



## 12 Death as Metamorphosis in the Devotional and Political Allegory of Christine de Pizan

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The essays in this volume have highlighted the interplay between the individual body and the communal body: that is, the way in which the community is figured as a body that contains mutually interdependent members, and excludes that which lies outside its boundaries. This closing essay focuses on how the body's apparent stability is undercut by its necessarily changeable nature: just as the individual human body appears different over time, just as it matures, eventually weakens, and finally dies and decays, so too the communal body is subject to alteration. Change is in its nature. In the Christian vision of community, however, the collective body of the Church could be understood as immutable because its template is the eternal and unchanging form of Christ. In this view, the perfect flesh of the Incarnation, remaining eternally whole as resurrected body, models the wholeness of the community of the Church that is at once a mirror of Christ and his bride.

Secular notions of community were somewhat different. Even though notions of the body politic were modelled upon conceptions of the Christian community, the immutability that could be assumed by the Church was not so readily available to the nation. On the contrary, mutability was written into the very fabric of the nation, not only in the lived realities of political conflict and continually redrawn national boundaries, but also in the elaborate (and, often, imaginary) genealogical relationships that underlay medieval European constructions of the nation. Change, in other words, had to be reckoned with in the effort to describe the contours of the late medieval body politic. This effort is the focus of the present essay, which explores the tension between the individual and the communal body in two works by Christine de Pizan, both of which portray the necessary phenomenon of change: the *Livre du corps de policie*, written

in 1406–7, and the *Livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V*, written in 1404. In each of these works, *vertu* is presented as the mediating property that both guarantees flux and ensures continuity. In the *Corps de policie*, *vertu* appears as a liquid, flowing substance that vivifies the body politic; in the biography of Charles V, it appears as a property of the king himself. In both cases, however, *vertu* is central to Christine's figurative representation of the formation and maintenance of the community, whether expressed in terms of political allegory (as in the *Corps de policie*) or devotional allegory (as in the biography of Charles V). The life of the body politic is maintained through the circulation of *vertu* throughout the community, while its leadership is perpetuated through the expression of *vertu* in the person of the nation's ruler. While the death of the king might threaten to interrupt the continuity of the body politic, Christine presents a vision of kingship in which death is, paradoxically, both a beginning and an ending, a time of change that is also a moment of supreme stability. Through the devotional allegory of her biography of Charles V and the political allegory of her *Corps de policie*, Christine constructs a figurative model of the body politic that reaffirms the fundamental stability of the French nation, defying the political and social turmoil of the period.

By the early fifteenth century, writers had come to think differently about the relationship of language to knowledge, and about the role of affective devotion in the act of knowing. No longer an intellectual process that could be described simply through tropes of vision, allegorical knowing came to be articulated in terms of bodily process, in which the flow of tears, blood, and humoral fluids were the signs through which knowledge was mediated. In this setting, metamorphosis – that is, bodily change – came to be used as an extended metaphor for other kinds of transformation: historical, ecclesiastical, social, and spiritual. Christine de Pizan's work manifests this perspective on the relationship of language to knowledge with particular clarity: she describes death in terms of metamorphosis, and uses it as a figure for transformation in general, expressed through the literary modes that she refers to as 'poesie' and 'methafore.'

While this essay will argue that Christine's biography of Charles V can be read as an expression of 'devotional allegory,' it is important to note that it is nothing new to point out devotional elements in the writing of Christine de Pizan. Her commentary on the seven penitential psalms, her *Epistre de la prison de vie humaine*, and, most famously, the legends of saints found in the third book of her *Cité des dames* clearly identify Christine as a writer deeply concerned with the literary expression of religious

piety. It is somewhat more unusual, however, to point out the integration of these devotional elements within Christine's allegory. In part, this is the result of Christine's own practice of signalling continuities between her writings and earlier works in the allegorical tradition, such as the *Roman de la rose* or Dante's *Commedia*; in part, this is the result of a modern tendency to separate what one might call 'secular' allegory from other uses of figurative language in a devotional setting. I myself have been guilty of contributing to this tendency, having argued that the writings of Christine de Pizan are particularly representative of standard late medieval secular allegory (Akbari, *Seeing* 236–43).

While there are good reasons to read Christine's work as part of a lineage of allegorical literature, I have come to think that it is misleading to use the harsh dichotomy of 'secular allegory' and 'devotional writing' to characterize her writings. Following the argument of Barbara Newman that a number of medieval allegories can be seen as representative of a mode of writing we might call 'imaginative theology' (Newman, 292–304), I would suggest that Christine can productively be read as a writer of 'devotional allegory.' Like the subgenre of 'devotional romance' that several readers (including myself) have proposed in recent years,<sup>1</sup> the subgenre of 'devotional allegory' may allow us to perceive the cross-fertilization of genres and figurative modes so characteristic of the early fifteenth century, an age of transition in many respects. Similarly, Christine's use of political allegory can be fruitfully studied in the context of the 'decision allegories' found in the work of Nicole Oresme, as well as in the broader framework of the late medieval proliferation of allegories focused on civic, national, and ecclesiastical division.<sup>2</sup> For Christine, as for other late medieval allegorists, the purposes of the enigmatic mode had moved far away from the abstruse philosophical allegories of the twelfth century; instead, allegory had come to be a figurative mode that could be used to describe the changes taking place in the surrounding world, and to account for the place of the individual within the swirl of time.

### The Body Politic

The *Livre du corps de policie* is a political treatise concerning the welfare and conduct of the body politic: linking together its political counsel, however, is what we might call the 'political allegory' of the body. While this political allegory is threaded throughout the work as a whole, it is most succinctly articulated in a passage that appears in the third book of the *Corps de policie*, which focuses on the 'menu peuple,' that is, the 'little

people' or 'commoners.'<sup>3</sup> Christine addresses to them a parable or 'fable' concerning the parts of the body:

[H]ere is a moral tale composed in the guise of a fable.

Once upon a time there was a great murmuring between the belly of the human body and its limbs ... Therefore the limbs stopped working, and the belly was no longer nourished, and so it began to grow thin, and the limbs to fail and become feeble. And thus, due to spite of the one toward the other, all perished together. Similarly, when the prince demands more of the people than they can provide, and when the people murmur against the prince, and rebel out of disobedience – in such discord, all perish together.

And for this reason, the union of accord is the conservation of all the said body politic.<sup>4</sup>

[C]hiet une telle moralité fourmee en guise de fable a propos.

Une fois sourdit moult grant murmuracion entre le ventre de corps humain et les membres ... Si cesserent les membres de oeuvre, et le ventre plus ne fu nourri, si commença a amagrir et les membres a deffaillir et a affoibloier. Et ainsi en despit l'un de l'autre tout peri ensemble. Semblablement avient quant prince demande plus a peuple qu'il ne peut fournir, et que peuple murmure contre prince et se rebelle par desobeissance: tel descort perist tout ensemble.

Et pour ce conclus que union d'accord est la conservacion de tout le dit corps de la policie. (3.1; Kennedy 92.6–25)

Versions of this 'fable' date back to the twelfth century, appearing in John of Salisbury's *Polycraticus* and, in a more developed version, in the *Fables* of Marie de France.<sup>5</sup> The need for all members of the body politic to work together for the good of the whole is stated in the starkest of terms: without the cooperation of all of the parts, the body becomes 'thin' and 'feeble,' and finally 'all perish together.' Here, death truly is the end, both of the individual and of the community as a whole.

