

CHRISTINE DE PIZAN AND
THE MORAL DEFENCE
OF WOMEN

Reading beyond gender

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The ‘querelle de la “Rose”’: Christine’s critique of misogynist doctrine and literary practice

In order to undertake a defence of women against the misogynist tradition and to construct an authoritative discursive position from which to mount such a defence, Christine de Pizan first had to take a stand against the text which, by end of the fourteenth century, had firmly established itself as the vernacular authority on misogyny: Jean de Meung’s *Rose*.¹ Christine’s temerity in attacking this authoritative text can be measured by the fact that up until the time of the debate which she was to instigate, assessments of Jean’s great erudition and knowledge in matters both amatory and philosophical had been overwhelmingly favourable.² She had already begun to engage directly with this text in 1399 in an earlier poetic work, the *Dieu d’Amours*, as well as indirectly in 1400 in the *Othéa*. However, it was only in 1401 that she became involved in a highly polemical exchange of letters with notable intellectual figures of her day on the question of the *Rose*.³ This exchange, generally referred to as the

¹ Armand Strubel, the most recent translator of the *Rose* into modern French, states that ‘les lecteurs médiévaux l’utilisent comme un inépuisable recueil de sentences sur l’amour et les femmes’: see Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung, *Le Roman de la Rose*, Armand Strubel, ed. and trans., Lettres Gothiques (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1992), 5. However, for a different assessment of the misogyny of the *Rose*, see Lionel J. Friedman, “‘Jean de Meung’, anti-feminism, and “bourgeois realism””, *Modern Philology* 57,1 (1959), 13–23.

² See John V. Fleming, ‘The moral reputation of the *Roman de la Rose* before 1400’, *Romance Philology* 18 (1964–5), 430–5; Pierre-Yves Badel, *Le Roman de la Rose au XIV^e siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 1980); Jillian M. Hill, *The Medieval Debate on Jean de Meung’s Roman de la Rose: Morality versus Art*, Studies in Medieval Literature, 4 (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991). See also Sylvia J. Huot, ‘Medieval readers of the *Roman de la Rose*: the evidence of marginal notations’, *Romance Philology* 43,3 (1990), 400–20; and Huot, *The Romance of the Rose and its Medieval Readers: Interpretation, Reception, Manuscript Transmission* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

³ All page references in this chapter are to *Débat*, unless otherwise stated. For a modern English translation of the ‘querelle’ documents, see Joseph L. Baird and John R. Kane, ed. and trans., *La Querelle de la Rose: Letters and Documents*, University of North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, 199 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, Department of Romance Languages, 1978), hereafter referred to as *La Querelle*.

'querelle de la *Rose*', ultimately turned out to be the first phase of a broader tradition of literary debates on women, known as the 'querelle des femmes', which extended into the Renaissance.⁴

The 'querelle' itself was in two distinct phases, the first beginning with a treatise written in 1401 in favour of the *Rose* by Jean de Montreuil, Provost of Lille, and the second being initiated in 1402 by Jean Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris, who wrote a dream-vision in which the author of the *Rose* is arraigned in the court of Christianity by the allegorical figure of Eloquence Theologienne, who acts as Gerson's mouthpiece.⁵ Christine's own intervention was limited, in the first phase, to a critical reply to Jean de Montreuil's original treatise and a sharp response to Gontier Col, First Secretary and Notary to King Charles VI, who was brought in by his friend Jean to bolster his case. In the second phase, Christine's role was to offer a lengthy condemnation of the views of Gontier's brother, Pierre, Canon of Paris and Tournay, who was also asked by Jean to intervene in the affair to defend the *Rose* against the attacks of both Christine and Gerson. At the end of each of these two phases it was Christine who published the documents in the form of dossiers, although in both cases her opponents' views were partially omitted. Modern scholars have therefore had to reconstitute the full complement of documents pertaining to the 'querelle' by using manuscripts which contain the material left out by Christine, though Jean de Montreuil's original treatise has never been recovered.⁶

Modern scholarship of the debate has, at times, threatened to

⁴ See Lula McDowell Richardson, *The Forerunners of Feminism in French Literature of the Renaissance, From Christine of Pisa to Marie de Gournay* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1929); Blanche Hinman Dow, *The Varying Attitude toward Women in French Literature of the Fifteenth Century* (New York: Institute of French Studies, 1936); Emile Telle, *L'Œuvre de Marguerite d'Angoulême, reine de Navarre et la querelle des femmes* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1969); Joan Kelly, 'Early feminist theory and the *Querelle des femmes*, 1400–1789', *Signs* 8 (1982), 4–28. See also Helen Fletcher Moody, 'The Debate of the Rose: The "Querelle des Femmes" as Court Poetry' (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1981); Madeleine Lazard, *Images littéraires de la femme à la Renaissance*, *Littératures Modernes*, 39 (Paris: PUF, 1985), 9–16; Helen Solterer, *The Master and Minerva: Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

⁵ On the humanist context of the 'querelle', see Gilbert Ouy, 'Paris l'un des principaux foyers de l'humanisme en Europe au début du XV^e siècle', *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de Paris et de l'Île de France* (1967–8 [1970]), 71–98; and Nadia Margolis, "'The cry of the chameleon": evolving voices in the Epistles of Christine de Pizan', *Disputatio* 1 (1996), 37–70.

