Introduction

Since its inception, feminist literary scholarship has had two main goals: first, to challenge what it sees as the marginalisation of women's experience typical of the works of the male-authored canon; and secondly, to construct an alternative genealogy of female writers. For many modern critics, whether medieval specialists or not,[1] Christine de Pizan (1364–1430?), is eminently suitable for inclusion in this genealogy by virtue of being France's 'first professional woman of letters'.[2] Despite the best efforts of some nineteenth-century scholars to dismiss her as a tedious blue-stocking,[3] Christine's place in the history of French medieval literature, alongside Chrétien de Troyes, Guillaume de Machaut and Jean Froissart, now seems to be fully secure.[4] Born in Italy, but brought to live at the Parisian court of King Charles V at the age of four by her father, Tommaso da Pizzano (Thomas de Pizan), Christine became a key figure in the social, intellectual and political milieux of early fifteenth-century France.[5] Her works encompass a wide range of

[1] See Maïté Albistur and Daniel Armogathe, *Histoire du féminisme français du moyen âge à nos jours*, 2 vols. (Paris: des Femmes, 1977), 53–67; and Léon Abensour, *Histoire générale du féminisme* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1979), 135–9.

[2] See Leslie Altman, 'Christine de Pizan: first professional woman of letters (1364–1430?)', in Jeanie R. Brink, ed., *Female Scholars: A Tradition of Learned Women before 1800* (Montreal: Eden Women's Publications, 1980), 7–23. See also Susan Groag Bell, 'Christine de Pizan (1364–1430): humanism and the problem of a studious woman', *Feminist Studies* 3 (1976), 173–84.

[3] See Gustave Lanson, *Histoire de la littérature française* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1898), 162–3. See also Kennedy, *Supplement*, item 529.

[4] See Kennedy, *Guide*; Kennedy, 'A selective bibliography of Christine de Pizan scholarship, circa 1980–87', in Richards, *Reinterpreting*, 285–98; and Kennedy, *Supplement*. See also Edith Yenal, *Christine de Pisan: A Bibliography of Writings by Her and About Her*, Scarecrow Author Bibliographies, no.63 (Metuchen, NJ/London: Scarecrow Press, 1989), second edition.

[5] See Marie-Josèphe Pinet, *Christine de Pisan 1364–1430: étude biographique et littéraire*, Bibliothèque du XVe Siècle, 35 (Paris: Champion, 1927); Enid McLeod, *The Order of the Rose:*

genres, from literary debates to courtesy manuals, from lyric poetry to treatises on chivalry, and from biographies of kings to books of pious devotion. However, Christine has been ranked in this genealogy of female authors not just because she achieved eminence in her own time but also because modern scholars have hailed her as the first woman to attack the medieval tradition of clerkly misogyny for its portrayal of the female sex as intrinsically sinful and immoral.

Yet despite this revival of interest in Christine (due largely to feminist scholarship), critics are by no means agreed on her exact status in the history of feminism itself. Those who have offered an assessment of her defence of women have tended to adopt one of two contrasting positions: whilst some have praised Christine for challenging the dominant misogynist ideology of her age, even lauding her ability to anticipate key tenets of post-structuralist feminist theory,[6] others have castigated her for failing to advocate reform of the social order or to demand equal rights for women.[7] Yet these wildly divergent assessments of Christine's work can be faulted on common grounds: both ignore her original cultural context and judge her by criteria which are fundamentally anachronistic. Positive or negative, such judgments tell us more about what modern feminists might wish Christine to have achieved, as opposed to what she herself sought to achieve in her campaign to champion the cause of women.

Rather than offering an overview of her feminism, one alternative approach to studying Christine's critique of misogyny has been to concentrate on her representation of women in specific texts. Scholars working in this vein have been far more attentive to Christine's own historical and intellectual context and, in particular, to the way she transformed her source material in order to provide images of women capable of countering those made familiar by the misogynist tradition. This approach has produced much fine scholar-

The Life and Ideas of Christine de Pizan (London: Chatto and Windus, 1976); Régine Pernoud, *Christine de Pisan* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1982); Willard, *Life*.