One might expect to find this concise allegorical summary of the body politic placed at the opening of the work; instead, however, Christine opens the *Corps de policie* with a more oblique evocation of the body politic, one that focuses on her own role within the community. This is in keeping with Christine's approach throughout her allegorical works, in which the position of the autobiographical narrator is used as a kind of staging ground for the broader aims of the work as a whole. For example, her *Livre de la mutacion de Fortune* prefaces the account of the great movements of nations in its universal history with an allegorical au-

tobiography of Christine herself, recounting how she too was changed by Fortune, while her *Livre de la cité des dames* opens with Christine alone in her study, unhappily contemplating a vast heritage of misogynistic literature before moving into a wide-ranging account of the great women of history and myth. Similarly, the *Livre du corps de policie* opens with Christine's identification of her own role within the body politic, one which, significantly, is defined by the obligation of the individual member of the community to express her *vertu*.

Consistently throughout her writings, Christine de Pizan expresses a passionate concern for the welfare of her community, whether that community be defined in terms of nation, in terms of gender, or in terms of a common allegiance to certain intellectual and philosophical principles. Nowhere, however, is Christine's concern for the welfare of the community expressed more passionately than in the opening lines of the *Corps de policie*:

If it is possible for virtue to be born of vice, it pleases me very well, in this respect, to be impassioned as a woman. Thus, since many men assume that the female sex does not know how to keep quiet or to silence the abundance of their hearts, now come boldly, then, and be shown, through many clear streams, the source and inexhaustible fountain of my heart, which cannot be restrained from pouring forth the desires of virtue. Oh, Virtue, thing noble and divine, how can I dare to put myself forward by speaking of you, when I know that my understanding does not know you well and cannot express you?

Se il est possible que de vice puist naistre vertu, bien me plaist en ceste partie estre passionnee comme femme. Ainsi que plusieurs hommes au sexe femenin imposent non savoir taire ne tenir soubz sillance l'abondance de leur courage, or viengne donc hors hardiement et se demonstre par plusieurs clers ruisseaux la source et fontaine interissable de mon couraige que ne peut estancher de getter hors les desirs de vertu. O vertu, chose digne et deifiee, comment m'ose-je vanter de parler de toy, quant je congnois que mon entendement ne te sauroit bien au vif comprendre ne exprimer? (1.1; Kennedy 1.6–14)

In this powerful passage, the passionate outpouring of *vertu* from the pen of the writer is representative of the same *vertu* that should infuse every member of the body politic, ensuring that the community is knit together in a state of social health, linked by the 'love' (1.1; Kennedy 2.4) expressed by each member towards all of the other members of the body.

As a number of scholars, including Kate Forhan and Cary Nederman, have pointed out, Christine's *Livre du corps de policie* draws upon John of Salisbury's extended metaphor of the body politic in order to outline the remedies available to the late medieval French state.<sup>6</sup> Christine alters John's anatomical metaphor, however, in order to elaborate on what one might call the 'physiological' aspects, illustrating how the social health of the body politic must be actively maintained. Nederman has shown that Christine's physiological amplification of John's fundamentally anatomical metaphor has parallels in the work of her contemporary Nicole Oresme: in his *De moneta*, Oresme emphasizes the role of economic exchange in dynamically maintaining the fiscal – and social – health of the nation.<sup>7</sup> Other studies of Christine's development of the metaphor of the body politic have focused on the crucial role of gender in Christine's imagining of the nation. Tsae Lan Lee Dow has gone so far as to suggest that Christine's reworking of John's metaphor actually 'feminizes' the body politic, constructing an idea of the nation that is not founded on the normative 'virile' body of the male (227–43). In a complementary study, Karen Green has argued that the personification of 'Felicité Vertueuse' [or 'virtuous happiness'] in the opening chapters of the *Corps de policie* is part of Christine's programmatic reworking of masculine normative forms in order to lay the groundwork not only for a specifically feminine poetics, but also for the exercise of political power by women.<sup>8</sup> In a series of articles focused on Christine de Pizan's writing about the French nation, Lori Walters has proposed that the opening of the *Corps de policie* features a 'female voice' that initially presents itself through 'female bodily metaphors,' but ultimately constructs a 'semimystical body combining male and female characteristics.'<sup>9</sup>

I propose to draw back from readings focused primarily on gender difference (which tends to be foregrounded in studies of Christine's work) in order to more fully explore the function of *vertu* in the *Livre du corps de policie*, showing how Christine expresses it in terms of two distinct discourses: that is, the devotional and the humoral. In each of these discourses, *vertu* functions as a liquid, mediating property that acts as a catalyst to enable motion and change. Within the terms of devotional discourse, *vertu* functions like blood or milk, calling forth an empathetic, affective response in the reader. Within the terms of Galenic discourse, *vertu* functions like one of the four humours whose balance is essential to the health of the body.<sup>10</sup> Within devotional discourse, *vertu* serves as a metonym for the nourishing, spiritually revivifying liquid of the divine presence; within the humoral discourse, *vertu* serves as a metaphor for the fluids that animate the body. Through *vertu*, the philosophical figure of the body politic

and the affective figure of the suffering Christ are drawn together into a single quality that the narrator both offers as a remedy to her readers and adduces as the source of her own poetic inspiration.

In medieval Latin, as in vernacular languages of the late Middle Ages, the term *vertu* has several different meanings. On the level of created nature, *vertu* is life sustaining and regenerative, conveyed through the natural moisture that infuses all living things. Such uses of the term are ubiquitous in medieval culture: for example, in the thirteenth-century encyclopedia of Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *vertu* refers to the power of animation, the power of fecundity, of thought, of precious stones, of seeds, of eggs, of music, and so on.<sup>11</sup> Nowhere, however, are the multiple meanings of natural virtue more fully on display than in medieval medical writings, where every aspect of the physiology of the living body is articulated through the expression of virtue – from the digestive powers located in the stomach and liver, to the generative powers of reproduction, to the expulsive powers driving fluids out of the body, to the humours that actively maintain and propagate the smooth workings of all of the body's parts. The faculties of the mind as it thinks and the faculties of the senses as they mediate between the outside world and the interior, sensitive soul are all characterized in terms of *vertu*.

The extraordinary accomplishment of the *Livre du corps de policie* is that, in it, Christine draws together the various applications of natural *vertu* and integrates them with ethical virtue: in other words, the expression of moral virtues such as prudence or temperance is characterized in terms of natural processes that (in medical writing) are also expressed in terms of *vertu*. Such integration is not unprecedented in medieval culture: late medieval philosophers and theologians worked hard to amalgamate Aristotelian and Augustinian notions of virtue,<sup>12</sup> and a popular, vernacular audience was addressed on this topic by Brunetto Latini in the late thirteenth century. In book one of his *Tresor*, Brunetto describes the 'vertu' of the soul, including sense perception (1.15, pp. 12–13), and the 'vertus' of the body, including the 'apetitive, retentive, digiestive et espulsive' (1.102, pp. 66–7). Book two, titled 'on vices and virtues' ('des vices et de vertus'), devotes its first fifty chapters to a vernacular translation of Aristotle's *Ethics* before turning to a compendium of authorities ranging from Cicero and Seneca to Augustine and Bernard, all centring on the nature of 'vertu' (2.52; pp. 203–6). Brunetto thus integrates Aristotelian philosophy with Christian theology in a synthetic redefinition of *vertu*, and implies – but does not state explicitly – that this *vertu* is to be identified, at least figuratively, with the virtues that animate the body.

