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FEMININE DISCURSIVE AUTHORITY THROUGH  
SYMBOLISM, ALLEGORY AND EXEMPLUM:  
A STUDY OF CHRISTINE DE PIZAN, A RHETOR OF THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Kathleen F. Burk

May 2021

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2021

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EXEMPLUM:  
A STUDY OF CHRISTINE DE PIZAN AS A RHETOR OF THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

By

Kathleen F. Burk

Approved March 19, 2021

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Pat Arneson, Ph.D.  
Professor of Communication & Rhetorical  
Studies  
(Committee Chair)

---

Richard H. Thames, Ph.D.  
Professor of Communication & Rhetorical  
Studies  
(Committee Member)

---

Janie M Harden Fritz, Ph.D.  
Professor of Communication & Rhetorical  
Studies  
(Committee Member)

---

Kristine L. Blair, Ph.D.  
Dean, McAnulty College and Graduate  
School of Liberal Arts  
Professor of English

---

Ronald C. Arnett, Ph.D.  
Chair, Communication & Rhetorical  
Studies  
Professor of Communication & Rhetorical  
Studies

ABSTRACT

FEMININE DISCURSIVE AUTHORITY THROUGH SYMBOLISM,  
ALLEGORY AND EXEMPLUM:  
A STUDY OF CHRISTINE DE PIZAN AS A RHETOR OF THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

By

Kathleen F. Burk

May 2021

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Pat Arneson

Rhetorical studies are deeply concerned with the way that human beings use language and symbols to interact and persuade others to follow a particular point of view, or plan of action. In the male dominant culture of 15<sup>th</sup> century France, Christine de Pizan recognized the limitations of speaking as a woman in her own voice. Therefore, she directed her voice through a cadre of allegorical divine beings, most of whom were women. These allegorical mentors held the divine authority to profess the virtue of women, as Christine, the narrator, humbly listened. This was a time in history when few women were entitled to a voice in society, and female practitioners of rhetoric were not considered to be credible. Rhetoric was a field of endeavor that was strictly limited to men. This dissertation addresses the question: What are the implications of

Christine de Pizan's use of rhetoric to defend the honor of women, advocate for their right to knowledge, and to promote the betterment of her adopted country, France?

This dissertation explores the empowerment of women in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century through the rhetorical tropes of symbolism, allegory, and exemplum. For that reason, a close examination of the literary oeuvre of Christine de Pizan warrants a more prominent place in the conversation of medieval rhetoric. This is particularly true regarding Christine's ability to engage literary symbolism as a way of circumventing a power structure that denied women a voice in that society. Because rhetoric in the Middle Ages was limited almost exclusively to men, for their own self-interest, this project argues how Christine successfully circumvented the limitations of a male patriarchal society to engage in the practice of rhetoric, not by outwardly teaching her theories, rather by focusing upon the more subtle use of tropes to project her persuasive voice to the French aristocracy, and later to exert an influence upon western intellectualism.

This project gives due consideration to the power of symbolism, allegory and exemplum, and Christine's use of these tropes to influence the course of an historical narrative. This dissertation also addresses the question of how a secular woman writer in, by today's standards, a misogynistic era succeeded in gaining cultural authority, and it deems relevant the influence of Christine de Pizan upon the late medieval conversation as it transitioned into the humanism of the Renaissance phase of early modernity.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mom, Connie.  
I truly believe she would have loved Christine de Pizan.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### The Political and Intellectual Context of the Historical Moment

The notion of rhetoric as a powerful force that can change the course of history has been around since the devil persuaded Eve, who in turn lured Adam into partaking of the forbidden fruit. In its many forms, rhetoric has been studied throughout the ages, often focusing upon the dialectic components of rational discourse, as well as the emotion laden symbolism that moves human beings to act in certain ways, or to accept a particular set of beliefs or viewpoints. Hans Georg Gadamer gave credence to the notion that a “hermeneutic engine of understanding can only be created through intersubjective dialogue” (276). Gadamer did not accept the idea that correctly interpreting a text is to recover the original intentions of the author and argued that human beings have an historically affected consciousness. That is to say that every individual has a particular narrative that shapes his or her own character and lives within a culture that influences his or her view of the world. One cannot entirely understand the viewpoint of another person unless one’s experiences and cultural influences precisely mimic the worldview of the other. Having the value of hindsight can be advantageous in terms of understanding consequences, outcomes, and the evolution of attitudes. If the past is viewed through the monocle of contemporary norms and experiences, those reading in the present day would not have context of all that converged to produce the textual meaning. Viewing the past from a present-day perspective runs a great risk of erroneous assumptions. (Miley and Read). What the reader can do is to attempt to understand the other persons by meeting them half-way, by taking into consideration the larger context of all, including the historical moment, the cultural narrative, and the belief systems of that moment in history.

Throughout most of the Middle Ages, rhetoric was a field of endeavor that was generally not open to women, simply because women were without the cultural authority to speak with any degree of validity. Because of distance between cities, plagues and epidemics, and the need to keep an accurate record, most of rhetoric was in written form, by letters, allegories, and poetics. Female writers were rare because the craft was limited almost exclusively to men, except for those women who had joined convents or chose to engage in the solitary life of an anchoress.<sup>1</sup> Less commonly, women were granted the authority to speak or write if they were able to convincingly relate that they had received sacred visions from higher beings of the spiritual world. Even rarer were secular female writers, such as Christine, who wrote to defend womankind, purvey history, and offer counsel to royalty.

With the presupposition that people are greatly influenced by their time and circumstances, this chapter aims to focus upon the question: how would Christine de Pizan's experiences as a widowed, western European woman, living in the late Middle Ages influence her rhetorical methodology? This chapter addresses Christine's place in time and her literary contributions as if she were transcending the six centuries that lie between when they were written, and when they are presently read. Every point of view is guided by a larger context that directs the relevance of the historical moment. As the reader engages the 15th century oeuvre of Christine, he or she would be best served to consider it from a 15th century European frame of reference. A hermeneutic approach is imperative to gain a contextual understanding of Christine's writing.

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<sup>1</sup> Anchoresses were women who retreated from the world, often sealed into an anteroom of a church, to spend their life in solitude, devoting their lives to prayer, scriptures, and writing. This was common during times of pandemic to protect young girls from the forces of contagion.

By examining the life of Christine de Pizan as an aristocratic Parisian French woman within the historical moment of the late Middle Ages, this dissertation offers evidence as to how Christine de Pizan was a major contributor to the cultural narrative as it shifted its path away from the dogmatism of the previous century, toward a more humanist approach to rhetoric. This dissertation demonstrates that Christine de Pizan was a major contributor to that change in narrative through her rhetorical contributions. Exploring the events of her life will reveal that which most influenced the formation of her viewpoint. Assessing the historical moment of her life will establish the context of Christine de Pizan's ideas, not only through her own experiences, but also through the turbulent political, theological, and philosophical events of her day. From this point forward, the subject of this project will be referred to as Christine.<sup>2</sup>

To gain perspective on the foundation of Christine's writings, one must first examine the time and place in history in which she spent her lifetime. Born in 1364 in the Republic of Venice, Christine was a product of the late Middle Ages, a time of cultural change in almost every regard, including political and philosophical ideals. Understanding the sphere of influence, as well as the social and cultural environment of the time, gives better insight into how Christine's writings were sparked within her own narrative and how they became accepted by members of the upper echelons of French society. Her rhetorical influence was evident in the fact that her ideas were well received, even though they often carried messages that ran counter to the narrative of the prevailing power structures, belief systems, and cultural viewpoints.

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<sup>2</sup> Pizan, sometimes spelled Pisan, was not her surname, but rather an identifier in relation to the location of her birth, the Italian town of Pizano.

## The Tumultuous Times

The Hundred Years War was raging between the House of Plantagenet in England and France's House of Valois over the legitimate right to rule over the kingdom of France. Ongoing from 1337 until 1453, this war was a series of wars lasting more than a century. Death on the battlefield was only part of the devastation. France was left in a state of economic upheaval, which culminated in an even greater loss of human life through starvation and social unrest. Consequences of this war included wide scale confiscation of crops and livestock, by both the invaders and the aristocracy, and the destruction of property by assailing forces (Forhan). This was a time of political uncertainty as the sovereign kingdom of France had become increasingly destabilized, reflecting devastating social and economic conditions.

