

The Conception of Authority and Power in the Works of Christine de Pizan. Mediation and Consensus in her Work¹

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**“There are historical periods in which the symbolic order
and the social order corresponds with one another.”³**

Abstract

My wish, in this text, is to study and observe the concept of authority and power in the work of Christine de Pizan (1364/1365-ca. 1430?), as well as editing ideas of mediation and consensus in the works of the author. I will analyze these political conceptions in *L'epistre à la Reine Isabeau (1405)*; *Le Livre de la Mutation de Fortune*; *The City of Ladies*; *The Rose and the Prince*; *La Vita e i buonicostumi del saggio re Carlo V*; in *Librodella Pace* and the *Poema di Giovanna d'Arco*. Christine was a woman of privileged culture, she had received since childhood a refined education in the Court, and she had had access to the Royal Library, as per her social situation. From a young age she was able to devote herself to the arts and culture, i.e., to move in an area that was considered in her time above all to be a male domain, at least for lay people, although this was not the case for the religious, because some nuns, canonesses and medieval beguines were also highly educated women. The ideas of authority and power, as well as the policy of mediation and consensus are present in the work of Christine de Pizan, because these ideas have as basic element the practice of relationship, or rather of relationships, and it is this that allows us to understand feudalism, because this system was conjoined in a network of relationships.

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²“Art (it doesn't matter what kind) has to do with two things: with *work* and with *love*”, in S. Weil, *Cuadernos*. Trans, commentary and notes by C. Ortega, Madrid, Trotta, 2001, p. 80 and “La *medida* no tiene ningún sentido si no es en relación con las dimensiones del cuerpo humano”, in S. Weil, *Cuadernos*. Trans., commentaries and notes by C. Ortega, Madrid, Trotta, 2001, p. 48. The author is referring to the Greek concept of measure, but I think that this conception can be applied to other civilizations. *Vid.* D. Sartori, “Medida por medida”, in *DUODA. Estudios de la Diferencia Sexual*, 41 (2011), p. 66-90.

³ Ch. Zamboni, “Ordine simbolico e ordine sociale”, in Diotima, *Oltrel'uguaglianza. Le radici femminili all'autorità*, Naples, Liguori, 1995, p. 31.

Feudalism was the system of relations that organized the society of the time of the life of Christine, although they had already incorporated elements that we could consider early seeds of the transition to capitalism. A careful reading of a good part of her mother's works of French literature allows us to observe that the care of her relationships, as for some current scholars, is a predominantly female element. and it gives great value to the mediation which, on the other hand, was exercised by the Queens and Princesses in Court.

Keywords: Christine de Pizan, authority, mediation, consensus, power, *Librodella Pace*, *Epistre à la Reine*, *La Vita e i buoni costume del saggio Carlo V*, *La Ciudad de las Damas*

My desire, in this text, is to study and observe the conception or conceptions of the figure of authority and the concept of power in different works by Christine de Pizan (Venice, 1364/1365-Monastery of Poissy, France, ca.1430?), as well as the ideas of mediation and consensus –despite her reputation as a polemicist, but also as a mediator in many causes-⁴in some of Christine's texts. I will attempt to show how she deals with these practices or political figures, because her voice is at once poetic and political, and how it shows itself as such in her works, particularly in the *Epistolae*. But I want to point to how the fore-mentioned practices or political figures can be appreciated in the *Librodella Pace*, dedicated to the dauphin Louis of France, duke of Guyenne,⁵in *La Rosa y el Príncipe*,⁶ in the *Poema di Giovanna d'Arco*,⁷ a true guide of the

⁴Whilst in an initial phase of her work Christine devotes quite a lot of attention to themes of love, progressively she distances herself from this subject and, little by little, two themes would come to be threaded through her works, the educational and the political. Education also understood as a group of norms of social behaviour, that is, the behaviour in relationships with people of both sexes; for her, possibly, this would be the first step towards women receiving an appropriate education and care and might have the same opportunities of receiving it as men, without it having to be, necessarily, the same as theirs. However, the importance of this position is not even understood by those studying her, S. Hout. *Vid. S. J., Huot, Lyric Poetics and the Art of Compilation in the Fourteenth Century*, Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1982, 339p. and 362.

⁵Louis of France, duke of Guyenne, was born in 1397 and should have become King with the name of Louis XI. The confrontations between the duke of Berry, that of Burgundy and Louis de Orleans (+ 1407, assassinated fearlessly by a hitman of Juan in a Paris street), his son Charles of Orleans, and his widow Valentina Visconti were to become the head of the party opposing those of Burgundy, the episodes of violence and cruelty between the parties, that is, some genuine civil hostilities, were mixed up with the events of the Hundred Years War. Because between the parties they repeatedly asked for the intervention of the English, with dramatic consequences, as we know.

In 1412, the dauphin, Louis of France accompanied his father with the army to the siege of Bourges, the most important city of the party of the allies Orleans and Berry. Already on this occasion, the intentions of the dauphin could be perceived as he insisted on the conferences that would lead to the Peace signed in Auxerre. Thus, Louis of France began to show his strength of character, which would lead him to being able to take on the regency in a moment of madness of his father, and Christine de Pizan placed in him her hopes for the

French army in the face of the weakness of Charles VII, the younger brother of Louis de Guyenne. The *Poema* or Ditié celebrates the victory of Joan of Arc over the English army⁸ in *L'Epistre à la Reine (1405)*, in *Le livre de la Mutation de Fortune*⁹, in *La*

achievement of a lasting peace. However, Louis died in strange circumstances in 1415, immediately after the dramatic battle of Azincourt, in which the French army, guided by the duke of Guyenne, suffered the great defeat inflicted by the English army, guided by Henry V, one of the hardest episodes for France in the Hundred Years War. Christine de Pizan, *Il libro della Pace*, Milan, Edition Medusa, p. 11. In the second part of this text, Christina turns Louis de Guyenne into a true character, perhaps because he belongs to the family who acted as patrons to her literary efforts. It may be, perhaps, because she places great hopes in him, thus idealising and exalting his qualities; she almost transfigures him with certain mystical tones. And, remaining faithful and consistent to her hopes of a happy future for France, she also dedicates to him *l'Avision du Coq*, as the author herself defines it, a small treatise that had as its aim to act as a remedy, as placebo, against "celle cruel ardeur de convoitise", that is, the greed that undoes and upsets courts and states. *Vid.*: B. Garavelli (ed.), Christine de Pizan, *Il libro della Pace*, Milan, Edition Medusa, p 190, note 13.