It is precisely this synthesis that Christine de Pizan effects in her *Livre*

*du corps de policie*. Christine coordinates natural *vertu* with the ethical expression of *vertu*, indicating that this quality must be expressed not only by the ruler (as head of the body politic), but also by the knightly class (as its arms and hands), and by the ‘common people’ (as its belly and lower limbs):

which three kinds of estate ought to be in one single polity just like a real living body, according to the teachings of Plutarch who, in a letter that he sent to Trajan the emperor, compares the republic [‘chose publique’; cf. *res publica*] to a living body, in which the prince or the princes hold the place of the head ... The knights and the nobles hold the place of the hands and the arms ... The other types of people are like the belly and the feet and the legs, for just as the belly receives everything into itself that is provided by the head and the limbs, just so the workings of the prince and the nobles must be directed to the good, and for the love of the public, as will be explained more fully later on. And just as the legs and the feet sustain the deeds of the human body, similarly the laborers sustain all the other estates.

lesquelz trois genres d'estat doivent estre en une seule policie ainsi comme un droit corps vif, selon la sentence de pultarque qui en une epistre qu'il envoya a Trajen l'empereur compare la chose publique a un corps aiant vie, auquel le prince ou les princes tiennent le lieu du chief ... Les chevaliers et les nobles tiennent le lieu des mains et des bras ... Les autres gens de peuple sont comme le ventre et les piez et les jambes, car si comme le ventre reçoit tout en soy ce que prepare le chief et les membres, ainsi le fait de l'exercite du prince et des nobles doit revertir ou bien et en l'amour publique, si comme cy après sera plus declairiée. Et ainsi comme les jambes et piez soustiennent le fais du corps humain, semblent les laboureurs soustiennent tous les autres estas. (1.1; Kennedy 1.27–33, 2.1–7)

Each of the three parts of the *Livre du corps de policie* corresponds to each of the three ‘estas’; each estate is, in turn, instructed in the expression of moral virtue. Such expression of moral virtue will lead to the health and growth of the body politic, a process which is articulated in physiological terms based on the workings of natural virtue in the living body.

Christine’s use of *vertu* in the *Corps de policie* is, as I have begun to suggest, polysemous, and this polysemy is further enriched by the description of personified virtue in the opening sections of the work. In a passage that has attracted attention from a number of scholars, Christine describes an ‘image’ of ‘Felicité Vertueuse’ ‘in the form of a very beautiful and very



delightful queen seated on a royal throne' ['en guise d'une tres belle et tres delictative royne qui en une chaire royal seoit' (1.2; 2.29–30)], surrounded by the personified virtues of Prudence, Justice, Force, and Temperance ('Atrempance'). As Karen Green points out, Christine's modification of her source, Augustine's *City of God*, is based not in an erroneous reading of Augustine but rather a deliberate reworking of the image: Green argues that the effect is to emphasize the role of the feminine – and, perhaps, the role of actual women rulers – in the exercise of political power (Green 134). Here, however, I would like instead to draw attention to the way in which the personification of Felicité Vertueuse forms the basis of Christine's physiological, dynamic model of the body politic, where *vertu* functions as the nutritive fluid of the state. Each of the personified virtues maintains the health of the body politic: Prudence ensures that Felicité Vertueuse 'is able to reign for a long time, and remain healthy, and in a secure state' ['peust longuement regner et estre saigne et en estat seur' (1.2; 2.33–5)], while Force makes sure that, 'if any sorrow come to her body, that she moderate it by resistant and virtuous thought' ['se aucune douleur venoit a son corps qu'elle l'amoderast par resistant et vertueuse pensee' (1.2; 2.36–7)]. Temperance ensures the health of the body politic by ensuring that she only moderately consume 'wines and meats and other delightful things' ['vins et viandes et autres choses delictables' (1.2; 2.37–3.1)]. That is to say, the personification of Felicité Vertueuse is significant not simply in terms of gender, but also in terms of embodiment: the virtuous quality of this felicity lies in its active maintenance of the flow of life forces within the body politic.

This dynamic flow of life forces through the medium of *vertu* recalls the opening passage of the *Livre du corps de policie*, discussed above, in which Christine's narrator explicitly couches the call to health that she directs to the people of France in terms of the upwelling of *vertu*. Here, *vertu* is explicitly characterized as that which is 'born' from vice, and which manifests itself as a 'pouring forth,' a liquid stream that offers revivifying nourishment to the body politic in the form of exhortation towards moral and ethical virtues. This liquid quality of *vertu* appears once again in the passage that immediately follows the long description of the personified Felicité Vertueuse:

Now we have to discuss virtue, to the profit of the order of living for all three different estates; by this said virtue, human life must be regulated in all works and, without it, no man may attain honor; and so that it be the right degree of honor, Valerius says that the most plenteous nourishment of virtue is honor.

Ainsi doncques nous avons a traictier de vertu au prouffit d'order de vivre en trois differences d'estas par laquelle dicte vertu vie humaine doit estre ruillee en toutes oeuvres et sans qui ne peut homme a honneur ataindre, et que elle soit le droit degré de honneur dit Valere que les tres plantureux nourissement de vertu est honneur. (1.2; Kennedy 2.9–13)

In this passage, *vertu* nourishes each part of the body politic, thereby leading to the nourishment of the whole. Such proper flowing of liquid virtue is what conduces towards not just the nourishment but also the health of the body politic:

And thus by this present description, one may understand that being virtuous is nothing other than having within oneself all the things that draw towards good, and which draw outward and away all that is bad and full of vice. Therefore, it is necessary that, in order to govern the public body politic, the head be healthy, that is, virtuous. For if it should be sick, all [parts] will feel it as well. Therefore let us begin to speak of the medicine for the head, that is, for the king or the princes.

Et ainsi par ceste presente description puet-on entendre que estre vertueux n'est autre chose fors avoir en soy toutes les choses qui tirent a bien et qui retraient et tirent en sus de mal et de vice. Doncques est-il necessaire pour bien gouverner le corps de la policie publique que le chief soit sain, c'est a savoir vertueux. Car s'il estoit malade, tout s'en sentirait. Sy commencerons a dire de la medicine du chief, c'est a savoir du roy ou des princes. (1.2; Kennedy 3.3–9)

The first of the book's three sections will exhort the 'head' of the body politic towards virtue, which is to say, towards 'health': 'if the head [of the body] is healthy,' Christine writes – 'that is, virtuous' – the parts of the body will follow. *Vertu* itself is defined as precisely the 'having within oneself all the things that draw toward good, and which draw outward and away all that is bad and full of vice.' Here, *vertu* functions like the natural *vertu* described in humoral theory, having the property to attract or repulse, to draw things inward or to drive them outward.

The proper working of *vertu* thus leads toward nourishment and health of the body politic, and also leads away from the incipient dangers of dismemberment and disease:

For just as the human body is not at all whole, but rather defective and deformed when one of its members is lacking, similarly the body politic cannot

be perfect, whole, or healthy unless all the estates under discussion be in a good conjunction and union all together, so that they can succour and aid one another, each one exercising the office it must serve; which various offices ought to serve only for the conservation of all together, just as the members of the human body aid in the movement and nourishing of the whole body. And just as soon as one of them fails to serve, it follows that the whole body feels it and it and suffers famine by it.

Car tout ainsi comme le corps humain n'est mie entier, mais deffectueulx et diffourmé quant il lui fault aucun de ses membres, semblablement ne peut le corps de policie estre parfait, entier ne sain se tous les estas dont nous traictons ne sont en bonne conjunction et union ensemble, si qu'ilz puissent secourir et aidier l'un a l'autre, chascun exercitant l'office de quoy il doit servir, lesquelz divers offices ne sont a tout considerer establis et ne doivent servir ne mes pour la conservacion de tout ensemble, tout ainsi comme les membres de corps humain aident a gouverner et nourrir tout le corps. Et si tost comme l'un d'eulx deffault, couvient que tout le corps s'en sente et en ait disete. (3.1; Kennedy 91.16–26)

For perfect health of the body politic to exist, unity is necessary: all the various 'estates' must be 'in a good conjunction and union all together,' so that each aids the other. If one part fails, the body is dismembered; if the body loses the good of one member, the whole falls into starvation and corruption.