The late Middle Ages was a turbulent time of both internal and international strife for the French (Bell). This was also a period of recovery from the devastation that was caused by the black plague,<sup>3</sup> which had wiped out a large portion of the population of Europe. Between 1347 and 1350 nearly thirty percent of the European people had perished (Forhan). This population decline resulted in a monumental labor shortage, leaving scant able bodies to work in the fields, and a limited number of artisans to turn grain into bread or to produce other necessary goods and services. This, in turn, caused drastic food shortages resulting in a doubling of the cost of food, leaving many Europeans devastated and on the brink of starvation. All the while, flooding and other calamities left the people of France vulnerable to disease and plundering (Forhan). Workers who managed to survive the black plague demanded high wages for their services. Mob anger and scapegoating were commonplace. This scapegoating was particularly severe toward the Jewish population who made up a high proportion of the moneylenders. They were often accused

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<sup>3</sup> The Black Plague, also known as the Great Bubonic plague, was believed to have been carried aboard seafaring vessels.

of unscrupulous lending practices and either imprisoned or burned and dismembered for their 'crimes.' While at the same time, desperate marauders plundered the countryside, stealing whatever was deemed valuable or edible (Forhan). The absence of law and order resulted in utter chaos.

Norman Cantor postulated, "Although there was a definite departure from the institutional and emotional aspects of late medieval Christianity, one can only speculate as to whether this was an effect of the isolation and despair that was brought about by the plague" (Cantor, *In the Wake* 205). The black plague may not have created the "privatization of late medieval religion, but it may have contributed to the psychological context that served as a pretext to the movement away from the hegemony of the church" (Cantor, *In the Wake* 206). Added to the religious turmoil, a severe fluctuation in population levels caused even greater upheaval. The black plague had affected most of the European cities, resulting in a shortage of manpower to produce the goods necessary to sustain the population. People competed for limited resources, often resulting in criminal and antisocial behavior (Cantor, *The Meaning*). The population upswing of the 15th century brought great optimism toward what could be accomplished as the workforce became more robust. A prodigious surge in literary culture and a rise in the arts and sciences became the defining characteristics of the late Middle Ages. Intellectual activity was in abundance and talent needed to be exceptional to be recognized as such (Cantor, *The Meaning*). On the counter side of the new intellectualism was the turmoil within both the monarchy and the church that created high levels of crises. These were crises that rattled the citizenry into seeking answers regarding their relationship with God and the nature of human knowledge, leaving them open to new ideas about life in the earthly realm. Moving away from that stronghold was likely to have created the cultural environment that welcomed a

philosophy that placed greater value on life being lived in the earthly realm, the very foundation of humanism, integral to the writings of Christine de Pizan.

### The French Monarchy in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century

Christine emphasized that a downward turning point in the downfall of France was the Hundred Years War, during which was the death of Charles V (1364-1380) (*L'Avision*). Charles' sixteen-year reign, although not completely free of unrest, was a reprieve from the tumultuous reign of the previous king, Jean II. Charles V brought a period of calm intellectualism to the kingdom, favoring a humanist philosophy on life. Unfortunately, the king died in 1380 at the age of 42, leaving behind a kingdom that was vulnerable to a multitude of upheavals (Kelly).

As required by law, the king's eldest surviving son, Charles VI, also revered as *Charles the Beloved*, inherited the throne. This was a defining moment after years of intellectualism within the monarchy, for things began to rapidly deteriorate after the coronation of Charles VI (sadly, also often referred to privately as *Charles the Mad*). The younger King Charles was said to have suffered from a "feeble memory and was not able to function because of his madness" (Hedeman 169). The fact that the heir was a mere child of eleven with a mental disability was not a dissuasive factor in the inheritance of the throne. Young Charles VI had been assigned regents to oversee his reign until he reached the age of majority, which, according to Canon law was fourteen, However, young Charles did not dismiss his regency until he had reached the age of twenty-one (Hedeman). Serving as his overseers were various family member who immediately became competitive, each of them vying for power over the kingdom of France. The young king's episodic incapacity was so pronounced that it fueled the chaotic political climate of the 1390s. Carefully tended to by his uncles, along with his wife, Queen Isabeau of Bavaria, Charles VI's mental health issues were addressed. These same family members also



served as regents when he was not fully capable of a competent reign. His illness was observed and accepted by many, with historical royal documents officially noting his episodes of madness as “the king’s absence” (Hedeman 169). The uncles began to compete for power, resulting in discord amongst the family members who served as regents to the king and other rivals for the throne as well (Forhan). The king’s four paternal uncles, Louis of Anjou, Philippe of Burgundy, Louis of Bourbon, and Jean of Berry took full advantage of the young king’s vulnerability, sweeping the kingdom with chaotic disarray because of their high-powered ambition. Louis of Anjou had been assigned to serve as regent for state matters, while the Dukes of Burgundy and Bourbon were assigned guardianship of the young royal himself (Forhan).

Upon the coronation of the new king, the four ambitious uncles promptly divided the kingdom of France so that each of them generously profited. Havoc ensued when Louis of Bourbon took control of the treasury before stealing more than eighty manuscripts from the king’s royal library (Forhan). The Duke of Berry increased taxes all over the territories that he claimed, which allowed him to experience an ultra-opulent lifestyle. In addition to his own duchy, the Duke of Burgundy took over Flanders, giving him control of the cloth trade with England. Louis of Orleans also raised taxes in his territories to an oppressive level, leaving many commoners in dire financial straits. Even going as far as to restore the taxes that his departed brother, Charles V had eliminated, Louis led many of his subjects into a state of ruin while creating disdain for the ruling class (Forhan). This chaotic leadership led to violence and riots in the streets of Paris, and eventually to a civil war (1407-1435).

The first episode of Charles the Beloved’s madness occurred in 1392 while he was away on a military expedition. Traveling with a large entourage, the king became increasingly frenzied with paranoid delusions. At the suggestion of a barefoot leper that he met along the side of the

road, Charles believed that he was about to be betrayed by some of his own men. As the journey progressed the king became increasingly distrustful, until he eventually flew into a rage, ranting and swinging his sword, having to be wrestled to the ground for the safety of all (Guizot). He had killed several of his men during this episode of instability, deeply regretting it later. Among his other symptoms was his belief that his bones were made of glass and therefore, highly breakable (Forhan). Often the king would wear clothing sewn with rods to protect his 'glass bones' from breakage. Throughout these episodes, the king would "wander the castle halls, ill kempt, unwashed and vermin-infested" (Quilligan 247). As a result of his infirmity, Charles VI was often prohibited from direct rule, and the well-being of the nation was left in the hands of his four unscrupulous uncles.

During the king's times of incapacity, the country was ruled by his paternal uncle, Philippe, Duke of Burgundy, also known as Philip the Bold. During the occurrence of Charles' lucid intervals, his other uncle, Louis of Orleans took charge. The aspirations of both uncles resulted in ample instability to the nation (Forhan). Although many of the citizens were aware of the king's illness, it was a criminal offense to speak of his madness or to criticize any of his council. Those who disobeyed this edict were subjected to severe punishment. Along with his four uncles, the king's council included his wife, Isabeau of Bavaria, and his brother, Louis de Orleans, who were tasked with the work of creating a government that could properly function regardless of whether the king was lucid or affected (Hedeman).

In November of 1407, the dukes who served as regents for the king in his times of incapacity went before the court of France and took solemn vows that they would reconcile their differences and better serve the kingdom. Three days later Louis of Orleans was brutally assassinated by a group of fifteen knife-wielding, masked men. This murder was carried out at

the behest of Jean de Burgundy, familiarly known as ‘John the Fearless’ (Jager). As the son of Philip the Bold of Burgundy, he was a cousin to Charles VI. Meanwhile, the remaining uncles, who also served as regents, continued the power struggle. This misfortune left France a divided nation, with two separate factions: the Burgundians and the Armagnacs (Forhan). The Burgundians enjoyed the support of the intellectuals and the bourgeoisie, who fully supported Jean when he admitted to the assassination of the heir apparent to the throne. After declaring that the murder was a justifiable tyrannicide, Jean de Burgundy gained the support of the British, who were intermittently engaged in the Hundred Years War with France. Reasons for the support of the British were economic as much as political, and because of the cloth and wool trading industry between Burgundians and Great Britain (Jager). The House of Orleans, also known as the Armagnacs,<sup>4</sup> was backed by the already-established nobility and royal family, therefore viewed the assassination of Louis as an act of treason. This led to what became known as the Armagnac-Burgundian Civil War. The familial dispute lasted for twenty-seven years (1407-1435), ending with the Treaty of Arras in September of 1435 (Jager). To further the chaos, the death of Charles V occurred just two years after the schism of the Catholic Church, with the people of France following the French pope Clement VII, seated in Avignon, France. The fracturing foundation of France was challenging to the faithful. The Great Western Schism (1378-1417) overlapped in part with the French Civil War, with the Burgundians siding with the British in their support of Pope Urban and the Armagnacs supporting Pope Clement. It was a tumultuous time for the Kingdom of France in every regard.