⁶V. Rossini (a cura di), Christine de Pizan, *La Rosa y el Príncipe. Voz poética y voz política en las "Epístolas"*.

⁷S. Solente (ed.), Christine de Pizan, *Le livre de la Mutation de Fortune*, Paris, Ed. A. & J. Picard, 1959. Book (1403) in which she recounts the brusque changes that she observes throughout her life and that she experiences in the first person; É. Hicks and Th. Moreau (ed.), Christine de Pizan, *L'Epistre à la Reine (1405)*, *Clio. Histoire, femmes et sociétés*, 5 (1997) [consult http://clio.revues.org/417_19/03/2012 and 5/07/2015]; M. -J. Lemarchand, (ed. and selec.), Cristina de Pizán, *La Ciudad de las Damas*, Ed. Madrid, Siruela, 2000; M. -J. Lemarchand, (ed. and selec.), Cristina de Pizan, *La rosa y el príncipe*, Madrid, Gredos, 2005; B. Garavelli (ed.), Christine de Pizan, *Poema di Giovanna d'Arco*, in the *Libro della Pace*, Milan, Ed. Medusa, 2007, p. 171-188; B. Garavelli (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Libro della Pace*, Milan, Ed. Medusa, 2007; V. Rossini (a cura di), Christine de Pizan, *La Vita e i buoni costumi del saggio re Carlo V*, Rome, Carocci, 2010.

⁸Ch. de Pizan in the *Libro della Pace* "treaty of good government" dedicated to the dauphin that never reigned, perhaps explaining his fatigue and tiredness of waiting and his battle between hope and freedom, between ideal stability and real confusion, between the desired peace and the war suffered and lived through. She would have to wait in order to see her "beloved France" in peace and prosperity. Pizan's capacity for hope seems not to diminish despite the general climate that got, if possible, even worse; in 1418 the Burgundys entered Paris; then Christine, surely disappointed by the worsening of the situation and afraid, went voluntarily into exile in a monastery, probably that of Poissy where her daughter who had taken orders lived. B. Garavelli (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Il libro della Pace*, Milan, Ed. Medusa, p. 11. In the *Libro della Pace* –treaty of good government–, Christine expresses her project, or dream, of a perfect state, in harmony in all its parts, thanks to the works of a prince full of virtue and conscious of the importance of his role.

The longing of Christine is the longing for a state nurtured by Christian virtues, but also by culture, literature, art..., which are sources of wisdom. It is because of this that the author, by definition, separates the "common" people from this construction because they cannot cultivate –according to the author– these virtues, because she considers them not very intelligent, not wise, not noble, rather violent and arrogant, evidently not adequate to participate in government. *Vid.* B. Garavelli (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Libro della Pace*, ch. X and XI of the third part. The critique of the "common" people is very harsh; she uses, even, the adjective "diabolical" on more than one occasion. *Vid.* B. Garavelli (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Libro della Pace*, ch. XI and XIV of the third part. Her ideal for a political class is a moderate class, educated, capable of appreciating beauty and with it to contribute in a valuable way to a civil life, a civilised life. For Pizan, the prince, educated in keeping the virtues present, **should never oppress the people, on the contrary, he should love them and desire their wellbeing-** (the emphasis is mine). *Vid.* B. Garavelli (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Libro della Pace*, *op. cit.*, p. 17. However, Christine continues to have a positive vision of human kind and this can be appreciated when, for example, she enumerates the three vices most disdained by power:

*Ciudad de las Damas*¹⁰, and in *La Vita e i buoni costumi del saggio re Carlo V*. Christine concerns herself throughout some of her works with the ethics of the new governor and defender of society as she expresses in her advice to the prince in the *Epistola a Othea*.¹¹

I have used editions in Italian, in French and in Castilian Spanish of the works of Christine de Pizan. Christine was a privileged woman both in her cultural development,¹² - she had received a refined education in the Court since she was a little girl and had had access to the royal library -,¹³ and in her social situation; from a young age she was able to devote herself to the arts, to move in an atmosphere that in her time was considered to be decidedly male for lay people.

However it was not so for religious women; some nuns, canonesses and Beguines in the medieval period were also women of great education and culture. Christine was one of the main authors to participate in what was called the *Querelle des femmes*; she devoted a great amount of energy to consolidating the value of women and did so with two of her treatises in the form of letters and her ballads against the misogyny of the *Roman de la Rose* (1401-1402), with the invention of a society, or rather, an ideal city, conceived, governed, organised and inhabited by women in ways suited to them, *La ciudad de las Damas* (1404-1405) and a little later in the treatise *Livre de Trois Vertus* (1405), and, at the end of her life with the *Poema* or *Ditié* of Jehanned' Arc (1429).¹⁴

the vice of tyranny, that of cruelty and that of greed; the author holds that they are vices "contrary to human nature". Vid. B. Garavelli (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Libro della Pace*, op. cit. p. 17.

⁹S. Solente (ed.), Christine de Pizan, *Le livre de la Mutation de Fortune*. Publié d'après les Manuscrits, Paris, Édit. A & J. Picard & C^{ie}, 1959.

¹⁰M.-J. Lemarchand (ed.), Cristina de Pizán, *La Ciudad de las Damas*, Madrid, Siruela, 2000.

¹¹S. L. Hindman, *Christine de Pizan's "Epistre Othéa. Painting and Politics at the Court of Charles VI*, Toronto, Ontario, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1986.

¹²From her arrival in France at the age of five approximately, to meet her father Tommaso de Pizzano, Christine takes good advantage of the privileged atmosphere that she finds herself in and also the work that her father -as a good humanist- does to favour the most complete education possible for his daughter.

¹³The foundation of the Royal Library of France is attributed to Charles V the Sage, who chose the Louvre to install it in and enriched it with numerous translations of ancient authors, some of them carried out by himself. Charles V was a student of philosophy and the numerous sciences of his time, as well as having a good knowledge of astrology and geomancy.