⁶ For a full chronology and detailed description of the 'querelle' documents, see *Débat*, intro.; and Eric Hicks and Ezio Ornato, 'Jean de Montreuil et le débat sur le *Roman de la Rose*', *Romania* 98 (1977), 34–64, 186–219.

become more of a 'querelle de Christine' than an analysis of the 'querelle' documents themselves.⁷ The patristic critics D.W. Robertson and John V. Fleming, whose view of the *Rose* as a moral attack on foolish love was at odds with that of Christine, were the first to accuse her of prudishness in '[refusing] to admit the efficacy of any allegorical work which was not sufficiently pious on the surface to be fit for the ears of children'.⁸ The translators of the debate into modern English, Joseph L. Baird and John R. Kane, have attempted to defend Christine against patristic attack, by stressing that both sides of the debate raise key literary and moral issues such as, for example, Jean de Meung's delegation of responsibility to his characters for putting forward misogynist views.⁹ However, despite this nuanced assessment, the Marxist critic Sheila Delany has more recently condemned Christine's role in the 'querelle' as part of a broader attack on her political conservatism.¹⁰ In addition to the familiar charge of prudishness,¹¹ Delany goes on to berate Christine for insisting that authors should take full responsibility for the views expressed in their texts, for condemning Jean de Meung's radical view of unmarried love, and for accusing him of

⁷ For a full bibliography of the early scholarship on the 'querelle', see Kennedy, *Guide*, items 364–9. See also Peter Potansky, *Der Streit um den Rosenroman*, Münchener Romanistische Arbeiten, Heft XXXIII (Munich: Fink, 1972); G. C. Furr, 'The Quarrel of the *Roman de la Rose* and Fourteenth Century Humanism' (Unpublished PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 1979); Karl August Ott, *Der Rosenroman*, *Erträge der Forschung*, 145 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980); Moody, 'The Debate'; Maxwell Luria, *A Reader's Guide to the 'Roman de la Rose'* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1982); Armand Strubel, *Le Roman de la Rose*, *Etudes Littéraires*, 4 (Paris: PUF, 1984), 112–17; Heather M. Arden, *The Romance of the Rose*, Twayne's World Author Series, 791 (Boston: Twayne, 1987); Karen Sullivan, 'At the limit of feminist theory: an architectonics of the *Querelle de la Rose*', *Exemplaria* 3,2 (1991), 435–65; Margarete Zimmermann, 'Wirres Zeug und übles Geschwätz': *Christine über den Rosenroman* (Bad Nauheim: Rosenmuseum Steinfurth, 1993); Eric Hicks, 'Situation du débat sur le *Roman de la Rose*', in Dulac and Ribémont, *Une femme*, 51–67; Helen Solterer, 'Flaming words: verbal violence and gender in premodern Paris', *Romanic Review* 86,2 (1995), 355–78; and Karen Sullivan, 'The inquisitorial origins of literary debate', *Romanic Review* 88,3 (1997), 27–51.

⁸ D. W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton University Press, 1962), 361. See also Fleming, 'The moral reputation'; and Fleming, *The 'Roman de la Rose': A Study in Allegory and Iconography* (Princeton University Press, 1969).

⁹ See Joseph L. Baird and John R. Kane, 'La *Querelle de la Rose*: in defense of the opponents', *The French Review* 48 (1974–5), 298–307.

¹⁰ Delany, '“Mothers”'.

¹¹ See also David F. Hult, 'Words and deeds: Jean de Meun's *Romance of the Rose* and the hermeneutics of censorship', *New Literary History* 28,2 (1997), 345–66, who likens Christine's stance as literary censor to that of contemporary anti-pornography campaigners such as Catherine MacKinnon.

slandering the female sex whilst ignoring the examples of virtuous women to be found in his work.¹² Here I shall argue that what Delany treats as four separate issues in the ‘querelle’, namely language, authorial responsibility, love and anti-feminism, are in fact unified by Christine’s ethical outlook which is the basis of her defence of womankind. In tackling the questions of anti-feminism and love in the *Rose*, Christine asserts that Jean de Meung’s negative representation of women leads to disharmony between the sexes and thus to immoral and un-Christian behaviour. On the matters of authorial responsibility and language, Christine’s views are, in general, typical of her age in their emphasis on the writer’s role as moral reformer, whose function is to impart ethical instruction to the reader.¹³ Moreover, an understanding of how, in the ‘querelle de la *Rose*’, Christine relates Jean de Meung’s misogynist doctrine to his immoral literary practice is the key to understanding both her position on misogyny in her later texts such as the *Cité*, and the theoretical and rhetorical underpinning of Christine’s own literary practice as moral writer.¹⁴ This chapter will therefore discuss first, Christine’s critique of the anti-feminism of both Jean de Meung and her own opponents in the ‘querelle’, and secondly her analysis of Jean’s literary practice. Since this latter issue, rather than the misogyny of the *Rose*, was also the chief target of Jean Gerson, Christine’s ally in the debate, his contribution will be discussed below in the second half of this chapter.

ANTI-FEMINISM IN THE FIRING LINE

Although Christine was a vociferous antagonist in the debate, criticising both Jean de Montreuil and Pierre Col for their views, it is significant that, in her letters, she presents *herself* as the one who is under attack from her opponents even though, for Jean and the Col brothers, it was they who were on the defensive in having to ward off

¹² See Christine M. Reno, ‘Christine de Pizan: “at best a contradictory figure?”’, in Brabant, *Politics*, 171–92; and Sheila Delany, ‘History, politics, and Christine studies: a polemical reply’, *ibid.*, 193–206.

¹³ See Claude Gauvard, ‘Christine de Pizan et ses contemporains: l’engagement politique des écrivains dans le royaume de France aux XIVe et XVe siècles’, in Dulac and Ribémont, *Une femme*, 105–28.

¹⁴ See Kevin Brownlee, ‘Discourses of the self: Christine de Pizan and the *Rose*’, *Romanic Review* 59 (1988), 213–21.

negative criticisms of the *Rose*. As we shall see, her strategy in the 'querelle' is to shift the grounds of the debate in order to show how the behaviour and language of Jean de Meung's defenders have been affected by the pernicious influence of his text, a work which she deemed to have 'empoisonney plusieurs cuers humains' (118, line 119), including those of her opponents in the 'querelle'. Christine therefore transforms the debate from an exchange of views about a particular literary text into a rhetorical 'battle' (as she puts it) between the two sexes, a battle which, for her, closely parallels that in Jean's text between the attacking Amant and the defensive Rose. In so doing, Christine uses the debate as a platform from which to identify and refute both the misogynist views propounded in the *Rose* and those of her antagonists themselves, particularly Pierre Col, whom she accuses of even outdoing his master in denigrating women.

