

## Introduction

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### *Christine de Pizan and the Other Voice*

Christine de Pizan (ca. 1365–ca. 1430) was born in Italy but moved to the court of King Charles V of France at the age of about four, after her father, Tommaso da Pizzano, became the king’s astrologer and physician. She married at fifteen (and happily), but was a widow by the age of twenty-five; in addition, her father had died a year or so before her husband. Christine turned to writing to support herself and her family, now consisting of a son, daughter, mother, and niece.<sup>1</sup> She wrote the major portion of her work between 1399 and 1410, although certain of her lyric poems date from before that period; it is remarkable that a good part of her output was completed in the first five or six years of the fifteenth century. The following (partial) list gives a sense of Christine’s extraordinary accomplishment. In addition to hundreds of short poems, there were five long “courtly” poems: the *Dit de Poissy* (*Tale of Poissy*), 1400; *Debat de deux amans* (*Debate of Two Lovers*), 1400; the *Trois Jugemens* (*Three Judgments*), 1400;<sup>2</sup> the *Dit de la pastoure* (*Tale of the Shepherdess*), 1403; and the *Duc des vrais amans* (*Duke of True Lovers*), possibly 1405.<sup>3</sup> Other works addressed various subjects in verse or prose, or sometimes in mixed verse and prose. These included her letters in the *Debate of the Rose* (see pp. 10–11); several lengthy, learned works such as the *Epistre Othea* (*Epistle of Othea*), 1400–1401; *Chemin de longue etude* (*Path of Long Learning*), 1402–1403; *Mutacion de Fortune* (*Mutability of Fortune*), 1403; *Fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V* (*Deeds and Good Practices of the Wise King Charles V*), 1404; *Cité des dames* (*City of Ladies*), ca. 1405; *l’Advision Cristine* (*Christine’s Vision*), 1405–1406; *Prodhomme de l’homme / Prudence* (*Man’s Integrity / Prudence*), 1405–1406;<sup>4</sup> and *Corps de Policie* (*Body Politic*), 1407;<sup>5</sup> a book on warfare, the *Fais d’armes et de chevalerie* (*Feats of Arms and of Chivalry*), 1410, as well as the *Enseignemens moraulx* (*Moral Teachings*), 1399–1402, and *Cent Ballades d’amant*

1. A second son died some time before October 2, 1402, the date of a letter Christine wrote in the *Debate of the Rose* in which she states that “je ay ung seul filz” (I have only one son). See *Le Débat sur le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Eric Hicks (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1977; rpt. Geneva: Slatkine, 1996), 128.

2. The most recent editions of these three poems are in *The Love Debate Poems of Christine de Pizan: Le Livre du Debat de deux amans, Le Livre des Trois Jugemens, Le Livre du Dit de Poissy*, ed. Barbara K. Altmann (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998).

3. We have only a relative date for this work: it preceded the *Trois Vertus*, traditionally dated 1405; in this latter work (Bk. 1, ch. 26) Christine writes that she had already included the dame de la Tour’s letter against wifely adultery in the *Duc des vrais amans*.

4. Neither one of these two nearly identical works has been edited.

5. A new English translation of the *Corps de Policie*, by Angus J. Kennedy, is forthcoming in The Other Voice series.

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*et de dame* (*Hundred Ballades of a Lover and Lady*), possibly 1407–1410.<sup>6</sup> Three devotional works were written between 1402 and 1403: *Oraison Nostre Dame* (*Prayer on Our Lady*); *Quinze Joyes de Nostre Dame rimees* (*Fifteen Joys of Our Lady in Rhyme*); and *Oroison de la vie et passion de Nostre Seigneur* (*Prayer on Our Lord's Life and Passion*). The number and variety of Christine's compositions over such a short period indicate the depth of her learning before and after her husband's death. She herself observed that between 1399 and 1405 she wrote fifteen major volumes, not counting specific shorter narratives, and that together they made up seventy substantial quires.<sup>7</sup> Her need for financial support was pressing, but she also possessed an intellectual drive that required expression.

Among Christine's early writings were six works about "woman." The *Epistre au dieu d'Amours* (*The God of Love's Letter*), 1399, introduces issues to be pursued at greater length later, in the much longer *Cité des dames*. The *Dit de la Rose* (*Tale of the Rose*), 1402, complements the *Epistre*, since both rebuke, in their separate ways, the misogyny of the influential thirteenth-century vernacular poem, the *Roman de la Rose* (*Romance of the Rose*), which itself dealt ironically with some principal tenets of contemporary natural law. Her censure of the *Roman* became even more pointed during the epistolary exchange known as the Debate of the Rose, which began before 1402; Christine's letters in the Debate further emphasize many points in her defense of women. The *Livre des Trois Vertus* (*Book of the Three Virtues*), ca. 1405, also known as the *Trésor de la cité des dames* (*Treasury of the City of Ladies*), is an advice manual for women of all stations in society, including poor women. In her final work, the *Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc* (*Poem about Joan of Arc*), 1429, a jubilant Christine celebrates Joan's deeds.

When Christine wrote the *Epistre*, her first narrative poem, she was already known in court circles for her lyric poems.<sup>8</sup> In some of them she had touched on themes that would reappear in the *Epistre*, such as pretense and betrayal in love, but those were motifs made familiar in courtly literature. Not until she wrote the *Epistre* could readers begin to see the larger, political resonance of Christine's campaign for women's dignity. Contemporary theology held that, at the level of

6. The *Fais d'armes* was translated into English by William Caxton in 1489; the French text, however, has not been published since 1527 (misleadingly titled *L'Arbre de batailles et fleur de chevalerie* [Paris: Philippe Le Noir]). See *The Book of Fayttes of Armes and of Chyualrye*, translated and printed by William Caxton from the French original by Christine de Pisan (London: Published for the Early English Text Society by Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1932; reissued with corrections, 1937).

7. *Le Livre de l'Advison Cristine*, ed. Christine Reno and Liliane Dulac (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2001), Bk. 3, ch. 10.

8. Note on the translation of the title: in medieval French the preposition *a* (*à*) was often used to indicate possession, and the construction still exists in modern French in such expressions as "à moi" ("mine") or "la femme aux cheveux blonds" ("the blond-haired woman"). The *Epistre au dieu d'Amours* meant a letter "belonging to," thus by, the God of Love.

the soul, all humans were equal, but once incarnate, men were leaders and women their helpmeets. Christine never openly contested that hierarchy, but she certainly objected to its abuses: men could vilify women with impunity, for in practice women had little redress against an entrenched system of male hegemony. She argued for women's ability to understand subtle thinking, which provided the capacity for ethical behavior. Her own experience—her desire for knowledge, and the education to which it led her—was probative, but it also revealed to her a long history of men's writing against women, and it gave her the tools with which to contest the misuse of masculine privilege. The two poems presented here in new editions and translations, the *Epistre* and *Dit*, take their place as her first public challenge to misogynous discourse and to the slighting behavior men could practice toward women.