¹⁴Patrizia Caraffi (a cura di), Christine de Pizan, *A Giovanna D'Arco*. Testo originale a fronte. Florence, Ed. Le Lettere, 2013.

Christina de Pizan offers in two of her works, *Librodella Pace* and the *Ditié de Jehanne D'Arc*—in which the author brings to bear the historical context and observes it with particular attention—two books of basically political content, the tumultuous moment that France is going through, and that of Christine herself, seem to provide the motivation that moves her to write and that decidedly mark not only the focus, but also the basis of the texts.¹⁵ Above all in the first, the quotations of a large number of authors, some close to her in time such as Dante¹⁶, others of previous centuries such as Juan de Salisbury (1110-1180)¹⁷ or an endless number of classics: Aristotle, Cicero, Ovid, Virgil, Prudence, Jouvenal, Seneca, Catton and still others, and the great number of biblical quotations—frequently done from memory—makes the book - *Librodella Pace*- a monument to the quotations in each one of its chapters.

Thus, the author reaffirms the important role that she attributes to culture in this ideal government, headed by an ideal prince, in this way foreshadowing the work of Machiavelli.¹⁸ Christine is an example of the entrance of the poet into the field of politics and shines light on a new role; that of advisor to the Prince, and this entrance carries positive and negative elements with it. Christine was without a doubt the first woman to whom the title of intellectual matched exactly,¹⁹ or if one wished to name it as is more frequently done, the first *femme de lettres*.

¹⁵The Hundred Years War and the French civil war are linked, especially the former, to the life of Christine de Pizan. Perhaps it was the many violent revolts and insurrections of the people which marked such a hard view of the author towards the people, or, rather, the diverse groups of people who made up the most numerous part of society. In the book *Libro della Pace*, in reality a true open letter, she tries to convince the lowest classes that they form part of the “political body” that should live in harmony under the guidance of the king. In 1385 Charles VI married the duchess Isabel de Bavaria—with the invaluable help of the diplomatic manoeuvres of the duke of Burgundy who from then on controlled the kingdom. It seems that a little later, in 1385, the young King frees himself to some extent from the tiresome control of his Burgundy uncle and also from the other uncles: supported and backed by his brother, Louis, duke of Orleans, and by the cardinal of Laón, who had already been the much loved advisor of his father Charles V, it seems that Charles VI achieves the force to distance all his uncles, at least momentarily, *vid.* B. Garavelli (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Il libro della Pace*, Milan, Ed. Medusa, p. 9.

¹⁶*Vid.* B. Garavelli (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Libro della Pace*, p. 21. The author mentions *El Paraíso* and *El Infierno* of *La Comedia*.

¹⁷ Ch. de Pizan cites the *Policraticus*, III, 4, of Juan de Salisbury in B. Garavelli (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Libro della pace...*, p. 61, note 82.

¹⁸She holds that they have the duty to uphold the prince at the side of the honest Parisian bourgeoisie and other beautiful French towns, the intellectuals and the “clergy” of the universities, or all those men and women who had, like them, cultivated throughout their lives the love of science. *Vid.* B. Garavelli (trans.), *Librodella Pace...*, p. 17.

¹⁹M. A. Soleti, *Mediatrici di sapienza. Il riflesso della tradizione profetica e femminile in Christine de Pizan*, Naples-Salerno, Orthotes Ed., 2015.

Throughout her prolific work, but undoubtedly in *Le livre de la Mutation de Fortune*, *La Querelle du Roman de la Rose* and in *Epistre Othéa* she shows her influence on the ideas of her time, in concepts such as love (in the *Debate sobre el Roman de la Rose* – of which she is a great promoter- and specifically in her *Epístola del dios del Amor* and in the *Cuento de la Rosa*), such as the reflection and contribution to the ethics of the new governor and defender of society, on devoting space, in more than one piece of work, but particularly in the *Epístola a Othea*, to advising the Prince how he should act in order to be respected both by the powerful classes and the people. Before starting to consider the value and importance that Christine de Pizán concedes to authority and whether she differentiates it and how she does so, from power, I would like to explain, briefly, how we understand authority from the studies of women's history and how we consider that authority and power are not the same; they are not the same thing. This difference has been shown to us and taught to us by the philosopher Luisa Muraro.²⁰

In general, authority is associated with politics and power, and perhaps because of this –in the present day with the lack of credibility suffered by politicians and the lack of politics in the present world, substituted by the economy- we have a certain mistrust of what is understood today by the word authority and even more so, by the confusion between authority and power, as if it were the same thing, that has constituted the politics and the power of political parties. This confusion has been a matter that has affected European culture throughout the entirety of the history of the West, amongst other periods. In the Middle Ages, in general, this confusion or ambiguity between authority and power was less, even the common people were clear what authority was and what power was; they knew that an authority existed in the relationships between the human beings of a peaceful society, although its meaning might not be fixed; it is after Humanism and the Renaissance that there is a rejection of the “principle of authority” and above all, from the Enlightenment on that this ambiguity and confusion in the West is *in crescendo*. The authority that, before Luisa Muraro,²¹ Hannah Arendt had reflected upon is linked to language, the maternal tongue of each one of us –as well as then to point us towards what happens through mediation.

²⁰ L. Muraro, *Autorità*, Turin, Roserberg&Sellier, 2013. However, she had already examined the subject of authority in numerous previous writings, for example, in L. Muraro, *El poder y autoridad no son lo mismo*”, in *DUODA. Estudios de la Diferencia Sexual*, 37 (2009), p. 47-59.

²¹ H. Arendt, “Che cos’è l’autorità?”, in *Trapassato e futuro*, Milan, Garzanti, 1991.

The language that we speak exercises a good form of authority, because of its combination of rules and of choices, in which the freedom of the latter grows with one's knowledge of one's own language, without completely forbidding the transgression of the rules. Until Humanism and the Renaissance, one would take into account, in any area of research and study, the *auctoritates* (the Bible, philosophers like Aristotle, and others. The *auctoritates* were, as is well known, texts of authors who acted as a guide to the delving in search of the truth, and as such, they were used.²² This figure of exchange – authority- has experienced changes over time, but until Humanism and the Renaissance, it was known and taken into account. The incorrect usage of the “principle of authority” originated in this principle, suffering such damage that it is perhaps an irrecoverable principle, because it has undergone irreparable harm, that is, it has died out in the West.

