

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 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 XVe 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

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 XIV^e et XV^e 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 pluseurs clerks et autres se sont efforciez par leurs dittiez 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 (‘honnesteté’) 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 misogamous 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 conseillé 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, loups, 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, loups, 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 autrui que celluy qui est injurié (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 espore 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 XVe 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 'certainne 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 "mieulx 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 .iii. 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 saincte 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 corrigier, desdire et amender envers le tres excellent et inreprehensible docteur en saincte divine Escripture . . . que si horriblement *oses et presumes* corrigier 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 meismes 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 'langaige 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 tirey 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 vouldroye 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 perrier 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 voulanté: qui juges venin angoisseux estre restorement de mort; doctrine perverse estre salvable exemple; fiel amer, miel doulcereux; laidure horrible estre biautey solacieuse; – de qui une simple fammelette, avec la doctrine de sainte Eglise, puet reprendre ton cureur!’ (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 pathology: Christine de Pizan and “les glorieux docteurs”’, 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 conviendrait 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 vould 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'.

ains les loe d'avoir la chaste vertu de honte' (136, lines 684–6).³⁷ Indeed, Christine turns this matter of the virtue of modesty in women into one of the major themes of the 'querelle' itself, using it as the touchstone by which to determine the morality of female readers' response to the *Rose*. She even suggests that this response should in fact be shared by all moral-minded individuals, irrespective of their sex: 'Et sans faille plus plaisamment et trop plus doucement et par plus courtois termes s'en feust passé, et qui mieulx plairoient mesmes aux amans jolis et honnestes, et a toute autre vertueuse personne' (20, lines 281–4, emphasis added). In claiming that women's blushes are a refutation of the very criticisms which the text and Pierre, its disciple, are making of the female sex, Christine argues that such blushes are visible proof of women's virtue and therefore constitute a moral reaction to an immoral text.

Christine further exploits this topos of female modesty to answer Pierre's third misogynist assertion that women should talk plainly of the male genitals. She refutes this opinion outright, stating that women's silence on this subject is due, yet again, to 'raisonnable honte qui – Dieux mercis! – n'est mie chasciee de leurs frons' (123, lines 265–6). She then denies that such behaviour is acceptable on the part either of men or of women, taking women's silence as exemplary (*ibid.*). Furthermore, she doubts whether women speak plainly even of their own genitals, as Pierre had claimed, and counters the universal nature of his statement by insisting that 'fames honorables' (*ibid.*, line 275) certainly do not do so, thereby refuting his misogynist generalisation which condemns all women on the basis of the behaviour of a few. In a final rhetorical flourish, she ironically praises Pierre for failing, in practice, to follow his own master's precepts, since throughout his discussion of the question of plain speaking he himself uses the euphemism of 'secrés membres' rather than Raison's explicit 'coilles'. She attributes this laudable failure on Pierre's part to the virtue of modesty, 'Benoitte soit tele honte qui desconfit tele Raison!' (124, lines 292–3). From Pierre's somewhat unwitting good example, Christine extrapolates a moral sentence to show the worthiness of refraining from such speech, on the part of a person of either sex: 'Car parler honneste avec les vertus moult advient en bouche de louable personne' (*ibid.*, 296–8).

³⁷ Although the term 'honte' literally means 'shame' in both Middle and Modern French, it is more appropriate to translate it as 'modesty', since Christine is making the point that such an attribute is a virtue, not a shortcoming.

Christine therefore draws an analogy between her opponents' misogynist attempts to put the virtue of female modesty to rout, especially as regards their advocacy of plain speaking, and Jean de Meung's own attack on the allegorical personification of Honte (Modesty) in the *Rose* itself. In her reply to Jean de Montreuil, Christine castigates the Provost of Lille for exonerating plain speaking in the *Rose*, stating: 'grant tort connectéz contre la noble vertu de honte, qui de sa nature reffraint les goliardises et deshonestetés en dis et fais' (14, lines 83–5). Similarly, in her long letter to Pierre, she defends her position on the moral irresponsibility of mentioning human genitalia in direct terms, stating that this silence is the source of 'honte raisonnable' and should be respected (118, lines 107–9). In her response to the disciples' misogynist attacks on women, and in particular to Pierre's assertion of women's guilt as revealed through their blushes, Christine argues that her opponents' views coincide with those of the author of the *Rose*. Both author and disciples would seem to be united in their immoral attack on the virtue of modesty, a virtue demonstrated by honourable women in their response to the text, thus proving to Christine's mind their, and indeed her own, moral authority.

For Christine, two principal matters are at stake in her critique of misogyny, both here in the 'querelle' and in her other writings in defence of women which address male readers, particularly the *Othéa*. On the one hand, she seeks to 'save' such readers from the harmful moral effects of misogynist teachings, which condemn men to immoral attitudes and behaviour in their amatory relationships with women. On the other hand, she attempts to convince these readers of women's potential and actual status as exemplars of virtues which are applicable to both sexes.

JEAN DE MEUNG'S *ROSE*: A POETICS OF MISOGYNY?

Not content with using moral arguments to denounce what she saw as the misogynist doctrine of the *Rose*, Christine, together with Gerson, also took its author to task for the immorality of his actual literary practice. For some modern scholars, Jean's detractors arrived at this position through their ignorance of the theoretical criteria by which his defenders were seeking to praise his moral authority as writer and to exalt the literary value of his

text.³⁸ However, as the following discussion aims to show, all the protagonists in the debate *were*, in fact, largely agreed on the criteria which determine an author's and a text's worth, and all believed that art and morality were inextricably linked. Where the two sides categorically disagreed is on whether Jean de Meung and the *Rose* actually met such criteria in practice. Indeed, Pierre's defence in particular might have been stronger had he argued, as Jillian Hill has claimed he did, from an 'art for art's sake' position.³⁹ Instead, as we shall see, it is because he too attempts to defend the *Rose* on moral grounds that he finds himself in the awkward position of having to make an ethical case for a text which conveys no clear ethical message.

To illustrate the differences of opinion held by the detractors and defenders of the *Rose*, we need to examine two key issues which are raised in the debate: first, the nature of Jean's authorship and literary authority; and second, the question of readership in the *Rose*.⁴⁰ As Alastair Minnis has shown, such issues formed the mainstay of medieval literary theory and criticism as developed in the tradition of the *accessus ad auctores* prologues of scholastic commentators.⁴¹ From the fourteenth century onwards, this commentary tradition paid increasing attention to 'modern' secular *auctores* such as Dante, who wrote in the vernacular, as opposed to the pagan and scriptural *auctores* writing in Greek and Latin who had been the original focus of such critical inquiry. The discussion of Jean's literary practice in the 'querelle', which should be read as a polemical prologue to a vernacular *auctor*, thus constitutes an important document in the history of this tradition.⁴²

³⁸ See Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer*; Fleming, 'The moral reputation'; and Fleming, *The Roman de la Rose*.

³⁹ Hill, *The Medieval Debate*, 241–4. See also Hicks and Ornato, 'Jean de Montreuil', 213.

⁴⁰ See Brownlee, 'Discourses', 216, who observes: 'Christine's overall critical strategy thus involves a systematic insistence on authorial responsibility and on reader response, both in a moral context.'