Misogyny in the 'Rose': men, women and love

Christine's critique of what she regards as Jean's misogyny centres on two key issues which, in general, correspond to the first and second phases of the 'querelle' respectively. In her letters to Jean de Montreuil and Gontier Col, Christine sets out her objections to the views of women presented by various characters in the *Rose*. In the second phase, in a more lengthy reply to Pierre Col, Christine briefly reiterates these views but expounds more fully on the dangerous consequences of misogynist thought for love between man and woman. For Christine, these two issues, the representations of women and love between the sexes, are inextricably linked because both raise important moral questions. This is made clear from the dedication to Queen Isabeau de Bavière in the first dossier of documents, where Christine explains that she has been moved to take a stand against 'aucunes oppinions a honnesteté contraires, et aussi l'onneur et louenge des femmes (laquelle plusieurs clerks et autres se sont efforciez par leurs dittiéz d'amenuisier, qui n'est chose loisible ne a souffrir ne soustenir)' (6, lines 28–31). Christine binds the issue of misogyny to that of morality ('honesteté') by arguing that Jean's view of love is contaminated by his negative conception of the female sex, which, to her mind, can ultimately only lead to the moral perdition of both sexes.

In the course of her reply to Jean de Montreuil's treatise on the

Rose, Christine outlines her points of disagreement with his more favourable view of the text. She declares her shock at reading pernicious words and doctrine from the mouths of its two female characters, Raison and La Vieille, expressing her disgust at the uncouth language of the former, 'laquelle nomme les secréz membres plainement par nom' (13, lines 61–2), and the dangerous incitements to young women on the part of the latter, 'qui y pourra noter fors ennortemens sophistez tous plains de laidure et toute vilaine memoire?' (15, lines 110–11).¹⁵ However, Christine reserves most of her criticisms for the misogynist speeches of the Jaloux and Genius. She mocks the supposed usefulness of the Jaloux's teachings, his 'faintises, faulx semblans et choses dissimulees en mariage et autre estat' (ibid., lines 127–8), and dismisses his outpourings as those of a character of limited authority in the text who merely makes pronouncements in a stereotypically misogynous fashion (ibid., lines 117–20).

Genius, on the other hand, is a more authoritative figure in the *Rose* and as such is severely attacked by Christine in the following terms: 'si excessivement, impettueusement et tres nonveritablement il accuse, blasme et diffame femmes de pluseurs tres grans vices et leurs meurs tesmoingne estre plains de toute perversité' (16, lines 163–6). She argues that Genius' view of women is untenable since his advice to men is contradictory. Whilst exhorting the male relentlessly to pursue the female for procreative purposes, Genius nevertheless also recommends that women should be avoided at all costs: '“fuiéz! fuiéz! fuiéz le serpent venimeux”' (17, lines 173–4). Christine thus unravels the logic of Genius' argument the better to reject it, arguing that for his teachings to have had any hope of proving useful, he should have remained consistent (ibid., lines 178–9). In order to refute Genius' other opinion that men should refrain from telling their secrets to women, Christine rhetorically conjectures what proof there is of the dire consequences befalling men as a result of this action: 'quans ont veuz accuséz, mors, pendus ou reprouchiéz en rue par l'encusement de leurs femmes: si croy que cler les trouveront seméz' (ibid., lines 185–7). Furthermore, in order to undermine Genius' argument that untrustworthiness in love is a feminine trait, Christine declares that such a failing should be

¹⁵ Despite the generally favourable assessment of the *Rose* prior to the 'querelle', Christine was not the first reader to take issue with its representation of these two female characters: see Badel, *Le Roman de la Rose*, 135–206; and Hill, *The Medieval Debate*, 1–25.

condemned wherever it is to be found, whether in man *or* woman. Finally, to cast complete doubt on the validity of Genius' teachings, Christine shows how his misogynist logic seeks to shift responsibility for men's actions on to women.¹⁶ In an ironic reversal of the behaviour of Amant towards the Rose, Christine demands to know whether all men's suffering has come about because they have been pursued and harried by women: 'Te vont elles en ton hostel querir, prier et prendre a force? Bon seroit savoir comment elles te deçoivent' (18, lines 205–7).

Christine then turns her attention to what she sees as one of the most insidious aspects of misogynist thought: the tendency to generalise and condemn a whole sex on the basis of a few particular examples.¹⁷ She shows how, when criticising wives, this tendency to generalise from the particular can have the especially harmful consequence of undermining the sacrament of marriage itself. Thus, to her mind, the *Rose* is invalidated as a possible useful source of teaching because of its lack of discrimination: 'Et se seulement eust blasmé les deshonestes et conseillié elles fuir, bon enseignement et juste seroit. Mais non! ains sans exception toutes les accuse' (ibid., lines 221–4). In order to emphasise the futility and dishonesty of misogynist generalisations, Christine cites numerous counter-examples of virtuous married women whose actions have directly benefited their husbands. Just as she will do later in the *Cité*, Christine adduces examples not only from the Bible and ancient history (Sarah, Rebecca, Judith, etc.) but also from the recent French past ('la sainte devote royne, Jehanne', 19, line 242) and even contemporary society ('la duchesse d'Anjou qui ore est nommee royne de Secile', (ibid., lines 243–4).

For Christine, the logical outcome of misogyny in works such as the *Rose* is, in effect, to present women as a race apart from men, a race which is less than human.¹⁸ Pointing out the similarity of approach in Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and Jean de Meung's *Rose*, a

¹⁶ This manoeuvre is a commonplace in misogynist literature. John Gower is an unusual example of a male medieval writer who lays the blame for men's lust squarely on the men themselves: see *Confessio Amantis*, Book VII, lines 4273–310.