Modern facing-page editions and translations of both poems first appeared in 1990, in *Poems of Cupid*.<sup>9</sup> In undertaking these second modern editions and translations, we have hoped to offer work that benefits from the great strides that have been made in Christine Studies since that time. *Poems of Cupid* featured the latest manuscript witnesses for each poem, but we have chosen here to produce the earliest texts of the two poems in order to offer a “genetic” edition of each—that is, an edition that traces the evolution of the poems written by the author as they were worked upon and recopied. We believe it is crucial to understand Christine's uniquely comprehensive approach to her writing, and to see her at work adjusting her text, making corrections or stylistic improvements (evidence of her own correcting hand appears in all fifty-four of the extant manuscripts now recognized as having been produced under her supervision); sometimes, too, she added or removed items in the interests of political judiciousness.<sup>10</sup> Her involvement with every aspect of a text's or manuscript's production invites us to see the person Christine, an engaged thinker and writer, but also a uniquely self-sufficient businesswoman and publicist for her ideas.

While nearly all her writing deserves a place in the Other Voice series, her defenses of “woman” especially, because they speak in the exceptional voice of a woman publicly defending women against the excesses of fifteenth-century androcentric culture, bring us a special, lone Other Voice speaking up against a vast chorus that might well have preferred her to remain silent about women's rights.

9. *Poems of Cupid, God of Love: Christine de Pizan's Epistre au dieu d'Amours and Dit de la Rose; Thomas Hoccleve's The Letter of Cupid; with George Sewell's The Proclamation of Cupid*, ed. and trans. Thelma Fenster and Mary Carpenter Erler (Leiden: Brill, 1990).

10. See in particular James C. Laidlaw, “Christine de Pizan: An Author's Progress,” *Modern Language Review* 78 (1983): 532–50; Laidlaw, “Christine de Pizan: A Publisher's Progress,” *Modern Language Review* 82 (1987): 35–75; and Gilbert Ouy, Christine Reno, and Inès Villela-Petit, with Olivier Delsaux and Tania van Hemelryck, eds. and collaborators, and with the advice of James Laidlaw and Marie-Thérèse Gousset, *Album Christine de Pizan* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012).

### *Background: The Roman de la Rose*

The years between 1399 and 1402 were an important moment in French literary history and in the reception history of a celebrated thirteenth-century poem, the *Roman de la Rose*, whose reach extended far beyond its time and place. Its misogynist tenor dismayed and angered Christine, and although she was not the first or the only French intellectual to find fault with the work, she was the first to record objections from a woman's point of view to its deeply degrading view of women. In between writing the *Epistre* and the *Dit*, in a period of a little over a year from June–July 1401 to October 1402,<sup>11</sup> Christine participated in the *Débat du Roman de la Rose* (Debate of the *Romance of the Rose*), an exchange of letters in prose in which she explained to a group of her humanist contemporaries why she found the *Roman* objectionable. She met with their condemnation for her views, but she never changed her opinion, moving on to significantly expand her ideas about women and the need for their defense.

The *Roman* was begun ca. 1230 by Guillaume de Lorris, who wrote the first approximately 4,000 verses, and it was continued and terminated in the 1270s by Jean de Meun, who added nearly 18,000 verses.<sup>12</sup> Together the two sections recount, in allegorized terms, the steps in the conquest of a rose. The two parts vary in character, with modern criticism sometimes referring to Lorris's portion

11. See the list of Debate documents and their dates in *Le Débat sur le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Hicks (cited in note 1 above), lii–liv; all citations here are taken from this edition. A newer edition by Andrea Valentini provides the Debate letters in the format Christine herself chose for presentation to the Queen and to the Provost of Paris—that is, in a dossier prominently featuring her own letters. See *Le Livre des Epistres du débat sus le Rommant de la Rose* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014; rpt. 2016). An English translation based on the Hicks edition is the *Debate of the "Romance of the Rose,"* ed. and trans. David F. Hult (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010). A modern French translation is that of *Le Débat sur le Roman de la Rose*, trans. Virginie Greene (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006). On Christine's feelings and stance in the Debate and elsewhere in her writing, see the perceptive comments of Jean-Claude Mühlethaler, "Désir et étonnement: de l'auteur au lecteur. Emotion, écriture et lecture au temps de Christine de Pizan," *Le Moyen français* 75 (2014): 19–42.

12. All citations here are taken from Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Félix Lecoy. 3 vols. (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1965–70). Citations in English are from *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Frances Horgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). The *Roman* has garnered a considerable modern body of criticism which is dealt with to 2017 in these bibliographies: Heather M. Arden, ed., *The Roman de la Rose: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York and London: Garland, 1993); Herman Braet, *Nouvelle bibliographie du Roman de la Rose* (Louvain, Paris, and Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2017); and Catherine Bel and Herman Braet, eds., *De la Rose: Texte, image, fortune* (Louvain, Paris, and Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2006). See also the *Roman de la Rose* Digital Library (a joint project of Johns Hopkins University Sheridan Libraries and the Bibliothèque nationale de France) at the Digital Library of Medieval Manuscripts: <<http://dlmm.library.jhu.edu/en/romandelarose/>>. A brief review of recent trends in *Rose* scholarship is provided by Jonathan Morton in "Etat présent: *Le Roman de la Rose*," *French Studies* 69 (2015): 79–86.

as “courtly” and to Meun’s as “scholastic.” In Lorris’s opening section, a young nobleman, called Lover, falls asleep and dreams that he has set out walking one May morning and has arrived at the Garden of Pleasure. Its exterior wall features portraits of figures such as Avarice, Hatred, Old Age, Poverty, Sorrow, and the like, all personifications of qualities or traits antithetical to love and positioned to face away from the garden. Once the dreamer has been received into the garden by its gatekeeper, Idleness, he meets the personifications Love, Courtesy, Joy, Pleasant Looks, and others. Strolling about, the dreamer reaches the fountain of Narcissus, named for the handsome young man of myth who fell in love with his own reflection in a pool, not realizing that it was only an image: fixated by the sight, and the victim of a love that can never be returned, Narcissus loses the will to live. In the *Roman*, however, the dreamer gazes into the fountain and sees one special rosebud reflected in a pair of crystals at the fountain floor. Wounded by Love’s arrows, he falls in love with the rosebud and accepts Love’s commandments. The stages in his courtship of the rose are then told through the activities of allegories such as Fair Welcome and Friend, on the one hand, and Jealous Husband, Shame, and *Dangier*, or Resistance/Rebuff, on the other. Reason warns against love’s follies, but Lover is unpersuaded. He is prevented from reaching the rose by Jealousy, who builds a castle around the garden and sets Old Woman to guard the door—but at that, Lorris’s poem stops.