⁴¹ This discussion draws extensively on Alastair J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Scholar Press, 1984; Aldershot: Wildwood House, 1988, second edition). For anthologies of scholastic prologues, see O. B. Hardison, Jr., Alex Preminger, Kevin Kerrane and Leon Golden, eds., *Medieval Literary Criticism: Translations and Interpretations* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1974); and Alastair J. Minnis and A. B. Scott, eds., *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁴² Minnis's own analysis of the 'querelle', which places it in the context of medieval commentaries on Ovid, reaches similar conclusions to mine on a number of points: see Minnis, 'Theorizing the rose: commentary tradition in the *Querelle de la Rose*', in Piero Boitani and Anna Torti, eds., *Poetics: Theory and Practice in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), 13–35.

An 'auctor' assailed: authorship and authority

What were the precise critical criteria established by the prologues of the scholastic tradition and to what extent do they inform the 'querelle'? The type of prologue which was dominant in the twelfth century commented on the book title (*titulus*), the name of the author (*nomen auctoris*), the author's intention (*intentio auctoris*), the subject matter (*materia libri*), the didactic mode of procedure (*modus tractandi*), the arrangement of parts (*ordo libri*), the usefulness of the text (*utilitas*), and the branch of learning to which the work was contributing (*cui parti philosophiae supponitur*).⁴³ After the thirteenth century, the vocabulary used in the scholastic prologue was augmented by and assimilated to a new 'Aristotelian' type which provided a critical model lasting well into the Renaissance.⁴⁴ This second type focused on the author as efficient cause bringing the work into being (*causa efficiens*), with particular attention paid to the life of the author (*vita auctoris*); on the literary subject matter derived from the writer's sources, the material cause (*causa materialis*); on the pattern imposed by the author on the material, the formal cause (*causa formalis*, incorporating both the *forma tractandi* or method of treatment and the *forma tractatus* or organisation of the work); and on the intended overall significance of the work, the final cause (*causa finalis*).

Although the 'querelle' documents themselves lack the explicit analytical rigour of these two types of prologue, the protagonists in the debate examine many of the same issues, at times even employ vernacular equivalents of some of the same vocabulary, and address related matters such as the use made by both scriptural and vernacular writers of rhetoric and imagery, language and authorial roles.

Jean's credentials as an *auctor* were dependent on a variety of factors, the first of which was the supposed usefulness or *utilitas* of the *Rose* as a work of poetry. Both sides in the 'querelle' adhered to the widely held medieval view that the *pars philosophiae* to which poetry properly belongs is ethics, a branch of moral philosophy, because it is concerned with human behaviour.⁴⁵ They were all familiar too with the Horatian commonplace which defined the *utilitas* of poetry ideally in terms of its ability to instruct (*docere*) and not just to please

⁴³ Modern scholars term this kind of prologue the 'type C' paradigm: see Minnis, *Authorship*, 19–25.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁵ Minnis and Scott, *Theory and Criticism*, 13.

(*delectare*).⁴⁶ The defenders of the *Rose* are in no doubt that the text *does* fulfil the criterion of instruction as well as that of pleasure, claiming that it provides important moral guidance on how to conduct oneself, which is the very cornerstone of ethics. For Jean de Montreuil, quoted by Christine, the *Rose* is: "[un]mirouer de bien vivre, exemple de tous estas de soy politiquement gouverner et vivre religieusement et saignement" (21, lines 320–2). Pierre reinforces his friend's comments, affirming that the ideals adhered to by Jean de Meung are indeed worthy since the *Rose* offers an attack on foolish love and provides the reader with a means of gaining self-knowledge, 'pour ung chascun avoir congnoissance de luy meismes et d'autres' (110, lines 762–3), which is a prerequisite for ethical self-conduct.

Christine, on the other hand, is categorical that the *Rose* fulfils only one of these principles: that of pleasing the reader. Whilst acknowledging the work's obvious poetic worth and beauty, she nonetheless doubts that it provides the reader with adequate moral matter. Although it is written in 'moult beaulx termes et vers gracieux bien leonimes' (13, line 56), she still regards it as worthless: 'toute chose sens preu, non obstant soit traittee, faicte et accomplie a grant labour et paine, puet estre appelee oyseuse ou pis que oyseuse de tant come plus mal en ensuit' (ibid., lines 41–4). She condemns the *Rose* for its 'oysiveté' (12, line 24), a term which echoes the name of a character in the text itself – Oiseuse, who first allowed Amant into the garden, thereby introducing him to a world of pleasure and indolence – and expresses her regret that Jean did not employ his considerable talents on some more worthwhile text (20–1, lines 291–3). Christine then invokes the practice of writers in Antiquity by recalling how the Romans would not honour a work with a laurel crown if it failed to contribute to the common good,⁴⁷ 'se elle n'estoit a l'utilité de la chose publique' (21, line 315, emphasis added). By this criterion of *utilitas* to which she explicitly alludes,⁴⁸ she claims that the *Rose* deserves to be destroyed in an 'ensevellissement de feu'

⁴⁶ See Horace, *On the Art of Poetry*, lines 341, and 343–4, in Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, *Classical Literary Criticism*, ed. and trans. T. S. Dorsch (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 90–1: 'Poets aim at giving either profit or delight, or at combining the giving of pleasure with some useful precepts for life. . . . The man who has managed to blend profit with delight wins everyone's approbation, for he gives his reader pleasure at the same time as he instructs him.'

⁴⁷ See D. A. Russell, *Criticism in Antiquity*, *Classical Life and Letters* (London: Duckworth, 1981), 86 and *passim*.

⁴⁸ Minnis, 'Theorizing', 23.

(ibid., lines 318–19).⁴⁹ Thus, for Christine, although a text should be pleasing as well as instructive, pleasure alone is not sufficient justification for writing but should be subordinated to the end of edifying the reader. We can see here the state of stalemate which ultimately caused the ‘querelle’ to falter: both sides agree on the principles involved, it is simply that the detractors of the *Rose* refuse to subscribe to the defenders’ opinion that the work is indeed both pleasing and instructive. As Christine herself states: ‘Je ne say a quoy tant nous debatons ces questions, car je croy ne toy ne moy n’avons talent de mouvoir nos oppinions: tu dis qu’il est bon; je dis qu’il est mauvais’ (145, lines 971–3).⁵⁰

Given this deadlock on the issue of the *Rose*’s status as a moral work, an alternative means of determining Jean’s literary authority was to assess his own personal morality and erudition as *causa efficiens* of the text. The question of whether authors’ own moral lapses diminished their learning and authority was hotly debated in academic prologues, particularly after the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when commentators began to focus attention on the author as a fallible human being, rather than just as God’s mouth-piece. In the course of the Middle Ages, this attention to the morals of the author, though initially paid to biblical *auctores* such as Solomon and David, was extended to both pagan and secular authors, culminating in Boccaccio’s treatment of the life of Dante.⁵¹ In the context of the ‘querelle’, both sides cite evidence from Jean’s life, albeit evidence gleaned from his own writings, in order to assess his worth on this moral criterion. Their conclusions, however, are diametrically opposed.

Since Christine holds Jean to be ultimately responsible for all opinions expressed in his work, she presumes that, for instance on the subject of unfaithful women, he arrived at the misogynist views expressed by the Jaloux because he himself, in his own life, failed to seek the company of more virtuous members of the female sex: ‘de croire par ceste raison suis contrainte que onques n’ot accointance ne hantise de femme honnourable ne vertueuse, mais par plusieurs femmes dissolues et de male vie hanter – comme font communement les luxurieux –, cuida ou faingny savoir que toutes telles feussent, car d’autres n’avoit congnoissance’ (18, lines 216–21). Imputing this

⁴⁹ See Solterer, ‘Flaming words’.

⁵⁰ See Hill, *The Medieval Debate*, 71–93.

