male relatives in recent Anglo-French conflicts.

I suspect that the process of reconciliation between mother and daughter was facilitated by spiritual counsel given to Christine by Gerson, her ally in the debate on the „Roman de la Rose“. I follow Jeff Richards¹⁸ in believing that an unnamed *femelette* („little or weak woman“) mentioned in his „Montaigne de contemplation“ de 1400 was in fact Christine.¹⁹ From that reference we can perhaps infer that Gerson gave Christine spiritual advice over an extended period of time. Gerson makes reference to the importance of acquiring patience in many of his vernacular works and sermons, in particular in his Good Friday sermon, the second one in which he mentions the *seulette*. We have no reason to believe that Christine would not have followed the rest of the court to hear him preach, since he was one of most electrifying orators of his time. The reference *si tu bien t'y mires* („Were you to take it for your model“) in „Advisiön“ 3, 17, may come right from one of his most popular works in the vernacular, his „Miroir de bonne vie“, which begins, *Mirez vous cy, mirez, mirez* (loosely translated as „Imitate this model, imitate it, imitate it“).²⁰ In this text in which Gerson asks all of the worldly estates to pattern themselves on models of virtue, he singles out queens and *bourgeoises* for special improvement. It is important to note that he also issues a pointed message to the queen in his Annunciation

18 E. J. RICHARDS, Christine de Pizan and Jean Gerson. An Intellectual Friendship, in: Christine de Pizan 2000, ed. J. Campbell/N. Margolis, Amsterdam 2000, p. 197–208.

19 See Lori J. WALTERS, The Figure of the *Seulette* in the Works of Christine de Pizan and Jean Gerson, in: „Desireuse de plus avant enquerre...“ Christine de Pizan 2006. Volume en hommage à James Laidlaw. Actes du VI^e colloque international sur Christine de Pizan (université Paris 7-Denis Diderot, 20–24 juillet 2006), ed. Liliane Dulac/Anne Paupert/Christine Reno/Bernard Ribémont, Paris 2008, p. 119–140, and Gerson and Christine, Poets, in: Poetry, Knowledge and Community in Late Medieval France, ed. Rebecca Dixon/Finn E. Sinclair, Cambridge 2008, p. 69–81.

20 JEAN GERSON, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Palémon GLORIEUX, 10 vols., Paris 1960–1973, vol. 7, p. 280–285.

sermon, the first one in which he mentions the *seulette*. In the „Cité des Dames“, as in many of her other texts, Christine appears to be working out Gerson’s idea that women have the responsibility for setting the country’s standards for wisdom and virtue. We can even ask ourselves if the advice that she puts into the mouth of Dame Philosophie in her „Advison Cristine“ was not in fact a paraphrase of the spiritual counsel that she actually received from a confessor or a priest, perhaps even from Gerson himself.

Mother-Daughter Conflicts and Generational Consciousness

As I come to the crux of my argument, it is time for me to clarify the critical assumptions that underly this study. I place myself in the line of thought of Rosalind Brown-Grant, who in her „Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women“ concluded that

„Christine’s achievement as a champion of women therefore lies not in her anticipation of the strategies which later feminists would employ, but rather in her prolonged critical engagement with the dominant ideology of her own day.“²¹

How, then, are we to identify the ‚dominant ideology‘ of Christine’s day? To a greater extent than in any other written source, that ideology was expressed in the official French history, the „Grandes Chroniques de France“, a major source for Christine’s works.²² Some time in the mid-thirteenth century Louis IX, the future „St Louis“, commanded that Latin sources traditionally kept at the royal abbey of St Denis be adapted to produce an official history of the French royal house. A monk named Primat presented the first copy to Louis’ son and heir in 1274. Subsequent monarchs continued to augment the chronicles with testimony about their own reigns. According to Anne D. Hedeman, the major authority on the chronicles, Christine, along with others such as Gerson, took over some of their functions when the periodically insane king Charles VI neglected maintaining them as well as they

21 Rosalind BROWN-GRANT, *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women. Reading Beyond Gender*, Cambridge 1999, p. 219.