¹⁷ See Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 1–15; and *Three Medieval Views*, 1–27. See also Katherine Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966); R. Howard Bloch, 'Medieval misogyny', *Representations* 20 (1987), 1–24; and Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

¹⁸ See Sullivan, 'At the limit', 454; and Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 1.

similarity which only serves to condemn the latter still further, Christine deplores the conception of women which such texts would seem to uphold, since the methods for conquering the female sex which they espouse are so extreme: 'Qui sont fames? Qui sont elles? Sont ce serpens, lous, lyons, dragons, guievres ou bestes ravissables devourans et ennemies a nature humaine, qu'il conviengne fere art a les decepvoir et prandre?' (139, lines 775–8). The reference here to serpents clearly recalls Genius' advice to flee venomous women as if they were snakes, but, coupled here with the allusion to 'ennemies a nature humaine', Christine uses it to imply that the *Rose* conceives 'human nature' to be male rather than something which is common to both sexes. This conception of women as in some sense non-human constitutes a key point of misogynist doctrine which Christine will contest throughout her later writings in defence of women.¹⁹ Here she attacks this view by stressing immediately the essential similarity of male and female nature: 'Et par Dieu, si sont elles vos meres, vos suers, vos filles, vos fames et vos amies; elles sont vous mesmes et vous meesmes elles' (ibid., lines 781–3). Thus she undermines the misogyny of the *Rose* by highlighting what she sees as its contradictory logic, countering its penchant for unjustified negative generalisations, and repudiating its attempt to classify female nature as essentially non-human.

For Christine, Jean de Meung's opinion of women as 'serpens, lous, lyons etc.' forms, in turn, the basis of his somewhat contradictory view of love. This view presents the female sex to the male as an object which is simultaneously both desirable and terrifying, a source of both attraction and dread. However, Christine does not simply content herself with diagnosing Jean's faulty logic. Rather, she aims to show that his view of love, which arises directly from his contradictory view of women, is both un-Christian and immoral, so stressing the heterodox nature of two key teachings of his text.²⁰ How then, according to Christine, does Jean's view of women inform his treatment of love in the *Rose*? Why should she claim that this representation of women is deleterious to the moral well-being of both sexes?

In her reply to Jean de Montreuil, Christine inveighs against the

¹⁹ See, for example, Richard de Bury's fourteenth-century description of woman as a 'two-legged animal' in his *Philobiblon*, quoted in Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 1.

²⁰ However, see Charles Dahlberg, 'Love and the *Roman de la Rose*', *Speculum* 44 (1969), 568–84.

harmful proverbial words uttered by Raison that "en la guerre amoureuse . . . vault mieulx decevoir que deceuz estre" (14, lines 99–100). As a means to an end, the practice of deception is, as Christine points out, contrary to Christian precepts: 'la Raison maistre Jehan de Meung renia son Pere a cellui mot, car trop donna autre doctrine' (ibid., lines 100–2). She returns to this point at greater length in the second phase of the 'querelle', citing the example of the story of Troy to illustrate the disastrous effects of deception in general.²¹ Within the realm of love, such a practice is all the more to be condemned for its immorality: 'car selonc la justice de Dieu celluy est plus pugniz qui injurie autruy que celluy qui est injuriés (et disons encore mesmement en cas d'amours pour ce que la Raison maistre Jehan de Meung dist que "Mieulx vaut" etc.)' (128, lines 432–6).

Just as Christine cites examples of virtuous women to counter misogynist generalisations, so she proposes an alternative form of love between men and women in which deception need play no part. Invoking the example of her own son, Christine declares that she would prefer him to love one good woman than to sin by deceiving several: 'Je ay ung seul filz . . . mais je ameroye mieulx qu'il fust parfaitement amoureux avec le scens que je espoire que Dieu luy donra, come ont homes raisonnables, d'une fame bien condicionnee et sage qui amast honneur . . . que je ne seroie qu'a son pouoir fut decepveur de toutes ou de plusieurs' (128–9, lines 437–44). The key words here are the lover's good sense, his reason, and his choice of a wise and virtuous lady since, for Christine, love ought to be based on honour, respect and, above all, the desire for a worthy object (129, lines 453–5).²² It is up to the lover to find an honourable woman to love rather than blaming all women should one of them fail to meet his expectations. Christine's view firmly refutes the misogynist tendency to lay responsibility for male chastity on to women, a view which is fundamental for her defence of the female sex, particularly in the *Othéa* where this teaching is delivered to the princely reader.

Instead of being condemned either to deceive or to be deceived,

²¹ Christine uses the example of Troy to illustrate this point at greater length in both the *Dieu d'Amours*, lines 536–40, and, of course, the *Othéa*.

²² See June Hall McCash, 'Mutual love as a medieval ideal', in Keith Busby and Erik Kooper, eds., *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context (Selected Papers from the Fifth Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society, Dalfsen, The Netherlands, 9–16 Aug., 1986)* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), 429–38.

the lover, according to Christine, can be ennobled by his love, provided that his sole motive is not simply to obtain sexual satisfaction, as would seem to be the case in the *Rose*: 'plusseurs ont amey loyaument et parfaitement qui onques n'y couchierent, ne onques ne deseurent ne furent deceu, de qui estoit principale entencion que leurs meurs en vauçissent mieulx, – et pour celle amour devenoyent vaillans et bien renommés, et tant que en leur viellesce ilz louoient Dieu qu'ilz avoient esté amoureux' (ibid., lines 458–64).²³ In conclusion, Christine offers a proverbial sentence to refute Raison's dictum, 'c'est pis decevoir que estre bien amoureux, et pis en puet venir' (130, lines 482–3), thus subverting Raison's view which, to her mind, condemns a lover to immoral acts towards women and leads him away from God.

If Christine attacks Raison's exhortation to deception in love, she abhors Genius' sermon which proclaims the desired end of love to be sexual intercourse in the interests of perpetuation of the species.²⁴ For Christine, not only does Genius commit the sacrilege of expressing the sacred ('paradis et les joyes qui la sont', 16, lines 147–8) in terms of the profane ('les euvres de Nature', ibid., line 150), he even seems to go so far as to propound lust as a virtue for both man and woman: 'Et par ce semble que maintenir vueille le pechié de luxure estre nul, ains vertu – qui est erreur et contre la loy de Dieu' (ibid., lines 152–4). She states that Genius is to be condemned for his failure to uphold the orthodox Augustinian notion that marriage is the only form of relationship in which sexual relations can be sanctioned. Indeed, his fault is compounded even further by the fact that, in her view, his relentless attacks on the faithless behaviour of wives towards their husbands can only lead to revulsion for the married state on the part of men, thus destroying their wish to procreate within it (144, lines 939–41).