⁵¹ See Minnis, *Authorship*, 103–12, 214–16; and Minnis and Scott, *Theory and Criticism*, 207–9, 453–8.

lack of moral values in the text directly to the lack of probity in the writer's own life, Christine declares that no amount of authorial erudition on Jean's part can compensate for his personal immorality; hence, for Christine, the *Rose* cannot be regarded as an authoritative text. Moreover, to her mind, Jean would seem to have fallen into the classic misogynist error of blaming lascivious – and by extension all – women for his own lack of chastity.

Gerson emphasises Jean's moral failings by persistently identifying him with the chief protagonist of the *Rose*, whom he refers to as Fol Amoureux. His evidence for making this identification comes from Jean's own confession in his later *Testament* that he had repented of being a foolish lover, a state he then described in the *Rose*: 'des son vivant il s'en repenti: et depuis ditta livres de vraye foy et de sainte doctrine' (66, lines 194–5). Yet, despite this supposed retraction on Jean's part, coupled with his evident erudition, Gerson too concludes that the *Rose* cannot be sanctioned as a useful work to give to readers, especially the young.

On the other side of the debate, neither Jean de Montreuil nor Gontier makes any reference to Jean de Meung's life nor do they attempt to compare his erudition with his morality, claiming that the one naturally presupposes the other. The Provost of Lille affirms the status of the author of the *Rose* as 'disertissimum ac scientificissimum actorem' (28, line 9; most learned and knowledgeable author, *La Querelle*, 43; translation slightly amended), whilst Gontier goes one better in order to stress the authority of his master as both moral and learned, since he is a 'vray catholique' and a 'docteur . . . en sainte theologie' (9, lines 8–9). However, Pierre does tackle the question of Jean's morality directly. For Pierre, Gerson's assertion that the author of the *Rose* had personal knowledge of the state of foolish love should in fact be put to his credit rather than held against him. Indeed, Pierre declares that Jean's experience of foolish love is the very touchstone of his authority since, as a penitent foolish lover, the author, like Solomon and David, is particularly well qualified to condemn such behaviour in his writings: 'Je dy que maistre Jehan de Meung, puis qu'il fut fol amoureux, fu tres fermes en raison: car de tant qu'il congnot mieux la folie qui est en fole amour par experience, de tant la desprisa il plus et loua Raison' (94, lines 191–5). In seeking to make this defence of Jean, Pierre may, as Minnis has argued, have had in mind St Bonaventure's authoritative defence of Solomon as a penitent lover in his commentary on

Ecclesiastes.⁵² Pierre goes on to exalt the primacy of experience when condemning a certain type of behaviour in order to dismiss Gerson's objections to the *Rose*. He states that as a celibate clerk, Gerson can have no experience of amatory matters, 'car trop plus a experience de ne say quelle puissance que n'a meismes l'effait de vive voix' (92, lines 120–2). For this argument, Pierre may have been drawing on another part of St Bonaventure's authoritative defence of Solomon, namely that:

No one who talks about the contempt of such things (as pleasure, wealth, honours, and human preoccupations) has any credibility unless he has actually experienced them himself. . . . The author had to be the sort of person who had experienced all of these things . . . and of an enquiring mind or wise. We have not heard of anyone who had these attributes to such a high degree as Solomon.⁵³

Pierre thus upholds the view that experience, even if it is of a doubtful moral kind, can, provided it is followed by penance, work in conjunction with erudition to consolidate an author's authority. But Christine and Gerson both stoutly reject Pierre's view since, for them, Jean's good intentions, unlike those of Solomon, cannot be confidently assumed.

Indeed, the problem of authorial intention (*intentio auctoris*) is fundamental to both sides of the debate, underpinning all other theoretical questions. It is the key to Christine and Gerson's position on the *Rose* since, given Jean's evident literary status and erudition, their case is based largely on the belief that the author *was* actively seeking to produce a book that would corrupt its readers. Hence the proliferation, in both their writings, of references to the *Rose* as a poison for which Jean must be held responsible. In Gerson's treatise, for example, Eloquence Theologienne berates Jean for having written a work which has never ceased to deprave and destroy since the day it was written: 'tu as par ta folie – quant en toy est – mis a mort et murtri ou empoisonné mil et mil personnes par divers pechiés et encores fais de jour en jour par ton fol livre' (67, lines 221–4). As evidence for believing that this was Jean's actual intention, rather than merely an unforeseen consequence of his

⁵² See Minnis, 'Theorizing', 31–6. For the text of St Bonaventure's commentary, see Minnis and Scott, *Theory and Criticism*, 230–3, 233: 'that book was written by Solomon when doing penance. God does not cast out those who repent, but receives them. In the light of this, Solomon was not in a reprehensible state when he wrote this book.'

⁵³ Minnis, *Theory and Criticism*, 231.

work, the detractors of the *Rose* outline three main areas of contention, all of which were important issues in medieval literary theory: first, the ending of the text; second, its expository indeterminacy due to the lack of a clear authorial voice; and third, its unconventional use of allegorical figures.

Christine and Gerson single out the ending of the *Rose* for particular criticism, since, according to the rules of rhetoric, the ending is paramount in determining the author's intentions, as Christine explains: 'se ung dicteur veult user d'ordre de rethorique, il fait ses premisses de ce que il veult traictier, et puis entre de propos en propos et parle de plusieurs choses s'il luy plaist, puis revient a sa conclusion de ce pour quoy il a faite sa narracion' (135, lines 641–4, emphasis added). Playing on the word 'fin' to link the idea of the ending with that of the intention, since the terms *finis* or *causa finalis* from which 'fin' is derived were used in Aristotelian commentaries to designate authorial intention,⁵⁴ Gerson declares: 'Certes en ce dit livre . . . bien a lieu le proverbe commun 'En la fin gist le venin' (78, lines 480–1). Christine, for her part, states that the ending of a moral text should provide an explicit conclusion in the juridical sense of a summing-up (134–5, lines 636–40).⁵⁵ For both of the detractors, the closing chapter of the *Rose* is therefore particularly pernicious because the allegorical rape which it describes is the final impression that the reader will take away from the text. In view of Christine's later championing of Dante over Jean de Meung in the 'querelle', it is likely that she, if not Gerson, is echoing here the Italian writer's comment in the *Convivio* on the powerful effect of endings on the mind of the reader: 'what a speaker is most intent on conveying must always be reserved for the end, for what is said last makes the most enduring impression on the mind of the listener'.⁵⁶ In their view, though, the danger of the ending of the *Rose* lies principally in the fact that it is left open rather than offering a clear condemnation of the immoral acts which it depicts.

It is Jean's failure to tell his readers clearly what behaviour should be adopted or shunned, not simply at the end of the *Rose* but

⁵⁴ See Minnis and Scott, 'Theorizing', 28; and Minnis, *Authorship*, 29.

⁵⁵ On Christine's familiarity with juridical language, see Maureen Cheney Curnow, "'La pioche d'inquisition': legal-judicial content and style in Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la Cité des Dames*", in Richards, *Reinterpreting*, 157–72.

