Christine de Pizan, Dame d’Eloquence

by

Lauren Squillante
Spring 2016

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for a baccalaureate degree
in History
in cursu honorum

Reviewed and approved by:

______________________________
(Sheila J. Rabin, Ph.D.)
Thesis Supervisor

Submitted to
the Honors Program, Saint Peter's University

4 April 2016
Acknowledgments

I learned many things during the process of writing this thesis, all of which are related to Christine de Pizan and the medieval world in which she lived. One such thing is the process of writing a manuscript, which - very much like a thesis - is a laborious task with many steps. Foremost, one must pray to God for His guidance in creating something as permanent as the written word. My prayer is that this thesis is not the culmination of my years of learning, but only the beginning.

Next, one must secure the proper foundation on which to begin her work. For medieval writers, this was a properly prepared piece of parchment cleaned and cut to the correct size. For me, this foundation is a support system made up of the most encouraging people: my teachers from Holy Family Academy of Bayonne, for helping foster a great love of learning within me; the enthusiastic professors, most especially those whom I was honored to have teach me in the classroom, as well as the energetic staff, of Saint Peter’s University, for sustaining and reinforcing this love; Dr. Rachel Wifall, who has been preparing me for this moment for four years; Drs. Michael DeGruccio, David Gerlach, Jerome Gillen, and Timothy Nicholson of the history department for their patience with my erratic, albeit, fervent love of history; Jillian Boyce and Amanda Gonzalez, who sustained me with their enthusiasm and humor; William Golden and
Maggie Ryan, who did not read my thesis, but assured me it was good anyway; my loving sisters, Andi and Gabbi, who always support me in my endeavors although their interests differ from mine; Daddy, who has always shared my love of history; and Momma, who always has been and always will be my biggest cheerleader... and who still believes she went to school with "Christina Pizzano."

Once the parchment is readied, one must prepare her ink and then meticulously and methodically write her words, careful not to make any mistakes ruining the whole project. The works of those scholars I read and annotated fiercely, which can be found in the "Works Cited" section at the end of this thesis, are my black ink, used liberally and – hopefully – artistically. However, I also have gilded ink. Gold ink was special to medieval authors for the wealth it portrayed, and my golden ink is made up of the works of Christine de Pizan herself.

But what would a manuscript be without those beautiful illuminations? A very special thank you goes to my "illuminator," Dr. Sheila Rabin, who has enlightened me for the past four years with her profound intelligence, fantastic wit, and limitless kindness, and who throughout the research and writing process, helped me see the light at the end of the tunnel. Pour sa patience, elle sera récompensée par une place dans la cité des dames.
Abstract

This thesis examines the question of whether or not medieval author and philosopher Christine de Pizan can be considered a feminist. It also gives a brief biography of the subject and outlines the influence she had over subsequent generations of feminist thinkers. Drawing from the portrait painted by Christine’s major biographers, as well as from arguments made by second-wave feminist historians on both sides of the question, it determines that although she cannot be labeled a feminist using the contemporary definition, she exhibits certain modes of feminist thought, notably her belief in education for women.
Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.........................................................ii
Abstract.............................................................................iv
Part I.................................................................1
Part II.................................................................11
Part III.................................................................16
Part IV.................................................................31
Part V.................................................................38
Works Cited............................................................47
Part I: In which Christine’s family, fortitude, and eventual misfortunes are

“Human superiority or inferiority is not determined by sexual difference but by the degree to which one has perfected one’s nature and morals,” says Reason in Part I Chapter 9 of Christine de Pizan’s *The Book of the City of Ladies.* Christine made this comment, which sounds contemporary in context if not in language, in the year 1405 — nearly four centuries before Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication on the Rights of Woman* ushered in the first-wave feminist movement, and four and one-half centuries before Charles Fourier coined the term “feminism.”

Christine’s writings range from lyrical poetry to a defense of feminine virtue to a biography of the king, and while she was widely read in her own time (long enough for King Henry VII of England to request a translation and printing of her book *The Feats of Arms and of Chivalry* by William Caxton in 1489), subsequent generations ignored her writings, until second-wave feminists began searching for historical feminists. Why her writings fell out of favor is easy, though discouraging, to

---

3 Charity Cannon Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* (New York: Persea, 1984), 216. William Caxton was the first English printer, active in the late fifteenth century. He is famous for his printing of Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* and Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur.*
comprehend; how she began her career as an author, in an age when most women were illiterate, is extraordinary.

Before one can comprehend Christine and her life, one must first understand from where she came. Her father, Tommaso di Benvenuto da Pizzano, was born and raised in Bologna, and when he was of age he went to university there to earn his doctoral degree in medicine. In 1357, Tommaso moved to Venice after serving his obligatory years as lecturer at the University of Bologna at the urging of his friend Tommaso Mondino da Forli. In Venice, he studied the Black Death, which was virulent in the period just before his arrival. It was also in Venice where he married his friend Modino’s daughter and, in 1364, where Christine was born.

Although the Black Death had swept through the city in the late 1340s, taking along with it half of the population, by the time Christine was born, Venice was beginning to thrive again. The city was blossoming into an important commercial port. As the city began to focus more on trade and moneymaking, Tommaso began to long to go home to his university city, so he moved back to Bologna where he felt more at home in his studies.

Once he was back in Bologna, the French king Charles V extended an offer to Tommaso to practice astrology as an advisor

---

4 Ibid., 18.
in his court in Paris.\(^5\) Tommaso’s degree in medicine required proficiency in astrology, since in medieval times it was believed the heavens played a direct part, not in only an individual’s overall demeanor, but his wellness throughout each astrological season. Christine later wrote that it was her father’s reputation as an eminent scholar which attracted Charles V to Tommaso, but Willard explains that it was most likely the prestige of the University of Bologna which attracted the king and prompted him to offer an invitation to an astrologer who had studied there.\(^6\) Likewise, the University of Paris interested Tommaso, who decided to go to the French court for several years – just long enough to take in the court culture and all there was to learn.\(^7\) In the Parisian court he became known as Thomas de Pizan, and after three years there Thomas decided to move his family to join him in France permanently.\(^8\)

Along with a yearly stipend, Thomas received estates in the Forest of Fountainbleau neighboring one of the king’s favorite

---

\(^5\) For more on Charles V and his court, see below p 12.
\(^7\) Ibid. Tommaso was also invited to the Hungarian court by Louis I, but Paris’s university was more attractive in his eyes.
\(^8\) Ibid. Willard notes that the Gallicization of Tommaso’s name to “Thomas de Pizan” may have been the cause of confusion for later historians who changed the name to “Pisan” and claimed that Christine and her family were from Pisa.
residencies, the Château de Beauté, and near his residence of St.-Paul. Willard explains,

Christine thus grew up in favored circumstances living... in one of the rambling buildings which made up the king’s favorite residence.... To [one of his residencies] he eventually added others, connecting them by series of galleries and passages. The whole was soon surrounded by gardens and orchards, and there was even a zoo.  

