NOT SO DUTIFUL DAUGHTERS: WOMEN AND THEIR FATHERS IN THREE FRENCH MEDIEVAL WORKS; *LE ROMAN DE SILENCE, EREC ET ENIDE* AND *LE LIVRE DE LA CITÉ DES DAMES*

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Feminist perspectives on medieval literature, no longer uncommon, continue to allow 20th century readers, especially women readers, to focus on the relationship between female protagonists and their men in a contextual manner. Our century permits us new readings of very old works, discerning female characters as reflections, even specular images, of the patriarchal value systems in which they are portrayed - not terribly different from century to century. This approach is all the more satisfying the older the society in which the work was produced.

The father-daughter relationship, it seems, is often relegated to the status of background information, and viewed as the obvious psycho-social structure, i.e., the family. The family can be undertaken as a microcosmic expression of feudal society, as J.-G. Gouttebroze does in his 1982 study of family structure and lineage in the works of Chrétien de Troyes: "La société noble n'ignore pas l'organisation élémentaire de la famille, c'est-à-dire la triangulation père-mère-enfant; Chrétien nous en donne de multiples exemples: famille d'Enide, de Cligès, du vavasseur qui reçoit Lancelot avant que ce dernier affronte l'épreuve du Pont de l'Epée" (81) [Noble society is not ignorant of the elementary organization of the family, which is to say the triangular structure of father-mother-child; Chrétien gives us many examples: Enide and Cligès' families, of the vavasseur who welcomes Lancelot before he confronts the test of the Bridge of the Sword.] I propose a portion of this structure, as a slightly more microscopic version of this view, namely, one specific side of this triangle: father-daughter. If we see the family structure as being an important tool - even an important model - for any literary analysis, the father-daughter relationship becomes of particular interest where medieval literature is concerned, because of its complex program of signifiers produced by a courtly, and therefore, patriarchal paradigm.

Within this social paradigm lies a nuanced family discourse, in particular within works containing heroines with influential fathers. The discourse of woman/man often is replicated by the discourse of daughter/father. Three works, despite some chronological disparity, are nonetheless all literary products of courtly society, and are particularly

good subjects for such a study; Heldris de Cornuälle's *Le roman de silence*, Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et Enide* and Christine de Pizan's *Le livre de la cité des dames*. Among their commonalities resides the simple fact that each of these works treats, either with distinctive candor, or obliquely, a particular perspective on the father-daughter relationship of its time. It is my purpose here to go one step further, and to suggest that this discourse is responsible for the larger discourse of the work, and ultimately, influences the narrative outcomes for medieval heroines.

The actions of fathers carry out much of these works' narrative designs. Fathers evolve, along with their daughters, to varying degrees and in varied manners. In each work, however, the father-daughter relationship serves a clear social purpose. If we see women as daughters, and men as fathers, we may better understand how women are represented in these works, and ultimately, what the works have to say about women in their historical contexts.

Family relationships are often glorified in literature, and the father-daughter relationship is no exception. In his wonderful article, "Specular Stories, Family Romance, And The Fictions Of Courtly Culture," Donald Maddox claims that the Middle Ages are no exception. Maddox uses Sigmund Freud's term, " Family Romances " to describe the phenomenon of the certainty of maternity, and the uncertainty of paternity: "While maternity is, as Freud observes, *certissima*, paternity *semper incertus est*" (299). Ironically, however, mothers seem comparatively absent in medieval literature. Perhaps because of the power of the church, perhaps because of the history of western patriarchy in general, the women in *Erec et Enide*, *Le roman de silence*, and *Le livre de la cité des dames* all seem infinitely more connected to their fathers than to their mothers.

A good starting point for viewing this connection is the earliest of the three works, *Erec et Enide*. Enide is perhaps typical of women in feudal societies; she is often used as a cipher for male power. In Chrétien's story of a medieval marriage, Enide is described primarily in context of the relationship between her future spouse and her father. Given no name for several hundred lines of verse, she is described only as "la jeune fille." Enide will only be named when she becomes a wife.