When Jean de Meun continues the narrative, he adds lengthy speeches by various personifications. Reason counsels Lover to abandon his pursuit of the rose, but Lover rejects her advice. Friend counsels on ways to seduce the rose, and the Jealous Husband, commenting on marriage, lambastes wives for being faithless and meretricious. Old Woman recommends that women take many lovers, and fleece them while they can. Further escapades and speeches follow. Eventually, Love’s army, abetted by Venus, comes to Lover’s aid. They pledge to defeat Chastity, which pleases Nature, for she confesses to her priest Genius her regret at having created man, who can be mulishly reluctant to perpetuate the species. Genius utters a sermon condemning those who fail to use the organs given by Nature to further the human species. Lover finally succeeds in entering the castle and taking the rose.

Christine’s displeasure with the *Roman* stemmed in part from Jean de Meun’s failure to provide clear and straightforward moral instruction, as was expected of medieval works. She argued instead that it did just the opposite, teaching readers improper behavior. Today, the *Roman* has many admirers, but their appreciation of the poem is not always without reservation. The poem’s conclusion still gives pause: there, Lover achieves sexual union with the silent rose, for whom refusal has never seemed an option. It is therefore not surprising that many see in this a depiction of rape.<sup>13</sup> Further, we should understand that for another group, such

13. For Rosalind Brown-Grant this is a depiction of “allegorical rape.” See *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women: Reading Beyond Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 35.

a resolution would have been titillating and thus unacceptable in a work of this kind. Christine herself points out that upon hearing the conclusion of the *Roman*, women would blush to hear the “horrible things included in the ending.”<sup>14</sup>

Christine further objected to perceived obscenities in the *Roman*, such as references to genitalia. This earned her the accusation of prudishness. As a writer cognizant of contemporary literary aesthetics, however, she objected not to sexually explicit language per se, but rather to its jarring use, as she saw it, in the mouths of Reason and Genius in particular. Medieval literary theory called for figures to speak in character, a point that would become key in the Debate of the *Rose*. Equally, she singled out the ending of the poem as especially heinous, for she believed a text should conclude explicitly upon a summing-up, “in the juridical sense,” as Rosalind Brown-Grant has observed. She deemed the final chapter of the *Roman* to be “particularly pernicious” because the rape “is the final impression that the reader will take away from the text.”<sup>15</sup>

In an otherwise impressively talky work, the silent rose is the only figure never to speak. (Had the rose been endowed with a voice, what might she have said? Given Lover’s strenuous efforts to reach her, the *Roman* suggests that she repeatedly rebuffed him, but the medieval reader is expected to accept that men play the dominant role in species preservation, and if a woman must be forced, so be it.) To the extent that the rose can be said to exist at all, it is in the dreamer’s imaginary, where “woman” is not really “a woman” at all; as a rose, she is a traditional, colloquial symbol for the vagina, woman synecdochally reduced to her genitalia. A vagina that spoke could of course undermine the portrait Jean de Meun wanted to provide of an acquiescing figure who is an unprotesting means of gratification and insemination. But the *Roman* is after all a dream, and those who wish to excuse the depiction of forcible sex upon which it ends sometimes invoke the dream framework, in which there can be no true or false. The rose’s fate is driven by Lover’s aspirations, but it should be noted that he too seems impelled by textual forces beyond his power to resist.

In the end, the plethora of voices in the *Roman* debating and contradicting one another results in a critical stalemate: just what is the *Roman* teaching? A precise answer remains elusive to this day, although it has been much discussed in the scholarly literature. Perhaps, as Noah Guynn suggests, the poem’s popularity

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See also Noah D. Guynn, “Authorship and Sexual/Allegorical Violence in Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la Rose*,” in *Allegory and Sexual Ethics in the High Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 137–70. For a succinct, fuller synopsis of the *Roman*, see Sarah Kay, *The Romance of the Rose* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1995), 117–19.

14. DR ed. and trans. Hult, 179.

15. Brown-Grant further suggests that Christine may be echoing Dante’s advice that what the speaker most hopes to convey should be placed at the end of a talk; for discussion of these points, see Brown-Grant, *Moral Defence of Women*, 30–43.

(there are nearly three hundred surviving manuscripts) can be explained by its “encyclopaedic range of themes and styles and its openness to diverse interpretive approaches.”<sup>16</sup>

### *Pushing Back 1: The Epistre au dieu d’Amours*

The God of Love’s “excommunication” of men who deceive women, a document with elements of a diplomatic act,<sup>17</sup> puts the reader in a royal court at a key moment. In the illustration in one of the manuscripts in which the *Epistre* appears, BnF fr. 835, an image at fol. 45r shows the god seated outdoors handing a piece of folded parchment to a young nobleman kneeling at his side. In British Library manuscript Harley 4431, known as the Queen’s Manuscript, Cupid is presented at fol. 51r seated in a garden, surrounded by trees; again, a young nobleman kneels to his right and receives the letter. This imaginary *locus amoenus* presents a kindly but authoritative god who has presumably descended to an earthly location in order to hand the letter over to a human messenger, who will then disseminate its contents.<sup>18</sup> Both illustrations feature birds flying overhead.<sup>19</sup> Each illustrator interprets this pleasant scene differently, however. In the Paris manuscript the

16. Noah D. Guynn, “*Le Roman de la Rose*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*, ed. Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 48–62, at 48.

17. Tania van Hemelryck notes that the *Epistre*’s format resembles the parts of a diplomatic act: the *suscription*, which names the author of the act (Cupid), vv. 1–2; the *adresse*, which names those for whom the letter is intended (all Cupid’s loyal subjects), v. 6, and is followed by the *salut*, or greeting, v. 7; the *notification* (“We make it publicly known”), v. 8; the *exposé*, or detailing of the reason(s) that led to the decision to prepare the *Letter* (we have received complaints from injured ladies), vv. 9ff; the *dispositif*, or details of the final judgment, the juridical decision, vv. 775–95; the statement of time and place (*date*), vv. 796–800; the final signature (*salut final*), vv. 825–26; the list of witnesses (*signes de validation*), vv. 801ff.; and finally the formulas of authentication (*formules d’authentification*), including, in one manuscript text of the poem (BnF, fr. 835), the anagram Christine creates for her own name, *Creintis*, “Fearful.” See “*L’Epistre au dieu d’amours* ou ‘l’origine du monde’ auctorial de Christine de Pizan,” *Le Moyen français* 78–79 (2016): 241–54. See also Earl Jeffrey Richards, “*Seulette a part*—The ‘Little Woman on the Sidelines’ Takes Up Her Pen: The Letters of Christine de Pizan,” in *Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre*, ed. Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 139–70. For a bibliography of medieval treatises including those on letter-writing, see James J. Murphy, *Medieval Rhetoric: A Select Bibliography*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).