This unity of the various parts of the body politic through the medium of *vertu* is enabled through a related, complementary medium, one which is expressed not through affections of the body but through affections of the soul: this medium is love, as Christine makes clear in the opening of the third book of the *Corps de policie*, where she exhorts the common people to virtue:

just as we spoke before about the love and care that the good prince ought to have toward his subjects and his people, and similarly of the office of the nobles, who are established for the care and the defense of the said people, now we must speak of the love, reverence, and obedience that the good people ought to have toward the prince. So let us speak universally to all, to the extent that it relates to this matter, how all estates owe to the prince the self-same love, reverence, and obedience.

comme nous avons devant dit de l'amour et cure que le bon prince doit avoir vers ses subgiez et people, et aussi de l'office des nobles, lesquelz sont establis

pour la garde et deffence du dit peuple, dire nous couvient de l'amour, reverence et obeissance que bon peuple doit avoir envers prince. Si dirons univarselement a tous en tant que touche ceste matiere, comme tous estas doient au prince une meisme amour, reverence et obeissance. (3.1; Kennedy 91.30–6)

Christine describes a reciprocal arrangement that involves all three estates that make up the body politic, but which seems to exist with a greater specificity between the first and the remaining parts of the state, that is, between the ruler and all of his people, both nobles and commons. Just as the prince must express 'amour' towards his subjects, so too the people owe to their 'prince une meisme amour,' the self-same love that he expresses towards them. This common love is exactly the same 'amour publique' that circulates among and thus unites all parts of the 'chose publique' or republic of France (1.1; 1.27–2.7).

This love is also evident in the passionate exhortation expressed by the narrator in the opening lines of the *Corps de policie*: she is motivated by love of the French people and their king to express moral teachings that will lead to the renewed *vertu* – and, therefore, health – of the state. This 'amour' that unifies the king and his people can, moreover, be more fully contextualized with reference to the theological template for the body politic, that is, the loving relationship of Christ to the Church, which is simultaneously both bride and body of Christ. The sacramental language of *vertu*, used to describe the quality that unites Christ with his Church, provides a template for the conceptualization of a specifically Christian model of kingship that Christine expresses most fully in her biography of Charles V. Like the language of *vertu* used in the *Corps de policie* to describe the health and security of the body politic, the sacramental language of *vertu* is frequently expressed in liquid terms. For example, the holy water used for baptism is commonly said to be imbued with 'virtue,' while the transubstantiation of water into wine, bread into flesh, is said to take place 'through the virtue of the Mass.'<sup>13</sup> In order to understand this allegorical function of *vertu* more fully, it is necessary to turn to Christine's devotional allegory in her biography of Charles V.

### The King's Body

It is strange but true that Christine de Pizan's most explicit articulation of her preferred genre of allegory appears not in her specifically allegorical works, but rather in her biography of the late ruler of France, Charles V. Before turning to her statement of allegory in the *Livre des fais et bonnes*

*meurs du sage roy Charles V*, however, it is useful to look more closely at Christine's position within the literary tradition of late medieval allegory, and at the unusual way in which she defines the genre. Because Christine self-consciously presents herself as a writer following in the tradition of earlier allegorists, especially Boethius, Alan of Lille, Jean de Meun, and Dante, it is tempting to read her allegories as part of a continuous literary genealogy linking a series of writers with shared assumptions regarding the function of figurative language. Christine's assumptions differ significantly, however, from her predecessors. Instead of describing figurative language in terms of 'allegorie' (a term she reserves to describe allegoresis, or allegorical exposition), she uses the terms 'poesie' and 'methafore.' Both of these terms are central to my argument here, with 'poesie' being closely connected to a form of allegorical exegesis in Christine's biography of Charles V, and 'methafore' being closely connected to Christine's depiction of moments of stark corporeal change. In both cases, whether expressed in terms of 'poesie' or 'methafore,' the transformative property of death – whether in the last days of the king or in the mythical figure of Atropos – appears as the fundamental mediator of all change, whether ontological or epistemological.

Christine's two most explicit definitions of 'poesie' appear in a preface to her last allegorical work, the *Advision Cristine*, and in her biography of Charles V.<sup>14</sup> In the third and last part of her biography of the late king, Christine includes what appears at first to be a digression 'concerning understanding and ways of knowing' ['de l'entendement et des sciences']. The apparent digression begins with an account of the senses and ends with a description of 'poesie,' which, Christine says, uses figurative language to convey meanings that 'cannot be expressed clearly' ['clerement ne se pevent enseigner' (3.68)]. Although Christine refers to this kind of language as 'poesie,' her description of it closely resembles typical medieval definitions of allegory. Christine writes that 'poesie' is generally taken to be any 'narration or introduction openly signifying one sense, and covertly signifying another or many others' ['narracion ou introduction apparaument signifiant un senz, et occultement en segnefie un aultre ou plusieurs']. More properly, Christine continues, 'poesie' is a mode 'whose end is truth, and the process of which is teaching, clothed [*revestue*] in words of delightful ornament and in the appropriate colors of rhetoric; with those clothes [*revestemens*] being of unusual styles in keeping with the purpose that one desires, and the colors of rhetoric according to appropriate figures' ['dont la fin est verité, et le proces doctrine revestue en paroles d'ornemens delictables et par propres couleurs, lesquelz reveste-

mens soient d'estranges guises au propos dont on veult' (3.68)]. In this definition, Christine uses several terms that are conventional to descriptions of allegory: the text signifies one thing openly, another covertly; it may have several levels of meaning; its purpose is to convey truth; and it clothes meaning with pleasant words, an allusion to the *integument* (a technical term, particularly common in the twelfth century), which is literally a veil or covering. Finally, among writers of 'poesie' Christine goes on to list several allegorists, including Boethius, Martianus Capella, and Alan of Lille.

After offering this description of 'poesie,' however, Christine abruptly draws back from this mode of writing, she states, 'because, to the many who have not learned it, this language may seem strange, and consequently bore them, let us return to our first objective' ['pour cause que a maint pourroit le langage sembler estrange, qui apris ne l'ont, et par consequent tourner a anui, retournerons a nostre premier objet' (3.69)] – that is, to the thread of the biography's narrative line, currently at the account of Charles's death. Overtly, then, Christine indicates that a political biography is not the place for language that veils its meaning in order to restrict interpretation to a few. Covertly, however, she signals that, for those few who do understand such 'strange language,' it may be possible to find a veiled significance in the biography of the former king. To put it another way, the historical narrative of Charles's life is the ground for figurative explication, in the same way that sacred histories of the Bible are subject to exegesis, or the historical narratives evoked in Dante's *Commedia* are unfolded within the hermeneutics of the 'allegory of theologians.' The fact that Christine identifies this form of figurative language as 'poesie' suggests, moreover, that 'poesie' can refer to veiled language that does not necessarily have a fiction as its literal level. On the contrary, we can read historical narrative – such as the life of Charles V – as 'poesie' just as we can more conventionally read the *narratio fabulosa*, or 'fabulous narrative,' of the *integument*. In this striking move, biography is assimilated to the genre of allegory, with the exemplary figure being not a personification, but a person – that is, Charles, king of France.<sup>15</sup>

Critics who discuss Christine's treatment of 'poesie' in the biography of Charles V generally overlook one of the most interesting and revealing features of that treatment, namely, the placement of those chapters. Significantly, Christine's definition of 'poesie' appears in conjunction with her account of the king's death, recounting the paradoxical disruption and continuity of that moment in the life of the nation. The substance that maintains this continuity is, as in the *Livre du corps de policie, vertu*. In

the biography of Charles V, the virtues of the king – that is, his deeds and good morals – are at the centre of a narrative that treats the life of the ruler and the life of the state as a single entity. The death of the king's natural body does not entail the death of the state, however, because the *vertu* of kingship is perpetual, passed on in an endlessly renewed chain of descent. In this context, the final chapters of the biography – which constitute an extended meditation on 'ends' or 'fins' – are of special importance, for they chronicle the paradoxical moment when the end of the king's natural body is subsumed into the continued perpetual health of the body politic. The concept of the 'fin' or 'end' in the biography of Charles V is polysemous, with 'ends' denoting not just the chronological terminus of a process but also its *telos*, that is, the culmination or fruition of a process. In this multivalent sense, the 'end' of the biography of Charles V includes 1) the chronological end or completion of the book itself; 2) the conceptual end or goal of the book; 3) the end – that is, the death – of the subject of the biography, the monarch Charles V; and 4) the end – that is, the enduring legacy, that which remains – of Charles's reign. The meditation on the 'end' of Charles – that is, the ending of his mortal life, and the purpose of his existence – is central to the articulation of what we might call 'devotional allegory' in Christine's work.