For Christine, Jean's contorted view of love, based on an erroneous and misguided conception of the female sex, can only undermine good relations between the sexes and weaken the sacrament of marriage, the one institution in which physical desires can be

²³ See Willard, *Life*, 61.

²⁴ However, see Alan M. F. Gunn, *The Mirror of Love: A Reinterpretation of the Romance of the Rose* (Lubbock, Texas: Texas Technical Press, 1952). See also George D. Economou, 'The character Genius in Alan de Lille, Jean de Meun, and John Gower', *Chaucer Review* 4 (1970), 203–10.

expressed without endangering the human soul. In her later works in defence of women, particularly the *Cité* and the *Trois Vertus*, Christine will tackle both of these misconceptions at once, offering examples of women as chaste and faithful wives whose virtuous actions brought countless benefits to their husbands.

Defending the indefensible? Misogyny in the 'querelle'

In her contributions to the debate, Christine not only attacked Jean de Meung's misogyny but also extended her critique to include the attitudes of his defenders as well. Central to her argument is the idea that the disciples of the *Rose* are themselves victims of its seductive, yet poisonous charms, which she frequently refers to as 'venin' mixed with 'miel' (see, for example, 145, lines 968–9). How then did Christine represent each side's role in the 'querelle'? What type of misogynist arguments did she deem her opponents to have marshalled against both her and other women? How did she combat each of these sets of arguments in turn?

Although in their letters it is clear that Jean de Montreuil and Gontier Col felt themselves to be under attack from a disgruntled female reader of the *Rose*, the dedications added by Christine to copies of the first dossier of documents which were given to Queen Isabeau de Bavière and Guillaume de Tignonville create precisely the opposite impression.²⁵ From being a debate centring on the defence of the *Rose*, the 'querelle' becomes the site of an energetic battle in defence of the female sex, an important reversal brought about by Christine herself. In her dedications, Christine is careful to construct herself as the injured and weaker party pitted against more skilful opponents.²⁶ To the queen, she explains how she has compiled the dossier in order to champion the female sex whilst also underlining the difficulty of this endeavour, since she is merely a

²⁵ See Hicks and Ornato, 'Jean de Montreuil', 214, who note that 'le rôle de Christine dans l'affaire ne fut pas, comme elle aimait à le faire croire, celui de la victime constamment et injustement attaquée. Ce fut elle, au contraire, qui relança le débat, alors que Montreuil et Gontier Col auraient préféré l'étouffer.'

²⁶ For Christine's frequent use of this strategy in her writings, see Jacqueline Cerquiglini, 'L'Etrangère', *Revue des Langues Romanes* 92,2 (1988), 239–52; Joël Blanchard, 'Compilation et légitimation au XV^e siècle', *Poétique* 19 (1988), 139–57; Mary McKinley, 'The subversive "seulette"', in Brabant, *Politics*, 157–70; and Nadia Margolis, 'Elegant closures: the use of the diminutive in Christine de Pizan and Jean de Meun', in Richards, *Reinterpreting*, 111–23.

woman whereas her adversaries are eloquent scholars, 'soubtilz maistres' (6, lines 32–3). However, though weak in might, she presents herself as strong in right, for the main weapon in her hands is the knowledge that she is acting out of 'certaine science' (ibid., line 34). To Tignonville, Christine stresses less the subject of the 'querelle', which she merely designates as 'oppinions contraires' (7, line 10), than the difficulty of her position: 'Pour ce requier vous, tres sçavant, que par compassion de ma femmenine ignorance, vostre humblece s'encline a joindre a mes dictes vraies oppinions par si que vostre saigesce me soit force, ayde, deffense et appuyal contre si notables et esleuz maistres' (7–8, lines 25–9).

It is in this second dedication that Christine sets the tone of her presentation of the 'querelle': although the debate is 'gracieux et non haineux' (7, lines 9–10), it is nonetheless a 'guerre encomencee' (8, line 33), in which her opponents are 'assaillans', attacking a weaker foe (8, line 41). Clearly this is rhetorical hyperbole, but in the circumstances it is an extremely useful image for Christine as it encourages the reader to see the analogy which she herself draws between her position in the debate and that of women in the *Rose*: both are under siege and in need of defence from misogynist attack. Through careful presentation and wily manipulation of the documents of the 'querelle', Christine thus focuses the reader's attention on to the issue of her own choosing: in this instance, the equation of the sentiments expressed in the *Rose* with those of her adversaries.

Unlike Jean de Montreuil, who refused to reply to Christine directly, or Gontier Col, who was content simply to demand that Christine retract her statements on the *Rose*, it was Pierre Col who engaged most vociferously with Christine in his defence of Jean de Meung, and who continued the imagery of warfare by which to represent their verbal jousting. He belittles his female opponent, claiming that although he himself is not the greatest of Jean's champions, Christine's arguments are so weak as hardly to require refutation by a more worthy defender. The reference to warfare occurs most strikingly in Pierre Col's defence of the *Rose* when he criticises the logic of Christine's condemnation of Raison's proverb "'mielx vaut decevoir que deceuz estre'". On the question of correct male behaviour in what he calls 'la guerre amoureuse', Pierre Col develops a hypothetical argument involving himself and Christine:

En oultre je dy qu'il me vaulroit mieux – c'est a dire qu'il me greveroit moins – faire semblant de toy amer pour moy aasier charnelement de ton corps qu'il ne feroit pour celle meisme fin que j'en fuisse fol amoureux, pour quoy j'en perdisse mon estude, 'sans, temps, chastel, corps, ame, los' (come dit est). (99, lines 365–70)

In other words, Pierre here explicitly compares his battle with Christine to that waged by Amant (or 'Fol Amoureux', as he is referred to throughout the 'querelle') on the Rose in Jean's text. Although this manoeuvre is evidently part of the rhetoric of his argument, it nonetheless shows how his view of the sexual politics involved in the debate, in which a weak female defender pits her wits against a powerful male foe, is identical to that of Christine.