18. At the conclusion of the *Livre des Trois Vertus* (Bk. 3, ch. [14]) a manual of advice for women, Christine sends her work out to be disseminated in all countries.

19. In a recent personal communication, Inès Villela-Petit associates the bird motif with the renewal of spring (*reverdie*), a theme integral to courtly lyric poems of that genre and consonant with the *Epistre*’s setting in the month of May. Both miniatures feature three white birds; the Queen’s Manuscript shows a fourth, a green ring-necked parakeet, which expresses contemporary aristocratic interest in exotic fauna.

colors are soft, light greens and pinks, evoking love's sweetness. In the British Library manuscript, colors are strong: Cupid's vermilion mantle rather brings to mind burning passion.

The *Epistre* centers on a number of seemingly unrelated themes whose common thread is that they respond to prevailing negative generalizations about women. These would have been familiar to the medieval reader but the poem's modern public must often infer what they were from the defenses the God of Love develops. Several items in the defense are not original, having appeared in works by other writers,<sup>20</sup> but Christine breathes life into them through her evocation of lively scenes: overachieving suitors bustling about in their created personas; lazy knights, ensconced before warming fires, boasting about their amorous conquests and slyly bringing the company around to "forcing" the information out of them—these are psychologically resonant "slice of life" portraits designed to be penetrating, mocking, and humorous.

To the reproach that women are faithless and deceitful, the God of Love retorts in several ways.<sup>21</sup> Men are duplicitous (that is, as the word suggests, they practice a form of "doubleness" or two-facedness), whereas women are "simple" (not simple-minded) in that they are not duplicitous and do not think about or practice doubleness.<sup>22</sup> It is women who are thus deceived by men, who instead should be kind to them, for they are their mothers, helpmeets, and nurturers.<sup>23</sup>

20. See Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), esp. "The Formal Case: The Corpus," 19–49, and "The Formal Case: Origins, Procedures," 50–69.

21. Tracy Adams argues that the *Epistre* in particular depicts the crisis in France in 1399, and that its God of Love is "helpless" and "flummoxed," an implied parallel to the ailing King Charles VI (1368–1422), whose grave mental illness imperiled France. See *The Life and Afterlife of Isabeau of Bavaria* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 51–52. It is true that in their opening complaint the women stress a decline in chivalry in France especially, but nothing in the god's portrait suggests a feeble or ineffectual king. Indeed, scholars generally agree that Christine intended to rewrite Cupid as an improved version of the *Roman's* Cupid, in keeping with the remedial tenor of the god's letter as a whole. Comparison with a king of France is not impossible, but if so, this God of Love would seem rather to recall Charles V, the "wise king," whom Christine so admired for "doing the right thing," as Cupid does here when he "excommunicates" false lovers.

22. On simplicity as a "stance" (French *posture*) that Christine adopts, see Claire-Marie Schertz, "Autour de Christine de Pizan: Entre lyrisme courtois et engagement politique," *CONTEXTES* 13 (2013), <<https://journals.openedition.org/contextes/5798>>. See also Thelma S. Fenster, "Strong Voices, Weak Minds? The Defenses of Eve by Isotta Nogarola and Christine de Pizan, Who Found Themselves in Simone de Beauvoir's Situation," in *Strong Voices, Weak History: Early Women Writers and Canons in England, France and Italy*, ed. Pamela Benson and Victoria Kirkham (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 58–77; and Fenster, "Simplece et sagesse: Christine de Pizan et Isotta Nogarola sur la culpabilité d'Eve," in *Une femme de lettres au Moyen Age: Etudes autour de Christine de Pizan*, ed. Liliane Dulac and Bernard Ribémont (Orléans: Paradigme, 1995), 481–93.

23. See Blamires, "Honoring Mothers," in *The Case for Women*, 70–95.

Women cannot deceive men because they do not do what men do: Jason betrayed Medea (vv. 435–42) and Aeneas abandoned Dido (vv. 443–58), but Penelope remained faithful to Ulysses during his long absence, in spite of being pressed by suitors (vv. 459–64).

The argument against women could swing two ways, however. If women were not clever enough to be duplicitous, then they were too gullible (Eve of Genesis) and gave themselves too readily (but if that is the case, the god asks [vv. 391–404], why must they be pursued so energetically in the *Roman*?). Women may well be trusting—perhaps too trusting—but they were created by God without the aggressive traits that cause war and destruction, with the result that they don't bring grievous harm to people or nations (vv. 643–50). Turning the tables against the commonplace medieval accusation that women gossip, the God of Love shows that men also gossip, and their gossip does more harm: because of men's greater influence and the sexual nature of their talk, women become the victims of men's boastful indiscretions or downright fabrications, sacrificed in what is fundamentally a contest between men.

Clerical culture is also to blame. The God of Love explains that clerics write books about women's purported ills and teach their young pupils to be wary of them. Ovid's *Remedia Amoris* (*Remedies for Love*), a treatise on ways to fall out of love that relies upon unappealing descriptions of women, was often used as a Latin-language textbook.<sup>24</sup> But clerics, Christine's God of Love says, are among the most lascivious of men: they seek only wanton women with interests like their own. They do not know honorable women, so how can they purport to speak about *all* women? Further, old men blame women in order to deflect attention from their own impotence. Even if there are some evil women, as a matter of principle women as a group should not be blamed (vv. 651–58).

One defense advanced by the God of Love reaches back into theological commentary on the Creation story. Clerics conceded certain "privileges" to Eve, and thus to women: for example, women were made of bone, a finer material than the earth from which Adam was formed (vv. 596–601); man was born outside the earthly paradise, whereas Eve was the first to be born inside it (vv. 602–6).<sup>25</sup> Incongruously familiar with the story of Jesus, Cupid further says that the biblical books about Jesus speak only good of women (vv. 558–73), and it was a woman who was worthy of carrying the son of God (v. 578). Truly noble men, such as the knights Othon de Grandson and Hutin de Vermeilles, would not dream of

24. See Elisabeth Pellegrin, "Les 'Remedia amoris' d'Ovide: Texte scolaire médiéval," *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes* 115 (1957): 172–79; and James G. Clark, Frank T. Coulson, and Kathryn L. McKinley, eds., *Ovid in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

25. See Blamires, "Eve and the Privileges of Women," in *The Case for Women*, 97–125.

defaming women; they should serve as exemplars (vv. 225–32, 233–39); this “naming of profeminine men,” in Blamires’s view, “is a new development.”<sup>26</sup>