While Christine and her family were not part of the French nobility, but only wealthy middle-class Italians, she certainly reaped the benefits of growing up in the court of a king. She mentions the excitement of growing up in the court of Charles V in her biography of the king, stating in detail what she remembers of the daily activities of the royal family as well as the intriguing and exotic diplomats who frequented the court.  

Christine explains in The Book of the City of Ladies that, as she grew, she was taught by her father against her mother’s wishes. Christine’s mother was more conservative and wished Christine would perform feminine tasks such as spinning. It is uncertain as to how Thomas came about this liberal notion; it was not common for fathers to educate their daughters in the middle of the fourteenth century. Christine’s father obviously taught her not only to read in the vernacular but how to write.

---

9 Ibid., 23.
10 Ibid., 23.
11 Ibid., 25.
12 Ibid., 33.
as well. While it is hard to determine why, it is clear Thomas taught Christine more than other women of her status would have learned. It appears he believed a young girl could be educated and be no worse for it.

When looking at the education of women in the medieval period, it is necessary to compare Christine’s education to that of noblewomen of the period. Although she was not of a noble background, she did live in the court of a king and did come from a university educated family. Even in the Middle Ages, the lawmaking men of the Church agreed that women should be educated just enough to read religious literature, which taught them to be modest and pious. This meant women learned to read in their vernacular tongue. It was believed only those women in the absolute highest strata of society—queens, princesses, and noblewomen—should be taught to write, in case it became necessary for them to manage the manor in their husbands’ absence. Generally, it was not considered necessary to teach women to write. Also, it was never expected that medieval women would learn languages other than their native tongues. Once

---

14 It can be assumed that Christine’s maternal grandfather, Tommaso Mondino da Forlì did not feel the same way, since Christine’s mother was not educated, nor did she wish for her daughter to learn from Thomas.
16 Ibid., 155.
17 Most scholars agree that it can be assumed Thomas never taught Christine Latin, and that she never learned the language on her own, for all of her
Christine began her career as a writer, she often noted that women possessed as much of a desire to learn and were just as capable of learning as men. She did not think women should replace men in the legislative roles of society, but she opined that women were capable of learning the skills for these roles if only they were taught.\(^\text{18}\)

Still, there were gaps in Christine’s education. She wrote of gratitude to her father for teaching her, yet she took special pains to note that she was self-taught. For example, the opening line of *The Book of the City of Ladies* reads, “One day, I was sitting in my study surrounded by many books of different kinds, for it has long been my habit to engage in the pursuit of knowledge.... [I decided], for once, I would put aside these difficult texts and find instead something amusing.”\(^\text{19}\) Therefore, it can be assumed that Christine’s father taught her to read and write, but that most of what she read she pursued on her own.

---

\(^{18}\) Shahar, 155.

\(^{19}\) Christine de Pizan, 5.
Her lessons were completed when she was very young. By age fifteen Christine was considered a woman, and she was married. The marriage was arranged, as most were in the fourteenth century, but from her writings, it seems as though she grew to love her husband very much. His name was Etienne de Castel. He was ten years her senior, and he worked as a notary. In 1380, the same year as the couple’s marriage, he was appointed as a royal secretary, which meant he was in a position very close to the king, writing out official letters and acting as representative on diplomatic missions. Not much is known about Etienne beyond what Christine herself writes, and she writes only of his kindliness. It is believed that he was the son of King Charles V’s armorer and emboiderer, who shared the same name. Therefore, while Christine mentions, “he was more notable for his character and intelligence than for his worldly goods” he was from a family who lived in the court of the king. Shulamith Shahar describes Christine’s relationship with Etienne using Christine’s own writings:

In one passage [Christine] depicts [her husband’s] gentleness on their wedding night, when she was only 15 years old and he a young man of 24. He did not approach her on that night, and apparently wanted to allow her time to become accustomed to his presence. Only on the following day did he kiss her lingeringly

---

21 Willard, Life and Works, 35.
22 Ibid., 34.
and promise her that God created him only to be good to her.23

The two had three children together: a daughter Marie, a son Jean, and another son whom Christine does not mention by name, but who died in childhood. They were married for a decade before Etienne died of an unnamed epidemic he caught in Beauvais while on a diplomatic mission for the king. Christine’s grief was compounded by her father’s death only two years prior. Christine’s brothers, Paolo and Aghinolfo, went back to Bologna after their father’s death to settle affairs and claim inheritances there. They never returned to France, and there is no evidence that they ever helped her with her emotional and financial troubles following the death of her husband.24 At the age of twenty-five, Christine was now responsible for her three children, her widowed mother, and a niece.

Christine did not receive much support from medieval society either. By the end of the fourteenth century, widows were no longer under the care and protection of the Church, but were left in the hands of individual secular states.25 Although the laws protecting and restricting the rights of widows varied from nation to nation, usually a widow of Christine’s socioeconomic status could legally inherit her husband’s monies and lands. Due to specifics of individual cases, and often

23 Shahar, 73.
24 Willard, Life and Works, 39
25 Shahar, 93.
corruption in the court systems, this was not always the case for women who tried to claim these inheritance rights. In cases such as Christine’s, it was tough for women to sue for their husband’s wealth.26

In her Book of the Body Politic Christine wrote about her experience with the courts – of the clerks in the financial bureaucracy who seemed intentionally to delay her requests and who treated her rudely, and of the gossip which resulted from her appealing to influential men of the court to help her.27 She also wrote an appeal to monarchs in this text, asking them to take pity on and to care for widows, orphans, and unwedded women.28 In her Book of the Three Virtues she warns widows of the dangers in lawsuits; she advises women to avoid them at all costs unless they have unlimited resources to pursue them to completion. It took fourteen years to resolve Christine’s case, eventually costing more than she wound up inheriting.

Christine’s circumstances were desperate and she needed a way to make a living to support her dependants. First, she sold an estate back in Italy which she managed to inherit from her

26 Ibid., 98.
father’s death.\textsuperscript{29} This helped immediately, but that money would not last very long with her everyday expenses and growing legal debt. It is not ever revealed in Christine’s writing why she did not marry again. It may have been that she loved her husband so much, she did not want to marry again. Or maybe her experience trying to claim her rightful inheritance was so bad she did not want to risk going through the process again in the event a second husband died, too. Whatever the reason, Christine never remarried, which meant she needed to find a source of income of her own.

