



Women in the Liberal Arts Tradition

with Dr. Brian Williams

Lecture 2: Christine de Pizan

Outline:

Christine de Pizan

- She lived from 1364 – 1430.
- Christine is often referred to as the first professional woman writer.
- She wrote at least 41 books of poetry and prose.
- She was falsely charged (more than once) with having educated men write her books for her because people doubted that a woman could have written them.
- Christine de Pizan was born in Venice.
- Dante showed up in several places in her work.
- Christine meets King Charles V when she was around 4 years old, and 35 years later she was commissioned to write his royal biography.
- Christine's education:
 - Both the girls and the boys were educated in the home together (per some Renaissance era Italian cities and homes).
 - She was given access to her father's extensive library and the library of Louvre.
 - In her book, Lady Justice reminds Christine that not all men oppose the education of women.
 - She references scripture, Homer, Ovid, Aristotle, Plato, minor Greek philosophers, Plutarch, Seneca, Cicero, Augustine, and Boethius...
 - She was clearly swimming in the stream of the great classical tradition.
 - Christine's homeschool education ended at age 15 when she was married.
- Christine's husband died 10 years into her marriage (after her father had also died). She was left with three young children, a mother, and a niece to care for.
 - She identified with Boethius and Dante, whose own wheels of Fortune turned against them.
 - Christine frequently wrote about applied justice in the land and between nations.
 - Christine never remarried. She was forced to fend for herself and her dependents.
- Christine was a prolific writer, publishing 41 pieces.
- Her fame as a writer grew (deeply immersed in the politics of England and France).
- Some of Christine de Pizan's works include:



- *The Changes of Fortune*
- *The Epistle of Othea to Hector (a collection of poems)*
- *An intellectual biography*
- *The Vision of Christine*
- *The Book of the City of Ladies*
- *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*
- *The Book of the Body Politic*
- *The Book of Deeds of Arms and Chivalry*
- *The Book of Peace*
- *The Letter of the Prison of Human Life*
- *The Hymn to Joan of Ark*
- Christine de Pizan's work that you might incorporate into you classical school curriculum:
 - *Letter of the God of Love*
 - This is the letter written in the person of Cupid.
 - This is a model of rhetorical persuasion.
 - She knew how to use literary skills turn a smile while they also turned the knife of critique.
 - This Letter of the God of Love could be read alongside Cooper's essay *The Higher Education of Women* and Sayers' 20th century essay *Are Women Human?*
 - *The Book of the City of Ladies*
 - Christine narrates her own experience of false consciousness.
 - She is concerned that early exposure to disordered books or distorted visions can have long lasting deleterious effects creating prejudices whether of race, gender, religion, nationality, and so forth.
 - Christine's case through Cupid is that ancient authors and sources are not authoritative simply because they are ancient and written down. They can nevertheless influence a developing child.
 - *Book of the Long Road to Learning* or the *Book of the Path of Long Study*
 - Christine's primary model is Dante's comedy.
 - Christine was born a hundred years after Dante.
 - Christine is both poet and pilgrim here, author and the main character. Her guide is Sibyl.
 - Christine's is primarily an intellectual journey.
 - What prepares Christine to be ready to speak into the political situation? What enables her to be a worthy conduit of lady reason and lady wisdom? What qualified Christine to write books about chivalry, just war, the political order, the education of princes, the state of women in society, and contemporary literature? Her classical education prepares her.
 - The way of long study is the way of preparation for service.



- The way of long study included learning about the nations and cultures of the world.
- *Book of the Body Politic*
 - She advocates an approach to discipline that includes more threats and admonitions than actual beatings. She advises the tutor to welcome the child with gentle words...and sometimes tell childish stories that make him laugh...so that the student comes to love his tutor as well as his studies.
 - Christine has practical wisdom as well for classical educators.
- *The Book of the City of Ladies*
 - This is a kind of reparative attempt to set the record straight by pursuing the truth that scripture, literature, and history are full of virtuous, intelligent, noble women who impacted their respective cultures.
 - Women were educated in the classical liberal arts tradition and did make significant contributions to it, and could and should find a place in the curricula of classical schools.
- *The Treasury of the City of Ladies* (The Book of Three Virtues)