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<sup>4</sup> The Armagnacs were so named to honor Bernard VII, Count of Armagnac, who was the father-in-law of Louis of Orleans’ son Charles in appreciation of his support.

## The Great Western Schism

Less than a century before the Great Western Schism (1378-1417), the infallibility of the pope had been solidly established by Pope Boniface VIII in 1302. Boniface had declared that, to obtain salvation in the afterlife, being subject to the papacy was imperative (Cheyney). This was a concept that captured the devotion of the faithful to the church and its ruling factions.

However, as heresy permeated the countryside in the late Middle Ages, various institutions began to vie for power. The Catholic Church was no exception. Its power over the faithful was significantly diffused when the church split into two separate factions, each having their own pope in a position of power. Further complicating the matter was the fact that they were reigning from two different countries, both having their own administrative offices and College of Cardinals. The people of France recognized Pope Clement VII, seated in Avignon, while the people of Italy recognized Pope Urban VI, seated in Rome. This brought European culture to a highly dysfunctional state. Prior to the schism, the papacy had been seated in Avignon for seventy years until Pope Gregory XI died in 1378. Upon his death, the cardinals in Italy wanted the papacy to return to Rome. They elected Urban VI as pope that same year, and shortly thereafter, the French cardinals moved to elect their own pope, Clement VII (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee). The church had become deeply politicized and the clergy from each of the two countries followed the doctrine of the pope who was approved by their own government. The French, and those who were under the influence of the French crown, followed Pope Clement, and became known as 'Clementines.' The other European Catholics were followers of Pope Urban and became recognized as 'Urbanists' (Cheyney). This is rhetorically important because the western segment of Christendom had been ripped into two mutually hostile factions, and it was a frightening prospect to anyone who may have been uncertain as to whether they had

chosen the pope that would lead them to everlasting life. As a result, the institutional authority on both sides had been diminished as the foundation of the Catholic faith had been severely damaged.

Many felt that the church had lost its way, becoming a means to acquire earthly power and prestige. The papacy had become politicized, and the power of the institution had begun to dissipate. All these events profoundly affected, not only the geopolitical environment, but also the politics of faith, and played a major role in the history of Christianity in Western Europe. This was a time of crisis for the church and the ruling class, and for all other classes of people across the social spectrum as well (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee). The church had become highly institutionalized and cemented by an intricate network of priestly ordinations and vows.

Each of the two papacies had its own system of social order that wielded influence over those outside the immediate sphere of ecclesiastical power. A sizeable amount of land was held by the church within various European countries. There were numerous clergy members who were paid by the church, which resulted in a large-scale monetary exchange between those who put their faith in the church and the members of the church elite (Forhan). The schism was horrendously scandalous and caused much of the laity to distance itself from the church. No longer having a single authority, and with two factions, the power of the papacy was greatly diminished. The church began to exhibit signs of a weakening foundation, and an insidious deterioration of its credibility. The papacy was slowly losing its ability to provide solace in a climate of instability, and the faithful began to experience feelings of desolation (Forhan).

The schism caused many followers of Christianity to feel deceived by the very institution that was supposed to save them from eternal damnation. To many of the faithful, the church was no longer their only link to the ever-after, holding the keys to their salvation. With this

disillusionment, the power of the church had begun to waiver. Western Christianity had been divided, and its authority over the faithful had been notably weakened (Cheyney). The crumbling of the institutional groundwork left an opening that welcomed a philosophical and rhetorical sea change. The strife that was experienced from every angle, arguably, facilitated the acceptance of the humanist philosophical stance of Dante Alighieri, Francesco Petrarch, Giovanni Boccaccio, and Christine de Pizan.

The late Middle Ages (1300-1500) was a time of transition, when the church-infused values of earlier centuries were still held dear, yet many were open to new ideas, paving the way for the European renaissance. The church had begun to lose some of its control over European intellectualism as well as the culture itself. With that weakening of a church stronghold, the notion of humanism as a philosophical point of view began to emerge. One of the prevailing aspects of the European renaissance movement was humanism. The humanist perspective placed a high level of importance upon the classical studies, which in turn guided much of the cultural thinking in France during the late 1300s. This movement held significant regard for the study of ancient Greek and Roman literature, giving it a prominent place in the curriculum of European universities at the time (Kristeller, *The Classic*). Christine accepted humanism as her philosophical perspective. She wrote in a manner that revealed her devotion to the church yet placed a greater emphasis on scholarship and that which occurred during life on earth. Profoundly influenced by the Italian humanists, her philosophical viewpoint is clearly present in most of her writings, especially those considered in this project.

### The European Renaissance

The existence of the European renaissance has often been the topic of debate among both historical and rhetorical scholars. Paul Oskar Kristeller argued that there is copious dialogue

regarding its characteristics, such as the timeline, and whether the European renaissance is an actual, legitimate, historical era. Like any other time in history, what we know about the historical moment is that which was written about it. There was a multitude of “writers from many different perspectives, as well as numerous chronological, regional and social differences, thus generalizations are very difficult” (Kristeller, *Papers on Humanism* 4).

Another reason for the controversy regarding the European renaissance as a true era is because the Middle Ages, once considered to be the ‘dark ages’ are no longer understood that way by most medieval scholars. The term ‘renaissance,’ having its origins in the French language, means ‘rebirth’ which implies coming out of the darkness and into the light. For that reason, many would prefer that the term be eliminated because they believe that there was no darkness to be illuminated (Kristeller, *Papers on Humanism*). Charles Nauert argues. “Whether historians like the concepts of ‘Renaissance’ and humanism, the centuries to which these terms are conventionally applied really did exist and must be faced, since they contributed in important ways to the subsequent development of Western society and civilization” (ix). European Renaissance was a time of change when rhetoric was applied to the more practical aspect of life. Heinrich Plett noted that renaissance rhetoric was not confined to one category of occupation as it was in earlier times, but rather included a range of areas, including history, science, philosophy, and literature (*Rhetoric and Renaissance*).

The overview of writings that are presented in this dissertation will substantiate Christine’s moral and philosophical devotion to defending womankind against all the prevailing institutions of power, making her a forerunner to the women’s movement of the twentieth century. Secondly her aim was to restore peace and humanity, first to the Kingdom of France, and then to the rest of the world as she knew it. The range of her oeuvre also included her ideas

as a rhetor of various other viewpoints, including those of historian, biographer, and political theorist. Through her prolific writings, Christine was a rhetorical guiding force in the changing narrative of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee).

### Prevailing Attitudes about Women

In the early and high Middle Ages, the religious and educational institutions allotted women such as Christine, a place where they were perceived as heralds of Satan, destined to bring about the fall of man (Guarino). However, women were essential to the process of repopulation after the Black Death of 1348 had ravaged most of Europe. Childbearing was a woman's primary purpose unless she were to enter the cloistered life of a nun, or to live sealed into a chamber as an anchoress, spending all her days in study and prayer, with little human contact. Aside from childbearing, women were, unquestioningly, thought to be inferior to men in nearly every way. The reality of these demeaning attitudes put women at an extreme disadvantage in both the family and the community.

According to David Hult, there were four predominant problems medieval women, as the marginalized other, confronted – power, speech, knowledge, and chastity. As a subset to disempowerment, typically, women were not given access to knowledge, nor were they generally afforded the same education that their male siblings would have received. Women, as a rule, were not entitled to a voice in society, as their male counterparts were. In western tradition women were largely excluded from power, and in the rare instances when women did attain power, it was simply because there was no male to fill the role. Those women who became leaders were almost always portrayed as virginal, such as Queen Elizabeth I of England, who held great power, while being referred to as the Virgin Queen. Chastity was perceived as the quintessential virtue that a woman must possess to have value in the world (Hult). Chastity



surpassed courage, kindness and intelligence and ensured that heirs to the household were bestowed that right through genetic continuity. Without it, an unmarried woman had no real respected place in humanity. Chastity was inordinately valued as it ensured that a household could maintain its legitimacy through a guaranteed blood line.