\textsuperscript{29} Willard, \textit{Life and Works}, 40.
Part II: She begins writing in the *trobairitz* tradition in the court of a uniquely cultured monarchy.

Christine, like many women of her time, did not have any career experience; it simply was not necessary before her husband’s death. However, unlike some less fortunate women, Christine did have certain skills she could employ, and she did. Charity Cannon Willard suggests evidence that Christine worked as a copyist between her husband’s death and the time she began writing for profit.\(^{30}\) Willard uses early manuscripts of her works, which have been identified as Christine’s own hand, compared with the handwriting on other contemporary documents as a key indicator that she was acting as an amanuensis before becoming an author.\(^{31}\) The fact that Christine had connections to professional notaries and copyists through her husband, as well as with Giles Malet, the librarian of the royal library in the Louvre through her father, also helps prove that she may have requested copy work for wages.\(^{32}\)

While she was copying, Christine also wrote poetry. She explains that poetry acted as a consolation to her during the grieving process. It gave her a place not only to release her sadness and frustration, but to distract her when she wanted to forget her responsibilities. Some of her early poems are about her grief at the loss of her good fortune, but many are light-
hearted lyrical pieces which recount happier days under the reign of Charles V.\textsuperscript{33}

The court of King Charles V was known for its intellectual atmosphere. Even before his accession to the throne, Charles commissioned medieval philosopher Nicole Oresme to translate the works of Aristotle into French.\textsuperscript{34} His library in the Louvre was constantly expanding with commissioned and collected texts. One of the areas which most interested him was astrology, hence why Thomas de Pizan was called to the French court.\textsuperscript{35} Willard speculates that Charles’s fascination with astrology stemmed from his fragile health and trauma from his father’s capture at Poitiers during the Hundred Years’ War.\textsuperscript{36} She suggests that he was looking to the stars for the answers to his misfortunes and for the fate of France. Regardless of the reason, he was very much interested in astrology, as well as other sciences, philosophy, and politics.

\textsuperscript{33} Willard, Life and Works, 42. Around the same year as Christine’s father’s and husband’s deaths, King Charles V died, leaving Charles VI the throne. While Charles V was a capable and much admired monarch, Charles VI was prone to bouts of madness, and his court became less intellectually stimulating and more decadent. Willard explains some of the reign of Charles VI and his hedonist queen, Isabeau of Bavaria, in chapter two of her biography of Christine.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 21.

\textsuperscript{35} Charles V seems to have had no problem with the conflicting views of the scholars he patronized. It is most probable that he wanted to cultivate as many views as possible on various subjects. Nicole Oresme, who translated Aristotle’s Ethics, Politics, and On the Heavens for the king, was a staunch opponent of astrology, yet Thomas de Pizan became the king’s court astrologer. Stefan Kirschner, “Nicole Oresme,” in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Fall 2013, edited by Edward N. Zalta.

\textsuperscript{36} Willard, Life and Works, 22.
In addition to his interest in intellectual pursuits, Charles V had a large collection of relics housed in Ste.-Chapelle, first brought to France by Louis IX, which he proudly showed off to dignitaries who visited his court. As well, he commissioned many original works in areas as diverse as literature, architecture, statuary, and jewels. Charles V’s brothers, Louis I, Duke of Anjou, Jean, Duke of Berry, and Phillip II, Duke of Burgundy, as well as his daughter-in-law, Isabeau of Bavaria all followed his example and became great patrons of the arts.

Though Charles V was more enthusiastic in his scholarly pursuits than previous French kings, there had been a long standing tradition of French monarchs acting as patrons to the arts, especially poetry, since the time of Eleanor of Aquitaine. The troubadour tradition in the south of France and the subsequent trouvères tradition in the north of France reached its height in the twelfth century, but continued to linger in France for centuries. It revolved around the writing of lyric poetry dealing with romantic longing. It did not always recount tales of what is commonly called “courtly love,” but could include love lyrics written about the lower classes and about

---

37 Ibid., 26.
38 Ibid., 27. Most notable was the Duke of Berry. He was called Jean le Magnifique because he patronized so many works of art and literature.
“true love” in marriage, too, though this was less common.\textsuperscript{39} There was also a tradition of female troubadours, or trobairitz. The names of at least twenty of these trobairitz are known today, and there were undoubtedly countless, unnamed amateur trobairitz, as there were countless amateur troubadours whose names have not survived.\textsuperscript{40}

The troubadour and trobairitz tradition of the French monarchy was revived under Queen Isabeau, who especially enjoyed poems which sang of courtly romance.\textsuperscript{41} In 1392, a definitive treatise on the writing of poetry titled The Art of Versifying and of Composing Songs, Ballades, Virelays, and Rondeaux was published, and it seems Christine took the format of her earliest poems directly from these “rules.”\textsuperscript{42} She did not truly seem to take seriously what she wrote, for she would later say that she was writing happy lyrics with a sad heart. Nevertheless, her poems became increasingly popular at court. She began to write on themes such as mythology, events at the court, courtly love, and beautifully unique to her, the sorrows of widowhood.\textsuperscript{43} She also began experimenting with different styles of writing, including the “ballade rétrograde” which is a

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid. Some of the trobairitz whose names we still have are Castelloza, Bietris de Roman, and Lombarda.
\textsuperscript{41} Willard, Life and Works, 42.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 44.
\textsuperscript{43} Willard, “Franco-Italian Professional Writer,” 336.
composition that is comprehensible whether it is read backward or forward, and with “ballades à réponses” in which the verses are actually a dialogue.\textsuperscript{44} By 1402, she had written enough poems to publish a collection titled \textit{One Hundred Ballades}.\textsuperscript{45}

But during this time, Christine was reading works more serious than those she was writing – ancient historical texts, Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses}, and Boethius’s \textit{Consolation of Philosophy} – and she was about to begin writing serious pieces of her own.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{44} Willard, \textit{Life and Works}, 56.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
Part III. In which Christine’s poetry turns to prose and she responds to the misogyny of her time

Christine continued to write poetry as the fourteenth century came to a close. However, her subject matter began to evolve. She no longer wrote about typical “courtly love” nor did she continue to play “poetic games.”\(^47\) Her later ballades showed that she believed the model of true love was that within marriage and not that which was found through extramarital affairs. As she continued to write, Christine found it easier to disclose her true moral feelings, rather than adhering to literary tradition.\(^48\)

In her first long poem, *Cupid’s Letter*, completed in 1399, Christine reveals her feelings on true love. The poem was successful at the time of its publication, as shown by its almost immediate translation into English by Thomas Hoccleve, a follower of Geoffrey Chaucer.\(^49\) Since the printing press had not yet been invented and it took great effort for manuscripts to be copied, only the most popular and/or influential works were ever translated into other languages or reproduced in multiple editions.