Some historical moments are responsible for this perhaps irreparable damage to the principle of authority; one of these moments occurred with the so-called Protestant Reform, on not recognizing the authority of hierarchy in the interpretation of the Bible in the name of the principle of freedom of interpretation of the Word of God. Another moment, which, perhaps, put the finishing touch to the principle of authority was that named as the scientific revolution, on not recognizing scientific research carried out until then; rather than being accepted, it was contested. The author who protested, intensely, against this principle, and, in doing so, lost his life was Galileo Galilei (Pisa, 15 February 1564 - Arcetri, 8 January 1642).²³ Authority as it takes place in a choral grouping has been listened to with many voices. Justice, laws and uses and customs were not *auctoritates* like the Bible and the books of Aristotle, but they enjoyed an efficacy that, in another form and in other contexts, was felt with force.²⁴ The demand and need to think and act freely would have collided with this form of authority, as had happened with the *auctoritates*, in the area of scientific and philosophical research. But, can we say that it really was about authority, that is, symbolic strength, or was it rather an oppressive force of a specific social order?²⁵

²²Sometimes they were used well, others badly or very badly; others were used dogmatically, and, luckily, other times sensibly and intelligently, depending on the circumstances and depending on those that used them, as Luisa Muraro says, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

²³*El mensajero sideral, el Ensayador*, etc. Perhaps his fundamental contribution was the introduction of experimental methodology, for which he is considered to be the father of modern science.

²⁴L. Muraro, *Autorità*, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

²⁵I do not wish to forget to mention here that, in parallel, alongside the rupture of the principle of authority in the area of research and knowledge, it was also happening in the mind, such as in the events bringing

What is it that makes us accept authority in our lives? According to the philosopher Luisa Muraro, an initial response, as I have already mentioned, would be: **language**, the first language that we have learned, bearing in mind that we do not consider this to be an arbitrary imposition but rather a symbolic strength and an unending source of mediations, as so many people consider it to be, from the great poets to the common speakers.²⁶ As well as language, one will see the experience of authority in analyzing and taking into account the fragility of the human condition. Because whilst it is true that as human beings we come to the world well gifted but lacking the most minimal preparation, with a weakness of judgment and strengths that each person in the singular cannot boast of ever overcoming completely and is aware of it, despite human presumption and prepotency, above all, after the affirmation of the subject.²⁷

Of authority, there is experience. In relationships with others, there is an experience that the figure "authority" names exactly, but it is not a simple and basic feeling. In the literal or strict sense, it is a change in relationship. We feel it when it is recognized in us by others; we feel it as strength, as responsibility, as respect, as a trembling, but also with tranquility and security, or, even, as an inciting to do and a growth of our possibilities. But we can also feel it in negative form, in abuse and then it is, perhaps, one of the most tremendous experiences that can be had. Authority deformed by abuse is arbitrary and it is monstrous for human beings.²⁸

Authority is not by nature fair and nor can it be justified; it is neither rational nor irrational. But, it cannot, due to this, be expelled from human matters as if it had no relationship to them. In human cases it is very important. It is, in itself and in its own way, powerful; it is so because it can act without using the means of power and domination. It would be a wrong choice for it to be fought against by those women and men who love freedom, it is a mistaken move or movement, and when the attempt is adverse, the sensation of failure is much greater.²⁹ Authority does not give guarantees, but it offers itself as an opportunity; it asks to be recognised and practised by the one promising it.

about great economic, ideological and political changes, some, undoubtedly, related to the discovery of the New World.

²⁶L. Muraro, *Autorità...*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

²⁷L. Muraro, *Autorità*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

²⁸L. Muraro, *Autorità*, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

²⁹L. Muraro, *Autorità*, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

What does it promise, according to the philosopher Luisa Muraro? It promises itself as an alternative symbolic strength to that which oppresses us or suffocates people, things, problems, or us. Frequently, authority has been formed and is reformed in a dual relationship in which we can say that one learns to speak about something that was mute and fixed due to repetition.³⁰

Language suggests that there is, there exists, a true sense of authority, as if it were a sixth sense, that some people perceive better than others, perhaps depending on the awareness of it existing and on the choice to see that it is real. Because of this we can say that the sense of authority can be cultivated and a practical medium be made of it.³¹ It is necessary to look for its manifestations in our lives, in art, in literature..., etc., in our relationships in public life, we put it to the test, we put it to the test in power relationships, we work on the language that has to do with it. Language is important – we depend on it for experience to be interpreted in the right way: authority is recognized, attributed, accepted, assumed, it is born in a relationship in which nobody owns it in itself.³²

In the relationships in which authority exists or is, before it acts, there exists, almost always, the fact of disparity, whether it is objective or subjective does not matter. Independently of whether we feel fragile or vice versa, if we feel strong³³ in comparison to another person.³⁴ In fact, strictly speaking, strong or weak people do not exist, in reality what exists are people who can be strong or weak depending on specific contexts. Strength and weakness are human characteristics. In fact, the most important thing or the main action of authority, when not reduced to a simulacrum of power, is that its contribution lies in the transformation of disparity into a relationship of change and exchange.³⁵

³⁰L. Muraro, *Autorità, op. cit.*, p. 50-51.

³¹L. Muraro, *Autorità, op. cit.*, p. 53.

³²In the hope of confirmation of its substance or hidden reason. Luisa Muraro, *Autorità, op. cit.*, p. 54.

³³L. Muraro, *Autorità, op. cit.*, p. 60.

³⁴Strength or weakness can sometimes make a person feel inferior or more vulnerable than another; however, in reality, it is usually the result of a lack or an arrogant attitude in a specific situation. The disparity that may exist –which is not inequality- in relation to a person or towards a specific context, whilst it may generate a feeling of inferiority or bring out roles of presumed superiority, these situations have been sanctioned by society and have enabled the existence of hierarchies. *Ibidem, Autorità, op. cit.*, p. 56.