When a woman was determined to be unchaste, her credibility and value were undermined and her worth as a human being was weakened (Hult). The Middle Ages unquestionably held a climate of male entitlement (Krueger). Widowhood was not well regarded, and anyone with the misfortune to experience it was immediately cast out into a state of being the 'marginalized other' (Margolis, *The Poetess*). A virtuous woman in the Middle Ages knew that proper behavior involved the curtailment of her own voice and that she should speak as little as possible. The voices of women were stolen by a male-dominant society which equated speech with lack of chastity for its ability to entice men into evil behavior, such as Eve with Adam, Delilah with Samson, and Bathsheba with David (Hult).

Theologians as well as popular writers of the late Middle Ages supported this notion of female inferiority (Guarino). There were few exceptions, however, nuns were outside of the purview of the ordinary womanly expectations. Because the church fathers placed such a high value on female virginity, women who retained it and were devoted to a cloistered lifetime of service to God were entitled to some of the advantages that were generally bestowed upon men, exclusively (Bell). Although medieval women were typically not given opportunities to receive a formal education, they would often take this alternative route to scholarship. Being cloistered gave them access to religious writings that were not always available to lay people of either gender. The fact that this form of education came under the auspices of Christian piety made it not only acceptable, but respectable as well (Glenn *Rhetoric Retold*).

By the end of the 14th century the female gender was gradually becoming more literate. Many could read and write, yet few had ventured beyond the very basics of education. Occasionally women were trained to assist with a family business and, consequently, learn to engage in various forms of correspondence (Taylor and Smith). “Christine lived in a time when learning for women itself became a matter for discussion within humanism” notes Susan Groag Bell (173). Prominent leaders in the humanist movement, such as Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444) began to see the value of education of women. As a liberal educator he stressed that, in addition to books about religion, women should also learn to read about other topics as well, “because in the broader course of learning they would develop their minds, grapple with the truth, and thereby acquire virtues that ennoble humanity” (Bell 178). Despite Bruni’s conviction that women should receive an education, he made an exception when it came to the study of rhetoric. Rhetoric was a field that he believed was so powerful that it should only be studied and practiced by men.

In 1405, the same year that Christine wrote *Cité*, Leonardo Bruni wrote *De studiis et literis*. In this tract he admonished that rhetoric in all its forms, lies outside the territory of women (Glenn *Rhetoric Retold*). It can be reasonably inferred from this that the role of woman in the study and practice of rhetoric was in support of men in their use of words. This was the case even regarding the study of women. Virtually all the books that had been written about women had been written by men, thereby relegating women to the role of non-speaking subject (Margolis, *The Poetess*).

Arguably, Christine could be more aptly described as a proto feminist or feminine apologist, for she was a staunch defender of the honor of womankind against the misogynist detractors, such as Jean de Meun and Matheolus. There is no suggestion in any of her work to

indicate that she had any expectation that “her contemporaries do more than accept their place in society” (Willard *Manuscript Tradition* 440). Although she may not have been a post-modern feminist, she exemplified the principles of the feminist movement, that women are intellectually equal to men and should be accorded the same level of respect and educational opportunities. Viewing Christine from within a postmodern framework, it is clear that she was not a feminist in the broad sense of the word. She did not argue for equal rights for women in every regard, a concept that was completely foreign within the parameters of the medieval narrative. Her hope for women was simply that they make the most in seizing the opportunities that arise before them, and to be recognized for being morally and intellectually equal to men, but otherwise know their place in society.

Christine passionately believed that women were given the intellect to become judges and lawyers but saw no need for women to be emulating men in employment, or other areas of social concern. The conservative nature of her defense of women is seen by some as “colluding with patriarchal values and misogynist values of the day” (Rigby 138). Even her defense of women was limited to those who “embrace humility, patience, charity love, diligence and sobriety, charity, love, and to subdue pride, wrath, avarice, envy, idleness and gluttony” (Rigby 138). Noting that it was not her objective to upend society by demanding equal rights in any area other than the right to receive an education. Christine was a proponent of the right to have equal access to knowledge, and to be free from misogynist attacks. She not only defended the virtue of women, but she also profoundly influenced the cultural conversation as European thought transitioned into early modernity. Her work was not blatantly feminist, but it certainly presented a feminine point of view on the condition of medieval women, as one of the few speaking subjects in her day (Willard, *Christine*).

## Prominent Philosophical Movements of 15<sup>th</sup> Century France

The late Middle Ages were a time of transition for many of the dogmatic attitudes that had been established earlier in the history of Catholicism. Beginning with Augustine of Hippo in the fifth century CE, and carried throughout the Middle Ages, the correlation between faith and reason became the basis for some of the fundamental viewpoints of the church. This also served as the perspective for all that transpired in the formation of beliefs and interaction between human beings in the earthly realm. Scholasticism and then later, humanism held the viewpoint that it is the joining of faith and reason that enables human beings to understand the mysteries of the Christian faith (Gilson). Humanism, on the other hand embraced the notion of living in the world that God created.

### Scholasticism

Scholasticism has a long history, going back to the early days of the church, when Augustine of Hippo introduced the notion that the biblical exegesis that was to form the foundation of Christian faith was to serve as the basis for all sources of knowledge. The marriage of faith and reason was a concept that the Roman statesman and theologian Boethius further expounded upon when he wrote *Consolation of Philosophy* in 524 CE, giving him recognition as one of the founders of scholasticism. Boethius developed the idea that in every way possible faith must be joined to reason (*Consolation*). The joining of faith and reason implied a belief in the intellectual abilities of human beings to understand the connection, and to be able to reason the tenets of faith. Although Christine was not known to have been attuned to the scholastic viewpoint, she was a serious devotee of Boethius, whose influence is apparent in much of her work.

By the twelfth century, monasteries that populated the countryside had become institutions of higher learning. As universities branched out from the monasteries, the church was

still in the forefront of all learning (Le Goff). The church as the basis of learning was a rationalization of faith in which proof is offered to doctrine, primarily based upon scriptural interpretation. Scholasticism was not so much a religious point of view as it was a school of philosophy that was recognized by medieval scholars, such as Augustine of Hippo, Boethius, Duns Scotus, and Thomas Aquinas.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was an Italian friar, and a doctor of the church who had the greatest range of influence upon scholastic thinking in the late Middle Ages. Referring to Aristotle as *the Philosopher*, Aquinas viewed his *Rhetorica* as rudimentary to the scholastic philosophic point of view. Followers of Aquinas' doctrine understood the relevance of scholasticism to the times they were living. Thomism, as the teachings of Aquinas were known, held an essential distrust of the Ciceronian idea that "the human artist of discourse can so shape and sway his audience that they are affected by only human factors" (Murphy, *Rhetoric* 111). As the idea of university-style learning spread throughout Europe, so did scholasticism (Berrigan). According to Berrigan, scholasticism was a method that was "used by the Church to safeguard itself and its teachings" (85). In the early and high Middle Ages, this was a dogmatic approach to life at a time when a strict social order was imperative.

By the 15<sup>th</sup> century scholasticism came to be viewed as a philosophy of superstition and naivety, and an impediment to intellectualism (Berrigan). Humanist thought had begun to emerge and a dearth of humanist thinkers with powerful ideas appeared. As a prelude to the age of enlightenment and scientific discovery, humanism also contributed to an air of discontent with scholasticism so far as to clear the pathway for the protestant reformation. Although there was not a direct conflict between the teachings of scholasticism and humanism, there was a change of perspectives that softened the dogma of scholasticism, into a more humane view of life in the

world. From the notion of greater humanity emerged European renaissance humanism, a perspective that Christine embraced and incorporated into much of her writing as a moral philosopher and defender of womankind.

With humanism, knowledge had expanded far and wide, affecting all areas of the intellectual spectrum. Although humanism does not run entirely contrary to scholasticism, its fundamental difference lies in the fact that scholasticism seeks a basic law or tenet by which all things transpire, while humanism has a belief that the “artistry of the human” has as much value as the rigid premises of scholasticism (Murphy. *Rhetoric* 111). This dissertation places a greater level of attention upon the humanist point of view than it does with scholasticism because humanism was the perspective that Christine took, not only in her approach to life, but in her writing as well.

### Renaissance Humanism

The renaissance humanist movement began in Italy in the 14th century, and rapidly spread throughout Europe. By the 15th century humanism had become the predominant form of intellectualism. Having fed into the literary field, renaissance humanism greatly influenced the scientific and philosophical endeavors of early modernity, opening the doors to the age of enlightenment. This philosophical movement welcomed new ideas and embraced ethics and morality over dogma. While recognizing humankind as diverse and human beings as unique individuals, there was the understanding that each person could find their own path to salvation (Kristeller, *The Classic*).

