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**Kate Langdon Forhan**, *The Political Theory of Christine de Pizan. Women and Gender in the Early Modern World*. Burlington, Vert. and Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2002. xvi + 187 pp. Table, notes, bibliography, and index. \$79.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 0-7546-0173-0; \$19.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-7546-0174-9.

Review by Nadia Margolis, Independent Scholar, Leverett, Mass.

Kate Forhan is the leading specialist in the United States on Christine de Pizan's political writing, having published numerous articles and an annotated translation of one of Christine's key political treatises, *Le Livre du corps de policie* (ca. 1407) as *The Book of the Body Politic*,<sup>[1]</sup> useful primarily for undergraduates. Yet she is not the only political scientist currently publishing on Christine, nor is she the first; indeed, the first book-length critical analysis-cum-anthology of any kind of Christine (as Forhan also affirms, viii) was precisely an *Essai sur les écrits politiques de Christine de Pisan* by Raimond Thomassy in 1838.<sup>[2]</sup> Even back then, Thomassy demonstrated not only that Christine composed many different works but also that most, if not all, of them could be deemed political and not simply literary. Since Thomassy, Claude Gauvard has been perhaps the first recent historian to ask and attempt to answer the question: "Christine de Pizan, a-t-elle eu une pensée politique?"—concluding that she was primarily a pacifist—while another pioneer, literary historian Gianni Mombello, published a substantial article on Christine's political formation far ahead of its time, ending nonetheless rather cautiously by adjudging her an important witness to her era.<sup>[3]</sup>

United States milestones in this category, like many of their German, Italian, Dutch and Spanish counterparts, include translations and studies with a feminist focus.<sup>[4]</sup> Sheila Delany (1983) tends to characterize Christine's feminist politics as conservative. By contrast, Margaret Brabant's 1992 landmark volume ventures beyond feminism, containing articles from an international group, mostly of literary historians on a gratifyingly broader range of Christine's political subjects. Forhan participated in the Brabant volume as the sole political scientist,<sup>[5]</sup> having since gone on to devote much of her scholarly career to promoting Christine as a true political thinker. This more properly representative perspective is all the more felicitous since, although Christine (c. 1365-c.1430) produced an immensely variegated oeuvre, most readers know only the *Cité des dames*, for a variety of literary-canonical reasons over the last two centuries.

Forhan's book sets out to remedy this situation by discussing other works by Christine that allow us a fuller view of her political concerns and opinions. She includes a French royal genealogical table and a chronology of Christine's works that are very useful, except for certain slips: the *Corps de policie* is more plausibly dated 1406-07 (as Forhan agrees, p. 125), not 1405; the *Epistre Othea* is composed mostly of prose, with only the "texte" sections in verse; the *Epistre a Eustace Mourel* is entirely in verse, not prose; the *Mutacion* has one section in prose (revealingly, the history of the Jews); the *Fais d'armes et de chevalerie* (1410) is missing here, though fortunately not omitted from the rest of the book. Forhan approaches her topic not chronologically text-by-text but rather thematically (pp. vivii). Each chapter is devoted to a representative principal construct driving medieval political thought as attested in the twelfth through fifteenth centuries.

Chapter one, "Alone Am I," sketches out a prefatory panorama of Christine's era: exceptionally complex and turbulent yet extremely vital to her adoptive country's destiny. Illustrative moments from economic, demographic, intellectual-historical, and visual-arts perspectives highlight the more traditional historical account of the Hundred Years War (1337-1453), interwoven with Christine's biography. Forhan also notes other medieval authors, their sources and readers, and the prevailing ethos of chivalry. In general this tableau is deftly drawn and complete. However, the Great Schism—a political more than theological crisis very much on Christine's mind in such works as the *Mutacion* and *Fais et bonnes meurs de Charles V*—receives only scant allusion (p. 14) without the sort of preliminary explanation (that finally surfaces on pp. 8990) one would expect in this section.