*Pushing Back 2: The Debate of the Roman de la Rose: Voices Carry*

Some two years after composing the *Epistre* Christine’s criticism of the *Roman* took a different turn. She entered into an epistolary exchange with the humanists Jean de Montreuil, Provost of Lille (1354–1418), and Gontier Col (ca. 1350–1418), joined by Pierre Col, Gontier’s brother and canon of Notre-Dame de Paris, all of whom admired the *Roman*. Jean Gerson (1363–1429), chancellor of the University of Paris, supported Christine’s view of the *Roman*, and he wrote against it in his *Traité contre le Roman de la Rose* (*Treatise against the Romance of the Rose*).<sup>27</sup> It is not known what events occurred in the roughly two years between the *Epistre* and the first Debate letter. It appears that in 1399 Jean de Montreuil had not yet read the *Roman*; when he did, he wrote in praise of it, circulating his appreciation in a now-lost treatise. In his letters, he was high-handed with Christine, refusing, as Emma Cayley has underscored, to address her directly, and referring to her through a third party as “she.”<sup>28</sup> In a Latin letter of 1402 sent to an unidentified poet—perhaps Eustache Deschamps (ca. 1340–1404/5), or the Benedictine cleric Honorat Bovet (ca. 1340–ca. 1410)—Montreuil compared her to the Greek courtesan Leontium, a pupil of Epicurus who had dared to write against “the great philosopher,” Theophrastus.<sup>29</sup> Christine did not flinch in her response to Montreuil’s slur: “may it not be attributed to folly, arrogance, or presumption that I, a woman, dare to reprimand and refute so subtle an author [Jean de Meun] and to divest his work of its renown, when he, just one man, dared undertake to defame and

26. Blamires, *The Case for Women*, 45.

27. In addition to the English translation of all the Debate documents in *DR* ed. and trans. Hult, Gerson’s treatise against the *Romance* is translated in *Jean Gerson: Early Works*, trans. Brian Patrick McGuire (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 378–98. For a fuller understanding of Montreuil and the circles in which he moved, see Gilbert Ouy, “Paris, l’un des principaux foyers de l’humanisme en Europe au début du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire de Paris et de l’Île de France* 94–95 (1967–68), 71–98; Ezio Ornato, *Jean Muret et ses amis Nicolas de Clamanges et Jean de Montreuil: Contribution à l’étude des rapports entre les humanistes de Paris et ceux d’Avignon (1394–1420)* (Geneva and Paris: Droz, 1969), and André Combes, *Jean de Montreuil et le chancelier Gerson: Contribution à l’histoire des rapports de l’humanisme et de la théologie en France au début du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1942).

28. Emma Cayley, *Debate and Dialogue: Alain Chartier in His Cultural Context* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 78.

29. *DR* ed. Hicks, 42–43; *DR* ed. and trans. Hult, 103. After Aristotle fled from Athens, Theophrastus succeeded him at the Lyceum. Leontium’s criticisms of the philosopher were called out by Cicero, who attacked the Epicureans for having “emboldened a loose woman like Leontium to write a book refuting Theophrastus.” See Cicero, *De natura deorum*, ed. and trans. Harris Rackham (London: William Heinemann, 1933), 1.33.93.

condemn without exception an entire sex.”<sup>30</sup> Montreuil was also embarrassed to be writing in the vernacular instead of Latin, the language deemed appropriate to humanist reflection and dialogue;<sup>31</sup> it fell to the Col brothers to respond further in French. Christine herself glossed the Debate as *non haineux* (not vicious), but her adversaries could be both condescending and rude.<sup>32</sup>

Christine would have caused consternation among her opponents when she prepared a dossier of the Debate letters and sent it to Queen Isabeau (ca. 1370–1435), wife of King Charles VI, and to Guillaume de Tignonville (d. 1414), Provost of Paris—especially since the dossier included, along with the dedicatory letter to the queen and one to Tignonville, only her own letters and two by Gontier Col. Of her own letters, the lengthy letter to Montreuil, a rebuttal of his praise of the *Roman*, may have been indebted to the genre of the newly developing vernacular prose treatise, at which Christine was trying her hand.<sup>33</sup> Andrea Valentini has persuasively argued that Christine probably saw her collected letters in the Debate as an integral literary work on their own.<sup>34</sup> (By 1402 she had fully launched her literary career and had every reason to think of herself as an author: in addition to her collected lyric poetry, she had completed three courtly narratives—the *Dit de Poissy*, the *Deux Amans*, and the *Trois Jugemens*—as well as the learned *Epistre Othea*, was working on the nearly 24,000-line universal history, the *Mutacion de Fortune*,<sup>35</sup> and was considering or had already begun the *Chemin de longue étude*, another learned composition.) It is also plausible that her exclusion of Pierre Col’s letter of late summer 1402, with its forceful response to her arguments, was deliberate.<sup>36</sup>

Implicit to the Debate is the simulated orality of the *Roman* itself, voice, or voices. Christine regarded the *Roman*’s many contradictory voices as a failure to

30. DR ed. Hicks, 22; DR ed. and trans. Hult, 63.

31. DR ed. Hicks, 30–31; DR ed. and trans. Hult, 65. See also Valentini’s comments in *Epistres du debat sus le Rommant de la Rose*, 119 and n. 25.

32. Nor was such condescension restricted to the Middle Ages. In 1969, John Fleming called Christine a “minor poet” whose role in the debate was “rather inflated . . . by modern feminists and should probably not be taken too seriously.” See *The Roman de la Rose: A Study in Allegory and Iconography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 47. Fleming’s comment bears witness to the ground Christine Studies have covered since he wrote.

33. Virginie Greene’s suggestion in “Le débat sur le *Roman de la Rose* comme document d’histoire littéraire et morale,” *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes/Journal of Medieval and Humanistic Studies (CRMH)* 14 Spécial (2007): 297–311, at 297 (accessible online at <<https://journals.openedition.org/crmh/2586>>). Christine’s letter to Montreuil was dated summer 1401 (DR ed. Hicks, 11–22; DR ed. and trans. Hult, 50–63).

34. Andrea Valentini, ed., *Epistres du debat*, 107.

35. According to Suzanne Solente, Christine began writing this work in 1400. See *Le Livre de la Mutacion de fortune*, ed. Suzanne Solente, 4 vols. (Paris: Picard, 1959–1966), 1:xi.

36. See DR ed. Hicks, 89–112; DR ed. and trans. Hult, 130–58.

provide the morally uplifting closure that a single narrating voice, with a single, instructive message, could furnish and which would signify the work's *utilitas*.<sup>37</sup> In the *Epistre* Christine sets this right by channeling many voices through the single voice of Cupid, and through the clarity of his point of view. But Cupid's voice is unavoidably thick with the trace of other voices: Meun's voice of Cupid and then Ovid's figure of the god, upon which Meun relied, are funneled through the god of the *Epistre*, to be refuted. One hears the distant buzz of anonymous, clerkly male voices, the fathers of the church, explaining "how women are," and the voices of the deliberate defamers of women, the would-be seducers who take delight in weaving stories of sexual conquest. These voices are made to be heard in the *Epistre* so that all may be identified and condemned by the one voice that articulates the moral standard, that of the God of Love.