In the text of the poem, Christine fashions herself as the royal secretary to the god Cupid’s court. She is called upon to read a letter from her sovereign which banishes all discourteous

---

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 59.
\(^{49}\) Ibid., 64.
lovers from his court. The letter is Cupid’s response to a series of complaints made by women who say men are unfaithful.\textsuperscript{50} Christine used her poem as a method to chastise the courtiers around her whom she saw as disloyal to women. By disloyal, she did not necessarily mean that they were carrying on multiple affairs. She was upset because they vulgarly joked of their liaisons with women. Gottlieb explains Christine’s disapproval of her contemporaries:

\begin{quote}
Men wanted only to trick women into sleeping with them. They lied to these women, and if they were unsuccessful they told lies about them. Men were promiscuous as a matter of course and falsely accused women of being the same. They boasted of their conquests after having promised to guard their mistresses’ honor.\textsuperscript{51}
\end{quote}

Christine also used the poem to publically denounce The Romance of the Rose. Written in the thirteenth century, The Romance of the Rose is broken into two parts. The first part of the poem, written by Guillaume de Lorris, tells the story of the poet’s attempt to court a lady.\textsuperscript{52} The poet falls asleep on a warm morning in May and dreams of discovering a beautiful garden, in which he finds the most perfect rose. He longs to pluck the rose, but it is surrounded by thorns. The action of the poem revolves around his attempts to obtain the rose as he is helped by allegorical characters including Fair Welcome, Hope, and

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 62.
\textsuperscript{51} Gottlieb, 280-281.
\textsuperscript{52} Willard, Life and Works, 74.
Friend, and he is turned away by Danger, Slander, Shame, and Fear. The goddess Venus intervenes to allow him a kiss, but then Jealousy builds a tower around the rose. This is where the first part ends unfinished.53

Christine’s real issue stems from the much longer second part of the poem, added several decades later by Jean de Meun. This latter half no longer tells the story of courtly wooing, but uses the allegory of the imprisoned rose as a means to write a satirical social commentary about the “true” nature of women. The lover of Jean de Meun’s verses is harangued by Reason, who claims he should not want to pluck the rose, for friendship is more important than love. To make this point, Reason elaborates with crude sexual terminology, which even the lover deems offensive for polite conversation. Friend appears in the text again, this time advising the lover to play on women’s natural opportunism, claiming women are truly debauched creatures looking only for riches in a man. The lover then calls on Deceit to help him invade the castle. In the attack, Venus appears again, this time with Nature, and they inform the lover – and the audience – of the importance of the propagation of the human species. They help the lover pluck the rose by burning down the tower walls.54

53 Ibid., 75.
54 Ibid., 75-76.
In 1402, Christine made public an ongoing argument which took place between her and Jean de Montreuil - a royal secretary, early French humanist, and infamous misogynist. Willard argues that with this act, Christine “instigated... all subsequent movements in behalf of women’s rights.”\(^5^5\) Along with publicizing her correspondence, she wrote an open letter to Queen Isabeau and to Guillaume de Tignonville, a scholar from the University of Paris, asking for their help defending the female sex from the “learned” men who were maligning them.\(^5^6\)

For her part in the argument, Christine conceded to Jean de Montreuil that Jean de Meun’s writing was very good. She found no fault in the poet’s style; however, she found that the context debased her entire sex. She condemned the poet’s assertion that women are unvirtuous, and claimed it as the reason contemporary men were so rude toward women. Most importantly though, she resented that he chose to put such vulgar language and suppositions in the mouth of Reason, who she believed would know better than to perpetuate lies about women.\(^5^7\) Jean de Montreuil responded by saying Christine was wrong to detract from the great literary accomplishment of an important French scholar because of her petty belief that he misrepresents women. His friend and ally in the argument, Gontier Col, wrote

\(^{5^5}\) Ibid., 73.  
\(^{5^6}\) Ibid.  
\(^{5^7}\) Ibid., 79.
to Christine implying she could not understand the important social commentary the text made nor its complex allegories because she was a simple woman.\textsuperscript{58} To this response she wrote that she could not understand why the men were becoming so defensive, “for it is but a small matter for her to object to what a single man says, when he has felt free to blame, without exception, an entire sex.”\textsuperscript{59}

But for Christine, the problem was much deeper than the literary merit of Jean de Meun’s work. She even allowed for her aggressors to say she was prudish for disapproving of the coarse language used throughout the poem because she maintained this language was only a method of debasing women and their sexuality. She continued to emphasize the unwarranted defamation of the female sex. Throughout the course of the responses, Christine maintained “her position had nothing to do with her female nature,” but clearly it has much to with her being female.\textsuperscript{60} Until Christine, a female, pointed out the inherent misogyny within the text, no other critic spoke about it. Even after she brought up the topic of women’s virtue, critics who allied themselves with her continued to speak only of the general immorality of the poem, and not its distinctive misogyny. When she did gain support from contemporary scholar

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 82.  
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 81.  
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
Jean Gerson, he wrote more about the overall immorality of Jean de Meun’s verses than on the question of how women were represented.\textsuperscript{61} Only a female could see how misogynistic society was.

Medieval society was misogynistic. Shahar explains that medieval literature “abounds in expressions of hatred for women.”\textsuperscript{62} This anti-feminism was based on Judeo-Christian religious tradition, as well as classical medical science. From the Book of Genesis, where it is Eve who commits the act of Original Sin, to the Letters of St. Paul, the Church maintained women were inherently prone to “vices such as disobedience, garrulity, treachery, and lasciviousness.”\textsuperscript{63} The works of Aristotle and Galen convinced medieval physicians that the female was simply a defective male.\textsuperscript{64} These beliefs were reflected in the literature of the time. Beatrice Gottlieb sums up the literary misogyny saying

\begin{quote}
In brief, misogynists called women lascivious, fickle and incompetent.... Women were depicted either as evil seductresses or as passive quarry for sexual predators, an inconsistency of outlook that Christine seems to have enjoyed pointing out. Inferior is hardly the right word: women were seen as utterly vicious and worthless, an afterthought in cosmogony and a mistake in biology.\textsuperscript{65}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{62} Shahar, 7.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Ibid., xx.
\item \textsuperscript{65} Gottlieb, 279.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
In the most common form of popular literature, fabliaux, or short, comic stories, social groups were often mocked for stereotypical traits (e.g. peasants were stupid or priests were lascivious). However, compared to caricatures which parodied a social caste, in fabliaux women were often considered representatives of their whole sex, and not just their socioeconomic group. In a story in which a peasant woman cuckolds her husband, the moral would be that all women are treacherous and lustful, not just peasant women.\textsuperscript{66} This can be seen in texts which retold these fabliaux, including Boccaccio’s \textit{Decameron} and Chaucer’s \textit{Canterbury Tales}. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the Church’s manuals for confessors included special sections “devoted to the characteristic sins to be expected in women.”\textsuperscript{67} For Christine, \textit{The Romance of the Rose} was only the worst of many texts which claimed women are sinful and debauched.