Often referred to as Italian humanists, or European humanists, or renaissance humanists, for the purpose of this paper they will be referred to simply as “humanists.” Those who followed the philosophy of humanism were significantly influenced by the French intellectuals in Paris

(Kristeller, *Classic*). These intellectuals included men such as Jean Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris (who will factor later in the discussion about the *Debate of the Rose*), along with Christine at the forefront of the movement. The epicenter of humanism in medieval time was unquestionably France, with other European countries following its intellectual and philosophical lead (Kristeller, *Papers on Humanism*). With the humanist monarch, Charles V, allowing his court and their families the luxury of his library, the sweep of humanist intellectualism across the kingdom was far and wide. This was a step away from scholastic dogmatism, opening the doors for new ways of thinking.

Unfortunately for women, humanism, like scholasticism, was a male-dominated intellectual movement. Although it was forward-thinking and progressive, humanism also accepted the misogynistic ideas that were promoted by the church as well as through popular literature, such as *Romance of the Rose*. The philosophy of humanism presented the criteria of what is required of a man to feel fully human (Allen). This notion of being fully human included acquiring a classical education, living a virtuous life, and learning to speak well, both publicly and personally. Access to these qualities was limited, almost entirely, to the male gender. The focus of humanism was education and enculturation using the classic Greek and Roman models. Humanist writers would often convey the thoughts, feelings, and circumstances of their own lives through the prism of the classical authors (Cassirer). Mastering the Latin and Greek languages was foundational for entry into the realm of humanist education. This automatically excluded almost every female with the very, rare exception of a marginalized few from socially elite families (Nauert).

Humanism, although most associated with the Italian culture, was likely to have been exported to Italy from schools in Chartres and later in Paris (Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*).

Nonetheless, the objective of humanism was to take the knowledge of the classics and make it the basis for wisdom and eloquence in the late Middle Ages and early modernity. Humanism holds the tenet that the one who gets the most out of life will have lived righteously and moderately. This educational approach celebrates the human being and the dignity of man, while highly respecting language and classical literature. (Kristeller, *The Classic*). Despite its misogynistic underpinnings, the movement toward a humanist perspective offered a suitable foundation for presenting the idea that women were indeed virtuous creatures and had the potential to make worthy contributions to society. This ran counter to the earlier philosophy of scholasticism, which harbored a deeply imbedded misogynistic viewpoint that was not open to the possibility of anything otherwise (Hult). The humanists embraced the traditions of the ancients and extended them into early modernity with a level of enthusiasm that was rather astonishing for its time (Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*).

European renaissance humanism was not really considered to be an ideology, but rather a world view that revered the models of classicism with a much broader outlook. Those who followed humanism valued the secular life but did not discount religion as an essential component. A belief in an afterlife was maintained while the earthly realm was embraced as long as humans were a part of it (Cantor, *The Meaning*). Although there was emphasis on leading the good life, there was also the ideal that one should work toward the betterment of society so that every individual could participate in living well. The movement had its origins in grammar and rhetoric, taking the three medieval rhetorical arts of poetics, epistolary, and preaching in a new direction that included the study of the classics. Paul Kristeller asserted that rhetoric was linked to humanism because its students presented a classical perspective on the effective use of



language. This was not a sudden leap from one mode of thought to the next, but rather thinking that developed over the course of centuries.

Sister Prudence Allen, a professor emeritus of women's studies, noted that "humanism had a particular interest in returning to ancient sources to glean new insights into wisdom, virtue and human love, and an emphasis on the theme of true nobility, which consisted in virtue rather than blood lines" (557). Love as a theme is one of the characteristics of renaissance humanism, emphasizing the concept of love that is presented in vernacular poetry, such as that of Christine. "Humanists were concerned with moral philosophy, history, poetry, education and clear and elegant language" (Bell 173). The humanists of the late Middle Ages enthusiastically embraced the classics to enhance the rhetorical skills of both oratory and writing (Kennedy).

To understand humanism is also to understand the backstory of a very practical written type of rhetoric in the form of epistles, referred to by medieval scholars as *ars dictaminis*, or the art of letter writing, also known as epistolary. Epistolary was one of the foremost developments in medieval discourse. During the tenth and eleventh centuries it was evident that there was a strong need to communicate by both the church and the state, and a need to have a record of that communication (Murphy, *Three Medieval*). Epistolary, in its various practices and purposes, also combined other rhetorical arts with it, as Christine demonstrated in her earlier works.

The humanists were experts in certain other areas of endeavor as well, including grammar, rhetoric, poetry, and history. Latin and Greek literature were also included in the curriculum. Although this was not a new field of study, humanism was an introduction of the classics into the interest of medieval rhetoric (Kristeller, *The Classic*). Paris became "the new Athens" and Christine was dubbed "France's first true humanist" after she and Jean Gerson held their ground in the *Debate of the Rose* at the beginning of the 15th century (Margolis, *The*

*Poetess* 366). The fact that Christine used classical models in her writing of history designates her as a humanist with an intellect as worthy as the other great thinkers of her era.

The late Middle Ages welcomed the humanists as they sought to take the ancient teachings of Cicero and revive the art of oratory (Murphy, *Three Medieval*). Never claiming to be introducing something that was entirely new, humanists placed added emphasis on the importance of the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy) to increase their level of relevance to academia (Kristeller, *Classic*). Albeit, playing a stronger role than it had previously, reason was not considered to be a means to the ultimate truth. Reason was viewed as a resource for conduct in one's personal life, as well as in business, and most importantly, in social and educational reform.

A humanist education was focused, not only upon discourse, but action as well. This manifested in the redevelopment of both the Ciceronian and Quintilian models for teaching the orator. Humanists also believed that the universities needed to move away from the abstract and walk toward the practical concepts that were important to the betterment of society (Cantor, *The Meaning*). This is not to say that God did not play a significant part in the humanist movement. By no means anti-church, or against the Christian faith, the humanists saw religion as something that was compatible with their philosophy, an ideology that included God while it entered a revival of the ancient arts after a long period of intellectual oppression (Kristeller, *The Classic*). Charles Nauert did not accept the commonly held belief that Renaissance humanism was a form of secularism, as had been argued by Swiss Historian Jakob Burckhardt. Nauert stated that "there is irrefutable evidence that leading humanists (beginning with Petrarch himself) were still moved by otherworldly religious values" (9). Humanism did not replace scholasticism, nor did it replace religion.

The word ‘humanism,’ arguably, has long been most associated with European renaissance thinking. When considering renaissance humanism as a cultural phenomenon, one may note that many people who were connected to this intellectual approach were often employed as teachers of the humanities in higher level learning institutions. Primarily viewed as a philosophical viewpoint, humanism was also considered to be a brand of intellectualism that Kristeller described as a “broad cultural and literary movement” (*The Classic* 22). He further noted that renaissance humanism is a characteristic phase in the rhetorical tradition of western culture, with a strong focus on the dignity of man and his esteemed place in the world.

By the 15th century, the humanist viewpoint had become the predominant form of intellectualism. Having fed into the literary movement, humanism greatly influenced the scientific and philosophical endeavors of early modernity, opening the doors to the age of enlightenment. While recognizing humankind as diverse and humans as unique individuals, there was the understanding that each person could find his or her own path to salvation. Unfortunately for women, as an intellectual movement, renaissance humanism was a male-dominated viewpoint. Although it was forward-thinking and progressive, humanism also accepted the misogynistic ideas regarding the subservience of women that were promoted by the church as well as through popular literature, such as *Romance of the Rose*.

Humanism softened the dogmatic scholasticism of the church while focusing on a revival of ancient Greek and Roman intellectualism to appreciate the value of humans, both individually and collectively (Bergin and Speake). Those who accepted humanism as a way of life saw no conflict with the tenets of the Catholic Church, because followers of humanism accepted the basic doctrine of the church. Where it deviated from the church was in its tone, which had shifted away from the dogmatism that focused solely on preparation for the afterlife and brought into

focus an appreciation for the earthly realm that God had created. Humanism was a welcome departure from the dogmatic control of the church (Cantor, *The Meaning*). By the year 1550 nearly every educated man in Europe was a humanist (Cantor, *The Meaning*), including John Calvin the reformist, and Pope Julius III. The humanist viewpoint was the call until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when Jean Jacques Rousseau changed the tide and became the first non-humanist scholar since the Middle Ages.

European rhetoric in the Late Middle Ages, on the cusp of early Modernity, was dominated by the three men who are referred to by scholars as the *tres corone*, or ‘triple crown’ of renaissance humanism (Houston). Renowned Italian writers, Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374), and Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) stood above the others in their influence over the narrative of the day. Christine, having the good fortune of literary exposure, was well-read and deeply inspired by these great Italian writers of the late Middle Ages. Having that knowledge Christine was also one of the first French writers of either gender to show influence from the full *tres corone* (Holderness). Taking her cue from these three renowned Italian humanist writers, Christine realized the relevance of living in the world as a human and embracing the classical wisdom of the ancients. In this dissertation, I argue that Christine holds a prominent place alongside Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch in the study of renaissance humanism.