6 See, for example, Lynne Huffer, 'Christine de Pisan: speaking like a woman/speaking like a man', in Edelgard E. DuBruck, ed., *New Images of Medieval Women: Essays toward a Cultural Anthropology*, Medieval Studies, 1 (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 61–72; Maureen Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority: Christine de Pizan's Cité des Dames* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1991).

7 See Delany, '"Mothers"'.

ship, but even here there has been a tendency for critics to take the *Livre de la Cité des Dames*, Christine's best-known work, as the yardstick by which to evaluate her defence of women, and to conclude that, by comparison, her other texts are disappointingly conservative.[8] The *Epistre Othéa*, for example, has been criticised as a work which colludes with misogynist exegetical practice,[9] whilst the *Livre des Trois Vertus* has frequently been attacked for its acceptance of a social status quo which relegated women to the rank of second-class citizens.[10]

In this present study, my aim is not to portray Christine's works in defence of women as failed versions of the *Cité* but rather to see this text as one part of a much wider project. I shall, therefore, neither condemn Christine for being a reactionary nor, alternatively, assume that she is necessarily radical or subversive simply by virtue of being a female author. Instead, my purpose is to show that Christine's choice of literary and rhetorical strategies with which to counter misogyny was defined by a culture profoundly different from our own. In common with her late medieval male contemporaries, Christine saw her role as author as principally that of a teacher or advisor whose task was to provide her readers with much-needed lessons in ethics and morality.[11] It is this emphasis on ethics, rather than simply a desire to provide positive images of female characters, that gives Christine's works in defence of women a far greater unity than has often previously been thought. Her feminism should thus be seen as based on a broader moral vision, one which refused to see virtue as an exclusively male preserve and which sought to prove that both sexes were capable of pursuing the universal goal of moral self-edification. However, Christine relates this ethical perspective to her ideas on gender in a variety of ways, depending on the genre in which she is writing. In particular, she modifies her defence of women according to her audience, since she makes a clear distinction between the precise needs of her male

[8] See the list of abbreviations above for full details of primary texts by Christine and other medieval writers and secondary works most frequently cited.
[9] See Schibanoff, 'Taking the gold'.
[10] See Delany, '"Mothers"'; and Roberta L. Krueger, 'A woman's response: Christine de Pizan's *Le Livre du Duc des Vrais Amans* and the limits of romance', in her *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 217–46.
[11] See Judson Boyce Allen, *The Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages: A Decorum of Convenient Distinction* (University of Toronto Press, 1982).

and female readerships. We thus need to analyse what her specific didactic purpose was in any given text, for example whether her primary aim was to criticise male writers' use of allegory for misogynist ends or to celebrate women's achievements. Moreover, rather than seeing Christine as a marginal figure who stood outside contemporary culture, we have to examine how she drew on many of the historical, philosophical and theological sources traditionally cited by anti-feminist writers, yet managed to put these sources to novel uses of her own.[12]

The choice of the texts which form the basis of this study was determined by two main criteria. First, all were written between 1399 and 1405, a key period in Christine's literary production which marked the transition between her early lyric poetry, written for the amusement of the Valois court, and her later political and pious works, composed in response to particular events such as the struggle between Armagnacs and Burgundians, or the battle of Agincourt.[13] Critics have frequently discussed Christine's last known work, the *Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc* (1429), in the context of her defence of women.[14] However, I shall not be considering the *Ditié* here since, as I have argued elsewhere,[15] Christine's text represents Joan as a miraculous figure, one whose exceptional abilities function to create cohesion in the French body politic, rather than (as some scholars have claimed) a 'feminist exemplum' whose deeds constitute the ultimate refutation of misogynist slander.[16] Secondly, the texts I have chosen for study are all prose works (or, in the case of the *Othéa*, which does contain short verse passages, mainly in prose). This is because Christine generally respects the traditional distinction in medieval literature between prose and verse according to which

[12] For a similar view of Christine's debt to previous intellectual and cultural resources, see Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

[13] However, it is important not to over-simplify this periodisation of Christine's works, since the period 1400–5 also saw the production of verse romances such as the *Livre du Duc des vrais amans* and political works such as the *Livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V.*

[14] For an edition of this text, see Angus J. Kennedy and Kenneth Varty, eds. and trans., *Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc*, Medium Aevum Monographs, New Series IX (Oxford: Society for the Study of Mediaeval Languages and Literature, 1977).