Christine exploited this parallel between the debate and the *Rose*, with which Pierre himself would seem to have concurred, in order to denounce her opponent's defence of Jean's view of women and love. In her reply to Pierre's hypothetical argument, she points out that in his fervour to attack her opinions and defend his master's text, he has actually gone one stage further than even the author of the *Rose* in the battle of love, by reducing the lover's choice to that of either deceiving or being a 'fol amoureux': 'Sans faille la faveur que tu y as te fait bien loings aler querre ceste extreme excusacion (et touteffois ne met il point ces .ii. extremités ensemble)' (127, lines 397–9). As we shall see, this is but the first of several instances in which Christine rebukes her opponents, and Pierre especially, for imitating or even seeking to outdo the precepts of Jean de Meung in their behaviour towards both her in particular and womankind in general. She thus blames the disciples' misogynist attitudes on the teachings of the *Rose* and uses this as evidence of its harmful effect on the male reader.

Christine sought to make further capital out of the parallel between herself and the Rose as women under attack, by using it to accuse her opponents of employing the same methods against her as Amant does in Jean's work. She reiterates the image of a battle between her and Pierre when she replies to his assertion that the author of the *Rose* intended to teach women to guard against devious male attackers, rejecting this argument on the grounds that even in the different context of actual warfare, its premises are false: 'se je te conseilloye la maniere de vaincre ton anemy, ce ne seroit mie affin qu'il se gardast de toy' (137, lines 722–3). Moreover, turning to the actual war involved in the debate itself, she asserts that the assaillant

always has the advantage over the defender if he chooses to attack a weaker foe, especially one upon whom he can practise deception. Christine's insistence on depicting herself as the weaker party and the disciples as 'soubtilz maitres/clercs', able to utilise the tricks of sophistry against an unskilled female opponent, allows her directly to equate the methods of deception and assault in the *Rose* with those of her adversaries in the debate (137, lines 706–11). She therefore castigates Pierre for his bad faith in choosing to spend so much effort employing his rhetorical skills against her writings when many other readers, more authoritative and worthy than she, share her opinion of the dangers of Jean's work (145–6, lines 991–3).

Christine's representation of herself, her opponents and the sexual politics involved in the debate is crucial to her critique of her opponents' misogyny. Paradoxically, however, whilst accusing them of verbal sleight-of-hand in their dealings with her, she proves herself to be no mean manipulator of rhetorical arguments in her attempt to turn the debate round to the questions which are of principal importance to her. We need to turn now to the actual substance of their remarks in order to see to what extent she blames their misogynist views on their reading of the *Rose* itself.

At the end of her reply to Jean de Montreuil's treatise, Christine tries to pre-empt a misogynist backlash against her on the part of her opponents: 'Et ne me soit imputé a follie, arrogance ou presompcion d'oser, moy femme, repprendre et redarguer aucteur tant subtil et son euvre admenuisier de louenge, quant lui, seul homme, osa entreprendre a diffamer et blasmer sans excepcion tout un sexe' (22, lines 353–7). She thereby attempts not only to preclude a stream of insults against her speech but also to justify her critical intervention, as a woman, against a male 'aucteur' who had, she believed, calumniated an entire sex. As Christine goes on to imply in her later replies to Gontier and Pierre Col, her opponents' treatment of both her and women in general reproduces much of Jean's own rhetoric of misogyny in their attempts to undermine the legitimacy of her position specifically as female critic.²⁷

Gontier, in his request to Christine for a copy of her reply to Jean de Montreuil, initially uses the term 'femme' in a neutral fashion, addressing her as 'Femme de hault et eslevé entendement' (9, line 2).

²⁷ See Willard, *Life*, 82–4, on the 'patronizing' nature of the Col brothers' remarks to Christine. However, for a different view, see Joseph L. Baird, 'Pierre Col and the *Querelle de la Rose*', *Philological Quarterly* 60 (1981), 273–86; and Hicks, 'Situation'.

However, he goes on to contrast her non-authoritative position with the supremely authoritative figure of his 'maistre' Jean de Meung, by describing the latter in hyperbolic terms: 'vray catholique, solempnel maistre et docteur en son temps en sainte theologie, philosophe tres parfont et excellent sachant tout ce qui a entendement humain est scible' (ibid., lines 8–11). On reading the substance of Christine's actual attack on the *Rose*, in his second letter Gontier is more explicitly derogatory towards her, accusing her of being an irrational 'femme passionnee' (23, lines 14–15). He effectively brings against her the charge of 'follie' which she had tried to preclude, a charge which closely resembles the misogynist stereotype of woman's reason being overcome by her emotions found in both the *Rose* and countless other anti-feminist texts.²⁸ Gontier similarly denounces Christine for her 'presompcion' or effrontery, another accusation which she had sought to deflect, in writing not only against such a renowned male author as Jean de Meung but also against his disciples:

te pry . . . que ton dessus dit erreur tu veuilles corrugier, desdire et amender envers le tres excellent et inreprehensible docteur en sainte divine Escripture . . . que si horriblement *oses et presumes* corrugier et repprendre a sa grant charge – et aussi envers ses vrays et loyaux disciples, mon seigneur le prevost de Lisle et moy et autres. (ibid., lines 17–25, emphasis added)

He therefore attempts to question Christine's authority as critic of the *Rose* by branding her an irrational female and by explicitly underscoring the vast difference between her, as woman, and Jean, as *auctor*, together with his fellow male disciples.

Later in the debate, Pierre develops both of these strategies employed by Gontier, similarly using markers of gender to stereotype Christine's words as unthinking and impetuous, and to reinforce the vast divide which should pertain between male and female in terms of learning and authority: 'O parole trop tost yssue et sans avis de bouche de fame, qui condampne home de si hault entendement, de si fervant estude, qui a si grant labour et meure deliberacion a fait si tres noble livre comme celluy de la *Rose*, qui passe aussy tous autres

²⁸ See, for example, Genius' remarks:

Mes, san faille, il est voirs que fame
legierement d'ire s'anflame.
Virgiles meïsmes tesmoigne,
qui mout connut de leur besoigne,
que ja fame n'iert tant estable
qu'el ne soit diverse et muable.