### *Dante Alighieri*

Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) is best known for his *Divine Comedy* which was completed in 1320 and considered to be one of the most important poems in the Middle Ages. He paid close attention to sentence structure and word order as primary components of his poetics (Murphy, *Medieval Eloquence*). Dante wrote both in Latin and in the vernacular Italian. Being one of the

first authors to write in the vernacular, he wanted to be understood by people who were outside of the field of academia. This was a significant step away from the more formalized usage of the more masculine Latin to what is the more feminine vernacular. The idea that the vernacular was more feminine than Latin is expressed by Dante, himself, when he notes that the Latin language was generally a language to be learned only by men and shared with each other, while the vernacular could, in addition to men, be understood by women and children (Allen). The fact that he wrote in the language of the ‘mother tongue’ also conveys a feminine, maternal side of language usage and understanding. Dante wanted to be understood by the common people, and the vernacular language was the best way to reach them. This offered inspiration and confidence to Christine in her choice to write in the vernacular, so she could reach both men and women with her message.

One of Dante’s most vital contributions to the feminine side of renaissance humanism is his use of intergender dialogue and virtuous women of wisdom. He created them in the persona of Beatrice, after whom Christine had patterned her Lady Philosophy. This was an idea that he borrowed from Boethius, who he greatly admired just as Christine had (Gualtieri). Both female personifications of philosophy impacted Christine in her own portrayal of them (Allen). Dante’s fictional women as the metaphors of wisdom can be said to have planted the seeds that later germinated into “the development of women’s historical consciousness” (Allen 241). The women were not only in possession of wisdom and virtue, but as Dante presented them, they also had the ability to teach these qualities to men who are respectful of their knowledge. Lady Philosophy, appearing in some form in all three of the author’s manuscripts played a similar role each time she was introduced. She engaged her wisdom to console each of the authors in times of great difficulty (Gualtieri).

One has only to read Dante's *Divine Comedy* to recognize the relevance and ubiquity of symbolism in late medieval thinking, and the expression of that thinking. Christine, being one of the first people of France to read Dante, is credited with introducing his work to her fellow citizens (Willard, *The Writings*). Agreed upon in the Middle Ages, as it is now, a symbol is "an expression of meaningful experience" (Dunbar 4). In it lies the basis for much of the intellectualism of the era. For example, Dante uses the idea of 'Dame Fortune.' Although he was not the first to introduce that metaphor, he brought it to the forefront of medieval thinking. Fortune was a symbol that was handed down to Boccaccio from Dante, and then passed forward to Christine. As a symbol that played heavily into Christine's work, it was 'Lady Fortune' that changed her life so drastically in *Mutation of Fortune*, written in 1403.

#### *Francesco Petrarch*

Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374) is considered by many to be the man who led the narrative out of the darkness that resulted in a "spring forward into greater light and freedom" (Cheyney, 264). Influenced by Augustine's *Confessions*, Petrarch disparaged the ignorance of the centuries that preceded him. Like Aristotle, Petrarch preferred the rational over the supernatural, yet he adhered to the religious ideals of the medieval era (Randall). Like Christine, he was a student of history, and continuously strove to capture the historical moments of other ages (*Letter to Posterity*). Petrarch adhered to the Ciceronian tradition that discourse could shape and influence the audience by purely human factors (Murphy, *Rhetoric*) and the basic belief that human artistry and influence was most impactful in the establishment of social agreement. Thus, Petrarch's treatment of Ciceronian rhetoric, approached from a humanist perspective, is what brought him recognition as the 'Father of Italian humanism,' which was a shift away from scholastic thinking of Paris and other parts of Europe. He asserted that the achievements in the

secular or 'human' domain did not exclude one's genuine relationship with God. Petrarch gained his reputation by promoting the ideas of antiquity and his admission that he was repelled by the age in which he lived (Kelley). He looked forward to a more enlightened future as he looked back to the antiquity that contributed so greatly to all that was good. Viewing the scholastic methods with little regard, Petrarch showed a preference for the eloquence of Cicero and the value of the humanities (Kelley). Unlike the ancients he often emulated, Petrarch, had no political interest or aspirations and was more widely known for his poetica and scholarly leanings (Kelley). He gave vision to the idea that if we look to antiquity, we will be reintroduced to the idea of humanity. In the liberal arts as well as in philosophy Petrarch was an influential force, maintaining ambivalence regarding the narrow path that is often associated with the tenets of faith. He believed in the power of faith, but he also believed in the natural tendency to study all that human experience has to offer.

Petrarch is credited with the discovery in 1345 of a manuscript of some of Cicero's texts that were previously unknown. Found in the library of the Cathedral of Verona were letters from Cicero to Atticus, Quintus, and Brutus. They offered a more personal view of life than his previously published manuscripts had, giving rise to the idea of celebrating what it is to be human. These newly discovered texts changed the course of rhetoric in the Middle Ages as they illuminated the life and works of the great rhetor, from an intensely focused eye upon the divine to an increased regard for the individuals within humankind. This discovery is credited with initiating the 14th century humanist movement and ushering in the European Renaissance (Kelley).

Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374), often referred to as the 'Father of Italian humanism,' viewed philosophy as the practical art of "living well and happy" (Cassirer 24). He held a strong

belief that *language* had the power to affect the emotions and he viewed the teaching of scholasticism and other medieval traditions in a less than favorable light. Using a careful blending of the literal with the allegorical, Petrarch drew upon the emotions of his readers. He believed the allegory to be a far more effective tool than the Aristotelian notion of logic and rationalism (Cassirer, Kristeller, and Randall). Petrarch's rediscovery of the writings of Cicero is credited as the event that led to the humanist movement in Italy (Nauert).

By the 15th century Petrarch's manuscripts were widely circulated throughout Italy, France, England, and Germany (Murphy *Three Medieval*). Although most of his writing was in Latin, (which was used as the universal mode) he wrote much of his poetry in the vernacular Italian, which was familiar to Christine as her native language. The triumph of humanism over the dogmatic scholasticism of the earlier Middle Ages was a gradual process that ushered in the European Renaissance. Because so many modes of expression and new ideas gained acceptability, the intellectual consensus of scholasticism that had been so much of the culture had begun to decline (Cantor, *The Meaning*).

Renowned Christian scholar, Charity Cannon Willard theorizes that Thomaso de Pizzano was likely to have known both Petrarch and Boccaccio. While Thomaso was working as an astrologer in Venice, he had a high level of prestige and with that he had access to many highly regarded people. As Thomaso was a proponent of humanist ideology and a man of the intellectual class, the likelihood is probable. Petrarch lived in the Republic of Venice for much of his life, and Boccaccio would visit there often. This may well have accounted for the profound impact that both men had upon Christine's humanist viewpoint (Willard, *Christine*).



## *Giovanni Boccaccio*

Boccaccio was a true renaissance man, who wrote primarily in Tuscan vernacular. He embraced the Augustinian notion of piety as it was presented in a Ciceronian pattern of influence. He was not particularly a fan of philosophy, yet he often quoted Cicero and Seneca in his work (Durant). In *Decameron* he demonstrated an affinity toward the humanism of Cicero and even goes as far as to show the literary lineage between the thought of the late classical period and the renaissance (Grudin). Having been influenced by Boccaccio and patterning much of her work after his, Christine began her writing career with the medieval rhetorical ‘Ars poetica,’ as the art of poetry was often referred. Her understanding of the allegory seems to have its foundation in Boccaccio’s *Of the Genealogy of the Gods* (Willard, *Christine*).

Boccaccio personally attested that it was Francesco Petrarch, after whom he most modeled his work (Houston). This is demonstrated in the fact that Petrarch is the founding father of Italian humanism, and Boccaccio followed his guidance. Influenced by both Petrarch and Dante, in his early years Boccaccio engaged in the art of poetics by writing about passionate, searing love. Using the 8-line stanza as his medium, Boccaccio presented words in a rhythm that added the necessary emotion to his message (Durant). The eight-line stanza, or *ottava rima*, which set the form for other poets that followed, including Christine, is demonstrated when she wrote *Cent Ballades* in 1399 (Corbett).