³⁵L. Muraro, *Autorità, op. cit.*, p. 59.

To the ordering and relational capacity of authority, we should add, then, its specific efficacy in making it possible for there to exist an exchange between the strong and the weak.³⁶

In reality, we might reflect upon what is strong/weak in us, in the other, in our relationships, in a collective enterprise, in an institution, in a group or collective, in sum, in the condition which identifies us as human. What does the operation of authority consist of in authority itself? It acts as a symbolic fire where the words are found³⁷ by those people or those experiences or those ideas that do not have the power to impose themselves.³⁸ The authorized word, which speaks that which wishes to be said, makes us aware of how things are and acts as the light that allows us to see in the darkness of any space. In the imbalance between the strong and weak, it introduces, too, the awareness of the possibility of not being thought: desires move, there is an awakening of energies. And this is turned into a factor of energy. Authority is a valuable non-material asset and its independence is feared due to the great impact it can have on the relationships between human beings. Because of this, the attempt has always been made to integrate it into the social order and established power.³⁹

The answer to what authority is must be found by looking into the human condition – a central theme of philosophy and, too, a challenge of politics-, in order to make it more livable and enjoyable.⁴⁰ It will be more livable and enjoyable if there is a free sense of life and of relationships, that is, of what we call in the studies of sexual difference, the symbolic. That is, the language that is the horizon that guides the human being when it interprets and, in being interpreted, interprets the world. When a human being interprets itself – and it does so all or almost all the days of its existence, wondering, for example, how it is, or how it would like to work, live, or die- it examines and weighs up its main treasure, which is its own experience. I think that, throughout the last century, and even less so in this one, personal experience has had little credibility because it was understood to be subject to so many conditioning factors that little or nothing remained of what was original to it.

³⁶Following the expression used by R. Sennett, *Autorità. Subordinazione e insubordinazione: l'ambiguo vincolo tra il forte e il debole*, trans. by S. d'Alessandro, Milan, Bruno Mondadori, 2006. Cited in *Ibidem*, *Autorità*, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

³⁷P. Florenskij, *Il valore magico della parola*, trans. di Gr. Lingua, Milan, Medusa, 2003.

³⁸L. Muraro, *Autorità*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

³⁹L. Muraro, *Autorità*, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

⁴⁰L. Muraro, *Autorità*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

Today, however, once the patriarchy is over, we know that, if something can develop our society and our culture and improve social and political shared life, it is recognising authority in personal experience, one's own and that of the other, because to do so implies admitting that each human being that is born brings something new to the shared world, something new that often enriches it, but always transforms it. Christine de Pizan was aware of this; she knew that the new brought to the world by each human being was and is its hope, and its fecundity. And because of this, female culture intervened and intervenes precisely in the plus that each human being carries within themselves, in their exquisitely composed energy, developing it and incorporating it into the shared economy and culture. Diverse passages can illustrate how the author differentiates clearly between authority and power, amongst them, this one:

Ti assicuro che si vedeva molto bene che era il principe... La gente gli andava incontro da ogni parte per salutarlo, come è usanza del buon popolo francese verso i suoi signori, e quando c'era una gran folla in qualche grande spazio, in segno di amore e benevolenza, nel ricevere il saluto di tante persone, sollevava il capello.⁴¹

And in a fragment where she cites Seneca, the author says:

*... il saggio consigliere esorta il principi a non avere troppa fiducia nella propria potenza e forza, ...».⁴²En otro pasaje en el que recuerda a Carlos V el Sabio, le dice al delfin: «Come difendeva la giustizia e voleva che fosse difesa sopra ogni cosa, tanto che non ci fu mai nessuno al suo tempo che si potesse lamentare di un'ingiustizia, perché se il lamento fosse venuto alle sue orecchie non ci sarebbe stato bisogno che fosse portato in causa, perché di certo non avrebbe risparmiato nessuno, proprio come si deve, né straniero né intimo, per quanto importante fosse, come molte volte ha dimostrato con persone tra le più vicine a lui...»⁴³ and she goes on, *Per questo suo seguiré e costantemente mantenere la giustizia, ti assicuro che era così rispettato...⁴⁴**

⁴¹ B. Garavelli (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Libro della Pace*, firstpart, ch. VIII, p. 45.

⁴²B. Garavelli(trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Libro della Pace*, secondpart, ch. VI, p. 70.

⁴³B. Garavelli(trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Libro della Pace*, secondpart, ch. IX, p. 78.

⁴⁴B. Garavelli (trans.), Chrisitne de Pizan, *Libro della Pace*, secondpart, ch. IX, p. 78.

But, even in the few discourses on authority in contexts of more liberal traditions–, authority is accompanied, in general by sovereignty and made equal to the power of this latter, as pointed out by Carl Schmitt,⁴⁵ for whom the problem of *auctoritas* che *facit legem* is reduced precisely to the problem of who decides, who decides in a relationship of authority (unlike the difference of one of power or force, it is not who “has it”, [authority] but rather who recognises it.⁴⁶

Because, as the philosopher Chiara Zamboni well points out, the symbolic order names the movement of the real and in this way becomes a measure.⁴⁷ Naturally, as the same author also points out, “the symbolic order can never name all of reality. The symbolic shows, then, the movement of the real according to its essence and leaves aside that which is not significant. This showing does not exhaust the real, but it renounces that the totality of the real gives the advantage: that the symbolic is the measure for all the real.⁴⁸ During the Middle Ages there are periods in which there is not, like today, such a big distance between the maternal symbolic order, between the maternal language and the social order, and perhaps because of this the authority that made the movement circulate between both orders was not diminished. Is it possible –Chiara Zamboni asks– that with the simple naming of authority, that is, with having found appropriate symbolic forms, that this circularity might be put into movement?⁴⁹ I have not been able or known how to find this idea in the work of Christine de Pizan, but I do not discard it for when I study, in greater depth, more of the author’s work.

The politics of mediation and consensus are present in several of the works of Christine de Pizan, because those ideas have as a base element the practice of relationship, or rather of relationships, and it is these that allow us to understand feudalism, because this system was articulated through networks of relationships.