(*Rose*, lines 16293–8)

qui onques fussent en langage ou il escript son livre' (100, lines 388–93). Pierre too denounces Christine's presumption in speaking against the author of the *Rose*. In a striking backhanded compliment, he appears to praise her verbal dexterity, describing her as a 'femme de grant engin' (109, line 731) who speaks with 'language bien ordené' (110, lines 732–3), only to warn her of the dangers of employing these powers against too eminent a target: 's'on t'a loué pour ce que tu as tiry d'un boulet par dessus les tours de Nostre Dame, ne t'essayes pour tant a ferir la lune d'un boujon pesant' (ibid., lines 733–5). However, Pierre goes one better than Gontier and attacks Christine's speech by comparing her to the crow of the fable who sang too loud and lost its supper, an animal image which recalls those frequently employed in misogynist texts to denigrate female speech (ibid., lines 735–8).²⁹ By using such an image, Pierre not only stresses the inappropriateness of Christine's speech but also its non-human qualities, thus reiterating Jean de Meung's representation of women as less than human and a race apart which Christine herself had denounced. In short, both Gontier and Pierre Col reproduce precisely the kind of personal insults which Christine had sought to obviate in the first place. Coupled with the use of misogynist stereotypes, the two brothers' attacks on Christine focus on her gender in order to deny that she can legitimately bridge the gap between female reader and authoritative male writer.

Christine responds with alacrity to the charges laid against her by the Col brothers. To begin with, she is at pains to refute her opponents' use of the term 'femme' as an insult to hurl at her, and thereby demean both her and the sex to which she belongs. She chastises Gontier for stereotyping her as an irrational 'femme passionnee' (23, lines 14–15) which she interprets as a slur on her sex for being 'passionné come par nature' (25, lines 22–3). Instead she re-affirms the desirability of her own standpoint, specifically *as* female: 'saiches de vray que ce ne tiens je a villenie ou aucun repprouche, pour le reconfort de la noble memoire et continuelle experience de tres grant foison vaillans femmes avoir esté et estre tres dignes de louenge et *en toutes vertus aprises*, auxquelles mieulx voudroye ressembler que estre enrichie de tous les biens de fortune' (ibid., lines 37–43, emphasis added). Central to her valorisation of

²⁹ See, for example, *Le Blasme des Fames*, line 84, in *Three Medieval Views*, where woman's speech is compared to that of the quarrelsome titmouse: 'Femme est mesenge pur tencer.'

women is the assertion that the female sex, far from being doomed to irrationality, shares the common human characteristic of a rational capacity for adopting virtuous forms of behaviour, an assertion which underpins her refutation of misogyny both here and in her later texts in defence of women, most notably the *Cité*. Thus Christine unequivocally identifies her own stance as being motivated by the moral and rational imperative of the pursuit of virtue, describing herself in the letter to her dedicatee Guillaume de Tignonville as 'la mendre des femmes desireuses vie honneste' (7, line 7).

Secondly, in answer to Gontier and Pierre's charge of effrontery in attacking a male *auctor* on the grounds of her lack of learning as an unschooled female, Christine accentuates instead the criterion of her moral virtuousness. When she is armed with the badge of virtue, any such attack on her erudition can easily be deflected and she therefore turns Pierre's taunts to her own advantage. Christine mockingly thanks him for his backhanded compliment that she sings like the over-enthusiastic crow (148), and even replies ironically to his animal image with one of her own which she transforms into a humility topos. Employing this topos to diminish her own accomplishments and to insist that she never laid any claims to clerkly authority (149), Christine describes herself as a mere squeaking grasshopper compared to the more worthy detractors of the *Rose* whom Pierre has chosen not to attack: 'ne suis fors comme la voix d'ung petit grisillon qui toute jour bat ses elettes et fait grant noise, et tout est neant envers le hault chant delitable des gracieux oisiaux' (146, lines 1003–6). In so doing, Christine effectively pre-empts the one charge which her opponents can safely lay against her, lack of a formal schooling, about which she herself complains in a number of her works.

Christine then uses these humility topoi as rhetorical devices by which to legitimate her criticisms of Jean and his disciples on *moral* grounds rather than seeking specifically to establish herself as a female clerkly authority.³⁰ Far from being disqualified from pronouncing truths by her inferior clerkly status, Christine twice attempts to make capital out of it by using the image of a small knife piercing a great, swollen object to underline the veracity of her moral stance in

³⁰ However, see Brownlee, 'Discourses', 216, who places equal emphasis on the moral and clerkly aspects of Christine's bid for authority in the 'querelle'.

the debate. To Gontier she points out that ‘une petite pointe de ganivet ou cotelet puet percier un grant sac plain et enflé de materielles choses’ (25, lines 45–7), and to Pierre she intimates that ‘par une petite pointelette est curey une grant enflure’ (149, lines 1111–12). This latter image of the lancet is extremely apposite, since it represents the culmination of Christine’s attack on the *Rose* as a poisonous and dangerous text which has infected its own disciples with its misogynist doctrine.³¹ She describes its venomous effects on Pierre in particular and hints at the way in which his malady might be cured: ‘O congnoissance pervertie, aveuglee par propre volanté: qui juges venin angoisseux estre restoration de mort; doctrine perverse estre salvable exemple; fiel amer, miel doulcereux; laidure orrible estre biautey solacieuse; – de qui une simple fammelette, avec la doctrine de sainte Esglise, puet reprendre ton eueur!’ (131–2, lines 535–40). She offers her own views, enlightened by Christian doctrine, as a purgative medicine to Pierre’s moral infection which is all the more dangerous for being an infection of the will. Through apostrophe and parallel invocation of Pierre’s own words to her (‘O parole trop tost yssue et sans avis de bouche de fame. . .’, 100, lines 388–9), Christine specifically employs the same markers of gender in order to point out how Pierre should see himself as a male victim of the deceptions perpetrated by the *Rose* rather than as a willing disciple and ally of Jean de Meung’s in attacking the female sex: ‘O homme, home deceu par oppinion volomptaire!’ (131, lines 531–2).