*De Mulieribus Claris* or in English language translation *Concerning Famous Women* (1362) was the work of Boccaccio that most influenced Christine de Pizan in her defense of women. In this manuscript Boccaccio offered short biographies of the women he considered to be most influential throughout the course of history. Many of the women were from the days of antiquity and adhered to the pagan religions. Christian saints were not included in this volume

because he believed that it would be unfitting to feature them in the same form as the women whose lives he highlighted. He also humbly believed, and he announced publicly, that he did not have to authority to write about them, so it stands to reason that he chose only to write about the pagan women of note (Quilligan).

Although it was known that Christine's inspiration for *The Book of the City of Ladies* was Augustine's *City of God*, her book is also recognized as having been modeled after Boccaccio's *Concerning Famous Women*. This is a fact that has long been acknowledged by literary scholars (Brownlee, 1995). However, Christine took a bit of a revisionist approach to her project as she counteracted the thinly shielded misogyny of Boccaccio. Although he highlighted the accomplishments of some women, he also presented the history of women as weak and foolish, as they were all descended from Eve, the woman who singlehandedly led humanity astray (Holderness). Ironically, Boccaccio also contributed to the anti-woman movement when he wrote *Il Corbaccio* in 1355 (Hall). In this work Boccaccio blatantly states that men are naturally more noble and superior to women in every way (King). There is irony in the message because Boccaccio later transitioned his message into one that defends the honor of virtuous women when he wrote *Concerning Famous Women*. Boccaccio was, on occasion, an earlier prelude to feminism, however as a male he lacked the authority that Christine possessed as a speaking subject (Margolis, *The Poetess*).

Christine largely mirrored Boccaccio's portrayal of pagan and mythological women throughout history, but she deviated from it when she depicted Lady Justice in Book III as telling the story of Christian martyrdom. One of the reasons that she included canonized martyrs because it gave her a solid footing from which to counter the narrative of Jean de Meun in his attack on the character of women (Quilligan). Christine also did not view pagan women as

necessarily different from women of the Christian faith, for many of them possessed the same virtues. This was a gentle nudge against the authority that her auctor, Boccaccio, had established, as she simultaneously imitated his style while taking his narrative further into the realm of women worthy of glorification. Christine's story highlighted many of the women that Boccaccio found to be relevant, but she also included some of the later day Christian women. Although she did not specifically mention Eve in *Le Cité*, she exonerated her in *Mutación de Fortune* as having been led astray by the devil due to her simplicity. She then presented the argument that women are perfectly capable of making wise decisions, if they are offered the educational opportunities that are accorded to them (*Mutación*). If Eve had been better schooled on the powers of persuasion, she may well have been better equipped to resist the temptations of Satan.

When Giovanni Boccaccio wrote *Concerning Famous Women*, he helped to set the tone for Christine's writing to be accepted by underscoring the notion that women should have the opportunity to read about topics that are not necessarily religious in nature. He also acknowledged that women have the potential to be great in nearly any area, however, it would be necessary for them to work twice as hard to do so, because nature had bestowed them with weak bodies and feeble minds (Guarino). In a backhanded form of praise, he wrote that women should be given a lot of credit for what they can accomplish because, to do so they must overcome their limitations (Boccaccio). He was a defender of women in the true spirit of medieval thinking.

### Conclusion

As the daughter of Thomaso, a devotee of humanist philosophy, Christine grew up in the shadow of an intellectual humanist king, Charles V. European renaissance humanism as an intellectual movement departed from the belief that the church held all the authority over one's human existence. Most of Christine's writings demonstrate that her humanist philosophical

viewpoint was clearly present, as she wrote with a focus on the betterment of the world in which humans live, often using the wisdom and rhetoric of the ancient Greeks and Romans to bolster her message. Hers was a message of moral wisdom and practical advice, that both influenced and was influenced by the narrative of the late Middle Ages.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Rhetorical Context of Christine's Writing

Having lived in France from the age of four, and with her family having been allotted many privileges by Charles V, Christine felt a deep sense of loyalty to the crown. In addition, she was enculturated by the scholarship to which she had been exposed and felt a deep sense of patriotic duty for the country she came to call her own. As a subject of the crown, Christine held allegiance toward France, and as a Catholic, a deep devotion to the trinity and a regard for the papacy. But, as a humanist, she discerned a true responsibility for the betterment of life on earth. Therefore, much of her writing addressed the injustices within society, as well as the political upheaval of her beloved adopted country, France (Margolis, *The Poetess*). To understand the rhetorical viewpoint of Christine, one must consider the events and the educational influences that motivated her rhetorical stance toward the betterment of society.

### Christine's Early Life and Influences

Most of what is known about Christine's life is what has been gleaned from *The Vision of Christine* (hereafter *L'Avision*). Written in 1405, *L'Avision* is an autobiographical account of Christine's life and her witness to the historical moment in which she lived. Born near Venice in the year 1364, Christine was the daughter of Tomaso di Benvenuto da Pizzanoa, who held a position as counselor to the government of Venice. Well regarded for his work, Tomaso's reputation spread to other countries across Europe. He was so accomplished in his profession that he was invited by both Louis I of Hungary and Charles V of France to serve in their royal courts (Lawson). As an adherent to the Catholic faith that had become a dominant force in European culture, Tomaso was also a strong devotee of the humanist philosophy that had begun to take shape in his native northern Italy.

Charles V of the French House of Valois (1338-1380) was one of the few European monarchs having a humanist philosophical leaning, and for that reason Thomaso made the decision to accept the king's offer and work in his service for the betterment of France. He initially went to France by himself to become established in a prominent place in the king's court as an astrologer and physician. *The Vision of Christine* (hereafter *L'Avision*) described his employment by stating "Thomaso filled the role of philosopher, savant, and counselor" (153). After three years in the king's employment Thomaso was rewarded with enough money to bring Christine, her mother, and her two brothers to Paris. They were given an opportune living situation near the king's primary residence in the Marais neighborhood on the right bank of the Seine River. Most likely they resided in one of the king's dependencies (Hindman). The Marais neighborhood was the location of much of the bookbinding and illumination endeavors transpired.<sup>1</sup>

#### Christine's Privileged Youth in Paris

As a child Christine was exposed to an upper-class lifestyle through Thomaso's valued position in service to Charles V (1338-1380), also known as 'Charles the Wise.' Charles the Wise was a man of great intellect, and a patron of the arts, with a fondness for scholarly pursuits of every genre (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee). The esteemed king would often hold court with other learned men, which included Thomaso. Charles V greatly enjoyed the company of those who shared his respect for humanism as well as the pursuit of intellectualism (Willard, *Christine*). His royal court was often augmented by scholarly men from all over the continent. Charles V believed that surrounding himself with scholars would make for a better government

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<sup>1</sup> This is relevant because Christine later came to work as a supervisor in a publishing operation, where she learned the rhetoric of manuscript production. With this experience came the realization that all the bookbinding arts, such as calligraphy, parchment quality, binding, and illumination were relevant to the rhetorical process. This was all part and parcel to having her message received by her intended audience, the French aristocracy.

of France (Forhan). His expansive library was a source of pride, not only because of its great aesthetic beauty but also because of the many volumes that were housed there, including French translations of all the greatest European literature and many of the Greek and Roman classics. His was a luxurious library with numerous beautifully bound and illuminated volumes.<sup>2</sup> Because the king valued scholarship to such a high degree, the library was made available not only to the members of the king's court, but to their families as well. In this royal setting Thomaso and his three children were able to freely partake of the bountiful offerings of the king's private literary collection, rich with an abundance of intellectual materials from across the eras (Lawson).

Universities were not open to women therefore Christine was highly reliant upon Thomaso and his connection to the king's library for her self-education. Thomaso took satisfaction that his daughter had an inclination toward studious endeavors. Christine not only loved the pursuit of scholarship but was strongly encouraged by the most important men in her life; her father, Thomaso, and later, her husband, Etienne. Both supported her initiative to freely explore the royal literature of which she was granted the privilege, and to learn all that she could about the world and the works of the illustrious authors who preceded her. The education she self-administered was equivalent to one that would be formally granted to a male in a royal position (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee). Remarkably, Christine created herself as an educated person and a notable writer at a moment in time when it was unnecessary and inappropriate for women to be educated. However, she had the good fortune of being the daughter of a man who was well-regarded by Charles V, the French king having the "most cultivated court in Europe" (Willard, *Christine* 2). Because of this privilege Christine was able to

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<sup>2</sup> Illumination was a medieval art form in which manuscripts were often adorned with artful designs, such as decorative borders leafed with silver and gold on parchment, and miniature illustrations to supplement the text.

take in volumes of classical works and to build upon her knowledge as she gradually became knowledgeable in a wide range of topics.