[15] Rosalind Brown-Grant: '"Hee! Quel honneur au femenin sexe!": Female heroism in Christine de Pizan's *Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc*', *Journal of the Institute of Romance Studies* 5 (1997), 123–33.

[16] See Alan P. Barr, 'Christine de Pisan's *Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc*: A feminist exemplum for the Querelle des femmes', *Fifteenth Century Studies* 14 (1988), 1–12; and Edith Joyce Benkov, 'The coming to writing: *auctoritas* and authority in Christine de Pizan', *Le Moyen Français* 35–6 (1994–5), 33–48.

prose is reserved for works of a more serious nature, such as historiography or biblical exegesis.[17] I have thus largely excluded from my discussion two of Christine's poetic works which fall into the period indicated above: the *Epistre au Dieu d'Amours* (1399) and the *Dit de la Rose* (1402).[18] Though these texts have an undeniably polemical quality, they were mainly written as 'poésie de circonstance' and offer a far less sustained critique of misogyny than that contained in Christine's works in prose.

The five works are discussed below in the following order: the 'querelle de la *Rose*' (1401–2); the *Othéa* (1399–1400), the *Avision-Christine* (end of 1405); the *Cité* (1405); and the *Trois Vertus* (1405). Although not strictly chronological, this sequence of discussion allows us to begin by examining the theoretical underpinning of Christine's attack on anti-feminism as explicitly set out in the 'querelle', before proceeding to analyse how these ideas inform her defence of women in her other texts. Chapter One shows how Christine's intervention in the famous literary debate on the *Rose* establishes the moral basis of her critique of misogyny, which she condemns both as a doctrine and as a literary practice. The next two chapters of this study explore how Christine delivers this anti-misogynist message to her male readers. Chapter Two demonstrates that in the *Othéa*, a courtesy book written in epistolary form for a princely readership, Christine not only provides an alternative to the negative representations of love and women offered in allegorical works such as the *Rose*, but also challenges the way in which they exploit the Ovidian, mythological tradition in order to slander the female sex. Chapter Three argues that the *Avision*, which critics have usually read simply as an autobiographical account of how Christine first became a professional woman writer, is in fact a 'mirror for princes' in which she seeks to legitimate herself in her role as the bearer of an important political message for France's rulers. The autobiographical elements of Christine's text thus allow her to make capital out of her lowly social status as a woman in order to propose herself as a Boethian model of moral consolation and ethical instruction for the princely reader.

Having discussed how Christine encourages her male readership to accept the authority of women as exemplars of moral truths, the

[17] See Michel Zink, *Littérature française du Moyen Age* (Paris: PUF, 1992), 175–80.
[18] For an edition of these texts, see *Dieu d'Amours*.

final two chapters of this study are devoted to works in which she turns her attention to her female readers, whom she saw as being in need of comfort and protection from the assaults launched on women by the anti-feminist tradition. Chapter Four examines how in the *Cité* Christine contributes to, and simultaneously transforms, the biographical catalogue genre of 'the lives of famous men and women', using the great achievements of heroines of the past to counter misogynist stereotypes and inspire her contemporaries to the pursuit of virtue. Finally, Chapter Five argues that, contrary to previous critical opinion, Christine's courtesy book for women, the *Trois Vertus*, does not betray, but rather perpetuates, the ideals of the *Cité* and presents its female readers with both a 'mirror' for their spiritual instruction and practical advice on how to construct a reputation for themselves which will confound misogynist opinion forever.

Whether writing didactic manuals for knights and princes or offering pragmatic advice to ladies and princesses, Christine was unwavering in her desire to convince her readers of the equality of the two sexes in moral, if not social, terms. Because of this aim, she was crucially concerned with the issue of women's moral representation in literature, an issue that she was to address most directly in the 'querelle de la *Rose*'. It is with this complex and highly polemical work that our study of Christine de Pizan's defence of women begins.

CHAPTER I

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 XIVe 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 XVe siècle', *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de Paris et de l'Ile 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.