⁴⁵D. Sartori, “‘Tu devi’. Un ordine materno”, in Diotima, *Oltre l’Uguaglianza. Le radici femminili dell’autorità*, Naples, Liguori, 1997, p. 22-23. The philosopher picks up on the appreciation of this right-wing thinker.

⁴⁶C. Schmitt, *Le categorie del politico*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1981, p. 22-23.

⁴⁷Ch. Zamboni, “Ordine simbolico e ordine sociale”, in Diotima, *Oltre l’Uguaglianza. Le radici femminili dell’autorità*, Naples, Liguori, 1997, p. 35 and D. Sartori, “Medida por medida”, in *DUODA. Estudios de la Diferencia Sexual*, 41 (2012), p. 66-90.

⁴⁸Ch. Zamboni, “Ordine simbolico e ordine sociale”, in Diotima, *Oltre l’Uguaglianza. Le radici femminili dell’autorità*, Naples, Liguori, 1997, p. 36.

⁴⁹Ch. Zamboni, “Ordine simbolico e ordine sociale”, in Diotima, *Oltre l’Uguaglianza. Le radici femminili dell’autorità*, Naples, Liguori, 1997, p. 43.

Feudalism was the system of relationships of the society of the time of the life of Christine (1364/1365-ca. 1430). An attentive reading of various works of the mother of French arts allows for the observation that the care of relationships is for her, as for some present-day women, a predominantly female element.⁵⁰ And she gives great value to the mediation that, on the other hand, she was accustomed to seeing exercised by the Queens and princesses in the court and also of some kings –like her admired Charles V the Sage,

(*Charles V le Sage, Vincennes, 21st January, 1338* – *Nogent-sur-Marne, 16th September, 1380*); he was the third King of France of the Valois dynasty. First son of the King Juan el Bueno and of Bona of Luxemburg) to whom Christine dedicated *La vita e i buonicostumi del saggio re Carlo V*,⁵¹ because for her «... el compito del príncipe per tenere il suo popolo in pace...»,⁵²

... *quinella parte che riguarda ancora l'argomento della clemenza, con la quale è iniziata questa terza parte di questo libro, e sempre seguendo l'argomento della pace nel buon governo di un príncipe, per tutto ciò che riguarda gli stat generali del corpo politico...*,⁵³ e insiste la autora «... per mostrare come con clemenza e bontà un príncipe può conquistare l'amicizia di stanieri e privati, terre e beni, **più che con guerre** e usando le arme, con durezza e rigore...»,⁵⁴

A clear example that reminds Christine of the dauphin, the prince Louis, Duke of Guyenne⁵⁵, of his grandfather –Charles V-:

⁵⁰ Those who analyse reality –historical of the past or the present- setting out from the self and from sexual difference.

⁵¹ V. Rossini (a cura di), Christine de Pizán, *La vita e i buonicostumi del saggio re Carlo V*, Rome, Carocci, 2010.

⁵² B. Garavelli (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Il libro della Pace*, Milan, Ed. Medusa, 2007, p. 118.

⁵³ B. Garavelli (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Il libro della Pace*, Milan, Ed. Medusa, 2007, p. 118. In this fragment we can appreciate, besides, the literary version of the idea of State as a biological organism, which the author investigates and analyses until the third part of the book.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem* (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Il libro della Pace, op. cit.*, p. 120.

⁵⁵ Son of Charles VI, who had already shown in 1392 the first symptoms of mental imbalance, his brother Louis took immediate advantage of this situation to call for the right to reign in his place. His uncle, the duke of Burgundy, impeded this and was the regent during the periods that his nephew was unable to exercise power. On his death in 1404, the new duke of Burgundy, Juan the Fearless, less diplomatic than his father, was not able to keep the peace between Orleans and Burgundy and in no time the confrontation broke out into open war. One of the main motives was to control the dauphin, Louis of France, to whom Christine dedicated the *Libro della Pace*.

... *Oh! Chegrandesaggezza in unpríncipeagirecosì, perche non dubitarechemaireigore di armipossaportare a qualcosa di più di dolcezza e bontà. E per quantoioparli, miostimattissimosignore, del tuosaggioavo, avreibisogno di troppo tempo per raccontaretuttodellesuevirtù, ma per diretutto in una frase, tanto agiva con senno, clemenza e liberalità che in fretta crebbe la usa buona fortuna, e sempre più.*⁵⁶

Mediation is a necessary relationship for women and some men for whom relationships and unending relationships⁵⁷ shape their life and their political actions. That Christine de Pizan values mediation is not an impediment to her praising, in one of her texts, Joan of Arc,⁵⁸ as the leader of the French troops and as a visionary, she probably does so, because the *pucellad' Orléans*, like Christine herself, does not conform to the stereotype of a fragile and passive woman that was expected of women of her time. Both are strong women, although the strength⁵⁹ of their opinions and opinions was to place them in jeopardy. When strength loses the measure it abandons mediation,⁶⁰ this is what happens to France during this period. France,⁶¹ which had been one of the strongest countries in Europe.

⁵⁶ B. Garavelli (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Il libro della Pace*, op. cit., p. 122.

⁵⁷ As the medievalist M.-M. Rivera Garretas calls them, *La diferencia sexual en la historia*, Valencia, PUV, p. 164.

⁵⁸ P. Caraffi (a cura di), Christine de Pizan, *Poema di Giovanna d'Arco*. Con testo originale a fronte, Florencia, Le Lettere Casa Editrice, 2013, p. 171-188; V. Sackville-West, *Juana de Arco*, Madrid, Siruela, 2003.

⁵⁹ On strength, see the number 100 of the journal of the Milan Women's Bookstore, *Via Dogana*, 100 (March, 2012); some of the articles have been translated into Spanish and Catalan in *DUODA. Estudios de la Diferencia Sexual*, 44 (2013). See too the book of L. Muraro, *Dio è violent*, Rome, Nottetempo, 2012 and also S. Weil, "La Iliada o el Poema de la fuerza" and "Annex a l'article de la "Iliada o el poema de la força", in *Escrts sobre la guerra*, Alcira, ed. Bromera, 2003, p. 79-109 and 138-153.

⁶⁰ L. Muraro, *Al mercato della felicità. La forza irrinunciabile del desiderio*, Milan, Mondadori, 2009, p. 119-137.