In the aim of revealing to Pierre the enormity of his error, Christine compares his infection of the will to that of one of the few negative examples of female behaviour which she cites in any of her texts in defence of women: Heloise (146, lines 1015–18).³² By comparing Pierre to Abelard’s famous lover, Christine breaks down the misogynist distinction between virtuous male and vicious female and shows instead how *both* sexes can be susceptible to error.

³¹ See Christine M. Reno, ‘Christine de Pizan: feminism and irony’, in Jonathan Beck and Gianni Mombello, eds., *Seconda miscellanea di studi e ricerche sul Quattrocento francese* (Chambéry/Turin: Centre d’Etudes Franco-Italien, 1981), 125–33; Joan Ferrante, ‘Public postures and private maneuvers: roles medieval women play’, in Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, eds., *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 213–29; and Thelma Fenster, ‘Did Christine have a sense of humor? The evidence of the *Epistre au dieu d’Amours*’, in Richards, *Reinterpreting*, 23–36.

³² See Leslie C. Brook, ‘Christine de Pisan, Heloise, and Abelard’s holy women’, *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie* 109,5/6 (1993), 556–63; and Earl Jeffrey Richards, ‘In search of a feminist patrology: Christine de Pizan and “les glorieux dotteurs”’, in Dulac and Ribémont, *Une femme*, 281–95.

Conversely, by adducing her own good (if immodest!) example, she argues that *both* can be capable of virtue and reason. Christine thus turns round her opponents' criticisms of her presumptuous feminine speech to show how, through her persistent virtuous efforts in attacking the *Rose*, she can help to cure their misogynist infection. She transforms her seemingly unauthoritative position of woman reader, in terms of her lowly intellectual status, into a bastion of female rectitude, in terms of her moral status.

However, the remarks made against Christine by her opponents are matched by those which Pierre Col in particular makes against the whole of womankind. To her mind, he is therefore guilty of adding to the misogynist comments already to be found in Jean's text. Whilst ostensibly refuting the substance of Christine's attack on misogyny in the *Rose*, Pierre actually inserts certain denigratory remarks of his own about the female sex. First, he claims that in the *Rose* Jean in fact condemns men more than women, and cites other *auctores*, whose views are more explicitly negative towards women than Jean's, in order to diminish Christine's attacks on him. For example, he quotes but fails to refute the opinion of one of the Church Fathers: 'saint Ambroise, en ung sien sermon, le blasme plus (le sexe femenin); car il dit que c'est ung sexe usagié a decevoir' (103, lines 500–2).³³ Secondly, Pierre defends Jean's opinion of women not only by quoting further misogynist authorities, but also by claiming that Christine is more of an anti-feminist than the author of the *Rose* himself. He deliberately misinterprets Christine's statement in her reply to Jean de Montreuil that noble women would blush to read the *Rose*,³⁴ and its ending in particular, to mean that she is accusing them of guilt: 'Car pour quoy rougiroient ilz? Il samble qu'ilz se sentiroient coupables des vices que le Jaloux recite de fame' (103, lines 505–7). Thirdly, Pierre answers Christine's charge that a female character like Raison should not refer to male genitals by their proper name. He protests that since it is well known that women speak plainly of their own genitals, they should therefore do

³³ See Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny, 'Comment les théologiens et les philosophes voient la femme', *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 20 (1977), 105–29; Graham Gould, 'Women in the writings of the Fathers: language, belief and reality', in W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood, eds., *Women in the Church*, Studies in Church History, 27 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 1–14; and Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 50–83.

³⁴ 'Et dont que fait a louer lecture qui n'osera estre leue ne parlee en propre forme a la table des roynes, princesses et des vaillans preudefemmes – a qui conviendroit couvrir la face de honte rougie?' (*Débat*, 20, lines 271–4).

likewise when referring to those of men since the latter are no more shameful than the former: 'car fames nomment bien leurs secrés membres par leur propre non' (97, lines 283–4). He thus imputes to female speech in general a frankness and prurience which even the *Rose* does not do. In defending Jean de Meung, Pierre launches his own assault on womankind which, in its zeal, frequently goes beyond even the admonitions of the *Rose* itself.

On the question of women in general, Christine not only refutes Pierre's specific remarks point by point, but once more turns her reply into a positive moral eulogy of certain virtuous and beneficial attributes of the female sex. In reply to Pierre's quotation of Saint Ambrose, Christine strikes at the heart of his misogynist 'citational mode' by accusing her adversary of using quotations out of context.³⁵ She exploits Pierre's invocation of patristic authority as a stick with which to beat both him and the *Rose*, by first elevating Ambrose's allegorical practice above that of Jean de Meung.³⁶ She argues that the saint did not intend his words to be understood literally, but figuratively, in such a way as to blame women not as individual sinners, let alone as representatives of an entire sex, but for their sins: 'si est bon assavoir que saint Ambroise ne le dist oncques pour les personnes des fames: car je croy que le bon sire n'eust riens voulu blasmer fors vices' (135, lines 656–9). Next, Christine points out that misogynists cannot pounce on patristic quotations in order to make generalisations about the sinfulness of the female sex because the Church Fathers themselves cited counter-examples of virtuous women: 'car bien savoit (saint Ambroise) qu'il estoit maintes saintes fames' (ibid., lines 659–60). Lastly, she argues that Ambrose was in fact putting responsibility for the supposed danger which the female represents for the male on to men themselves: 'il vouldt dire que c'est ung sexe dont home usagieement dessoit son ame' (ibid., lines 660–1), a key argument in her own defence of women, as we have already seen.

Christine goes on to tackle Pierre's second point, upbraiding him for his bad faith in accusing her of attacking women by imputing their blushes on reading the *Rose* to a guilty conscience. She retorts that such a response is due to their virtuous sense of modesty, their 'honte': 'Et de dire que elles en rougiroient, je ne les blasse de riens,

³⁵ See Bloch, 'Medieval misogyny'.

³⁶ On Christine's use of the Church Fathers in this particular context, see Richards, 'In search'.