Because voice is so crucial to the *Epistre*, some modern readers have lamented that it is Cupid, and not Christine herself, who speaks for the feminine collectivity. Claire Nouvet remarks that in order to give voice to the previously silent "we," the "community of women" who are the poem's plaintiffs, the case against men must be heard through another male voice; as Nouvet puts it, this "feminine plaint, this muted voice, will have to be articulated in the voice that muted it." And because it is Cupid who discloses the damage done to women, he "speaks in women's place the certainty that they cannot speak."<sup>38</sup> Nouvet captures an important difference in expectation as between medieval and modern readers, but Christine's critical technique in both the *Epistre* and the *Dit* depended on rewriting the God of Love as a deliberate and obvious riposte to Meun's god: Christine's god is the exemplar, a male figure whose thoughts and actions are just as Christine would wish, and that is because the God of Love is not speaking *instead of* Christine—rather, he is "being spoken" by Christine. This is a further twist on Christine's talent for "mastering . . . the 'master discourse,' her turning it to speak her own ends," as Maureen Quilligan has observed.<sup>39</sup>

It is in fact voice, material and metaphorical, speaking, reciting, or singing in both the *Epistre* and the *Dit*, that is foregrounded. Emphasized too is the fear that talk could sow chaos, and Christine vehemently condemns it, especially slanderous talk, against which she believed women (and some men) had no recourse. She also made clear in her writing that women had to control what other people

37. On the matter of Christine's approach to responsible writing, see Glenda McLeod, "Poetics and Antimisogynist Polemics in Christine de Pizan's *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*," in *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan: Essays in Honor of Charity Cannon Willard*, ed. Earl Jeffrey Richards et al. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 37–47.

38. Claire Nouvet, "Writing (in) Fear," in *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Chance (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 279–305, at 284 and 293.

39. Maureen Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority: Christine de Pizan's Cité des dames* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 204.

thought and said about them—that is, women had to “manage” their *fama*.<sup>40</sup> The serious need to do so can be extrapolated from the example of medieval jurisprudence, an indicator of an ethos in the larger society. Without a concept of proof as we know it today, the court testimony of witnesses, called the *fama* of the case, or what people said, “what everyone knew,” or common opinion, could serve as proof. Further, an informal but acceptable practice of surveillance by one’s neighbors played a regulatory role. In such circumstances, Christine urged women to avoid potentially incriminatory behavior, which could attach especially to them, and she encouraged women to engage instead in conduct that could enhance their good reputations. Both avenues depended on the key factor of self-control, integral to managing one’s *fama*. So it was that Christine later wrote the *Trois Vertus* and the cautionary *Duc des vrais amans*,<sup>41</sup> whose married princess, talked about because of her affair with the eponymous duke, pays for her indiscretion with a ruined reputation and an unhappy life. The duke, on the other hand, accused of laziness, restores his good name by going off to fight in foreign wars. In Christine’s view, nothing was better evidence of the damage done by talk—or writing—than assertions of women’s lasciviousness, greed, dishonesty, and faithlessness, as uttered by characters in the *Roman* such as Old Woman and Jealous Husband.<sup>42</sup> The lack of respect such rumors might engender could effectively erase whatever power and influence women had—running a household, for example, or a kingdom. As Carolyn Collette puts this, a “prudential habit of mind . . . continually assays, weighs, and checks to maintain the strength of the webs of affinity and influence that a woman constructs and which are constructed around her in the social world.”<sup>43</sup>

The centrality of language to the project of opposing Jean de Meun is also conveyed in the *Epistre* by the mimicry and displacement that foregrounds certain vocabulary. Old Woman was one of the *Roman* characters Christine found especially offensive, for she is a go-between for clandestine lovers. Further, she counsels young women to profit from their lovers while they can. She observes that young men are seldom reliable, and she advises women not to be so foolish as

40. On *fama*, see Bernard Guenée, *L’Opinion publique à la fin du Moyen Age: d’après la chronique de Charles VI du Religieux de St. Denis* (Paris: Perrin, 2002), and Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail, eds., *Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

41. *Le Livre du Duc des vrais amans*, ed. Thelma Fenster (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995); *Le Livre du Duc des vrais amants*, ed. Dominique Demartini and Didier Lechat (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013); *Le Livre du duc des vrais amans*, in *Ceuvres poétiques*, ed. Maurice Roy, 3 vols. (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1886–1896) 3:59–208; *The Book of the Duke of True Lovers*, trans. Thelma Fenster and Nadia Margolis (New York: Persea, 1991).

42. For advice by Old Woman and Jealous Husband, see RR ed. Lecoy, vv. 12710–14516, and vv. 8437–9390; RR trans. Horgan, 191–224, 130–44.

43. Carolyn P. Collette, *Performing Polity: Women and Agency in the Anglo-French Tradition, 1385–1620* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 37.

to take only one lover; but, she warns, be sure to tell each one that you are faithful to him alone. Old Woman argues that the mistake made by Dido and Medea was to have given all their love in just one place.<sup>44</sup> She puns on the verb *partir*, advising the lady to say to her lover that he alone will have the rose, and “Ja mes autre n’i avra **part!** **Faille** moi Dex se ja la **part!**” (Never will another have a **share** (part)! May God fail me if I **divide** it!).<sup>45</sup> The quite similar pun on *partir* in the *Epistre* is unmissable: the subject (women’s alleged promiscuity) is the same, but now its articulation is placed in the mouths of men, the gossiping knights who tease one another about their mistresses’ purported sexual adventures:

Telle t’aimë et tu le jolis fais  
 Pour sienne amour, et pluseurs y ont **part**;  
 Tu es receu quant un autre **s’en part!**

(Lady so-and-so loves you, and you play the swain / For her love, but many get their part; / You are welcomed as another departs! vv. 128–30)

These echoes of Old Woman’s *partir* work intertextually to emphasize that women are seen to act disloyally only in the ribald and self-serving tales told by men.

For Meun’s character of Old Woman, a young woman who fails to fleece her lover—that is, *plumer*, or pluck his feathers as if he were a chicken—is a fool.<sup>46</sup> (In Kay’s reading, Old Woman says this because men are fickle, and in this way she upends the misogynist discourse of men who so often repeat that women are unfaithful.<sup>47</sup>) The *Epistre* uses the same verb to describe such women as tarts, reprehensible exceptions to the generality of women, but Cupid retorts that he’s pleased to have the men who traffic with them dealt with in such a way. As he says: “Si ne remaint en eulz plume a plumer—/ Bien le scevent a leur droit reclaimer” (They haven’t a feather left to pluck—/ These women know how to claim their due; vv. 513–14).