⁵⁶ Dante, *The Banquet*, trans. Christopher Ryan, Stanford French and Italian Studies, 61 (Saratoga: ANMA Libri, 1989), 58.

throughout the book, which so perturbs Christine and Gerson. For both of them, simply *showing* a certain type of behaviour tends to recommend it to the reader in the absence of an explicit injunction from the author *telling* the reader otherwise.⁵⁷ Christine cites the example of a description of how to make counterfeit money in order to argue that such a description, even if not *intended* as a recommendation of evil-doing, can still nevertheless have that effect on the reader (137, lines 725–7). By analogy, she asserts that Jean's description of the assault on the castle at the end of the *Rose* illustrates only too well the manner in which such an assault can be undertaken by any would-be assailants (*ibid.*). Both she and Gerson are equally concerned to demonstrate that if showing error, without clearly telling the reader to avoid that error, is not sufficient, neither is the alternative technique of telling the reader to avoid an error whilst showing it to be attractive, as Eloquence Theologienne argues: 'Ung dissolus mauvais fera et dira toute lubricité qui se peust trouver entre home et fame devant une pucelle en disant: "Ne fay pas ainsy come tu nous vois fere, ainsy et ainsy; regarde bien!": sera tel a soustenir?' (73, lines 369–72). On the contrary, both showing and telling need to be unambiguous for the author's intention to become apparent. Gerson thus laments that the *Rose* did not follow the example of the Scriptures: 'c'est assavoir en reprouvant le mal, et tellement que chascun eust apperceu le reproche du mal et l'aprobacion du bien, et – qui est le principal – que tout se fist sans excès de legiereté' (74, lines 381–4). Similarly, Christine finds Jean's text wanting because it fails to adopt the proper form of more explicitly moral works, such as those of the ancient philosophers or the Church Fathers (22, lines 338–9). As a corrective to the dangerous indeterminacy of the *Rose*, Christine recommends that Pierre Col read instead Dante's *Divina Commedia*,⁵⁸ precisely because it is the work of a theologising poet whose intention was to give clear moral instruction to his readership (141–2, lines 868–71).⁵⁹

⁵⁷ See Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (University of Chicago Press, 1983), second edition, 211–40. See also Minnis, 'Theorizing', 19; and Minnis, *Authorship*, 193–4.

⁵⁸ Christine may well have been familiar with Boccaccio's praise of Dante as '(standing) forth rather as a Catholic and sacred theologian than a mere mythmaker': see Boccaccio on Poetry, 113. See also Robert Hollander, 'Dante theologus-poeta', *Dante Studies* 94 (1976), 91–136.

⁵⁹ For a similar view of Dante, see Benvenuto da Imola in his commentary on the *Divina Commedia*, quoted in Hardison, *Medieval Literary Criticism*, 87: 'no other poet ever knew how to praise or blame with more excellence . . . [Dante] honoured virtue with encomia and lacerated vice and vicious men.' On Christine's probable familiarity with Benvenuto's

Christine and Gerson explicitly relate the problem of indeterminacy and the difficulty of pinning down Jean's intentions in the *Rose* to the absence of a guiding authorial voice above that of the character-narrator or the other allegorical protagonists. As Minnis has shown, it is not that Christine or Gerson was unfamiliar with medieval *persona* theory, which distinguished between writers speaking as themselves *in propria persona* and those allowing their characters to speak *in persona aliorum*.⁶⁰ Rather, what they both lament is the fact that nowhere in the *Rose* does Jean appear to speak in his own voice as moral author. Indeed, for Gerson, where the authorial voice can be identified it does not simply fail to correct the morally dubious opinions of characters; even worse, it actually contributes some of the most scabrous points of doctrine in the whole text:

il conseille en sa propre persone et a son exemple essayer de toutes manieres de fames sans difference, et maudit tous ceulx et celles qui ainssy ne le feront . . . Il, en sa persone, nomme les parties deshonestes du corps et les pechiés ors et villains par paroles saintes et sacrees, ainssy comme toute tele euvre fut chose divine et sacree et a adourer. (62, lines 93–101)

Christine and Gerson do not condemn Jean simply for delegating the responsibility for the teachings contained in the text to his allegorical characters. What they chiefly abhor is his flouting of the conventions of allegory as a means of putting across didactic views. In their opinion, Jean fails to observe two key rules of poetic decorum governing allegorical personification, that is, appropriateness of a character's speech and proper attention to the context of that speech.⁶¹ The first of these rules is broken by allegorical figures such as Genius and Nature, who should be made to act in a way consonant with their name and attributes, but who are in fact made to speak out of character. Thus Gerson and Christine express their shock at the inappropriateness of letting Nature, who is meant to symbolise the sublunary force responsible for the perpetuation of species, speak of questions of faith (85, lines 646–7), and Genius, who is presented as Nature's chaplain and confessor, expound on the need for sexual relations outside the bonds of marriage (132, lines 559–65). The worst example of this flagrant breach of convention is Raison, whose speech is, for Gerson, anything but reasonable. He

commentary, which may have served as a model for the layout of her glosses in the earliest manuscript of the *Othéa*, Paris, BN f. fr. 848, see Willard, *Life*, 95.

⁶⁰ Minnis, 'Theorizing', 14–18.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 14–22.

argues that Jean has reversed the reader's expectation of her character and that of Cupid, since it is the God of Love, in Guillaume's portion of the *Rose*, who counsels discretion in the lover's speech, whereas Raison in Jean's text advocates plain speaking: 'come se Cupido fust plus chaste et raisonnables que dame Raison et Chasteté!' (85, lines 655–6). Gerson also claims that Jean flouts the second rule of poetic decorum, namely the provision of a correct context for a character's speech, which is determined by the person to whom the character speaks, the precise purpose of the speech, etc. Citing once again the example of Raison, Gerson asserts that the context of her speech on how to refer to human genitalia given the fallen nature of language is inappropriate, because the person to whom she speaks, Fol Amoureux, being neither a clerk nor a theologian, is an unsuitable character with whom to discuss such matters (83). As Eloquence Theologienne declares: 'y cy garda mal l'acteur les riegles de mon escolle (les riegles de rethorique), qui sont de regarder cil qui parle et a qui on parle, et pour quel tamps on parle' (85, lines 641–4).

For Christine and Gerson, Jean's failure to observe these two rules of poetic decorum means that generic conventions break down in his text. If an allegorical character can no longer be relied upon to symbolise a personification recognisable from previous literary authorities, it becomes impossible to read that character in any other than a literal fashion. Such is the case of Nature, 'corrumpuement estraitte' (80, line 527), to Gerson's mind, from the *De Planctu Naturae* of Alain de Lille.⁶² As he goes on to argue, once this allegorical contract has been broken, Jean can use the characters of Nature and Genius to put forward his own views and to exhort the kind of behaviour which is the very opposite of what the reader would traditionally expect of such figures (80, lines 518–25). Likewise, once Raison is represented in the *Rose* as acting in a manner unbecoming to her usual attributes of rationality and reasonableness, she can no longer function as an authoritative voice. For Christine and Gerson, she thus becomes a foul-mouthed woman, indoctrinating the foolish lover with Jean's pernicious and irresponsible views.

Paradoxically then, what has ensured the popularity of the *Rose*

⁶² See Economou, 'The character Genius'; and Earl Jeffrey Richards, "'glossa Aurelianus est quae destruit textum': medieval rhetoric, Thomism and humanism in Christine de Pizan's critique of the *Roman de la Rose*", *Cahiers de Recherches Médiévales (XIIIe–XVe s.)* 5 (1998), 247–63.

amongst modern post-structuralist critics, namely its indeterminacy and lack of a hierarchy of discourses, was precisely what condemned it in the eyes of at least two of its medieval readers.⁶³ Neither did Christine nor Gerson subscribe to the view, now held by modern patristic critics writing in defence of Jean de Meung, that the inconsistencies in the *Rose* between characters, and even within the speeches of a single character such as Genius, offer cues for an ironic reading of the text which can be seen as a moral condemnation of the lover's pursuit of lustful passion.⁶⁴ The detection of irony necessarily involves the reader's perception of a distance between author and character, or narrator and character, and the ascription of such distance to authorial intention.⁶⁵ For Christine and Gerson, the distance between Jean and his characters is practically non-existent, hence the difficulty of ascribing a moral intention to him.