The “quarrel of the Rose” ended inconclusively, although it is often reported that Christine “had the worst of it.”\textsuperscript{68} The debate remained open though, and well into the sixteenth century the “querelle des femmes” was a popular literary subject. It appears as though Christine ended the public discussion before the New Year because it was having the opposite of her desired

\textsuperscript{66} Rosalind Brown-Grant, “Introduction,” xxi.
\textsuperscript{67} Shahar, 7.
\textsuperscript{68} Willard, \textit{Life and Works}, 88.
effect; instead of repelling people from the poem, she was only attracting more attention to it. 69 But she would have the last word.

Christine’s final exhibit in the quarrel came in the form of her Book of the City of Ladies, completed in 1405. Drawing on the work of Boccaccio in his Concerning Famous Women, as well as her own knowledge of translated classical texts and contemporary examples, Christine compiled a text in which all the virtuous women of history and their deeds are laid out. Christine defines her task in the beginning as “to rectify a tradition riddled with mistakes and slander.” 70

To set the scene, on the first page of the text, Christine is reading the Lamentations by Matheolus. Matheolus’s text catalogues and retells all of the popular stories about bad marriages and deceitful wives. Woven throughout these tales is Matheolus’s complaints about his own unfortunate union. Christine feigns shock when she opens the book and discovers its contents, for she was under the impression that Matheolus was going to recount wedded bliss. She says, “Although I had never read it, I knew that, unlike many other works, this one was said to be written in praise of women.”71 Instead she finds a book which “slanders” women again.

69 Ibid., 86.
70 Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 299.
71 Christine de Pizan, The Book of the City of Ladies, 5.
Discouraged, Christine puts the book aside and begins to ponder the fate of women’s character, for it is not just this one book which disgraces women, but “all manner of philosophers, poets and orators too numerous to mention, who all seem to speak with one voice and are unanimous in their view that female nature is wholly given up to vice.”\(^72\) It is just when she begins to agree that maybe God did make woman evil that she is visited by Ladies Reason, Rectitude, and Justice.\(^73\) Reason is the first to speak, and she is quick to assure Christine that God would not have created woman if He believed she was incapable of being virtuous because God does not create bad things.\(^74\) Moreover, she states, “Human superiority or inferiority is not determined by sexual difference but by the degree to which one has perfected one’s nature and morals.”\(^75\)

The ladies comfort Christine and explain it is up to her to build a city of ladies for all of the virtuous women to inhabit. Christine uses the metaphor of building a walled city to create a historical foundation of women who are virtuous, intelligent, and noble, and who counter all of the bad things the “learned men” say. Just as any dwelling needs a strong fortification to defend against attack, Christine is given the task of creating

\(^{72}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^{73}\) In the French language, Reason, Rectitude, and Justice are all feminine nouns. Christine takes advantage of this and calls attention to them as feminine virtues.

\(^{74}\) Ibid., 22.

\(^{75}\) Ibid., 23.
an arsenal filled with virtuous women to counter any negative generalizations about women. In the introduction to their women’s history textbook, Linder Kerber, Jane Sherron De Hart, and Cornelia Hughes Dayton describe this moment as essential to the future of women’s history:

Pizan described her contemporaries as “valiant women” who, denied a knowledge of their own history, had been “abandoned... exposed like a field without a surrounding hedge, without finding a champion to afford them an adequate defense.... Where is there a city so strong which could not be taken immediately if no resistance were forthcoming?” To provide women with their history was to build “a city wall, strongly constructed and well founded.”

This walled city (i.e. Christine’s chronicle of virtuous women and their deeds), would be women’s protection from future defamation. Lady Reason tells Christine that through scholarship her eyes will be opened to all of the virtuous women in history that the male writers and philosophers ignore. Christine knows women are not immoral as they are portrayed, but now she has to prove as much.

The Book of the City of Ladies is broken into three sections. The first section deals with women from history and mythology who were strong leaders, who completed noble deeds, or who founded or invented something. Included in this category are Minerva, who invented the art of arms making, and Ceres, who

---

developed agriculture. Even women who were traditionally considered wicked by men can sometimes be found within Christine’s catalogue. In part I, Reason tells Christine the story of France’s Queen Fredegund, widow of King Chilperic. Fredegund is often considered unnaturally cruel for a woman; she was the leader of armies and ruthless in battle. But Reason argues that she is virtuous: she was fiercely maternal in protecting her son, the young heir to the throne; in assuring her son, the rightful heir, took his place as the ruler, she was loyal to the monarchy of France and the divine right of kings; and she was strong enough to enforce this on the French barons. These women are among the strong women who form the foundation of the City of Ladies.

While giving the names of women who made contributions to academia in Section I, Christine takes a moment to support the concept of women’s education. Lady Reason tells Christine that there are so few women who have contributed to science, not because they are incapable, but because they are not encouraged in these pursuits. She assures Christine that were women given the opportunity to study science, it would be found that their mental capabilities are equal to that of men.

---

77 Christine de Pizan, 53.
78 Ibid., 31.
79 Ibid., 57.
The second section tells the stories of women who are morally virtuous. These stories cannot be misinterpreted by the men, and they are useful in contradicting typecasts put forward by medieval literary tradition. In this section, Christine shares tales of the wise prophetesses (although men say women cannot be wise), steadfast lovers (although men say marriage is a lamentable state and wives are untrue), responsible daughters, mothers, and sisters (although men say women are inconsistent), and the honest and generous contemporary ladies who fit these moral categories (although men claim women are only temptresses without any good qualities). She even includes Queen Isabeau as a virtuous lady, although that is arguable! The women from this second section are those who populate the city once the foundation and walls are built. They include the ten wise sibyls, Odysseus’s wife Penelope, Patient Griselda, and Queen Blanche, mother of St. Louis IX, who is loved more for her virtue than her beauty.

Christine reserves the last section for virgin martyrs and saints. These women are chosen to live in the turrets of the city, for their virtue is above all others. They do not only display grace and nobility to their neighbor, but humble themselves enough to die for their love of God. In the

---

80 Ibid., 195. For more on Queen Isabeau see chapter two of Willard’s Life and Works.
conclusion of the text, Justice crowns the Virgin Mary Queen of the City of Ladies. She is the perfect lady. Conceived without sin, she is the example of virtuousness which all people, women and men, should strive to achieve. Reason explains, “Happy is he who serves the Virgin Mary, for she is exalted even above the angels.”