Enide is more or less a political tool, whose cachet is that of a prize for the spouse, as well as the *means* toward wealth for her father. She mirrors the patriarchal value of ownership, she is a "deal" between two

men, the father who wants to marry her to the first available suitor, and the suitor himself. Enide serves both men, as her father makes clear when he says, "Bele douce fille, prenez / Cest cheval et si le menez, / En cet estable avec les miens" (451-53) [My dear sweet daughter, take/ this horse and lead it/ to the stable near mine]. Enide is called upon initially to care for her future husband's horse, then later to care for the man in the same fashion: "Bele fille cheire, / Prenez par la main cest seignor, / Se li portez mout grant honor, / Par la main le menez lasus" (470-73) [My dear daughter,/ take this lord by the hand/ doing him very great honor,/ and lead him upstairs]. The visual metaphor is stunning; Enide's father asks her specifically to take her future husband's horse and to lead it to the stable "near his own horse."

Enide's father and her suitor speak not of the woman, but of her clothes, as if her packaging, as it were, determined her status. At times, however, her father speaks of Enide with tenderness, "C'est mos solasz, c'es mes conforz" (544) [She is my solace, she is my comfort]. Here, and somewhat parenthically, one cannot help but think of the father in one of Marie de France's *Lais*, "Les deux amants," of whom Marie writes "Li reis n'aveit altre retur:/ pres de li esteit nuit e jur;/ cunfortez fu par la meschine,/ puis que perdue ot la reine" (lines 29-32) [The king had no other comfort/ and he spent his days and nights next to her/ for she consoled him/ over the loss of the queen]. When Enide's father says, "She is my solace, she is my comfort," we are not compelled to read incestuous undertones, as with "Les deux amants". Nonetheless, the intimate exclusivity of the father's gaze toward his daughter is unequivocal, and it is worth noting that we never learn how the mother feels about Enide. Enide never speaks in the presence of her father. It is a silence which will be even more poignant in the context of *Le roman de silence*.

The significance of fathers with regard to their adult daughters is expressed through a system of polarities, best described as either protection or oppression. The price the women pay for this protection, is, ultimately, the elimination of their own power. In the case of Silence, it will be the elimination of her own voice and gender - her entire identity. The father is the ultimate source of all social determinations, and certainly, as the chief figure of western patriarchy, we might call him the *original misogynist*. For paternal protection is a form of oppression and thus, a form of misogyny.

Women are usually placed in amorous contexts, i.e., as love interests

for male protagonists. These women, such as Enide in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*, are primarily wives and lovers of men, as well as daughters of father-kings or king-like fathers. However, some one hundred years after *Erec et Enide* in Heldris de Cornuälle's *Le roman de silence* (thought to have been written in 1260), relationships between women and men are tossed in the air, and come down for the most part, while not necessarily redefined, certainly rearranged. Through cross-dressing and constant linguistic play, the text wages a slippery gender game, all the more slippery for its astonishingly early date.

In this thirteenth century romance, the fate of Silence, a women born to noble parents, is determined even before her birth, first by a royal decree, then by the paternal determination of her name. The king having decreed that females may no longer inherit, Silence's parents decide to "beat the system," as it were. They create an instant medieval gender bender: they raise her as a boy. First comes the issue of Silence's name. If, as Gouttebroze suggests in his article when quoting Perceval's mother, "C'est au nom que l'on connaît l'homme" (88) [It's by name that one knows the man], then it is by name that one *cannot* know the woman, in the *Roman de Silence*.

Naming is then an early task for Silence's father, which he exercizes as a way of concealing the truth, in turn contributing to the shaping of Silence's gender. In fact, a close look at the text reveals Count Cador's paternal role as complete gender manipulation; he decides not only her name, but her sex: "Faire en voel malle de femiele" (2041) [I want to make a male of a female]. Silence's relationship with her father will become fascinatingly dualistic, as she will cross-dress throughout her adventures - first as jongleur, later as chevalier, always, ultimately, attempting to please him. She will become "other" - which is to say here, "male" in order to obey her father, and indirectly, in obedience to the king. Daughterly obedience to father and courtly obedience to king are one and the same. In this way, her otherness is sanctioned.