By contrast, the champions of the *Rose* base their whole defence of the author's intentions on identifying a distance between him and his characters. Whilst Jean de Montreuil anticipates the patristic critics' view that this distance is the clue to its moral lesson about love, Pierre Col strikes an uneasy compromise between this reading and a defence of Jean de Meung's indeterminacy which comes closer to the post-structuralist position. Ignoring Christine and Gerson's point about the importance of the text's ending, the Provost of Lille claims that the *Rose*'s detractors have fundamentally failed to understand the author's intentions as a satirist who has agency over and above that of his characters (42, line 127). Moreover, in classifying the author of the *Rose* as a satirist, Jean de Montreuil is able to defend the openly scurrilous words of Raison and the Jaloux by implicitly drawing on medieval commentators' view of satire as a genre which 'in forthright, unadorned terms censures and corrects vices in

⁶³ See, for example, Michael D. Cherniss, 'Irony and authority: the ending of the *Roman de la Rose*', *Modern Language Quarterly* 36 (1975), 227–38; Kevin Brownlee, 'The problem of Faux Semblant: language, history, and truth in the *Roman de la Rose*', in Marina S. Brownlee, Kevin Brownlee, and Stephen G. Nichols, eds., *The New Medievalism* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 253–71; David F. Hult, 'Language and dismemberment: Abelard, Origen, and the *Romance of the Rose*', in Kevin Brownlee and Sylvia J. Huot, eds., *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose: Text, Image and Reception* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 101–30; and Sarah Kay, 'Sexual knowledge: the once and future texts of the *Romance of the Rose*', in Judith Still and Michael Worton, eds., *Textuality and Sexuality: Reading Theories and Practices* (Manchester University Press, 1993), 69–86.

⁶⁴ Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer*; Fleming, *The 'Roman de la Rose'*. At the same time, however, both critics identify Jean de Meung's authorial voice with that of Reason: see, in particular, John V. Fleming, *Reason and the Lover* (Princeton University Press, 1984).

⁶⁵ See Peter Haidu, *Aesthetic Distance in Chrétien de Troyes* (Geneva: Droz, 1968).

society and advocates virtues'.⁶⁶ Jean thus asserts that the critics of the *Rose* are wrong to deny its author the poetic licence which permits him to say things for which other non-moralising writers might be condemned, because his characters' words should not be taken at face value but rather as a critique of society and its corrupt mores (*ibid.*).

Pierre similarly argues that the *Rose* is meant to be read ironically, but he replies at greater length than Jean de Montreuil to the detractors' points on indeterminacy and lack of an authorial voice. He justifies the author's intention merely to put forward the opinions of his characters *in persona aliorum* without giving his own views (100, lines 403–6) by relating it to the practice of compilers who, according to St Bonaventure's classification of authorial roles,⁶⁷ report the opinions of other writers without necessarily subscribing to such views themselves, as in the example of Sallust reporting Catiline's denunciation of Rome (101, lines 456–8).⁶⁸ In neither case, Pierre claims, can one ascribe a bad intention to the compiler who simply shows immoral behaviour or reports the immoral opinions of others, on which point he invokes the example of the Bible and its portrayal of Sodom and Gomorrah (102, lines 460–2). For Pierre, Jean expresses his own intention solely in his authorial apology, where he affirms *in propria persona* that his role is merely to allow others to speak and that his aim here is to pre-empt any charges that he is seeking to condone the misogyny, anti-clericalism and bawdy language uttered by his *personae*: 'Car la seulement parle il come aucteur et la come aucteur il dit . . . qu'il n'y fait "riens fors reciter"' (110, lines 747–60).

However, in seeking to make a virtue of the indeterminacy and limited authorial interventions in the *Rose*, Pierre is then left with few convincing arguments with which to claim that Jean's intentions *are* moral. For instance, Pierre attempts to assert that there is no doubt that the author's aim *was* to follow Guillaume who, in the first part

⁶⁶ Paul Miller, 'John Gower, satiric poet', in Alastair J. Minnis, ed., *Gower's Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983), 79–105, 82. See also Minnis and Scott, *Theory and Criticism*, 116–19, 136–7, 474–5.

⁶⁷ The four roles which St Bonaventure outlines – scribe, compiler, commentator and author – are differentiated according to the extent to which the writer is responsible for all the views expressed in the work, the scribe being the least and the author the most responsible: see Minnis, *Authorship*, 94.

⁶⁸ Minnis, 'Theorizing', 19, cites the example of Abelard's Prologue to the *Sic et non* as an instance of an author's defence of 'reporting' another's views: see Minnis, *Theory and Criticism*, 90–2. See also Minnis, *Authorship*, 193–210.

of the *Rose*, had exhorted his readers to pursue virtue and flee vice: 'Pour ce parle il de paradis et de vertus: pour les suir' (106–7, lines 628–9), a view commonly held by patristic critics. Yet, in arguing that Jean speaks *in propria persona* only in his apology, Pierre has no clear authorial declaration with which to back up this assertion of moral intentions. In practice he is forced to contradict his own logic and to pass off moral sentences by Jean's characters as those of the author himself. For example, although Pierre is careful to preface his citations with caveats such as 'ne dit il pas en chapistre du Jaloux' (102, line 474), he is nonetheless confident in claiming such views to be Jean's even if there is no justification for it in terms of his own insistence on the clear separation between author and characters. Thus he regards Jean as being responsible for the defence of chastity from the episode of the Jaloux, the castigation of male sins as opposed to those of females from the speeches of Nature, and the warning against youthful folly from the mouth of Raison (102–3). Moreover, in defending the *Rose* against Christine and Gerson's specific charge of the inappropriateness of characters' speech, Pierre has to resort to a distinctly circular argument which only serves to undermine his case still further. In his view, Raison's use of bawdy language when talking to the underclerk Fol Amoureux is both appropriate and moral because, he claims, Jean's precise didactic intention here is to show how she tries to lead the lover away from foolish passion: 'Quant Raison les nonme elle presche au Fol Amoureux qu'il s'ostast de la Fole amour' (97, lines 310–1). Yet, in order to prove this point, Pierre has no explicitly moral sentences that he could quote Raison as saying with which to back up this attribution of moral intention to the author.