22 This is especially apparent in her „Charles V“ and „Advison“. See WALTERS, *Constructing Reputations* (as note 15).

had been formerly.²³

Primat expresses a ‚generational consciousness‘ when in the prologue to the vernacular chronicles he claims to be writing because doubts have arisen about the purity of the royal line.²⁴ Later in this same prologue he says that the reputation of France is conveyed by the image of its noble ladies: *La France est une dame renommée seur autres nations* („France is a lady renowned over other nations“). France retains its designation as the „most Christian“ of Christian monarchies as long as it remains the ardent defender of the Church: *France comme loiaus fille secourt sa mere (l'Eglise) en touz besoinz*. („France as a loyal daughter helps out her mother, the Church, in her every need.“) By the conclusion of the „Cité des Dames“, the reader comes to see the symbiotic relationship of Christine and her mother as an expression of this tenet of royal ideology. Christine who supports her elderly mother is symbolic of France who defends the Church in her time of need.²⁵ By evoking this symbolic representation of the monarchical Church-State alliance, Christine thus provides justification for France's claims to act as Christianity's legitimate spokesperson during the time when the Great Schism divided the Western Church.

The implicit resolution of Christine's conflicts with her mother in the „Cité des Dames“ goes hand-in-hand with her use of another example of non-conflicted mother-daughter bonding. It appears in 2, 11, in the scene in which the daughter breastfeeds her mother in prison in order to help her endure her fate with patience. The daughter symbolically becomes the spiritual mother of her own biological mother, just as Marie de Castel had become for her mother Christine. Breastfeeding is

23 Anne D. HEDEMAN, *The Royal Image. Illustrations of the 'Grandes Chroniques de France', 1274-1422*, Berkeley 1991, p. 139, 153, 163, 168, 172. His reign from 1392 to his death in 1422 was marked by periodic bouts of madness.

24 *Pour ce que plusieurs genz doutoient de la genealogie des rois de France, de quel originel et de quel lignie ils ont descendu*, „Because several people had doubts about the genealogy of the kings of France, of their origins and of their line of descent.“). *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, ed. Jules VIARD, 10 vols., Paris 1920–1953, vol. 1, p. 1. The other quotations also come from this prologue, vol. 1, p. 4–5.

25 This goes along with Christine's use, in „Cité“ 1, 10, of St Augustine's mother Monnica, who remains unnamed like her own mother. Christine follows St Augustine's lead in the „Confessions“ in depicting Monnica as both a real person and as a *figura* of the Church. Note that I use the spelling „Monnica“ that is found in the majority of the manuscripts of the „Confessions“. All references to Christine's biography, which I will refer to as „Charles V“, will be made to the edition of Suzanne SOLENTE, *Le Livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V*, 2 vols., Paris 1936, 1940.

a key image in Christine's relationship with her own mother, as shown in a passage from the „Mutacion“:

*Si fu comme fille nommee
Et bien nourrie et bien amee
De ma mere a joyeuse chiere,
Qui m'ama tant et tint si chiere
Que elle meismes m'alaicta,
Aussitost qu'elle m'enfanta,
Et doucement en mon enfance
Me tint et par elle ot croissance.* (vv. 401–408)

(„From the time she called me ‚daughter‘, I was well brought up and well loved by my joyous mother. She loved me and cared for me so well that she breastfed me herself, as soon as she gave birth to me. And she treated me tenderly during my childhood and through her I grew up.“)

Breastfeeding here has both physical and spiritual connotations. They are physical in that her mother feeds her from her breast, as she says, „as soon as she gave birth to me“ (v. 406). They are spiritual, in that her mother gave her spiritual nourishment from the time when she named her as her daughter. Christine's Christian name, which she glosses in the „Mutacion“ as the „name of the most perfect man plus INE“ (vv. 375–378), marks her as a daughter of the Church. It is probable, given Christine's widespread use of St Augustine as an authority in her works, that her use of the breastfeeding image is indebted to the venerable Church Father, for whom it was an image of the Church feeding its children on the milk of its doctrine.²⁶ In the „Cité des Dames“ mother and daughter become *figurae* of France's relationship to the Church in that they are humans who have applied Church doctrine to their lives, have impressed those doctrines upon others through their example, and will continue to influence others by means of the exemplary images of them that Christine places in her texts.