From an alternate perspective however, a portion of Silence's obedience is split; by living as a man, she obeys both men. Yet when she decides to run away with the jongleurs, she does so in order to learn a trade which she can "fall back on," thereby planning for the possibility that she be obligated to contradict her father's initial wish, i.e., the denial of her true gender. Her conscience tells her,

> Se lens iés en chevalerie

Si te valra la joglerie.
Et s'il avient que li rois muire,
Es cambres t'en poras deduire.
Ta harpe et ta viële avras
En liu de cho que ne savras
Orfrois ne fresials manoier.
Si te porra mains anoier
Se tu iés en un bastonage
Ke tu aies vials *el en gage* (2863-72).

[If you are slow at chivalry,/ minstrelsy will be of use to you./ And if the king should happen to die,/ you will be able to practice your art in a chamber;/ you will have your harp and viele/ to make up for the fact that you don't know/ how to embroider a fringe or border./ You will be less bored/ in your captivity/ if you at least have something to fall back on].

In this, she disrupts the father-daughter discourse; she disobeys her father. She may obey the king in the short run, but in the long run, she disobeys her father in considering the restoration of her biological gender. While this plot point clearly underscores the author's predetermination of the outcome of the story in favor of Nature over Noreture, one wonders, is this a conflict of interest for Silence? Can she in fact, obey one father figure (the king) while obeying the other - her father?

As Silence evolves into a successful man, her father becomes more and more remote. Upon her return from England, he will not recognize her. Could this be a father's revenge? Originally, Silence is the subject of a double banishment. First she is banished from her inheritance by the king's decree, and second, by her father's interdiction of all minstrels, when he learns mistakenly that she has been abducted by the jongleurs ("I[l] fait banir par cel forfait/ Les jogleörs tols de sa tiere, Que rien n'i viegnent mais aquierre," 3118-20) [For this crime, he had all jongleurs/ banished from his lands]. Ultimately, she returns, still disguised as a man, to perform with the jongleurs for the court, and her father fails to recognize her, believing instead that she (he) must be the man who has killed his daughter/son. Heldris tells this episode with irony, and with each line of verse, seems to enjoy the travesty of mistaken identities even more, as they play out between ignorant father and all-knowing daughter in drag:

Qu'alongeroie plus mon conte?
L'endemain l'erumena al conte
Tolt vielant amont le rue.
L'enfens le voit, si le salue.
Li cuens ne li volt mot respondre
Car il le pense bien confondre.
Silence dist: "Sire, merchi,
Car se jo ma vie perc chi
Nule rien n'i conquesterés
Ne ja plus riches n'en serés!" (3539-48)

[Why should I prolong the suspense?/ The next day the youth was taken to the count,/playing the viele as he went up the street./ When he saw the count, he greeted him./ The count didn't want to say a word in reply,/ because he planned to have him killed. Silence said, "Mercy, Sire!/ If I lose my life here,/ you won't have gained any great advantage/ or be at all the richer for it! "]

Even when not *known*, not recognized by her own father, Silence's voice cannot be entirely quelled, for here we see her strolling along, playing her viele. She has enormous control over the situation, and knows it, which is why she is able to dissuade her own father from unknowingly killing his own daughter.