Neither Christine nor Gerson was slow to pick up on the inconsistencies in Pierre's defence of Jean's intentions. On the one hand, Christine rebukes him for what she perceives to be his faulty logic and duplicity in collapsing or maintaining the distinction between author and character purely for the convenience of his own argument. To her mind, Pierre invokes the author behind his characters in order to prove his moral intentions whilst, conversely, insisting on the independence of the characters when a less savoury sentence is enounced. On the subject of marriage for instance, Christine criticises Pierre for suggesting that it is Jean who praises wedlock in the chapter of La Vieille, whilst, in fact, the character herself states plainly, "toutes pour tous et tous pour toutes" (143,

lines 911–12). As Christine observes, Pierre cannot have it both ways: ‘Et si croy que maistre Jehan de Meung ne fist point dire a elle ce mot pour louer mariaige, car ce n'estoit mie son office; et te souviengne que tu as dit autre part que ce n'estoit pas Meung qui parloit’ (ibid., lines 920–4). Gerson, on the other hand, argues that, in taking Jean’s apology at face value, Pierre must accept the logical implications of the author’s desire to present himself as a mere compiler. In his reply to a letter from Pierre which had attacked his dream-vision, Gerson declares that by claiming merely to have collated the work of others and added nothing of his own, Jean relinquishes all responsibility for his own text. As Minnis has stated: ‘In Jean’s *apologia*, the traditional protestation of the compiler is well on its way to becoming a “disavowal of responsibility” trope.’⁶⁹ Following this line of logic, Gerson goes on to assert that Pierre cannot praise Jean as author of the moral parts of the *Rose* if he refuses to blame Jean as compiler of the immoral parts:

Quamobrem nolite vos, admiratores sui, laudem ei tribuere si bene dixit, sicut non vult maledicta sua in probrium eius versa iri si quedam arguenda transtulerit. (170, lines 165–7)

(Wherefore you, his admirers, do not seek to praise him if he spoke well, since he himself, in bringing controversial matters into the book, denies responsibility for wicked words which might bring shame upon it.) (*La Querelle*, 150)

As Christine and Gerson see it, the convoluted and contradictory arguments which Pierre is forced to adopt to defend his master are evidence that there can be no positive interpretation of Jean’s intentions in the *Rose*. Pierre’s desperate glossing of the awkward passages of the *Rose* points this up only too visibly, as Christine exclaims: ‘Voire, come dist le proverbe commun des gloses d’Orliens, qui destruisent le texte’ (144, lines 953–4). For the two detractors of the *Rose*, Jean’s authority is called into question on all counts: they deem him to have failed to match the pleasure provided by the text with a didactic message, to find a balance between his own erudition and morality, or to guide his readers by means of unambiguous exposition and conventional use of allegory. As we shall see in the following chapters, the criteria by which Christine faults the *Rose* are

⁶⁹ Minnis, *Authorship*, 198. See also Jill Mann, *Apologies to Women: Inaugural Lecture delivered 20th November 1990* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

precisely those which underpin her own literary practice as moral author writing in the service of a defence of women.

Readership and the 'Rose': response and responsibility

The detractors of the *Rose* base their negative opinion of its moral teachings not simply on their views of authorship but also on their conception of readership. First, both Christine and Gerson express their general nervousness about the reader's moral vulnerability when faced with inflammatory literary material, such as that contained in the *Rose*. Secondly, they voice their specific concerns about the potential harmful effects produced on the reader of the *Rose* by its volatile literal and figurative language, and inclusion of material from other texts of doubtful moral authority. Thirdly, Christine in particular takes issue with Pierre's defence of the *Rose* as a text which delegates responsibility for moral edification from the author to the reader. Although modern critics such as both Robertson and Delany have accused the detractors of an untimely prudishness in raising these issues,⁷⁰ it is important to note that Christine and Gerson were by no means alone in their preoccupation with the reader's well-being. As reference to the academic prologue tradition will reveal, many of these issues were also the subject of intense debate amongst medieval literary commentators.

Christine's and Gerson's belief in the moral vulnerability of readers of texts such as the *Rose* is grounded in the Church's teaching on Original Sin. Using an image which suggests the weak state of the reader, Christine declares that it is pointless to stress to a sick person that they must not eat the kind of unripe fruit which will harm them if in so doing one makes the fruit seem all the more appetising and delicious. The fevered mind of the reader/sick person will only remember the pleasing description of the fruit and will forget the advice not to touch it: 'Vraiment je tiens que mieulx li souvendroit et plus luy aroit penetré en son appetit les choses nommees que la deffence faicte de non en mengier' (125, lines 328–31). She sums up her view of the reader's moral vulnerability, and thus the inadvisability of including anything in a didactic text which can be misinterpreted, with the help of the image of a limping foot to express the idea of human predisposition towards evil: 'nature humaine, qui de

⁷⁰ Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer*, 361; and Delany, '“Mothers”', 98–9.

soy est encline a mal, n'a nul besoing que on lui ramentoive le pié dont elle cloche pour plus droit aler' (22, lines 329–31).

Gerson develops and amplifies Christine's concerns, similarly employing the idea of a foot which could stumble and fall at any moment, although he stresses that it is the young who are most likely to fall victim to the blandishments of the *Rose*: 'Vices et pechiés, croy moy, s'apranent trop de legier: n'y fault maistre quelconque; nature humaine, par especial en jeunesse, est trop encline a trebuchier et a glassier et cheoir en l'ordure de toute charnalité: n'estoit besoing que tu les y tirasses ou a force boutasses' (67, lines 207–12). The Chancellor of Paris outlines the specific perils of literary texts for an untrained, youthful readership by comparing the *Rose* with the Song of Songs. The latter, despite being of an undeniably religious nature, is nevertheless written in such a way that it should only be given to readers over thirty (!) in order to avoid any wilful misinterpretation: 'affin qu'ilz n'y entendissent quelconque malvaïse charnalitey' (74, lines 393–4). Gerson's concern with careful reading of the Song of Songs was by no means atypical, as Minnis points out: 'On the literal level, Solomon's song seemed to resemble the lascivious fables (particularly those by Ovid) studied in courses on grammar. Because they comprised the subject of a Scriptural text, the apparently erotic encounters recorded by Solomon demanded "reverent interpretation" – and got it in abundance.'⁷¹ However, for Gerson, the *Rose* is all the more to be avoided as there is no discernible religious inspiration behind it. Indeed, he maintains that, through the person of the foolish lover, the text enacts its own effect on the young reader, for its aim is to attack the virtues, above all that of modesty: 'mauvaises paroles et escriptures courrumpent bonnes meurs et font devenir les pechiés sans honte et ostent toute bone vergoingne, qui est en jeunes gens la principal garde de toutes bones condicions contre tous maulx' (75–6, lines 422–6).⁷²

As evidence for their criticism that the *Rose* corrupts the unwary reader, Gerson and Christine raise a second set of issues concerning readership. On the one hand, they condemn its use of sexual

⁷¹ See Minnis, *Authorship*, 43. On the status of this work in the medieval period, see Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 25–41. For an example of a medieval commentary on the Song of Songs, see that of Giles of Rome in Minnis, *Theory and Criticism*, 243–7.

⁷² The classic example of the misuse of the written word for erotic purposes is, of course, that of Paolo and Francesca in the *Divina Commedia*, *Inferno* 5: see Susan Noakes, 'The double misreading of Paolo and Francesca', *Philological Quarterly* 6 (1983), 221–39.

language in both a literal and a figurative context, and on the other, they castigate the *Rose* for including morally dubious material from other literary sources. First, then, the actual language used by many of the characters in the text gives them both cause for concern in terms of its potentially inflammatory effect on the reader. Whilst Gerson expresses his revulsion at the 'feu de paroles luxurieuses a merveille, ordes et deffendues' (61–2, lines 73–4) from the mouths of Venus, Cupid, Genius and even the author himself, Christine develops a more far-reaching critique of the language employed in the *Rose*, arguing that Jean showed no respect for the need to speak and write with extreme caution if he was to benefit the reader. In order to counter Jean de Montreuil's view that plain speaking is permissible about all things created by God, Christine points out that since the Fall, many things which were once innocent, such as the human genitals, have since become corrupt to the extent that the words used to designate them have become tainted and should now be avoided.⁷³ She states that since the thing determines the word and not vice versa, the possibility of speaking plainly of a corrupt thing is precluded: 'le nom ne fait la deshonesteté de la chose, mais la chose fait le nom deshonneste' (14, lines 89–90). For Christine, a necessary concomitant of the author's responsibility to praise or blame in a moral work is that of their responsibility towards the reader in the use of language. As Hicks has pointed out: 'Autant Gerson que Christine . . . sont persuadés de l'efficacité morale de la parole, qui sous-tend la mission du prédicateur ou de l'écrivain engagé.'⁷⁴ To persist in letting a character speak plainly, despite the dangers of doing so, necessarily raises doubts about the morality of the author's intention towards the reader. Moreover, Christine rules out the admissibility of euphemism to designate things of dubious virtue, for she argues that this too raises the problem of intention, so that it only becomes permissible to use a euphemism to speak of the human genitals if the intention is good:

se pour certain cas de maladie ou aultre neccessité il convenoit declairier ou les membres ou quoy que ce fust, et j'en parloie en maniere que on m'entendist et non nommer par propre non, je ne parleroye point deshonestement: la cause si est pour ce que la fin pour quoy j'en parleroye ne seroit pas deshonneste. (117, lines 71–6)

⁷³ See Marcia L. Colish, *The Mirror of Language: A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1968).