Leading up to the culminating dozen or so chapters of the biography, Christine begins to signal that the meditation on 'ends' is at hand:

And it is now time that I draw toward the end of my work, in ending the process of the particular praising of the deeds and good mores of this wise king, whom I have described; but ... my last conclusion will be of wisdom alone.

Si est dès or temps que je tire vers la fin de mon oeuvre, en terminant le procès des particulieres louenges des fais et bonnes meurs de cestui sage roy, dont j'ay traictié; mais ... ma desreniere conclusion sera de sapience aucunement.  
(ch. 62; 158)

As Christine draws towards the 'end' of the work, she approaches the 'end' of 'this wise king'; her 'conclusion,' however, will be purely of wisdom, as 'deeds and good mores' drop away and are eclipsed by the simple light of wisdom. How are these multiple 'ends' integrated together? On a narrative level, simply enough, the discourse of the biography draws to a close as the life of the biographical subject draws to a close.<sup>16</sup> On a more complex level, however, the 'end' denotes not just termination, but *telos*: that is, destination, trajectory, fulfilment. In this sense, the 'end' is

the harvest or fruition of all that has come before. ‘Sapience,’ or wisdom, for Christine is part of this harvest. It is therefore unsurprising that the various chapters nested within the introduction to the ‘end’ of the work, and the final three chapters of the work, which recount the death of the king, concern topics such as understanding and knowledge, sense perception, prudence, the sciences and metaphysics, and, finally, ‘poesie’ (‘de l’entendement et des sciences’ [63–4], ‘des sens du corps’ [65], ‘prudence’ [66], ‘des sciences, et de ceulz qui les trouverent’ [67], ‘poesie’ [68]). All of these things are the ‘end’ of the work, that is, they are both situated *at* the end of the work, in narrative terms, and *are* themselves the end, that is, the goal or *telos*.

The language of ‘ends’ is repeatedly threaded throughout these chapters. To cite just one example, in the chapter on prudence, Christine alludes to how this virtue has been ‘interwoven throughout the abundance of other matters leading to the end’ [‘Pour ce que cy devant fu entamée la matiere de traittier de la vertu de prudence, entrelaissié par l’abondence des autres matieres traire à ffin’ [66; 167]]. Here again, the end is both the end of the narrative and the goal of the endeavour. The penultimate chapter, which immediately precedes the account of Charles’s death, accordingly focuses on ‘what goods come from the things spoken of below’ [‘quel bien vient des choses susdittes’ (69)], that is, the harvest that grows out of the narrative of the life of Charles, and the harvest that grows out of his life itself. These latter goods are spiritual benefits that accrue both to the individual soul of the king and to the community he leaves behind him. The former goods (those that grow out of the biography) are also spiritual benefits, which permit future generations to partake in the same abundant goods as did those who were fortunate enough to live during Charles’s reign.

Following this exposition of the good that flows out of the ‘end’ of Charles, Christine turns sharply to the account of the death itself: she states, ‘let us return to our first object,’ ‘it is time to come to an end’ [‘retournerons à nostre premier objet’ (178); ‘[il] est temps de terminer’ (179)]. The rubrics of the three final chapters sufficiently indicate their focus: one on ‘the approach of the end of King Charles,’ one on ‘the passing away and beautiful end of the wise King Charles,’ and one on ‘the end and conclusion of this book’ (70: ‘l’aprouchement de la fin du roy Charles’; 71: ‘le trespassement et belle fin du sage roy Charles’; 72: ‘la fin et conclusion de ce livre’). The termination of the king, and of the book, are mirrored and fulfilled in the ends – that is, the bountiful rewards – they provide:

Just as it is clearly known and understood that all created things have an end,  
for all things are drawn this way, in getting near to the end of our work, let us



speak of the last period of this wise one, concerning whom we took up this matter and contents of this book; and just so says the common proverb, 'In the end one may know the perfection of the thing,' we may truly, in the last end of our said wise king, know the perfection of his very highly elevated virtues and wisdom.

Ainsi comme clerement est sceu et cogneu toutes choses créées avoir fin, car ad ce se trayent toutes ycelles, en aprestant la fin de nostre oeuvre, dirons du desrenier terme d'ycellui sage, ouquel avons prise la matiere et contenu de ce livre; et tout ainsi que dit le commun proverbe: 'En la fin peut on cognoistre la perfection de la chose,' povons vrayement, à la perfin de nostre dit sage roy cognoistre la perfection de ses tres preesleues vertus et sapience. (*Charles V* 3.70; Solente 180).

The duality of the polysemous 'end,' appearing in the simultaneity of the 'fin' of the king and of the narrative, and in the 'fin' – that is, the 'goods' – arising from his reign and from the biography of him, is amplified dramatically in the detailed account of Charles's death. His death is recounted in terms of a whole series of binary oppositions. While he suffers from a terminal 'enfermeté,' he continues to display 'sain entendement' and 'saine discrecion' ['healthy understanding' and 'healthy discretion' (182)]. While his body displays the 'signes mortelz' of approaching death, the king continues to utter prayers and make 'signs of great faith in Our Lord' ['signes de grant foy à Nostre Seigneur' (185)]. This duality is finally emblemized in the episode of the two crowns:

He requested that the crown of thorns of Our Lord be brought to him by the bishop of Paris, and also that the abbé of Saint-Denis bring him the crown for the coronation of the kings. That of thorns he received with great devotion, tears, and reverence, and had it raised up high before his face; that of the coronation he had placed at his feet. Then he began to utter prayers to the holy crown: 'Oh, precious crown ...' And he said long prayers there and very devout. After that, he turned his words toward the crown of France, and said, 'Oh, crown! How precious you are, and how extremely vile!'

[II] requist que la couronne d'espines de Nostre-Seigneur par l'evesque de Paris lui fust aportée, et aussi par l'abbé de Saint-Denis la couronne du sacre des roys. Celle d'espines receipt à grant devocion, larmes et reverence, et haultement la fist mettre devant sa face; celle du sacre fist mettre à ses piez. Adonc commença telle oroison à la sainte couronne: 'O couronne precieuse ...' Et longue oroison y dist moult devote. Après, tourna ses paroles à la cou-

ronne de France, et dist: 'O couronne! Quan tu es precieuse, et precieusement tres vile!' (3.71; 187)

This duality, emblemized in the two crowns, is more than a reaffirmation of the birth of the soul into eternal life even as the body descends into death. It is an integral part of Christine's devotional allegory, in which typology affirms destiny.