Earlier, when Silence's gender is still an issue, we see the *benevolent* father, loving, caring, serving his daughter's interests. Determined to protect his daughter, the father becomes, nonetheless, more and more confused, as the narrator tells us; "Mais par lui mesme I est la doute, / Qu'il rova porter la noviele, / Que qu'il eüst, malle u femiele, / Qu'il eüst un bel fil eüt" (1990-93) [But he himself had caused this doubt/ when he asked her [that is, Silence's mother] to announce/ that he had a fine son/ whether it was a boy or a girl]. Now, he is once again faced with his own power to determine his daughter's destiny. The difference is, that this time the father has lost self-awareness, and the daughter has gained it. Silence's destiny first seemed to hang in the ambiguous space between "malle " and "femiele." Now, it hangs in the ambiguous space between her own awareness and her father's ignorance. Thus the daughter's identity will always be shaped, at least in part, by her father, no matter how misinformed or ignorant he is. The benevolence of

Silence's father seems to be part of his ignorance. This rapport remains significant in later representations of father-daughter relationships, such as in *Le livre de la cité des dames*.

The benevolent, adoring father transmogrifies into what we may call the "enlightened father" in Christine de Pizan's *Cité des dames*. The daughter of an enlightened father herself, Christine was educated well by him, and encouraged in intellectual pursuits. In her works, the enlightened father cherishes his daughter and validates her intellectually. On the surface, paternal pride is the basis for some of the saints' vitae in this work, which she claims is a response to the misogyny in historically prevalent writings by men.

The stories of three historical female figures which she retells in the *Cité des dames*, present a progression from paternal benevolence to violent cruelty. Whether built on conflict or harmony, the father-daughter relationship is central to the portraits of women. Images of daughters cherished by their fathers abound in *Cité des dames*, such as the story of Hortense, in which female intellect is one criterion for paternal love: "he cherished [her] particularly because of the vivacity of her intelligence" (179). Intelligence is therefore grounds for paternal love, and yet the following declaration by the narrator is itself grounds for the father's narcissism: "Elle excella tant en cette dernière discipline que, d'après Boccace, non seulement elle ressemblait à son père pour l'intelligence, la rapidité de sa mémoire et l'élocution, mais aussi pour l'éloquence et l'art oratoire, si bien qu'elle l'égala en tout" (179) [She excelled so in this last discipline [rhetoric] that, according to Boccace, not only did she resemble her father in intelligence, speed of memory and elocution, but also in eloquence of the art of oratory, so well that she equaled him in everything]. Hortense's success in attaining such accolades could be seen as a case of "like father like daughter." Another interpretation is possible however: such equality could be threatening to the father. Christine de Pizan's point of view is not clear, for comparing father and daughter might simply be a way to undermine the daughter's success.

Such acclaim is blocked by the obstacle of physical beauty in the case of another heroine described by Christine, Novella. Her father proudly places his daughter directly in an arena of male intellectual prowess, before the Magistrate of the Court, to make a speech. Despite her abilities, her face must be hidden by a curtain lest her beauty distract her (male) audience: "Mais afin de soustraire aux regards du public une

beauté qui l'eut distrait, on fit tendre un petit rideau devant la chair" (179) [But in order to take away from the public view a beauty which would have been distracting, a small curtain was hung in front of her flesh]. Here, a woman is prevented from being fully what the patriarchy wants her to be, beautiful *and intelligent*. Her two most prized attributes are not permitted to coexist. Her own personality is thus dissected. The use of the passive voice ("*a small curtain was hung*") limits our understanding of the dissection: *Who* made the decision to hide Novella's beauty, Novella herself, or her father?

This motif of disintegration is pursued further by Christine's discussion of yet more women torn in two, such as Sigismonde, daughter of Tancrède, Prince of Salerne. This father is so possessive that the daughter must fight the threat of incest. Paternal authority poses the threat of complete abuse of power. There are many examples of the *jealous father* in *Cité des Dames*, but the final example here goes farther. The *jealous father* becomes the *tyrannical father*, as in the story of the author's namesake, Saint Christine. One of many Catholic martyrs in medieval literature, Saint Christine is persecuted so violently by her father, King Urbain, because of her faith, that the misogyny seen throughout these works is taken to its farthest conclusion: infanticide.