Chapter two, on the "Mirror for princes" tradition, does a creditable job of introducing and rapidly surveying the development of this metaphor in medieval political writing. Forhan identifies Christine's eleven didactic "mirror" texts, rightly including her mirror for princesses, the *Cité des dames* and *Trois vertus*, to which one might add that the *Trois vertus* was intended as a practical-manual sequel to the loftier, revisionist-historical *Cité*, thus carrying perhaps a more down-to-earth political message to its various classes of female readers. In writing her own sequel in a new key, Christine demonstrates her keen awareness of levels of audience, even among her political-didactic mirror works, all quite distinct from courtly-lyric readers. Forhan seems at ease with John of Salisbury and his *Policraticus*, its sources, significance and influences, yet omits the well-attested (by other scholars) role of his translator for Christine's time, Denis Foulechat, even though she notes Gauchi's part in the French transmission of Giles of Rome. Likewise, Forhan is adept at comparing Christine to better-known authorities, from Aristotle, Cicero, and Augustine to John of Salisbury, Brunetto Latini, Giles of Rome and Machiavelli, while engaging the findings of modern political historians such as Born, Ullmann, Krynen, and Nederman. Forhan's notes are full of useful background, particularly other surveys on political mirrors and princely ideals, from which she often extrapolates in her attempt to situate Christine within the mirror-for-princes genre. She successfully argues that Christine, following Giles' lead, favored a pragmatic, adaptable theory of princely conduct and governance, entirely different from seventeenth-century absolutism and more akin to our modern constitutionalism (pp. 4344). Curiously, however, she neglects studies directly discussing Christine's works on this topic like Parussa on the *Othea* and Haselbach on Pseudo-Seneca (Martin of Braga, mentioned p. 31) and his influential medieval translator, Jean Courtecuisse, as sources for Christine's *Prodommie/Prudence*.<sup>[6]</sup>

In chapter three, "The Body Politic," Forhan displays her expertise with John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* and experience in translating Christine's *Corps de policie*, to which she relates the *Cité des dames*, *Charles V*, and *Ditié de Jeanne d'Arc*. Forhan's approach to the body in the Middle Ages is strictly along the lines of this secular-political metaphor; there is no room here for Bynum and other currently "hot" scholarship on mystical-theological and sacramental bodies, not even in the initial discussion of Christ's body and additional corporeal metaphors appearing in Christine's work. But Forhan accomplishes a great deal as she links the body with the idea of community, then to the Augustinian image of the city (both celestial and earthly), and analyzes how Christine marshals the symbolism of body politic and city, then Church and state, to express her own political ideas, while eschewing the metaphor of the two swords deployed by Bernard of Clairvaux and others. Forhan fruitfully incorporates ideologues ranging from Cicero to Machiavelli to John Winthrop. She dwells at length upon Nicolas Oresme's influence upon the later Middle Ages in general and upon Christine in particular, stressing her debt to Oresme—himself a philosopher and translator of Aristotle's *Politics*—and Cicero in formulating her ideal of "mediated monarchy" (p. 75). One might observe, in connection with Christine's use of Oresme and other authorities connoting some personal adversity for her (Oresme deplored astrologers such as Christine's beloved father) that just as she absorbed Jean de Meun's genius in her feminist writing, she was capable of the same pragmatic forgiveness of indispensable source authors in composing her political works. This prioritization of professionalism over personal feelings sharply exemplifies what Forhan emphasizes about Christine's politics overall.

Chapter four, "Kingship," begins by citing the classic scholarship on this question and in particular invokes Antony Black's more recent parallelism between the medieval positive view of kingship and our modern preference for democracy. Forhan proceeds to outline the most salient questions of legitimacy, authority, and tyranny as well as how medieval political theorists defined those terms as they moved toward formulating a notion of ideal kingship. Moving next to the Church's traditional image of infallibility and thus sole restraint upon secular monarchy, Forhan astutely remarks upon Christine's uniqueness among most medieval theorists in advocating virtually the opposite: that the Church is indeed susceptible to corruption (fortunately, Forhan does take up the Great Schism here) and therefore in these cases must be corrected by lay authority, as exemplified in the *Charles V*. Forhan sensitively probes Christine's retelling of Charles's "disastrous" decision to support Clement VII, the Avignon pope, over the pope in Rome, observing the panegyricist's embarrassment, and reasonable success, in trying to portray Charles favorably in this debacle. One might also suggest here that Charles's (and Christine's) nationalism played a greater part in his and his advisors' papal choice. The Great Schism of the Papacy was first and foremost a political, not a theological, showdown between France and Italy (as scholars like Ouy, Guenée, and others have shown) in which Christine, like Nicholas de Clamanges on a more official level, acted as pro-French apologists.[7] Christine's political-rhetorical funambulation thus was rendered all the dicier as she sought to immortalize Charles as ideal king and France as supreme kingdom, even over her native Italy, while she condemned disunity within the Church. Forhan also interprets the later *Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc's* praise of Joan as evidence of a laywoman correcting the Church (pp. 9293). However, might this attest not so much Christine's pro-secularism as her faith in Joan's claim of divine appointment, remedying France's and the Church's ills as an emissary of God?