Christine thus uses natural lineage in two ways: as a physical phenomenon underlying and guaranteeing France's hereditary monarchy and as a metaphor for a spiritual bonding capable of uniting everyone in France. From the notion that

²⁶ In his „Enarrationes in Psalmos“ St Augustine equates the Church with Mary in his commentary on Psalm 8, where he uses the metaphor of the Church who nourishes her children with the milk of her doctrine.

humans are all brothers and sisters, she moves to the idea that they are all brothers and sisters in Christ. This is a conception dear to Gerson. We can observe him affirming his belief in spiritual conjoining as the basis for social harmony when in his 1397 French sermon on the Annunciation (the first in which he alludes to the *seulette*), he reminds his listeners that he and they are all are bound to each other in the Lord, united as he says by an *amour naturelle qui doit ester entre freres et seurs tout d'un sang, d'un char* („a natural love that should exist between brothers and sisters of the same flesh and blood“).²⁷ Gerson proposes a disinterested affection among people as the love that should bind everyone together in the commonwealth as an antidote to the factionalism currently dividing the country and the Church. Christine expresses her desire for unity by echoing the four-fold repetition of the term *nation* that is found in the „Grandes Chroniques“ prologue. In her 1404 biography of the „Wise King“ Charles V she voices her high hopes for the future of the „noble French nation“ despite momentary setbacks.²⁸ Through their words and deeds the „most Christian doctor“ Gerson and the „holy widow“ Christine make themselves into exemplary models for the entire community, a ‚nation‘ held together by feelings of spiritual kinship among its members.

Through her „Cité des Dames“, the text that Christine leaves behind her as a spiritual legacy incarnating her wisdom, she as it were creates a „cité des dames“ that is the concretization of the idea of France, personified as it traditionally was, as a woman. By harnessing official ideology through her service to the monarchy, she becomes a defender of France and of the Church. This exemplary gesture is a product of her natural body, the body she received from „the good mother who bore her.“ It is also a product of her reason, a faculty related to the consciousness and to the soul in St Augustine's thought, and a faculty first nurtured in the child by its mother. For a woman whose name is a female variant of Christ's, defending France and the Church is as natural an act as a mother feeding her daughter, or a daughter supporting her mother in her time of need. Yet these acts of natural nourishment are also symbolic of higher ones.

27 JEAN GERSON, *Oeuvres complètes* (as note 20), vol. 7, p. 549.

28 SOLENTE, *Le Livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V* (as note 25), vol. 1, p. 5. See Colette BEAUNE, *The Birth of an Ideology. Myths and Symbols of Nation in Late-Medieval France*, ed. F. L. Cheyette, trans. S. R. Huston, Berkeley 1991, originally published as: *Naissance de la Nation France*, Paris, 1985, and my discussion in: Christine de Pizan, *Primat, and the noble nation française*, in: *Cahiers de Recherches médiévales*, 9 (2002), p. 237–246, available online at <http://crm.revues.org/index83.html>.

Moving in a direction opposite to that taken by her three abstractions, her „Trois Vertus“, which morph into crowned queens over the course of her narrative, Christine, a real person, comes to be seen as a personification of the corporate civic body, and even of France herself.²⁹ Christine legitimizes her self-appointed role as public defender by associating her „cité des dames“ with the image of the Church militant and triumphant promoted by the monarchy. By presenting herself as an erudite woman supporting her mother, Christine includes herself among members of Primat's Parisian *fontaine de clergie* („fountain of learning“) that sustains ‚*Holy Church*‘.³⁰ In his prologue Primat had suggested that France must strive continually to deserve its special status in the eyes of God. In writing the „Cité des Dames“, Christine becomes a defender of the Church-state alliance needed to maintain France's key position as leader of the Christian world by advocating the moral improvement of the women of France. A major reason for this was because women, whether they were nuns, mothers, or wives, had to set the example for France's hereditary monarchy, as stipulated by the „Grandes Chroniques“ prologue to which I referred earlier. Women's role was paramount since they had a great part in producing and educating future generations. (Can we not even say that in a very real sense, dynastic legitimacy depended more upon them than upon their husbands?)

Through her subliminal appeals to symbols deeply engrained in contemporary consciousness, Christine urges her audience to move from symbol to action. Working, so I believe, under Gerson's inspiration and perhaps even his tutelage, she develops the royal ideology set forth by Dionysian chroniclers and kings like St Louis and Charles V by insisting that women, from queens down to the lowliest prostitute, have to do their part to ensure that France maintain its privileged position in Christendom. Christine's adroit use of royal symbols omnipresent in her society is meant to galvanize women to take her advice to heart. No less a proselytizer than Gerson, Christine suggests that the ideal of the corporate civic entity founded on justice, the fifteenth-century monarchic avatar of St Augustine's „City of God“, can only be

29 Lori J. WALTERS, Christine's Symbolic Self as the Personification of France, in: Christine de Pizan. Une femme de science, une femme de lettres, ed. Juliette Dor/Marie-Elisabeth Henneau with Bernard Ribémont, Paris 2008, p. 191–215.