In the chapter on 'poesie' that precedes the concluding account of the death of Charles, Christine recalls that 'figures' (that is, figurative language) are amply attested both in the literature of the ancients and in the sacred page of the Bible. She writes, 'the Old Testament was entirely made up of figures, and similarly Jesus Christ spoke in figures' ['l'ancien Testament fu tout fait par figures, meismement aussi Jhesu-Crist si parla par figures' (67; 177)]. It is not remarkable to cite Jesus's parables as a precedent for the use of figurative language; to describe the entire Old Testament as made up of 'figures,' however, sets up a typological relationship of type and antitype, anticipation and fulfilment, that will be a crucial substrate of Christine's account of the 'end' of Charles V. As he suffers, moving ever closer to his 'end,' Charles mirrors the suffering Christ, and he offers spiritual gifts to those who sorrowfully attend his last days. Charles's reflection of Christ's passion, and his people's reflection of Charles's own passion, becomes increasingly apparent as the text goes on. His words, 'full of such great faith, devotion, and knowledge of God,' move 'all hearing them ... to great repentance and tears.' Passages similar to this one, in which those who observe Charles's suffering come to participate in it, appear frequently in this part of the biography.<sup>17</sup>

This mirroring of the Passion culminates, finally, in a passage that highlights the typological relationship fundamental to Christine's devotional allegory:

A little later, approaching the period of the end ['le terme de la fin'; literally, 'the end of the end'], in the manner of the ancient patriarchs of the Old Testament, he had brought before him his elder son, the dauphin; then, in blessing him, he began to speak this way: 'Just as Abraham [with] his son Isaac ...' This mystery completed ... he blessed all those present, saying this, 'May the blessings of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, descend upon you and remain forever'; the which benediction everyone received upon their knees, with great devotion and tears.

Un peu après, en approchant le terme de la fin, en la maniere des anciens Peres patriarches du viel Testament, fist amener devant lui son filz ainsné, le daupin;

alors, en le beneissant, commença ainsi à dire: 'Ainsi comme Abraham son filz Ysaac ...' Ce mistere fait ... beney tous les presens, disant ainsi: 'Benedicio Dei, Patris et Filii et Spiritus sancti, descendat super vos et maneat semper'; laquelle beneiçon receurent tous à genoulz, à grant devocion et larmes. (3.71; 190–1)

As in a series of preceding passages, the affective response of the assembled community reflects their participation in the spectacle of the death of the king. His suffering knits together the community into the imagined community of the nation, just as the suffering of Christ unites the body of the Church. Here, however, Charles is both Abraham and Christ, both the father who bestows the blessing on his offspring and the Son who accepts the will of the Father. In Charles, then, the blessings of the Trinity appear in microcosm, and serve as a nexus that binds together the Christian nation of France – even if only temporarily.

It is this very temporariness, however, that Christine refutes in her polysemous notion of the 'end' in the devotional allegory of Charles's life. In chronological terms, the life of Charles – and his biography – has reached its 'end.' In eternal terms, however, the life of Charles has its 'end' (that is, its fulfilment) in the eternal present, in which the bounty of his life, and Christine's recounting of his life, continue perpetually to bear spiritual fruit. The protracted process of Charles's death, which extends over the last eleven chapters of the biography, beginning with Christine's promise to 'draw toward the end of [her] work,' continues to be drawn out as a series of successive signs of suffering, and signs of affective response, mark the slow progress towards the moment of death – towards the 'end.' This is heightened still more in Christine's account of Charles's last moments: 'He listened to the whole story of the Passion, and almost to the end of the gospel of John, and began to labor toward his last end' ['(Il) oy toute l'ystoire de la Passion, et aucques près de la fin de l'Evangile saint Jehan, commença a labourer à sa desreniere fin' (71; 191–2)]. The narrative Charles hears, 'almost to the end,' brings him closer – but not quite – to 'his last end' ['sa desreniere fin']. This stretched-out process of time enables the reader to approach – but not quite touch – the moment of change, when body is left behind and the soul departs, when the king's reign ends and only the 'biens' or 'goods' remain, when the biographical narrative concludes and the memory lingers.

### The Ends of Virtue

In Christine's biography of Charles V, virtue appears in the ethical and

moral rectitude of this exemplary ruler and has its supreme expression in the hours and days leading up to his death. The moment of death witnesses the perfect convergence of the king's two bodies: as the body natural fades away, the body politic is renewed, mediated through the virtue of Christian kingship. The virtue of the king, and his surpassing wisdom, lie in the transcendence of his ethical, political virtue by spiritual, devout virtue. To put it another way, Charles expresses moral and ethical virtues in an exemplary manner; his own *vertu*, however, his transformative power to renew and regenerate the body politic, is mediated not through his virtuous life but, more specifically, through his way of dying. The death of the king is paradoxically a moment of both change and stability. This same paradox is also the focus of Christine de Pizan's narratives of Ovidian metamorphosis, in which (as in the *Ovide moralisé*) transformation entails a paradoxical reaffirmation of essential identity.<sup>18</sup> For Christine, 'methafore' – an unusual term in medieval allegory – is intimately intertwined with metamorphosis, and it finds its most profound expression, unsurprisingly, in the greatest transformation of them all: that is, death.

Christine's best-known use of the term 'methafore' appears in the famous autobiographical scene that concludes book one of the *Livre de la mutacion de Fortune*, where she recounts how she was miraculously transformed by the goddess from a woman into a man, a change that enabled her to become the financial and social supporter of her family. The same term reappears later in the same work, in the course of her description of Atropos, one of the Fates, who together with three personifications guards the four entrances to Fortune's castle. The curious inclusion of Atropos within a group of personifications is explained by Christine as a use of 'methafore,' a usage reinforced in the account of Atropos given in Christine's first allegorical work, the *Epistre Othea*. In the *Mutacion*, as in the *Epistre Othea*, Atropos represents the liminal point that marks not the end of life, but the transition from one state of being (life on earth) to another (eternal life of the soul). She therefore makes an appropriate emblem of transformation, whether realized in the form of Ovidian metamorphosis or in the form of figurative change – that is, metaphor.

The notion of metamorphosis in late medieval translations of and commentaries on Ovid was conceived in terms that explicitly framed death as an agent of the final metamorphosis. Like a butterfly emerging from its shell, the experience of death was understood as a gateway from the confines of the material world to the liberation of the eternal life of the soul. The extent to which Ovidian descriptions of metamorphosis served as the template for medieval images of death can be seen in a brief quotation

from a manual on how to die well written by Jean Gerson, chancellor of the University of Paris and close associate of Christine de Pizan:

My hands grow cold, my face grows pale, my eyes turn backward and are sunken in my head ... My strength grows faint, my mouth is blackened, my tongue fails and my breath also. I cannot see at all.

Les mains me [f]roidissent, la face me paslist, mes yeulx me tournent et profondissent en la teste ... Mon pouvoir commence a defaillir, la bouche me noircist, la langue me fault et mon alaine aussi. Je ne voy plus goutte. (Gerson 119)

Reading this passage, it is difficult not to recall the ‘fearful changes’ experienced by figures in the *Metamorphoses*, as the bark closes over the face of Myrrha, or Daphne reaches upward as her arms are clothed with leaves. Death was understood as a kind of metamorphosis, and metamorphosis was expressed most fully at the moment of death, when flesh would fall away and the new, true form of the soul would emerge.<sup>19</sup>

As a writer of allegory, in which the trope of language clothes meaning within a beautiful and obscuring veil, Christine sought to integrate such conceptions of metamorphosis with her usage of figurative language. Her treatment of metamorphosis as a paradoxical revelation of essential identity, therefore, was aligned in her writing with a conception of language as a covering which paradoxically exposes the truth that lies behind. In the *Mutacion de Fortune*, Christine asserts that ‘it is not a lie to speak according to metaphor, which does not put the truth in front’ [‘qui ne met la verité fore’]. In this definition of allegorical language as metaphor, figurative language appears as that which places truth *behind* – that is, conceals it behind a veil or covering. In the biography of Charles V, by contrast, Christine defines allegorical language as ‘poesie,’ language ‘whose end is truth’ [‘dont la fin est verité’]. Figurative language, then, places truth either behind (as in ‘methafore’) or ahead (as in ‘poesie’). In each case, knowledge of truth is displaced spatially: wherever it is, it is not where we are.