⁷⁴ Hicks, 'Situation', 60.

For Jean's detractors, the problem of the effects produced on the reader by the language used in the *Rose* is further exacerbated by the fact that it mixes different registers of figurative expression. It employs terms of a sacred register to express the profane, such as the earthly paradise for a garden of love, but in such a way as to undermine the sanctity of the sacred term.⁷⁵ As Gerson states: 'Quant il parle des choses saintes et divines et espirituellenes, il mesle tantost paroles tres dissolues et esmovans a toute ordure' (62, lines 87–9). Christine takes particular exception to Jean's habit of using religious terms as a figurative euphemism for human genitalia and so she rejects Pierre Col's assertion that in the *Rose*, the use of the term 'sainctuaires' (93, lines 164–5) to refer to women's genitals was motivated by a similarity between the holiness of the portals of a city and a woman's chastity (93–4, lines 171–7). To her mind, Jean was not searching for metaphorical appropriateness but rather employing the image to excite readers and to lead them into error: 'onques ne le dist en entencion de la chose qu'elle puist estre appelee sainte, mais le dist par une maniere d'une desrision plus aluchaint, ou pour plus grant atisement aux luxurieux' (121, lines 186–8). In other words, for Christine, the author of the *Rose* misuses euphemism as a veil or integument which, according to scholastic allegoresis, should clothe a higher truth in literal language.⁷⁶ Rather than leading the reader towards such a truth, Jean's allegory actually *descends* from the spiritual to the literal. As Maureen Quilligan has put it: 'Lifting the veil of such metaphorical language is simply to lift up skirts, to discover physical objects only.'⁷⁷ For the detractors of the *Rose*, the danger of its use of language lies in its tendency to lead the reader's mind back towards earthly matters, by advocating explicit literal terms for tainted objects and by its profanation of the sacred through inappropriate figurative euphemisms. In Christine and Gerson's view, these problems are symptomatic of the general effect produced by the *Rose* on its readers in encouraging them to seek vice and to flee from virtue.

⁷⁵ See Earl Jeffrey Richards, 'Christine de Pizan, the conventions of courtly diction and Italian humanism', in Richards, *Reinterpreting*, 250–71.

⁷⁶ See Minnis and Scott, *Theory and Criticism*, 120–2.

⁷⁷ Maureen Quilligan, 'Words and sex: the language of allegory in the *De Planctu Naturae*, the *Roman de la Rose* and Book III of *The Faerie Queene*', *Allegorica* 2 (1977), 195–216, 199. See also Alastair J. Minnis, *Lifting the Veil: Sexual/Textual Nakedness in the 'Roman de la Rose'* (King's College London: Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 1995); and Richards, "'glossa Aurelianensis'".

Gerson voices the second of his and Christine's concerns when he goes on to attack Jean for including within his own perilous work dangerous texts from previous authors, thus turning the *Rose* into a veritable compendium of salacious literary matter. Most notably, Gerson castigates Jean for his injudicious inclusion of mythological fables, such as that of Venus and Mars from Ovid, as well as of characters and teachings from the satirical works of Juvenal, both of whom were the subject of debate in the Middle Ages as to their usefulness for a Christian audience (76–7).⁷⁸ Although by the thirteenth century Ovid had become a standard author on the university grammatical curriculum, scholastic commentators had to justify his status by claiming to find philosophical truths veiled under his poetic 'lies' and frequently base subject matter.⁷⁹ This search for an allegorical integument in Ovid's works culminated in the numerous fourteenth-century moralisations of his works by mythographers such as the anonymous author of the *Ovide moralisé*, Pierre Bersuire, and Christine herself in the *Othéa*.⁸⁰ Similarly, as we saw when discussing Jean de Montreuil's defence of the *Rose* as a satire, medieval commentators were also at pains to justify the 'naked' truths and the often obscene and riotous behaviour depicted by Juvenal and other satirists by imputing a didactic purpose to works in this genre.⁸¹ Gerson would seem to disapprove of the fact that Jean both incorporates Ovid into the *Rose* without an accompanying mythographical apparatus and cites Juvenal without a clear indication as to the butt of his satire. In other words, for Gerson, the *Rose* fails to include the critical framework needed in order to neutralise the potentially dangerous impact of such texts which he declares to have been 'translatés, assemblés et tirés come a violence et sans propos' (76, lines 443–4).⁸²

⁷⁸ Gerson's caution on this matter, which also extended to the type of acceptable story material which could be included in sermons, is typical of preachers of his time: see D. Catherine Brown, *Pastor and Laity in the Theology of Jean Gerson* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 20–2.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Boccaccio's defence of pagan poets in *Boccaccio on Poetry*, 104–5: 'Some men have thought that the learned poet merely invents shallow tales, and is therefore not only useless, but a positive harm. This is because they read discursively and, of course, derive no profit from the story. Now this work of mine removes the veil from these inventions, shows that poets were really men of wisdom, and renders their compositions full of profit and pleasure to the reader' (emphasis added). See also Minnis and Scott, *Theory and Criticism*, 113–64.

⁸⁰ See Jane Chance, ed., *The Mythographic Art* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1990).

⁸¹ Minnis and Scott, *Theory and Criticism*, 116–18, 134–50.

⁸² As Minnis observes ('Theorizing', 35–6, n. 97), in his reply to Pierre Col Gerson makes a

As the final element in the detractors' critique of readership in the *Rose*, Christine attacks Pierre Col's view of the reader, which, because he does not reply to all of her and Gerson's objections, has to be deduced from his general remarks. Pierre readily agrees with his antagonists on the need for texts to inculcate moral views and so he persistently claims that the *Rose* is concerned not to condone the behaviour of its chief protagonist but to condemn it: 'ne fault ja qu'on s'efforce de plus blasmer Fol Amoureux que fait le livre de la *Rose*' (92, lines 141–2). Yet whilst Christine and Gerson insist on the need for moral texts to be unequivocal, since the vulnerable reader is likely otherwise to be tempted into an erroneous reading, Pierre ignores this problem and instead assumes that the reader *will* be able to arrive at the moral meaning of the *Rose*. Despite the text's mixture of good and evil, Pierre declares that the reader will not be led astray or tempted into reading wrongly, provided they read the text enough times (102, lines 471–4). He reinforces this argument that texts can legitimately mix both good and evil without corrupting their audience by citing the example of sermons: 'Quant tu vas au sermon, n'ois tu pas aux prescheurs respondre les vices que tous les jours font homes et fames, affin qu'ilz aillent le droit chemin? . . . on doit ramentevoir le pié de quoy on cloche pour plus droit aler!' (ibid., lines 462–6). Pierre's confidence in the reader of the *Rose* parallels that expressed by Chaucer in the implied readers of the *Canterbury Tales* who are invited to take what they want out of the text and leave those parts which fail to please them.⁸³ In the case of both Jean and Chaucer, it is their assumption of the role of the compiler which allows them to afford the reader freedom of choice (*lectoris arbitrium*),⁸⁴ a notion with which Pierre would seem to concur. It is thus the reader who becomes responsible for reading the text morally rather than the author for ensuring that nothing immoral is included in the text.