30 We can thus see how official ideology fosters Christine's relationship with someone like Gerson.

realized with the aid of a „cité des dames“.³¹ The latter represents a spiritual line of mothers and daughters who work together by consciously deciding to pattern themselves upon Mary's example rather than on Eve's, thus setting the standard for all their biological and spiritual children.

In conclusion, Christine's implicit resolution of the conflict with her mother had an important part to play in the larger project of nation building undertaken by the French monarchy. Her model of conflict resolution provided a blueprint for the establishment of the disinterested affection that according to Christine and to Gerson would form the spiritual cement designed to caulk the rifts in the fractured body politic. We recall that at the time France was a country split apart by tendentious factions whose divisions eventually led to eighteen years of English occupation of Paris.³² We can very well imagine that the affection proposed by Christine was the feeling galvanizing the French people to rally behind Jeanne d'Arc's support of the dauphin, and which gave them the resolve to eventually drive the English from their lands. In this respect it is significant that Christine returns to her image of breastfeeding when in her „Ditié de Jeanne d'Arc“ she represents Jeanne *qui donne à France la mamelle / De paix et de douce norriture* („who gives France the breast of peace and sweet nourishment,“ v. 189-190).³³

I do not believe that it is an exaggeration to say that the feeling of spiritual affection that Christine represents as the love that should exist between mother and daughter is the same feeling that enabled *la France* to get back on her feet after the conflict.³⁴ I would also suggest that it was this feeling of social cohesion that helped the country to establish herself in the seventeenth century as the most powerful monarchy in Europe.³⁵ Christine encouraged this feeling of social cohesion through the use of her signature persona as the *seulette*, which figured prominently both in

31 See Lori J. WALTERS, *La réécriture de saint Augustin par Christine de Pizan. De la Cité de Dieu à la Cité des Dames*, in: *Au Champ des escriptures. Actes du IIIe colloque international sur Christine de Pizan*, Lausanne, 18-22 juillet 1998, ed. E. Hicks et al., Paris 2000, p. 197-215, and *Magnifying the Lord: Prophetic Voice in La Cité des Dames*, in: *Cahiers de Recherches médiévales*, 13 (2006), p. 239-253.

32 Gilbert OUY/Daniele CALVOT, *L'oeuvre de Gerson à Saint-Victor de Paris: Catalogue des manuscrits*, Paris 1990, p. 23.

33 CHRISTINE DE PIZAN, *Ditié de Jeanne d'Arc* (Medium Aevum Monographs, New Series IX), ed. Angus J. KENNEDY/Kenneth VARTY, Oxford 1977.

34 I am exploring this idea in a book-length study of Christine and Gerson.

35 Jacques KRYNEN, *Idéal du prince et pouvoir royal en France à la fin du Moyen Age (1380-1440). Etude de la littérature politique du temps*, Paris 1981.

her texts and in many of the manuscripts she produced of them.³⁶ We are reminded of Christine's famous self-portrait as the *seulette* found in the copy of her collected works that she presented as a New Year's Day gift to the Queen of France, Ysabel de Bavière.³⁷ The *seulette* represents the integration of her father's studious nature and the contemplative nature of her mother and her daughter. Christine fostered this image of her own integrated individual body politic as a model for the integration she wished to establish in the larger body politic. With its use she announces herself as a „spiritual mother“ to the Queen, the country's symbolic mother and the earthly reflection of the queen of heaven, a point she makes clear in her „Epistre à la Reine“ of 1405. Christine in effect offers to help Ysabel reflect the image of France as a lady „whose renown surpasses that of all other nations“ that had since the mid-thirteenth-century been promoted by the official French history.

³⁶ These represent roughly 20% of the surviving manuscripts of her works.

³⁷ For a reproduction of the image and a discussion of the dating of the manuscript, see <http://www.pizan.lib.ed.ac.uk/index.html>. See WALTERS, „The Book as Gift of Wisdom. *Le Chemin de lonc estude* in the Queen's Manuscript, Teaching Christine de Pizan, ed. Andrea W. TARNOWSKI (New York: MLA Publications, forthcoming).