Within the terms of the devotional allegory of the biography of Charles V, the deferral of full, unmediated knowledge of truth is in keeping with the Christian expectation that the soul’s full knowledge of God will come only with the experience of the Beatific Vision, when the individual can hope to see the divine ‘face to face.’ Within the terms of the political allegory of the *Corps de policie*, however, the deferral of full knowledge is more problematic and, arguably, unsatisfactory. The *Corps de policie* acts as a kind of handbook of conduct, like Christine’s *Livre des trois vertus*; it

does not, however, address the deeper questions of how and why the body politic comes into being. One might say that it is directed towards practical rather than theoretical knowledge.

As early as the twelfth century, with John of Salisbury, the metaphor of the body politic was explicitly formulated on the model of Christian community, in which the Church is itself the body of Christ. Just as Christ has a natural body and a spiritual body, made up of the community of the Church, so too the king has a natural body and a 'body politic.' While John of Salisbury explicitly grounds his conception of the body politic in classical antiquity, citing Plutarch's address to Trajan as his source (though no such source appears to exist), explicitly Christian antecedents lie behind John's formulation: these include not only the foundational Pauline analogy of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12–28), but also twelfth-century elaborations of the parallelism between the power of the Church and of the State expressed by figures such as Robert Pullen.<sup>20</sup>

The late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries witnessed a renewal and an elaboration of the devotional underpinnings of the metaphor of the body politic, as Lori Walters has shown in her work on Christine's use of Augustine's *City of God* and its role in the emergence of medieval forms of French national identity.<sup>21</sup> A particularly pointed example of the convergence of sacramental language and the expression of national identity can be found in the early fifteenth-century English Parliament rolls, in which an extended analogy is drawn between the Parliament and the Mass, with the king in the place of the priest:

The said Commons put forth to the king that it seemed to them that the Parliament could be likened to a Mass ... And in the middle of the Mass, when the sacrifice is offered to God on behalf of all the Christians, the King, to accomplish this goal, has at the Parliament many times declared plainly to all his liegemen that his will is that the faith of Holy Church should be sustained and governed just as it was in the time of his noble progenitors ... And, moreover, at the end of the Mass it is necessary to say, 'Ite missa est, et Deo gratias'; similarly, it is performed by the Commons.

Les dites Communes monstrerent au Roy, Coment leur sembloit, que le fait de Parlement purroit estre bien resembler a une Messe ... Et a la mesne de la Messe, qe feust la sacrifice d'estre offertz a Dieux pur toutz Cristiens, la Roi mesmes a cest Parlement pur acomplir celle mesne, pleuseurs foitz avoit declarez pleinement as toutz ses lieges, Coment sa volunte feust, que la Foie de Sainte Esglise serroit sustenez et governez en manere come il ad este en temps

de ses nobles progenitours ... Et auxint au fyne de chescun Messe y covient de dire, Ite missa est, et Deo gratias. Semblement y feust monstrez par mesmes les Communes. (Rotuli parliamentorum 3:466 [15 March 1400/1])<sup>22</sup>

In its patterning of the body politic on the body of Christ – that is, the community of the Church – this record from the English Parliament is relatively conventional. What is striking is the way in which the ‘Commons’ are drawn into the performance of the body politic, affirming their participation in a political ritual that is presented as a secular reflection of the ecclesiastical ritual of the Mass. Further, it is striking that this reaffirmation of the unity of the body politic was uttered in the Parliament of Henry IV just months after the deposition and execution of his cousin, the former Richard II. In the face of disruption and discontinuity of rule, the incorporate nature of the body politic had to be reaffirmed in the strongest terms, namely, in terms of the eucharistic body of Christ.

While France did not suffer the removal and execution of its king, the political unrest of the first years of the fifteenth century was certainly comparable to the state of affairs across the Channel. Christine’s biography of Charles V, written in 1404, was both a celebration of the virtuous rule of the former king and a prayer, one might say, that a similar time of peace and benign rule might be at hand. Her *Corps de policie*, written just a few years later, expresses even more plainly the extent to which the restoration of national harmony depended on more than just leadership from the head of the body politic: it required active participation by all members of the body, including the ‘menu peuple’ or commons. Like their king and the chivalric ranks, they too were expected to express *vertu*. This was a new development, for fourteenth-century descriptions of *vertu* in sacramental terms were restricted to the role of the king. This can be seen, for example, in the early fourteenth-century *Ovide moralisé*, one of the literary sources that Christine drew upon most frequently. In this passage, which describes the shield of Perseus, sacramental language is used to express chivalric virtue:

The shield has a round form  
 In order to make it known  
 That God is without beginning  
 And without end, eternal:  
 He is the triangular alpha  
 And the omega, simple and singular,  
 Who begins all, and ends all,

And encompasses all, by divine virtue.  
...  
The fourth heraldic stripe represents the sacrifice  
That the priest celebrates and consecrates,  
When by the virtue of the holy sacrament  
The bread and wine upon the altar  
Become divine flesh and blood,  
Just as God consecrated them  
Who blessed his flesh and his blood  
When he wanted to give his peace  
To his apostles at Cana.  
It is the body of God, who was hung  
Upon the cross, and the blood poured forth  
When for our redemption  
The Son of God endured his passion.  
It is the food, it is the life,  
That gives the soul peace and vivifies it,  
Of which God said that there was never one who lived  
Who did not worthily eat and drink  
His flesh and his blood.

Si puet reonde forme avoir  
Li escus pour fere assavoir  
Que Diex est sans commencement  
Et sans fin pardurablement:  
Il est a 'Alpha' trianguliers  
Et 'O' simples et singuliers,  
Qui tout commence et tout affine  
Et comprent par vertu divine.

...  
Li quars [labiaux] note le sacrefice  
Que li pretres celebre et sacre,  
Quant par la vertu dou saint sacre  
Sor l'autier li pains et li vins  
Devient char et sans devins,  
Ensi com Dieux le consacra,  
Qui sa char et son sanc sacra,  
Quant il vault de son sanc demaine  
Ses apostres paistre en la Chaine;  
C'est li cors Dieu, qui fu pendus



En crois, et li sans espondus,  
 Quant pour nostre redempcion  
 Souffri la filz Deu passion;  
 C'est la viande, c'est la vie  
 Qui l'ame paist et vivifie,  
 Dont Diex dist que ja ne vivroit  
 Qui ne mengeroit et buvroit  
 Sa char et son sanc dignement.

(*Ovide moralisé* 5.1195–1213)

The shield of Perseus, himself an exemplary figure of knightly virtue (as in Christine's *Epistre Othea*), is here figured in terms of the all-embracing power of divine *vertu*. The shield's heraldic marking represents the sacrifice of the Mass, actualized by the transformative power – or *vertu* – that makes flesh out of bread, and blood out of wine. The death of Charles V, as recounted in Christine's biography, reflects and even participates in this sacramental quality, as the death of the king entails the renewal of the body politic in the same way that the crucifixion, commemorated in the sacrifice of the Mass, entails the renewal of the body of Christ in the Church.