### “Qui sont fames?” *Who Are Women?*

When Christine set out to explain the *nature de femme*, she was working within the long-established formulations of influential Christian male writers, principally Augustine and then the neo-Aristotelian interpretations of Thomas Aquinas.<sup>48</sup>

44. *RR* ed. Lecoy, vv. 13123–42; *RR* trans. Horgan, 203–4.

45. *RR* ed. Lecoy, vv. 13091–92; *RR* trans. Horgan, 202.

46. *RR* ed. Lecoy, vv. 13667–68; *RR* trans. Horgan, 208. Horgan transforms the metaphor of plucking a lover’s feathers into plucking love’s fruit.

47. Kay, *Romance of the Rose*, 103–4.

48. For a general survey of clerical ideas about women, see Marie-Thérèse d’Alverny, “Comment les théologiens et les philosophes voient la femme,” *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale: X<sup>e</sup>–XII<sup>e</sup> Siècles*

In discussions of sex and gender, writers seemed to return to a small number of thorny issues, centered in various ways on whether men and women enjoyed complete equality. Souls, which had no sex or gender, were all equals; as incarnate beings, however, women were men's helpers. To answer why woman had been created, Augustine invoked her role in procreation and her divinely ordered place as man's helpmeet.<sup>49</sup> Man's primacy came in part from the order of creation: God created man first, then woman, who was taken from man's side;<sup>50</sup> such arguments from events in the garden were countered by the privileges of women.

A second issue had to do with whether both man and woman were made in the image of God. Saint Paul had declared that only man was the image and glory of God while woman was the glory of man,<sup>51</sup> and for Augustine, woman enjoyed the image of God in her soul alone, which had no gender.<sup>52</sup>

Guilt for the Fall constituted a third topic of importance and was a popular subject for debate. Aquinas argued that since the woman was "more grievously punished than the man, . . . she sinned more grievously than the man." (*ST II-II.163.4*)

Like Augustine, Aquinas believed that women were physically and intellectually weaker than men, but having adopted from Aristotle the more extreme view that woman was a failed man (*mas occasionatus*)<sup>53</sup>, he seems to want it both ways. He writes:

As regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from defect in the active force or from some material

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20 (1977): 105–29. For Christine's ability to read Latin, see Liliane Dulac and Christine Reno, "L'humanisme vers 1400. Essai d'exploration à partir d'un cas marginal: Christine de Pizan, lectrice de Thomas d'Aquin," in *Pratiques de la culture écrite en France au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Actes du colloque du CNRS (Paris, 16–18 mai 1992), organisé en l'honneur de Gilbert Ouy par l'Unité de recherche 'Culture écrite du Moyen Age tardif,' ed. Monique Ornato and Nicole Pons (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995), 161–78.

49. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, 2 vols. (New York and Ramsey, NJ: Newman Press, 1982), 2:72–74. See also Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), and Kari Elisabeth Børresen, "God's Image, Man's Image? Patristic Interpretation of Gen. 1:27 and I Cor. 11:7" and "God's Image: Is Woman Excluded? Medieval Interpretation of Gen. 1:27 and I Cor. 11:7," in *Image of God and Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition*, ed. Kari Elisabeth Børresen (Oslo: Solum Vorlag, 1991), 188–207 and 208–27.

50. Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 1:182–83.

51. I Cor. 11:7.

52. Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 1:98–99.

53. See Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 133.

indisposition, or even from some external influence. . . . On the other hand, as regards human nature in general, woman is not misbegotten, but is included in nature's intention as directed to the work of generation. Now the general intention of nature depends on God, Who is the universal Author of nature. Therefore, in producing nature, God formed not only the male but also the female. (ST I.92.1)

Aquinas was hard-pressed to reconcile that understanding with the church's belief that God could not create a defective being. Blamires observes that not even Aquinas's "best efforts" could "mask" such a "disparity."<sup>54</sup> In the *Cité des dames*, Christine exclaims, "Ha! Dieux, comment peut cecy estre? Car se je ne erre en la foy, je ne doy mie doubter que ton infinie sapience et tres parfaicte bonté ait riens fait qui tout ne soit bon. Ne formas tu toy mesmes tres singulierement femme et dés lors lui donnas toutes teles inclinacions qu'il te plaisoit qu'elle eust? Et comment pourroit ce estre que tu y eusses en rien failli?"<sup>55</sup> (Ah, God! How can this be? For unless I err in my faith, I cannot suspect that your infinite wisdom and very perfect goodness made anything that might not be perfect. Did you not create woman with the greatest care and give her the inclinations you were pleased for her to have? And how could it be that you could have failed in anything?) Viewed in terms of the theological beliefs of her time, Christine's argument is on firm ground.

In the popular sphere, following the appearance of the *Roman* and over the course of the next century, "praise" and "blame" poems about women, in Latin and in the vernacular, came to constitute nearly a literary genre of their own. They stated why women were good or bad, and because they were based on a stock supply of arguments, they could take on the character of literary exercises on a popular subject. More significant for its length and its vitriol was the *Lamentationes Matheoluli* (1290–1291) (*Lamentations of Matheolus*<sup>56</sup>), by the cleric Matthew of Boulogne, a work that rails against women and marriage; it was translated from Latin into French by Jean LeFèvre around 1380, after which LeFèvre wrote a riposte to the *Lamentations* in French, a defense of women called the *Livre de Leesce*

54. Alcuin Blamires, ed., with Karen Pratt and C. W. Marx, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 89–90.

55. *La Città delle dame*, ed. Earl Jeffrey Richards, trans. [into Italian] Patrizia Caraffi, 2nd ed. (Milan: Luni, 1998), 44.

56. *Les Lamentations de Matheolus et le Livre de Leesce de Jehan Le Fèvre, de Resson: Poèmes français du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. A. G. van Hamel, 2 vols. (Paris: Emile Bouillon, 1892–1905). A more recent Latin edition with commentary in German is Matheus von Boulogne, *Lamentationes Matheoluli*, ed. Thomas Klein (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 2014). A summary of the French *Lamentations* is Charles-V. Langlois, "Les Lamentations de Mathieu," in Langlois, *La Vie en France au Moyen Age* (Paris: Hachette, 1925), 2:241–90.