⁶¹ France kept up a long conflict with England which went back to the eleventh century, when William, duke of Normandy, invaded the island of Great Britain (1066) and dominated a good part of the island. The rivalry would be kept up during the twelfth centuries, when the Normandy dukes were replaced by the Anjou dynasty which owned important territories in the southwest and west of France, and by the support of France for Scotland. Throughout the thirteenth century the rivalry was kept up amongst the reigning dynasties in both countries, the Capeta in France and the Plantagenets in England. See P. Stafford, *Women and the Norman Conquest. (Transactions of the Royal Historical Society)*, (1996), 6^a series (4), p. 221-250; [Ch. Petit-Dutaillis](#) et P. Guinard, *L'essor des états d'Occident (France, Angleterre, Péninsule ibérique)*, Paris, Les Presses universitaires, 1937, (*Histoire générale*, published under the leadership of G. Glotz, *Histoire du Moyen Age*, t. IV, deuxième partie) and E. N. Hallam.; J. Everard, *Capetian France 987-1328*, New York, Longman, 2001, second ed.

Stronger than most of those it was in competition with,⁶² it had committed the error of not learning from its mistakes, losing its ability to act through diplomacy, or, if one prefers, incapable of formulating a foreign policy. France did not do the work of relationship that is done through language, that is, seeking the words for the other to be able to understand or perhaps share, taking their point of view or at least foreseeing it; that is, thinking about a world and a space –the European one- that was shared. France paid dearly for its error with a cruel war⁶³ and with defeats such as that of Azincourt (or Agincourt, 1415).⁶⁴

As Christine points out in *Il libro della Pace: in questo reame che tuttigli altri precede e supera in nobiltà, non si addestrassero e allenassero anche in tempo di pace i nobili nell'usodell'armatura e delle armi, affinché nel momento del bisogno fossero abili e pronti a combattere, senza bisogno di altri uomini...*⁶⁵

Christine does know how to recognise the value of mediation that is always necessary which, as Muraro says, is inaugurated when one learns to talk and is taken up again when we learn to read and write.⁶⁶ Mediation is not a political practice in which the result is won for once and for always; that is, once and for all. Mediation has to be made available, making it circulate if it is possible.

The necessary mediation is a real symbolic work, as Luisa Muraro indicates, a work of searching for the exact words to say them in the first person. There is mediation when the words to speak experience make me or us recognise them with a new and different way of looking than the previously known way, it makes me take them on and accept them as I could not before. And this can be appreciated in diverse texts by Christine de Pizan; she found the words and gave them a new light.

⁶² The rivalry between France and England had a feudal origin and would end up as a war which was to last one hundred and sixteen years, the Hundred Years War (1337-1453). A confrontation which was to embed pain, death, hunger and worry in the lands of the kingdom of France, and would also affect the English and the Flemish lands... The war was to become an international conflict in which Castile, the Sacro Imperio, Navarre, Mallorca would intervene... E. Perroy, *La Guerre de Cent ans*, Paris, Gallimard, 1945; J. Baschet, *La civilisation féodale*, Paris, Aubier, 204.

⁶³ F. Birulés, (trans.), Á. Lorena Fuster and G. Rosich (ed.), Hannah Arendt, *Sobre la violencia*, Barcelona, Angle editorial, 2011.

⁶⁴ B. Matthew, *Agincourt 1415*, London, Osprey, 1991. Madrid, Ed. Esp. del Prado, 1995.

⁶⁵ B. Garavelli (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Il libro della Pace*, Milan: Edition Medusa, 2007, p. 114.

⁶⁶ B. Garavelli (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Libro della Pace*, second part, ch. IX, p. 78.

Because of this, Luisa Muraro says that mediation is not a mere reproduction or a copy, it is a force that activates a dynamic and awakened circle or a plus. So that, we can say, mediation is not the work of extraordinary people, but rather of common people who take on the responsibility of a specific enterprise, and decide, with the awareness of not going back, of not pulling back in the face of difficulties. A good and clear example of how mediation works is constituted in the shared language, which continually is made, is unmade, is remade, because it always works with mediation, which is why it is said that a language is alive, in consideration of the circle that it activates and is in itself. Is this why Christine chose to write in great measure in her adopted maternal tongue, French? We believe this to be so, because it was for her the living language, the language of reality and of experience.

The circle that language activates is a circle mediated by experience that awakens the consciousness, a consciousness that gives light to experience, in a continuous change of its respective places, in such a way that we can say that precedents in this way of acting do not exist. With the coherent mobility of things and words, without a fixed previous position and without precedents, subjectivity is put into play –I Christine-, and this putting into play, that is, into movement, is what some feminist thinkers call *setting out from the self*, that is, renouncing the objective external point of view in order to implicate oneself in the reality in question, and to do so by separating oneself, letting go of oneself in order to put oneself into the movement of the transformation of self and of language, one thing through the other.

When someone recognises another or someone's competence in something, for example, the speakers of a specific language, the thinker Luisa Muraro speaks of authority, because there is a symbolic competence. This is analogue to the difference with which authority is exercised in the linguistic and non-linguistic context, like a capacity to make words and things coincide, thus giving life to a special coherence.

It is not logical, because it makes reference not only to the relationships between words, but also between things and words, relationships of correspondences that are established on the condition of not fixing them but rather as if it were an unstable balance that seeks mobility. Many female thinkers and researchers of different disciplines, amongst them, historians, believe that a world with a symbolic coherence existed until the middle of the last century, a symbolic coherence that has diminished alarmingly due to the great number of historical changes that have taken place; in reality, the change of civilization that has occurred.

Changes some of which we can no longer manage or govern over, they no longer depend on us. Of these changes, Luisa Muraro considers as most significant the little consideration that has been given (and continues to be the case for some) of a difference that should be considered as an inaugural element for the necessary mediation; this mediation is female desire. Symbolic activity, as is also indicated by another great thinker, the linguist Roman Jakobson, "is that which feeds in us the meaning of reality", because if not, it is as if everything were to disappear, to turn into something and we might end up believing that everything can be pretended.