"Justice and the Law" form the subject of chapter five. After distinguishing the terms "substantive justice" (based on objective norms of virtue) and "procedural justice" (based on the invariability of the offense itself), Forhan recapitulates their evolution and legal practice in the ancient, medieval, and modern worlds, from Justinian to our modern *Corpus juris civilis*. Christine, in making a virtue of procedural justice, appears to have been chiefly influenced by Brunetto Latini's *Tresor* and Pseudo-Seneca's *Formula honestae vitae*, as made manifest in her *Corps de policie, Livre de la paix*—which Forhan categorizes as procedural and administrative in focus—while the *Othea, Prodommie/Prudence* and *Cité des dames* concern themselves more with the moral virtues of rulers (p. 119). Many fresh and thoughtful readings of these works guide Forhan to conclude with a paradox: although Christine is more obviously a moral rather than political philosopher, politics informs her morality. The *Livre de la paix* is proclaimed Christine's most theoretical mirror and also the most rhetorically and thematically independent (p. 132). Also enlightening here might be a reference to Margaret Ehrhart's linking of Christine to her great poetic model, Machaut, via the so-called "duties of rulers" tradition. Another example, though more on criminal law, also sheds significant light on Christine's legal thought: Claude Gauvard's "*De grace especial*": *Crime, état et société en France à la fin du Moyen âge*. [8] Also unheralded by Forhan are Christine's ideas on "outsider jurisprudence"—in this case, women's rights—topic of the only legal-historical study specifically on Christine, by Mary Anne Case, a legal-procedural complement to Rosalind Brown-Grant's excellent but more literary-ideological book, which Forhan cites abundantly. [9]

In chapter six, "Peace and Just War," Forhan signposts these questions as eliciting Christine's most paradoxical side (p. 133), since, despite her career-long expressed yearning for peace, her most original contribution to political thought is demonstrably her theory on war, particularly the concept of just war. Examining these notions first as deriving from Roman (especially Cicero) in conjunction with Christian theological influences (Augustine, Abelard, Aquinas), Forhan lays out the necessary criteria for just war, strikingly germane to world diplomacy even today. Medieval and modern political commentators are combined with medieval literature for insights into attitudes toward war and its conduct and also into the contrasting codes of warriors and clerics (the famous clerk vs. knight topos). Among Christine's works on war and peace, Forhan discusses the *Othea, Chemin, Charles V, Prodommie, Policie* and *Lamentacion* for her ideas on peace, and the *Advision* and *Fais d'armes* for those on just war, especially the

latter text. This chapter portrays Christine as a pragmatic optimist, despite her (justifiably) pessimistic moments, believing in the triumph of peace and justice, but only if the majority of society wills it so; sometimes war is the only solution. One is tempted to draw an analogy between Christine's ideas on politics and war and those she enunciates on love: both are worthy pursuits provided one does not indulge in them frivolously but rather for the common good.

Forhan's general "Conclusion," structured upon multiple layers of tripartite criteria as she progresses from topic to topic, recalls and develops her image of Christine as a paradoxical thinker and presence, both during her career and in her reception history. She assesses the poet's legacy in terms of her contribution to Western political thought and to modern democracy's institutions and values--adumbrated by a trenchant comparison of Christine and Machiavelli and Burke--and finds Christine to have been a genuine political theorist, at once conservative yet progressive, whose primary gift to modernity lay in her powers as witness to "the anxieties of her era" (p. 166)--this latter part quite close to Mombello's (see paragraph 1, above), if unwittingly.