Maureen Quilligan sees the torture present in so many saints' stories as a social microcosm:

> Explaining male hostility to women has been a singular burden of Christine's argument throughout the text of the *Cité des dames*, and her representation of torture in the saints' vitae implicitly acknowledges that while domination exists throughout all levels of society, sadomasochistic family relations are a more intense, one might say more personal, textbook version of it. Their pathology replicates the larger structure of society (222).

Indeed, exploring relationships between fathers and daughters provides varied contexts for the study of male hostility to women. In Saint Christine's ability to survive her father's attempts to destroy her, the biological father is replaced by the spiritual father: "Tyran sans pitié, ne t'ai-je pas déjà dit que mon Père Jésus-Christ m'a appris cette constance et cette haute vertu en la foi du Dieu vivant?" (257-58) [Pitiless tyrant, have I not already told you that my Father Jesus Christ

taught me this constancy and high virtue in the faith of the Living God?]. Saint Christine replaces her sadistic father with a benevolent one. It is through powerful resistance against paternal abuse that Saint Christine is portrayed as transcending humanity and becoming a woman of extraordinary power; a saint.

These three paternal types (or one could say *archetypes),* studied in the order in which they appear in *Cité des dames*, paint a picture of progression from benevolence to tyranny, from the father's possessive love of the daughter to his complete destruction of her. The violent struggle between Saint Christine and her father seems to play out in a concrete way the struggle of women against the tyrannical authority not just of men in general, but specifically of fathers, as seen in other medieval works. The conclusions which could be drawn from these struggles would certainly be complex. Must we always see the role of the father as oppressive? At what point does benevolence become oppressive?

The fathers in these works define their daughters in many different ways. One is responsible for gender manipulation, for silencing, then for giving, or allowing his daughter to live; one dictates his daughter's transition from girl to wife; one competes with God for his daughter's adoration. Nonetheless, these fathers also define themselves through their daughters. In all the works discussed here, fathers not only play central roles in the lives of their daughters, but are in fact, significantly more influential than mothers. If the mother's absence, seen not as a cultural construct, but as a literary one, allows room for the father's influence, she would have to be considered influential *in absentia.* Fathers, in these works, determine their daughters' names, marriages, and in the hagiographic accounts of Christine de Pizan, seem to desire a God-like status.

It is interesting to note however, that in view of the chronological spread of the works discussed, the women portrayed in these twelfth and thirteenth century works appear to have more control over their relationships with their fathers. The voice is always a central ingredient in the tableau of the daughter, as it is in the wife's tableau. Enide is a cipher, and ultimately will choose the silence which characterized her relationship with her father, as the foundation for her role as dutiful wife of Erec- who will ultimately choose silence as a wifely modus operandi.

Silence's transvestism allows her more freedom perhaps, yet the phenomenon of voice and non-voice carries through her relationship

with her father and is, at times, a determiner of her status as a man, and later, as a woman.

Among these selected texts, it is only two decades later, in Christine de Pizan's hagiographic tales, that we see portrayed by literature, women as martyrs. Perhaps Christine, in her attempts to defray the high cost of what she considered to be misogynist treatments of women's lives by male writers, offers in the *Cité des dames* exaggerated portraits of female suffering.

In *Erec et Enide*, the father annihilates his daughter's status as daughter, by marrying her to Erec, but thereby makes her "woman." In *Le roman de silence*, the father annihilates his daughter's gender entirely, and by extension, her sexuality, but is ultimately incapable of annihilating her voice (hence the irony of her name, Silence). Christine de Pizan gives us - among others - stories of saints whose very lives are threatened by their fathers. Here, the symbolic annhiliation is replaced by a literal annihilation, and is yet associated with liberating the saintly woman. A parting question might be: In these medieval fictions, is the "mère dévorante" replaced by the "père dévorant"? One thing is clear: the fathers in these works are responsible for a certain degree of annihilation of their daughters. Despite their annihilation, these women are never consistently dutiful. Perhaps for twentieth century readers of medieval literature, this is more than interesting; perhaps it is encouraging.

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