(*Book of Gladness*).<sup>57</sup> Christine disliked the *Lamentations*, as she tells us at the beginning of the *Cité*, where she points out that Matheolus himself confessed to being an old man who blames women for his own impotence, for he is *plain de voullenté, et non puissance* (filled with desire, and not able to act).<sup>58</sup> She does not mention *Leesce*, but the *Epistre* bears a large number of similarities to it.<sup>59</sup> *Leesce* shared arguments with poems that preceded it, and Christine herself was often walking upon well-trodden ground. Her inventiveness in the *Epistre*, however, and the seriousness of her effort, depended not so much on the defense topoi she used, otherwise widespread, but on the larger framework within which she situated them, an illustration of the essential humanity of women and their aptitude for moral virtue.

Brown-Grant has argued that at the heart of Christine's defense of women is a question intended to refute the scurrilous implication of much anti-feminist writing claiming that woman was somehow less than human. In her letter to Pierre Col of October 1402, Christine pointedly asked:

Qui sont fames? Qui sont elles? Sont ce serpens, loups, lyons, dragons, guievres ou bestes ravissables devourans et ennemies a nature humaine . . .<sup>60</sup>

(Who are women? Who are they? Are they snakes, wolves, lions, dragons, vipers, or rapacious, devouring animals and enemies to human nature?)

Already in the summer of 1401, in her debate letter to Jean de Montreuil, Christine had pinpointed a contradiction in the argument of Meun's character Genius, who advocates sexual relations as often as possible for the continuance of the species, while he elsewhere advises men to flee from the venomous snake: "Fuyez, fuyez,

57. Jehan LeFèvre, *The Book of Gladness / Le livre de Leesce: A 14th Century Defense of Women, in English and French*, trans. Linda Burke (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland, 2013) reprints, with minor changes, LeFèvre's French translation from van Hamel's edition.

58. *Cité*, Bk. 1, ch. 8.

59. See Blamires, *The Case for Women*, 5 and 36.

60. Brown-Grant, *Moral Defence of Women*, 14; DR ed. Hicks, 139; DR ed. and trans. Hult, 181–82. Christine was surely familiar with the tradition of "feminine bestiaries" that linked mostly negative qualities of women with features popularly associated with specific animals. The Anglo-Norman *Blasme des fames* (*The Vices of Women*), for example, compares women with snakes, lions, leopards, foxes, bears, dogs, cats, rats, mice, hedgehogs, falcons, sparrowhawks, titmice, sparrows, blackbirds, bats, and owls; when women are lambs or doves, it is only for superficial attraction. See *Three Medieval Views of Women*: "La Contenance des Fames," "Le Bien des Fames," "Le Blasme des Fames," trans. and ed. Gloria K. Fiero, Wendy Pfeffer, and Mathé Allain (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 120–42.

fuyez le serpent venimeux!”<sup>61</sup> This clearly alludes to the metonymic slide by which Eve and women after her were not merely accused of acting like the serpent, they *became* the serpent.<sup>62</sup> Commenting on Genius’s injunction, Brown-Grant observes that it “constitutes a key point of misogynist doctrine which Christine will contest throughout her later writings in defence of women.”<sup>63</sup>

The main elements in Christine’s argument accentuating women’s membership in the human species postdate the *Epistre*, appearing instead in the more accommodating prose of the *Debat* and the *Cité*. In the *Cité*, the character of Rectitude, one of three ladies (with Justice and Reason) who help Christine build the city, says that:

“Et n’est mie doubtte que les femmes sont aussi bien ou nombre du peuple de Dieu et de creature humaine que sont les hommes, et *non mie une autre espece*, ne de dessemblable generacion, par quoy elles doyent estre forcloses des enseignemens moraulx.”<sup>64</sup>

(And there is no doubt that women number among God’s creatures just as much as men do and are *not another species* or bred in such a dissimilar way that they should be excluded from the teaching of virtue [emphasis added].)

The same reasoning is already present in the *Epistre*. Christine casts the defense in terms associable with natural law theory: *inclinacions*, *meurs*, and their frequent companion word, *condicions*. These three, which Christine brings together for the first time in the *Epistre*, would come to constitute a meaningful semantic field in her writing about women.

“Par droite condicion et inclinacion naturelle”  
*Through [Their] Rightful Condition and Natural Inclination*

For Aquinas, as D. E. Luscombe puts it, “all beings have within themselves inclinations which direct them to the end that is proper to them.”<sup>65</sup> In a passage from the

61. DR ed. Hicks, 21; DR ed. and trans. Hult, 61.

62. See John A. Phillips, *Eve: The History of an Idea* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), 38–51.

63. Brown-Grant, *Moral Defence of Women*, 14.

64. *Città*, 376 and 378 (Bk. 2, ch. 54).

65. D. E. Luscombe, “Natural Morality and Natural Law,” in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 705–19, at 709. A helpful guide to the *Summa* is Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). See also Stephen L. Brock, “Natural Inclination and the Intelligibility of the Good in Thomistic Natural Law,” *Vera Lex*, n.s. 6 (2005): 57–78.

*Summa Theologica* worth giving in full here, Aquinas explains the inclinations belonging to human beings:

Wherefore according to the order of natural inclinations, is the order of the precepts of the natural law. Because in man there is first of all an inclination to good in accordance with the nature which he has in common with all substances: inasmuch as every substance seeks the preservation of its own being, according to its nature: and by reason of this inclination, whatever is a means of preserving human life, and of warding off its obstacles, belongs to the natural law. Secondly, there is in man an inclination to things that pertain to him more specially, according to that nature which he has in common with other animals: and in virtue of this inclination, those things are said to belong to the natural law, "which nature has taught to all animals" . . . , such as sexual intercourse, education of offspring and so forth. Thirdly, there is in man an inclination to do good, according to the nature of his reason, which nature is proper to him: thus man has a natural inclination to know the truth about God, and to live in society: and in this respect, whatever pertains to this inclination belongs to the natural law; for instance, to shun ignorance, to avoid offending those among whom one has to live, and other such things regarding the above inclination. (*ST I-II.94.2*)

Inclinations were subject to the action of reason, the higher faculty that separated humans from other animals and gave humans the ability to formulate ethical behaviors. The possibility existed, however, that human beings might not follow the promptings of reason in some instances, and in certain circumstances inclinations could change. Aquinas wrote that "the natural law, in the abstract, can nowise be blotted out from men's hearts. But it is blotted out in the case of a particular action, in so far as reason is hindered from applying the general principle to a particular point of practice, on account of concupiscence or some other passion" (*ST I-II.94.6*). This law of "the natural," it should be noted, appears to be less rigid than the idea of nature in present-day understanding, which tends to posit a rigidly fixed and unchanging drive.<sup>66</sup>

Christine did not directly challenge the gender hierarchy enforced by the church, choosing instead to emphasize the complementarity of gender roles, but she also insisted on fair, equal, and respectful treatment of both men and women. In the *Epistre* (v. 733), she goes even further by stating that men and women are

66. See Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), 3.