Although Christine draws strongly from the work of Boccaccio to create her list of famous women, her text is very different from his. Boccaccio’s Concerning Famous Women is more generally a list of women mentioned throughout histories and mythologies. Christine uses these women’s stories to point out virtues and morals; citing them as proof that women are not monstrous sinners. Willard explains the difference in Christine’s writing: “She did not pursue her subject chronologically, and her purpose was clearly didactic, to illustration certain feminine traits to which she wanted to call her readers’ attention.” This is important because it is the first time a woman ever took up the pen specifically to defend her gender.

After completion of The Book of the City of Ladies, Christine wrote The Book of the Three Virtues which is a guidebook for ladies on how to behave to gain entrance to the

---

81 Ibid., 23.
82 Willard, Life and Works, 136.
City of Ladies. In it she gives practical advice to women: be sure not to turn a pilgrimage into a vacation; when caring for the estate while your husband is away, be sure to manage legal affairs before petty chores; if there is a siege while your husband is away, face the foe with courage and trust your men to defend; do not let jealousy or infatuation corrupt your marriage; and most importantly, be kind, loving, and generous.\textsuperscript{83}

Started during the summer of 1405, it is likely that Christine had the Dauphine Marguerite of Nevers in mind as she wrote, for the young girl was married that year and would need to learn quickly the ways of a virtuous woman.\textsuperscript{84} The Book of the Three Virtues is supposedly the key for all women to get into the City of Ladies; however, Christine devotes much of the text focusing on the role of noble and upper class women. This is because these women were her patronesses for whom she was writing. Christine focused her text so it would be utilized by these women and passed along within the court. Perhaps she believed that the virtuousness of the nobility would present itself as an example for the lower classes.

These two texts, The Book of the City of Ladies and The Book of the Three Virtues, became Christine de Pizan’s most famous works. Manuscripts of the former were produced well into

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 148-152.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 146. Marguerite of Nevers was 11 years-old when she married the heir to the French throne, Louis of Guyenne.
the sixteenth century, and the latter went through three more editions in the century and a quarter after it was written, proving it was well read by women for generations.\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 153.
Part IV. Christine’s other works and her interest in virtuous women until her death

Although The Book of the City of Ladies and The Book of the Three Virtues are Christine’s most popular texts, she did have success with her other writings. Before writing The Book of the City of Ladies, Christine used her writing as a cathartic exercise following the death of her husband, as well as a way to earn a living. By this nature, her earlier works were often reflections on her own life. One such text is The Mutation of Fortune, in which she describes the turn of events which required her “to ‘become a man’ and take on a man’s responsibilities in the world.”\(^{86}\)

The Mutation of Fortune (1403) is greatly influenced by Boethius’s Consolation of Philosophy. The Consolation was written in the early sixth century by Boethius, an advisor to Emperor Theodoric, in the period of his imprisonment before his execution. Alternating between verse and prose, Boethius constructs a dialogue between himself and Lady Philosophy on subjects such as good and evil and fate and free will, in an attempt to comfort him in his hour of greatest need.\(^{87}\)

Christine’s Mutation of Fortune, much like her later work The City of Ladies is written as an extended allegory. In this allegory, Christine imagines her life as a sailing ship; Fortune

\(^{86}\) Willard, Life and Works, 48.
provides her with either smooth sailing or stormy seas. The tale begins with her birth. She portrays her father Tommaso a “philosopher” and her mother “Dame Nature” (possibly alluding to her mother’s insistence that she perform only those tasks of a feminine nature). She humbly explains that because she was a girl she was not able to inherit her father’s knowledge and position as a philosopher, but she was able to learn from him and put those bits of learning to use.\textsuperscript{88}

When she is older, she is visited by Hymen, the god of marriage, and is bestowed the gift of a strong and faithful young man as her husband. Her husband takes the helm at this point, but as the title of the work suggests, Fortune turns. Christine tells of a tempest which throws her husband overboard, at which point she must transform into a man in order to fulfill her worldly responsibilities. After this metaphorical transformation, she is able to sail her ship into Fortune’s dwelling on her own.\textsuperscript{89} The six sections of The Mutation of Fortune which follow this allegorical autobiography, tell the story of the inhabitants of Fortune’s dwelling, including: the chivalrous, yet also avaricious nobility, the middle classes, who are often virtuous but prone to vicious habits, and the industrious, yet ignorant, common people. The last sections of

\textsuperscript{88} There is no English translation of The Mutation of Fortune in its entirety. For a summary of the text, see Willard, Life and Works, 108-113.

\textsuperscript{89} Willard, Life and Works, 108.
the text are dedicated to the murals painted on the walls of Fortune’s castle, which recount historical tales of both good and ill fortune, and the history of these scenes. She concludes by wishing good fortune on her own future as well as on the future of the Kingdom of France.\(^{90}\)

Although *The Mutation of Fortune* is unknown to most modern readers, at the time it was written it came to the attention of one very important person – the Duke of Burgundy. Impressed with Christine’s recounting of history, he commissioned her to write the only authorized biography of his brother, King Charles V.\(^{91}\) It is important to note this important patronage of Christine’s writing, not because her biography of the king was very authoritative, but because it is remarkable that a female poet would be called upon to write a biography of the king. It is the style in which Christine wrote contemporary history that attracted the Duke of Burgundy. She mostly recounted happy stories and praised her current rulers, comparing the princes of France to great leaders in history, and notably comparing Charles V to kings as great as Hector and Alexander.\(^{92}\) While the content of Christine’s biography of Charles V is not significant, the very fact of her writing it certainly is.