It is necessary to recall this devotional and Christological template for the construction of national identity in order to fully appreciate the integrated role that humoral and devotional discourses play in Christine's *Livre du corps de policie*. These discourses share a common vocabulary concerning the process of change, with *vertu* consistently serving as the transformative element. The role of devotional discourse is particularly worth pointing out in the *Corps de policie* if only because scholarship on this work has tended to emphasize precisely Christine's *lack* of engagement with the role of the Church and, especially, the clergy in her prescription for the health of the body politic. As Nederman puts it, Christine goes beyond even Oresme in her 'anticlerical' perspective: 'Christine's use of the organic metaphor extends medieval precedent by imputing to it a noticeably anticlerical orientation ... Her organic model disposes her to count the priestly function as essentially a civil office.'<sup>23</sup> Nederman is surely right in emphasizing Christine's omission of significant attention to the role of the clergy; a closer examination of Christine's perspective on the Schism and its impact on French society might help to explain this omission. Neglect of the role of the clergy, however, did not preclude Christine from emphasizing the sacramental role of kingship and construing that role in explicitly devotional and even Christological terms: this approach is particularly evident in her biography of Charles V, and also more subtly imbues her description of the body politic in the *Corps de policie*, where

*vertu* is the nourishing, revitalizing fluid that unites the metaphorical body just as surely as the blood of Christ unites his flock.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to describe Christine's use of *vertu* as a polysemous term elsewhere in her writings; here, I will just sketch out the rough outlines of the larger picture. In the *Advison Cristine*, *vertu* is both a property resident in natural objects and a quality that, in the viewer, enables the recognition of the *vertu* resident in the thing and, consequently, the formation of a philosophical and poetic community.<sup>24</sup> In the *Cité des dames*, the *vertu* of the sibylline stones is recalled in the overflowing *vertu* of the virgin martyrs of the third book, whose bodies run with milk and blood in a corporeal representation of the sacramental *vertu* they bear. And, as we have seen, in the biography of Charles V, the king's *vertu* appears not only in his moral, ethical qualities, but in the Christological role he plays relative to the body politic, in imitation of the relationship of Christ to his own mystical body, the Church. Finally, in the *Livre du corps de policie*, ethical *vertu* is articulated in terms of a discourse of natural *vertu* that is expressed in the relatively technical terms of Galenic medicine: in this discourse, the health, wholeness, and nourishment of the body are achieved through the smooth flow of *vertu* throughout the parts and, therefore, throughout the whole of the body politic. *Vertu* is the catalyst that enables the perpetuation of life, both natural and political: it marks an ongoing, dynamic process that is – paradoxically – the very basis of stability.<sup>25</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Earlier versions of this material were presented at the Medieval Academy (Toronto, 12–14 April 2007) and the International Congress on Medieval Studies (Kalamazoo, MI, 8–11 May 2008). Thanks very much to Ben Semple and Lori Walters for their constructive comments. For an overview of 'devotional romance,' see Akbari, 'Incorporation' 22–4.
- 2 On Oresme's 'decision allegories,' see Sherman 35–174; on Christine's use of Oresme, see Akbari, 'Movement' 143–4. On late medieval allegories of civic, national, and ecclesiastic division, including the work of Honoré Bouvet, John Gower, and John Lydgate, see Akbari, *Seeing* 234–43.
- 3 On the 'little people' in Christine's works, see Dudash 788–831.
- 4 All translations from Middle French are my own unless otherwise noted.
- 5 On the body politic fable in Marie de France, see Akbari, 'Between Diaspora' 26–8.

- 6 The relevant passages in the *Polycraticus* are 5.2, 4.3 (Nederman 67, 32). On the dissemination of this analogy, see the foundational work of Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, esp. 208–11. See also Forhan; Nederman.
- 7 Nederman argues that both Oresme and Christine use 'the corporeal analogy ... to express equilibrium and equity.' Yet while, in the *De moneta*, 'Oresme constantly sketches a circulatory image of the body politic, stressing the need to "normalize" the flow of fluids between the bodily parts so as to prevent unhealthy "enlargements,"' Christine 'stress[es] the need for the limbs and organs to cooperate in their active coordination and interconnection of functions' (Nederman 32).
- 8 'The image asserts that there is nothing inappropriate about a woman on the throne ... One cannot help wondering whether Christine does not choose this passage also to promote a literal queen' (Green 128–35; quotation from 134).
- 9 Walters, 'Christine de Pizan as Translator' 36; see also Walters, 'Magnifying' 243–7.
- 10 For a useful overview of the system of humoral physiology, see Paster 77–134 (chapter 2, 'Love Will Have Heat'). For a specifically fourteenth-century French context, focusing on the *Chirurgia magna* (1363) of Guy de Chauliac, see Ogden 272–91. On medieval Galenism and humoral theory as known in medieval Paris, see Jacquart, *Milieu* and *Médecine médiévale*; on medieval Galenism more broadly, see Temkin, *Galenism* 95–116.
- 11 On the virtues (intellective and sensitive powers) of the soul, see Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum* book 3; ed. Long 149–88. On the virtues (vital spirits) of the body, see book 5, especially the overview of the spirits, including the retentive and expulsive virtues, in chapter 1, pp. 114–19 of the incunable edition, Frankfurt 1601 [no modern edition for book 5 has yet been published]; on the virtue of generation, see book 5, chapters 48–50, pp. 204–9; on the virtues of precious stones, see book 16, pp. 715–71.
- 12 For an overview of scholastic integration of Aristotelian and Augustinian concepts of virtue, see Michel, 'Vertu,' especially cols. 2748–53.
- 13 On the 'vertue' given to the water in baptism, see Higden, 4:257; on the 'vertu' of the transubstantiated host in the Mass, see *The Lay Folks' Mass Book* 54–5. Both examples are from the fourteenth century.
- 14 For a fuller account of 'poesie' in Christine's work, see Akbari, 'Movement' 139–44.
- 15 '[N]ous couvient recueillir em briefves paroles les motifs de ceste oeuvre pris en un seul suppost, qui est le sage roy Charles devant dit' (179). Here, Charles is the focus of the allegorical narrative, similar to – but different from – a personification.

- 16 In her perceptive reading of Christine's biography of Charles V, Delogu points out the extent to which Christine highlights the simultaneous conclusion of the biography and the death of the monarch (181). Delogu argues that this is part of a broader strategy to align the author with her subject, so that she is 'uniquely and intimately associated with him, at once his double, partner, and successor' (160).
- 17 In one passage, Charles identifies himself with the suffering Christ as he approaches death: 'Quant la crois lui fu presentée, la baisa, et, en l'embraçant, commença a dire, regardant la figure de Nostre-Seigneur: "Mon tres doulz Sauveur et Redempteur, qui en ce monde daignas venir, affin que moy et tout l'umain lignage, par la mort, laquelle, volontairement et sanz contrainte, voulds souffrir"' (70; 189). In another, Charles listens to the gospel account of Christ's death as he 'works towards' his own death: "[Il] oy toute l'ysstoire de la Passion, et aucques près de la fin de l'Euvangile saint Jehan, commença a labourer à la desreniere fin' (71; 191–2). In a third passage, Charles's suffering causes those around him to empathetically identify with his experience, in an imitation of pious devotion to the suffering Christ: 'Celle oroison finée, se fist tourner la face vers les gens et peuple, qui là estoit, et dist ... [asks their pardon]. Et adonc se fist haulcer les braz, et leur joingny les mains; si povez savoir se grant pitié et larmes y ot gittées de ses loyaulz amis et serviteurs' (70; 190).
- 18 On metamorphosis in the *Ovide moralisé* and Christine's *Mutacion de Fortune*, in which the 'outer form comes to reflect the inner form' (88), see Akbari, 'Metaphor and Metamorphosis' 86–9.
- 19 For a more detailed account of death as metamorphosis in Christine's work, see Akbari, 'Metaphor and Metamorphosis' 82–5.
- 20 On Pullen as a source for John of Salisbury, see Forhan 45–75.
- 21 On Christine's use of Augustine, see Lori Walters's monograph in progress, early fruits of which can be found in her numerous articles, especially her 'Réécriture de saint Augustin par Christine de Pizan' and 'Christine de Pizan, Primat, and the "noble nation française."'
- 22 *Rotuli parliamentorum* 3:466 (15 March 1400/1). Translations are my own. For a fuller analysis of this and related passages in the Parliament rolls in connection with late medieval expressions of English national identity, see Akbari, 'Hunger' 214–16.
- 23 Nederman, 28.
- 24 For a fuller account of the polysemous nature of *vertu* in the *Advison Cristine*, see Akbari, 'Movement' 146–8.
- 25 Earlier versions of this material were presented at the Medieval Academy (Toronto, 12–14 April 2007) and the International Congress on Medieval Studies

(Kalamazoo, MI, 8–11 May 2008). Thanks very much to Ben Semple and Lori Walters for their constructive comments.

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