It is because of this that mediation is a fundamental element in the world, in that of today and in that lived in by Christine de Pizan; because of this I will bring together some fragments of different texts where one can appreciate with significant clarity the importance and the value that the author concedes to mediation, not only in the situation she finds herself in in France, but rather mediation in the life of the world, one single world, but made up of two sexes: women and men. We can all contribute to the necessary mediation to this symbolic activity, that is, of meaning, that language provides; in the case of Christine, her adopted language, as the maternal one –French-which made names coincide with things.

If mediation is so important and necessary for all human beings – why does having power over others, in whatever form, attract all people so much, including little girls and boys? Because to have more power than the other is an extraordinary reduction; it frees us from the fatigue of mediation, even that which would be very necessary, mediation with other women and men, with the world, but, also with the most difficult part of oneself/ourselves⁶⁷.

In a place in which relationships of force prevail with their greater power to that of others, the requirement is not felt to create shared spaces and places in which to negotiate how to live freely and peacefully, as Christine de Pizan wished. The circle of force can be fought against with the symbolic force of authority, which, being in itself neither good nor bad, is directed in a relational sense, admits free consensus and disputes with power over the terrain of what is at stake politically.⁶⁸

⁶⁷L. Muraro, *op. cit.* p. 57.

⁶⁸L. Muraro, *op. cit.* p. 59

When Christine speaks of the fourth virtue that the prince should have she highlights: *La quartavirtùchedovrestipossedere, nobilissimoprincipe, è la forza, che è moltoimportante e sicombina con la magnanimità, datoche' unanascedall'altra. E non è da intendersi come forza o potenza fisica, ma pura forza di animo.*⁶⁹

We can understand that she understands another kind of relationship, of power and of mediation between the people and the prince when she signals, citing Casiodoro: ... *che è unagrandefelicitàottenere la signoriasenzacontese, chesipuòinterpretarechesiilpríncipesatener a signoriasenzachesisiadiscordiafraisuoisubbiditi, è segno che è saggio e virtuoso...*⁷⁰ Or when, citing Cicero, she indicates: ... *come è grande la forza e la virtù dell'amicizia e della concórdia contro i mali che ci sono venuti dalla divisione e dalla discórdia. E perciò serve a conferma del fatto che, visti gli orribili problemi trascorsi a causa della discórdia, per non nutrire rancori, viviamo ormai e per sempre in unione e pace.*

And she adds:

*E ancora torniamo a quanto è detto sopra. Che nel contenuto di questa santa unione dev'essere compreso lo stesso popolo, per il fatto che potrebbe sembrare ad alcuni, considerati gli eventi e gli errori e le offese passate che il popolo steso, o una sua gran parte, ha sopportato benché non dovessero essere accettabili, mi sembra bene mettere in rilievo, per esempio, che il principi debba avere grande cura del popolo minuto...*⁷¹ and also when she points out: ... *è più sicuro per la sua signoria che non l'essere molto vendicativo [il signore], il che può significare che è meglio per un principi essere amato per il fatto di non essere troppo rigido, piuttosto che essere troppo temuto per il fatto di essere crudele.*⁷²

In spite of praising nobility when she marks some very strong bonds between her and her lord, Christine says: ... *perché nonostante davvero tutti gli uomini siano uguali per creazione e nascita, nondimeno dovete sapere che per lunga usanza questa uguaglianza si trasforma in diverse condizioni sociale, ed è cosa naturale: gli uni sono nobili di linaggio, gli altri per grandezza di cuore e costumi...*⁷³

⁶⁹ B. Garavelli (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Libro della Pace*, secondpart, ch. XVI, p. 88.

⁷⁰ B. Garavelli (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Libro della Pace*, thirdpart, ch. VI, p. 102.

⁷¹ B. Garavelli (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Libro della Pace*, thirdpart, ch. VII, p. 104.

⁷² B. Garavelli (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Libro della Pace*, thirdpart, ch. VII, p. 104.

⁷³ B. Garavelli (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Libro della Pace*, thirdpart, ch. X, p. 108.

And to finish, I would like to point to the clear desire of Christine de Pizan to carry out the mediation herself, when she says:

... e desidero contribuiré allà pace ed evitare la guerra, con i mezzi della mia limitata conoscenza ne ho parlato per dimostrare come queste persone siano da governare con grande accortezza, affinché mai il pericolo a cui ho accennato possa verificarsi, perché, come dice un saggio, chi non vuole incorrere inconvenienti deve dominare la situazioni...»,⁷⁴ y por último señala Christine y que esto sea verdad «ce lo insegna l'esperienza del passato recente...»⁷⁵

The small fragments chosen mark many elements that show clearly the desire for mediation and consensus of many of the works of Christine de Pizan, and not only this, but she also differentiates clearly between authority and power, that of the prince, but also that of others, such as some of the contemporary authors, like Jean Gerson, in whom she recognised authority, independently of the power that the clergyman and teacher of the University of Paris had or might come to have. Christine de Pizan was a woman who valued women and not only in the *Ciudad de las Damas* did she undertake to give them value in the face of others and before the world, highlighting that they had to have access to culture, those that were capable of it. Her focus and conception of the role of writing is enormously modern, not only –as we have already said– as a poetic and political voice, but rather in its material aspects, given that she covered all the stages of production and distributing her texts, and this was in a time prior to the printing press. Mistress of a workshop of miniaturists, as she explains in *La Ciudad de las Damas*.⁷⁶ We know that she was an author who was very concerned about making her texts known and through her autograph manuscripts; we know how she annotated in her texts the place that a miniature had to go and the subject of the same.⁷⁷

⁷⁴B. Garavelli (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Libro della Pace*, thirdpart, ch. X, p. 108.

⁷⁵B. Garavelli (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *Libro della Pace*, thirdpart, ch. XII p. 113.

⁷⁶M-J. Lemarchand (ed.), Cristina de Pizán, *La ciudad de las Damas*, Madrid, Siruela, 1995, ch. XLI, p. 140.

⁷⁷ Vid.M. Le Noir, Christine de Pisan, *Le Tresor de la cité des dames de degrémdegré et de tousestatz*, [Texte imprimé] selon dame Cristine, Paris, 1503. This book is about a text in which she gives advice to women and is written in the same years as *La Ciudad de las Damas*.