For Christine, this delegation of responsibility from author to reader is unacceptable, given the moral vulnerability of the latter. She refutes Pierre's claim that sermons function like literary texts in

point of stating that he has actually read all of Jean's sources, including both Ovid and Juvenal, to show that he was speaking not out of ignorance but *en connaissance de cause* (*Débat*, 172).

⁸³ See Minnis, *Authorship*, 201–2: "'Blameth nat me if that ye chese amys'", warns Chaucer; "Avyseth yow, and put me out of blame" (I, lines 3181, 3185).'

⁸⁴ Ibid., 201.

mixing good and evil by pointing out that preachers do not allow their listeners complete freedom of interpretation. Unlike the author of the *Rose*, they unequivocally condone good and condemn evil: 'Ainns [le preescheur] ramentoit ce pié de telle maniere que il fait grant orreur aux oyans' (134, lines 613–15). Moreover, she dismisses as a wilful deformation of the text Pierre's own method of selective reading, and in particular his attempt to exonerate Genius, whose speech is probably the most controversial of all the characters' except Raison's: 'Si en recites voirement plusieurs de ceulz propos que il dist, mais tu en trespases assés, et vas queillant sa et la ceulx qui mieux te plaisent; et n'as talent de mettre arriere le bien que il dist permy le mal' (145, lines 962–5). Christine accuses Pierre of manipulating the *Rose* to make it fit his view of it, finally dismissing his attempts as those of an alchemist, who seeks to make gold out of filth (126, lines 365–6). Paradoxically, then, Pierre manages to do what Christine claims is impossible, that is to read the *Rose* as a moral text. She is therefore obliged to accuse Pierre of *misreading* Jean's work, since, to her mind, there is no chance of turning his text into a *Roman de la Rose moralisé*.⁸⁵

The fundamental difference between the two sides' views of readership in the *Rose* concerns their notion of the reader's competence. For Pierre, competent readers are assumed to be already moral and can read the *Rose* only to confirm what they previously know, arriving at its moral lessons in spite of its mixed registers and expository ambiguities. For Christine, readers are assumed to be in need of further moral instruction which cannot be provided by a text which affords its readers the kind of interpretive latitude which can lead to sinfulness. Unlike Pierre, she believes that the reader's freedom of choice should be curtailed by a authoritative text in which the author acts as a moral guide. As we shall see, this belief informs her own literary practice, particularly in the *Othéa*, where she provides not only a safe mythographical framework for the stories she borrows from Ovid, but also a set of instructions for her reader in the art of moral and allegorical interpretation.

⁸⁵ One late-fifteenth-century reader of Jean de Meung's text, Jean Molinet, did in fact see fit to 'moralise' it: his *Romant de la Rose moralisie cler et net*, composed around 1482, was printed three times in the following century. See Huot, *The Romance of the Rose*, 315, n. 14.

CONCLUSION

In contrast with those studies which have dismissed Christine's moralistic attack on the *Rose* as being motivated merely by prudishness or political conservatism, this discussion has aimed to show that morality not only provides the foundation for her critique of Jean de Meung's misogynist doctrine and his literary practice, it is also the key to understanding how, for Christine, the two issues are intimately related. To her mind, Jean's immoral view of women as non-human and irrational, corporeal and corrupting, is conveyed through a mode of allegorising which fails to raise its readers to the higher realm of the spiritual and instead confines them to the material realm of the literal, with all its perilous associations with the bodily side of human experience. Christine condemns the slander of women in the *Rose* as doubly immoral, since Jean does not simply attack the female sex but attempts to do so with impunity by delegating all ethical and didactic responsibility for his own views to his characters. Moreover, Christine takes what she perceives to be the misogynist attitudes of the author's own disciples as evidence for her view that the *Rose* is dangerous in that it seduces even those readers who strive to find a moral message within it and infects them with its 'poisonous' doctrine.

Previous positive assessments of Christine's contribution to the 'querelle' have shown how it outlines the principal arguments of her defence of women, arguments which were to receive their fullest expression and development in the *Cité*. However, as the following chapters will contend, in addition to setting out her substantive points of disagreement with misogyny, it is important to emphasise that Christine's literary criticism in the 'querelle' forms the basis of her own choice of rhetorical strategies throughout her anti-misogynist writings. In other words, Christine conceives of her defence of women as an ethical doctrine *and* as a moralising literary practice. As a doctrine, it involves a two-fold valorisation of the female sex in terms of both the shared humanity of women and men and what Christine deems to be women's specific contribution to humanity. First, she stresses that, in their common essence as human beings, male and female are not fundamentally distinguished but are both sentient creatures, capable of rational thought and of virtuous behaviour. This perspective, which challenges the misogynist tendency to define the female sex primarily in terms of the body rather

than of the mind, pervades all of Christine's texts in defence of women, particularly the *Cité*. Secondly, she rejects any presentation of the differences between men and women as a moral hierarchy in which males are elevated over females. Rather, she underlines the complementarity of the two sexes as mutual helpmeets and companions, an approach which she was to pursue in greatest detail in the *Trois Vertus*. Thus Christine locates her refutation of Jean's view of love within an ethical framework which stipulates that virtuous conduct in the personal realm is the key to laudable conduct in the political sphere, a lesson which is addressed to the male reader in the *Othéa* and to the female reader in the *Trois Vertus*.

Since her defence of women is motivated explicitly by her broader ethical assumptions, it follows that, in her own literary practice, Christine as author does not absent herself from the text nor does she speak through abstract personifications of dubious authority. Instead, she adopts in turn one of two possible strategies. On the one hand, in texts such as the *Avision* and the *Cité*, she teaches by example, depicting herself as a protagonist in her own works who must undergo the processes of ethical instruction which she, as author, expects her reader to follow. On the other hand, in those texts where Christine does not appear as a character after an initial preface or prologue, she provides in her place a female figure of unimpeachable moral authority, such as the allegorical figure of Prudence Mondaine in the *Trois Vertus*. As part of her moralising literary practice, Christine's use of multiple allegorical levels in the *Othéa* and the *Avision* contrasts sharply with the mode of allegorising found in the *Rose*. Unlike Jean, Christine explicitly persuades her reader to search beyond the allegorical veil to find the higher, spiritual truths which it conceals. Finally, since she sees misogyny as a doctrine which is deleterious to the well-being of both sexes, her anti-misogynist programme is aimed at edifying two different sets of readers. When speaking to the female reader, in the *Cité* and the *Trois Vertus*, Christine strives to rouse her from the despondency that misogyny induces when it claims that women cannot aspire to virtue, and to encourage her, as a moral being, to take responsibility for her own actions and reputation. When speaking to the male reader, particularly in the *Othéa*, Christine seeks to prevent him from accepting misogynist slanders of women which, by leading him to commit immoral acts, ultimately harm the slanderer more than the female object of his calumnies. It is to this text that we must now turn.

CHRISTINE DE PIZAN AND
THE MORAL DEFENCE
OF WOMEN

Reading beyond gender

ROSALIND BROWN-GRANT



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