\(^{90}\) Ibid., 111-112.
\(^{91}\) Ibid., 113.
\(^{92}\) This comparison between Classical scenes and contemporary history would be major characteristic of humanist historians in the following century.
Christine continued to be a prolific writer in the decade after the publication of *The Book of the City of Ladies* and *The Book of the Three Virtues* as well. But as the fifteenth century rolled on and the political climate in France became more unstable, Christine’s writings became more serious and reflective of a growing melancholia. During the final phase of Hundred Years’ War which resurged during Christine’s lifetime, the House of Burgundy and the House of Orleans diverged and split France. Christine’s two biggest patrons were at war with one another, and her anxiety shows in her work. In *The Book of the Body Politic*, she tries to convince France to unify and work as a strong whole to defeat the common enemy – England.93

Between 1413 and 1418, there are no known writings from Christine. In her middle age, she picks up her pen to write the “Letter Concerning the Prison of Human Life” in 1418. The letter, written to Marie de Berry, Duchess of Bourbon, is a lamentation about the grief of French women who have lost their husbands and their country due to the horrors of war.94 Her writings continue in this pessimistic vein into the next decade. Her son, Jean de Castel, was a royal secretary to the Dauphin and followed him into exile in 1420. He died while in exile, prompting Christine to write the “Hours of Contemplation on Our

93 Ibid., 182.
94 Ibid., 197. Willard describes Marie de Bourbon as “smart and resourceful.” She ruled strongly in her husband’s absence during this period, and earned the position Christine gave her in the *City of Ladies*. 
Lord’s Passion” in 1425. The meditation on the death of Christ draws a stark and bleak parallel between Christine and the Virgin Mary with the loss of their sons.

Christine lived out her last years in the convent. Although she never took the veil herself, she stayed within the cloister walls where she was provided the time and solitude to write. It is not known precisely at which convent she stayed, but it is assumed it was the Abbey of Poissy. In 1392, only two years after her husband’s death, Christine sent her daughter to take religious vows at the Abbey of Poissy. Knowing she would never be able to provide a proper dowry for young Marie, she provided her with a safe alternative to marriage, where she could also be sure her daughter would receive an education. Several years later, Christine wrote a short poem about a visit to see her daughter in the convent, in which she seemed to find life there charming; perhaps that is why she chose to spend her later life there. She wrote only one line about her life in the convent: “I, Christine, who have wept for eleven years in a closed abbey, where I have lived ever since... the king’s son, fled... from Paris.”

---

95 Ibid., 203.
96 Ibid., 43. Marie de Castel’s religious dowry was provided by the royal household, for she entered the convent alongside several young noblewomen, all of whom accompanied King Charles VI’s daughter, Princess Marie to the Abbey of Poissy.
97 Christine de Pizan, “The Tale of Joan of Arc,” The Selected Writings of
This line is the opening of her poem about Joan of Arc, her last piece of writing, completed in 1429. The poem contains Christine’s excitement and praise of the young peasant girl, who was called upon by God to save their beloved France. Not only is Christine celebrating that her home is finally safe and that the king is rightfully in the position of power, but she is overjoyed with the fact that it was a woman who succeeded in doing this. She makes a point of saying, “Oh, what an honor to the female sex! That God loves [them] is clear... the realm elevated and restored by a woman – something a hundred thousand men could not have done!”

This is the happy note with which Christine de Pizan’s life came to a close. At the age of sixty-five, Christine completed her last poem, in which she encompasses the recurring themes of her life: tribulation, optimism, love of her country, and the defense of women. It is unknown precisely when Christine died. It was between 1429 and 1434, when a Burgundian courtier wrote of his excursion to Paris and mentions Christine in the past tense. Willard sounds hopeful when she suggests Christine died before the execution of Joan of Arc in the spring of 1430. One can only hope she was spared the pain of seeing her heroine, the most shining example of a virtuous lady, betrayed and killed.

98 Ibid., 257.
99 Willard, Life and Works, 207.
Regardless, it is certain that Christine and Joan of Arc both earned a place in the City of Ladies upon their deaths. Perhaps Christine’s residence in the City proudly distinguishes her as the Architect of the City of Ladies.
V. Christine de Pizan’s legacy in the Modern Era

Charity Cannon Willard makes it clear that Christine de Pizan was a popular writer in her lifetime. Her writings on the virtue of women sparked a debate known as the “querelle des femmes” that would continue until the seventeenth century. The Heptameron, a sixteenth century work by Marguerite de Navarre echoes many of the same arguments about women’s virtue and tales of virtuous women which are recounted in Christine’s work, and it may well be that Castiglione drew from Christine’s Book of the Three Virtues to create his guidebook The Book of the Courtier.100

[Christine’s] writings were far from unappreciated in her own lifetime and even during the century after her death. She was forgotten for a time because of the change in taste which threw nearly all medieval French literature into eclipse.101

Her legacy was only obscured during the Enlightenment period, when the medieval period was considered the Dark Ages and all writings from the period were cast in shadow (most especially those written by a female author.) Beatrice Gottlieb explains that by the time of the French Revolution, she was “virtually unknown.” It was only at the end of the eighteenth century that she was rediscovered by another French female writer and

---

100 Life and Works, 89.
translator named Louise de Keralio, “who between 1786 and 1789 issued a 14-volume edition of works by women.”

Once her works were rediscovered, though, it was not long before they again became widely read. In the Victorian period, although her works were not yet translated into English, early first-wave feminists were aware of Christine’s writings and her position on the question of women; “in 1886 [William Minto] a politically liberal literary critic in Great Britain called her a ‘woman’s rights person’ in an article entitled ‘A champion of her sex.’” Then, during the second-wave feminist movement, Christine’s works were translated into English, and scholars of women’s history began to argue whether or she could be considered an appropriate foremother of the feminist movement.

As previously mentioned, Willard determines that Christine’s questioning of the misogynistic tradition in the fifteenth century began a practice of women questioning society and their place within society which would develop into modern feminism. But there is a difference between saying Christine started a tradition which would develop into feminism as it is known today and labelling her as a feminist.

In “The Problem with Feminism in the Fifteenth Century,” originally published in the middle of the 1980s, Beatrice

---

102 Gottlieb, 274.
103 Ibid. 274-275.
104 See above, p 19.
Gottlieb seeks to put a cap on the contemporary argument over whether or not Christine can be considered a feminist. She cites Enid McLeod as saying in 1976, “That kind of feminism which claims that women are equal to men in every way was far from her. [Christine’s] ideas on the subject were much more reasonable.”\textsuperscript{105} In contrast, she cites a piece by Joan Kelly in 1982, in which she claims Christine as an “early feminist theorist” who opposed “the cultural and social colonization of women by men.”\textsuperscript{106} Gottlieb rejects both of these arguments about Christine’s feminism by stating the term as well as the concept “feminism” is anachronistic. She urges readers to understand what Christine says without projecting modern philosophies into it. “Utterances of the past should never be taken at face value,” she says, “because ‘face value’ more often than not means current value, the value derived from a [contemporary] context.”\textsuperscript{107} Therefore, she maintains Christine was not a feminist, although some of her philosophies overlap with contemporary feminist ideals.

Similarly, Rosalind Brown-Grant makes a valid point about accepting Christine’s words in context.