Despite its occasional minor shortcomings, this is an extremely important and highly readable introduction to a most difficult subject. It clearly and capably contextualizes Christine's politics within her own time while synthesizing valid parallels with modern political theory. I would strongly recommend this book for any intellectual history course as well as those in women's history and medieval-Renaissance studies.

#### Some slips and oddities:

- p. 28 n. 3 and biblio.: "Leslie" > Lester K. Born.
- p. 38 n. 24: Molenaer's edition of the French *De Regimine principum* was originally published by Macmillan in 1899, not 1966.
- p. 43, bottom: "No medieval political theorist was wrote in a vacuum."
- p. 84 n. 21 and biblio: Most of us cite "Marc Léopold-Benjamin Bloch" as Marc Bloch without fear of appearing disrespectful; for his *Rois thaumaturges*, see the more accessible revised ed. of 1983 instead of 1924 ed. cited in biblio.
- p. 111 n. 1: "Wittgenstein's phase" to "phrase"?
- p. 121: text and note: "Kantorwicz", "Kantowicz" > Kantorowicz.
- *Passim*: Christine's word for chivalry, also in one of her titles, whether in modern form (*chevalerie*) or Middle-French (*chevalerie*) often misspelled throughout as *chevalrie*; several other titles contain errors in spelling or grammar.

#### NOTES

[1] Kate Langdon Forhan, *The Book of the Body Politic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[2] Paris: Debécourt. This was Thomassy's thesis at the then newly-formed Ecole des Chartes in Paris. His book edited several important texts for the first time, under the guidance of Paulin Paris, manuscripts curator of the (now) BnF, if only in extracts, some of which survive to this day.

[3] Gauvard, "Christine de Pisan a-t-elle eu une pensée politique?" *Revue historique* 250 (1973): 41730; Mombello, "Quelques aspects de la pensée politique de Christine de Pizan d'après ses oeuvres publiées," in *Culture et politique en France à l'époque de l'humanisme et de la Renaissance*, ed. F. Simone (Torino: Accademia delle scienze, 1974), pp. 43153.

[4] See citations for Opitz, Caraffi, Ponfoort, Milagros-Rivera and others in Angus J. Kennedy, *Christine de Pizan: A Bibliography and 2 supplements* (London: Grant & Cutler, 1984, 1994, and 2004 [forthcoming]).

[5] Delany, reprinted in *Medieval Literary Politics* (Manchester UP, 1990); Brabant, *Politics, Gender, & Genre: The Political Thought of Christine de Pizan* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1992), containing an interesting debate between Christine Reno and Sheila Delany, as well as essays on Christine's non-feminist political writings.

[6] On Denis Foulechat, see, e.g., Sylvie Lefèvre's article in *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises: Le Moyen âge*, rev. ed. G. Hasenohr and M. Zink (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1992), pp. 37677, based on Charles Brucker's notes to his eds. of Foulechat's trans. of the *Policraticus*; on the *Othea* as princely mirror, see Gabriella Parussa's introduction to her edition, *Christine de Pizan: Epistre Othea*, TLF, 517 (Geneva: Droz, 1999), esp. pp. 8186; on Martin of Braga, *Formula honestae vitae*, see Hans Haselbach's extensive notes to his edition, *Seneca des iiiii vertus...Jean Courtecuisse (1403)*. Publications universitaires européennes, 13: Langue et littérature française, 30 (Berne: Lang, 1975), esp. pp. 15-17, 171, 25694 *passim*, 331. [7] Gilbert Ouy, "Paris, l'un des principaux foyers de l'humanisme en Europe au début du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de Paris et de l'Ile de France* (1967-68): 7198, plus many others; Bernard Guenée, *Entre l'église et l'état* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987); Mombello (see above, n. 2).

[8] M. Ehrhart, "Machaut and the Duties of Rulers Tradition," *French Forum* 17 (1992): 522, esp. p. 8; Gauvard Paris: CNRS, 1992.

[9] "Christine de Pizan and the Authority of Experience," in *Christine de Pizan and the Categories of Difference*, ed. Marilyn Desmond, *Medieval Cultures*, 14 (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 7187. Brown-Grant, *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

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