**Christine de Pizan - the women’s movement in Medieval Europe by Karen Plumb**

Christine de Pizan created a counter-narrative that challenged the existing historicization of women in medieval Europe. During the Middle Ages medieval Europe was known for binding together many cultural groups with one common thread; their religion was Christianity.[[1]](#endnote-1) Christine de Pizan was from an affluent family whose father was an astronomer to King Charles V of France so ostensibly she had a good upbringing.[[2]](#endnote-2) She was well read and became an author. She was married then widowed leaving her to care for and raise three children on her own.[[3]](#endnote-3) This indicates that she was a very responsible, level headed individual. In the excerpt of The Book of the City of Ladies Christine de Pizan expresses her own view of the world using characters that she develops. She does this in a contrived way such that her work will be accepted at that time, in the Middle Ages in Italy and generally throughout Europe. The characters she creates are daughters of God, Lady Reason, Lady Rectitude, and Lady Justice, who discuss the significant issue, inequality of women.[[4]](#endnote-4) This gives her the opportunity to express her frustrations about the inequality of women as she develops a counter narrative that challenges the existing historicization of women in medieval Europe.

Christine de Pizan attacks all men namely Matheolus, who claimed all women are “fundamentally evil” [[5]](#endnote-5) during her conversation with the first daughter, Lady Reason, as she challenges the convention of women.[[6]](#endnote-6) Lady Reason, speaks to her about reality by helping her to realize her true thoughts as she says “recover your senses...Any evil spoken of women only hurts those who say it.”[[7]](#endnote-7) Lady Reason is saying that Christine should know better than to believe what others are saying about women and that the evil spoken about them is not true. Lady Reason also discusses building a city that will only house the virtuous women and will last forever because it will never be conquered.[[8]](#endnote-8) Lady Justice confirms her confidence in women by stating that she will judge those by virtue, then she will populate the city with only the chosen women, and then she will give control of the city to Christine de Pizan.[[9]](#endnote-9) Another example of how she challenges the historicization of women in medieval Europe is when the justification of the perpetrators against women is brought to our attention through her discussion with the daughter, Lady Rectitude in Book 11. Christine de Pizan challenged the notion of the laisse faire attitude of the rape of women, outlined the terror experienced by a victim, and justified condemning the rapist to death through Lady Rectitude’s example of Lucretia.[[10]](#endnote-10)

The whole idea of Christine de Pizan’s piece is an example of how she provided a counter narrative to what was prevalent in medieval Europe. She challenged the tradition of the most widely accepted religion at that time, Christianity, by writing about being presented with daughters of God rather than the son of God and she justified her thoughts by writing that she is expressing them after being in a dreamy state of sleep.[[11]](#endnote-11) . Christine de Pizan was courageous to express her feminist views and was very strategic in her writing to avoid the chance of persecution because she was taking a risk to challenge what men had said about women up to and during the middle ages. She is successful in her argument to show the inequality of women by using examples of well known men such as Matheolus and Aristotle. Furthermore, the City of Women is a utopia-like creation for her as justification of the unjust oppression that women have suffered as compensation to make things right. The excerpt does not include the portion about how men and women should be treated as equal and judged by virtue alone which is outlined in one of the brief summaries.[[12]](#endnote-12) Again, this indicates how she is successful at providing an alternative historical account that challenged the historicization of women in medieval Europe.

By Karen Plumb

Notes

1. *“European” Middle Ages* <http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/MA/INTRO.HTM> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Christine de Pizan/Pisan (Biography) <http://www.csupomona.edu/~plin/Is201/christine1.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Excerpt from Christine de Pizan’s The Book of the City of Women <http://academic.udayton.edu/BradHume/hst307/pizan.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Christine de Pizan’s *The Book of the City of Women* (also known as *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 1405) (Brief summaries) <http://faculty.msmc.edu/lindeman/piz5.html>

Images: <http://www.google.ca/search?q=christine+de+pizan&hl=en&prmd=imvnsbo&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=doQLT6gnpPjSAcys-e0F&sqi=2&ved=0CGQQsAQ&biw=1280&bih=892> [↑](#endnote-ref-12)