We need to pay Christine’s critique of misogyny the respect it deserves and to see it as a dialogue with the society and culture of the late Middle Ages, rather than judging it by the standards of the late

\textsuperscript{105} Quoted in Gottlieb, 275.
\textsuperscript{106} Quoted in Gottlieb, 275.
\textsuperscript{107} Gottlieb, 277.
twentieth century. Christine’s voice in [defense] of women is utterly different from our own, but it was in its time a dissenting voice and one which spoke out to its audience with as much urgency and [vigor] as that of any modern feminist.\textsuperscript{108}

In her “Christine de Pizan as a Defender of Women” Rosalind Brown-Grant claims that Christine was by no means radical in her defense of women if we go by twenty-first century standards. She did not move past asking for women to be considered morally and intellectually equal to men to demanding equality in all things. However, if we take Christine’s writings into context with the other writers of her time, she seems to have feminist leanings because other writers were not saying anything about the position of women.\textsuperscript{109}

In her “‘Mothers to Think Back Through’: Who Are They? The Ambiguous Example of Christine de Pizan,” Sheila Delany strongly attempts to discredit the idea of Christine as a feminist. She rejects previous writings on Christine, especially those who call her a feminist, a proto-feminist, or a “woman before her times,” by calling them hagiographical.\textsuperscript{110} Delany maintains that Christine should not be considered a feminist – not in terms of the twentieth-century or the fifteenth century. She calls Christine prudish, just as her attackers during the “quarrel of

\textsuperscript{108} Brown-Grant, “Introduction,” xxxv.
\textsuperscript{109} Brown-Grant, “Christine de Pizan as a Defender of Women,” 81.
\textsuperscript{110} Delany, 314.
the Rose” did. Delany implies that Christine was not remotely unique in anything that she said or did, not even for a woman in the Middle Ages.

While she appreciates that Christine was trying to confront misogynistic traditions, Delany does not see her as trying to create any kind of equality for women. She criticizes Christine’s comfortable position in the French court, while middle class women in cities were beginning to work out in the public sphere, taking part in the rising commercial economy. Moreover, she seems disappointed that Christine did not join in “republican” revolts which were occurring in the fifteenth century. She notes specifically the Cabochian revolution, which took place during Christine’s lifetime, the purpose of which was to remove nobility from positions as the French king’s advisors and replace them with the upper middle classes and university educated youths. She is disappointed that Christine did not support this revolution, but remained on the side of the king and supported the nobility as advisors once they came back into power.

111 Ibid., 316.
112 Ibid., 315.
113 Ibid., 320.
114 Delany uses the term “republican” to refer to the Cabochian revolt; however, the purpose of the movement was not to dispel the monarchy, but to replace the king’s advisors. Therefore, it is not correct to refer to this as a republican movement.
115 Ibid., 318-319.
Delany draws on the fact that Christine rejected any form of “republic” in favor of the hierarchy of the monarchy to say that she was not truly a feminist.\textsuperscript{116} Her definition of feminism necessitates Christine to believe in equality of all people. This point is ridiculous if one takes into consideration how few people were part of republican movements in the fifteenth century, especially in France, and how few of the republican revolutionaries believed in total equality for all people; but it is also ridiculous to think that Christine would join a force which opposes the king and bite the hand that fed her.

Delany goes too far in her attempts to disprove Christine’s connection to feminism. The principle of her argument, that Christine does not fit the modern ideal of a strong feminist, is completely misplaced. She commits the historical blasphemy – anachronism – which Gottlieb warns readers against. Her assertion that Christine was not a strong voice in support of women during her lifetime is simply wrong. Christine did write in defense of women, not just in The Book of the City of Ladies, but throughout the entirety of her literary career. Gottlieb says

\begin{quote}
For a woman to write for a wide audience (as audiences went) and to deal specifically with the subject of women was extremely rare in the fifteenth century. Christine de [Pizan] dealt with the subject many
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 321.
times.... There is no doubt that she gave the subject a lot of thought.\textsuperscript{117}

Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski’s argument in her essay “Christine de Pizan and the Misogynist Tradition” also contrasts what Delany says about Christine being a complete conformist with a tendency to be too conservative. Instead, she says Christine pleads a case for the “unnatural” woman in her City of Ladies. Christine tries to extend the categories of what is natural for a woman in the fifteenth century. Blumenfeld-Kosinski uses Christine’s retelling of the story of Queen Fredegund as an example of widened horizons.\textsuperscript{118}

Fredegund is... not “unnatural” but rather represents an expansion of the notion of the natural woman. Although Fredegund may represent an extreme, she also reenacts Christine’s own experience of overcoming female nature.... What warfare was for Fredegund, writing is for Christine.\textsuperscript{119}

She also points out that although Christine repeatedly states that humility, honesty, and honor are the three feminine virtues, she allows for women to be strong, intelligent, and even willful martyrs and still be considered just as virtuous. Therefore, she, too, seems to argue in favor of Christine’s feminism.

In summation, it would be wrong to consider Christine a feminist in modern terms; however, it seems as though some

\textsuperscript{117} Gottlieb, 278.
\textsuperscript{118} See above, p 26.
\textsuperscript{119} Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 310.
historians, notably Sheila Delany, can only consider Christine in this manner. This modern critique of Christine’s writings and philosophies is not the best way to study historical works. Beatrice Gottlieb concludes her argument thusly:

If feminism means thinking about women and feeling that they deserve better in the world, then Christine was a feminist... and I have no doubt that many mute women who sang the praises of women whose thoughts we will never know were feminists. So were the men who sang the praises of women in the querelle des femmes, if we are to judge from what they wrote. But if feminism means a belief in the equal capacities of men and women, if it means wanting sweeping changes, if it means demanding equal opportunities for women to be educated and trained for careers, if it means women organizing to get what they want, if it means having any kind of program — well, then feminism obviously did not come into existence until the nineteenth century.\(^\text{120}\)

While one cannot say Christine is a feminist without the looming argument of anachronism, one also cannot ignore her great importance when it comes to the history of women. She wrote in defense of women during a time when most people not only took misogyny for granted, but accepted and promoted it.

Perhaps the fact that her writings against the slander of women still resonate with readers says more about how women are treated today, than it does about Christine’s beliefs about gender in her time. Maybe it proves that society still has a great distance further before ridding itself of the residue of institutionalized misogyny. Willard says that Christine “retains

\(^{120}\) Gottlieb, 294.
a vitality which evokes sympathy" in her readers. It is this vitality which earned Christine her "place-setting in that powerful and controversial monument to 'sisterhood,'" Judy Chicago’s installation ‘The Dinner Party’" where one “criterion for inclusion... was the ability to be ‘a role model for the future.’”¹²¹ Christine certainly has been a role model for female writers since the fourteenth century.

Works Cited:


-----.


-----.


-----.


-----.