The importance of education was not lost to Christine, which is why she welcomed it in every way. To her dismay she found that her mother (whose name remains unknown) was not nearly as supportive as Thomaso and considered education to be unsuitable for a daughter. She kept Christine occupied with spinning, weaving and other activities that she thought were better suited for girls (Hindman). Her mother's preferences did not inhibit Christine from her thirst for intellectualism. The benefit of the king's library allowed her to access an education that she would otherwise never have been able to obtain. Despite her love of learning, she often referred to her education, metaphorically, as "the crumbs I gathered from my father's table" (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee xii). As learned as she was, the best that Christine could do was to accept the education that came to her by way of her father and brothers. As second rate to the education her male family members received, it was far better than that which was acquired by other females in European society. As Christine's work evolved, she became a strong advocate for the education of women. She even went so far as to propose the radical idea that little girls ought to be sent to school and be exposed to the subjects that their brothers might be learning about (Christine, *Path of the Long Study*).

As much as Christine relished her scholarly endeavors, they were, in no way considered to be a substitute for marriage in the medieval world. Marriage was essential to the survival of women, unless they chose to enter the convent and devote their lives to the service of the church. At her father's arrangement, Christine and Etienne du Castel were united in marriage in 1379 when she was fifteen years of age. Marriage at age fifteen was neither unusual nor inappropriate, and arranged marriages were quite common (Allen). As a nobleman, Etienne was a suitable



match, and the fact that he was employed in the court of Charles V as a notary and secretary was an added attribute (Christine *L'Avision*). It proved to be a match that brought ten years of blissful happiness and romantic love (Willard, *Christine*). Together they formed a family that included two sons and a daughter, and a happy state of shared intellectual pursuit (Hindman). Just as Thomaso had, Etienne also strongly encouraged Christine to partake of the richness of the royal library in quest of fulfilling her own penchant for the learning process.

As the times were, the pursuit of intellectualism brought a needed distraction from the turmoil, and often added calm to the chaos, enabling the king to perform his governance more efficiently (Hedeman). The relative calm and stability of France turned chaotic after the death of Charles V in 1380, and his son, Charles VI's, ascension to the throne. The young heir to the throne was eleven years old and was afflicted with a cognitive disability that drove him to experience bouts of insanity. Partially because of his infirmity, the newly crowned monarch did not value intellectualism therefore courtly discussions among the scholarly humanists became a bygone occurrence (Hedeman).

Thomaso and Etienne were retained in their service to the newly crowned king, Charles VI. Unfortunately, their esteemed positions were devalued, and they were compensated at a much lower rate than they were while serving the king's father, Charles V (Hedeman). That was the beginning of a downward spiral in the personal fortunes of both Thomaso and Etienne. But, even with a downturn in their financial well-being, the marriage of Etienne and Christine remained solid and happy. This was despite the shift in their personal circumstances, and the fact that political and religious strife had permeated the kingdom. Much of the upheaval in their lives coincided with the instability that the people of Paris were experiencing under the rule of a

mentally unfit monarch and his power-mongering overseers. To make matters worse, there was also an extreme upheaval in theological leadership (Hedeman).

Amid the disarray of her adopted country, France, Christine's family fortune was dwindling. She also experienced a series of profound personal losses that drastically altered the life that she had known. The first of these losses was the death of her beloved father, Thomaso, in 1387, leaving her grief stricken and desolate. The loss was profound, but to make matters worse Christine was now in a position of having to provide for the well-being of her widowed mother and a niece. Because of unscrupulous inheritance laws, the wife of Thomaso de Pizan, and mother of Christine had been left with little, and in need of Christine and Etienne's support.

#### The Death of Etienne as Pivotal to Christine's Rhetoric

The most severe devastation occurred in 1389 as the defining moment in Christine's life, when her fortunes had forever changed. The unexpected, tragic death of Etienne left her both emotionally and financially devastated. Etienne's untimely death occurred while he was away on business for the office of the king (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee). Although Christine referred to the culprit as an epidemic, most likely it was one of the widespread contagion outbreaks that infiltrated Europe after the "Black Death of 1348" (Willard, *Writings* xi).<sup>3</sup> Regardless, she was overcome with debilitating grief, and left in a state of, by her standards, financial ruin (Kellogg). At the age of twenty-five, the gilded life that Christine had known was to be no longer. In *The Book of the Mutation of Fortune* (hereafter, *Mutación*) written 1403, she compared the moment of her husband's passing to a sea captain who died while he was on a voyage, leaving Christine to take the helm in his absence (Christine, *Mutación*).

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<sup>3</sup>The plague had taken its toll on Europe numerous times in the latter half of the 14th century (Cantor).

Heartbroken and financially devastated, Christine was left to raise her own three children as well as support her niece and her widowed mother. As she metaphorically conveyed, suddenly, the wheel of Fortune had shifted. She lamented that Fortune had placed her on the downward curve of its wheel (Griffin). Christine was further demoralized when she was denied Etienne's pensions and offered little choice deciding her own future. With four simultaneous lawsuits tied up in the legal system, along with the other woes of early widowhood her sheltered life of comfort and prestige had been forever changed, and she had been cast out into the marginalized existence of widows and other less fortunate members of society (Margolis, *The Poetess*). In the historical moment, the conventional solution to the upheaval of widowhood would be to start the process of entering a new marriage (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee). With little in the way of a dowry, and as sole provider for her three children, her mother, and a niece, she chose to take a different path. Through her determination she set out to become the breadwinner of her family, and to do so she was forced to, metaphorically speaking, 'become a man' (Griffin). This is significant, because a major turning point in Christine's rhetorical journey occurred when she penned *Mutación*. In this dream vision Christine addressed her series of family bereavements that left her feeling adrift at sea with her loss of a male protector in the stormy waters of life. As a woman she was unable to assume the role of sea captain, which was her metaphor for the traditional male responsibilities of providing for a family. The only option she had was to undergo the mutation of her gender, which was provided to her through and other-worldly visitor, Lady Fortune (Chandermohan). In the process of her gender mutation, she accomplished other transformations that included assuming the roles of historian, biographer, political theorist, and moral philosopher.

Miranda Griffin cited a lecture by Jacques Derrida at the Washington School of Psychiatry in 1982. She related that Derrida discussed in his lectures the way that fortune and coincidence can collide with learning to produce meaning (Griffin 57). The idea of being in the right place at the right time, which leads to a series of events, in Christine's viewpoint, is dependent upon chance. Meaning is often derived from the context that is aligned by chance. The important role that it plays in the determination of meaning is evident in much of Christine's own personal experience as well as the allegories that were written about it. The concept of 'fortune' plays a significant part in Christine's philosophical outlook.

Medieval viewpoint dictated that one's personal existence was closely tied to one's social status. While Etienne was alive, Christine, as his wife, held a position of great esteem. With his death her social standing had been brought down considerably (Kelly). To escape her burdens, she often immersed herself in her studies and her writing (Lawson). Survival became a priority, and to do so, she was forced to rely upon her willpower and her wit. Unlike other widows who chose either to enter a convent or remarry, Christine saw neither of those choices as viable options. With a natural inclination toward scholarship and a talent for writing, she chose the life of a literary philosopher – partly out of passion and partly out of necessity (Willard, *Christine*).

Christine's philosophical point of view was borne of both her personal experiences, her self-acquired education, and her historical moment in time. The most significant influence upon her work was the narrative that came about from historical viewpoints, many of which have evolved over time, leading the pathway to Christine's own humanist perspective on life. She revered many of the ancient writers and philosophers, such as Aristotle and Cicero, and she highly regarded the early Christian writers, such as Augustine and Boethius. Her knowledge of

literature and philosophy was vast, and her talent for refashioning the work of those who came before served a definite purpose in the defense of womankind and the promotion of peace.

### Christine's Rhetorical and Philosophical Influences

Having had freedom to use the king's library as a young woman, Christine had access to many of the great works from the classics through the humanists. All the books and manuscripts contained in the library had been translated into French at the king's request. She studied the classics of antiquity, and the works of the early medieval period. In her poetics, letters, and even in her proscriptions for preaching the word of God, she captured the essence of the three medieval rhetorical arts that were described by James Murphy. Influenced by both the secular and the religious, she was a scholar of the pagan classics as well as the teachings of Christianity.

All of Christine's writings show some form of lineage of influence from writers who preceded her in time, and of whom she was well versed. Among the most noted in her work were Aristotle, Augustine, Boethius, Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Jean de Meun. Minor influencers included Matheolus, Aquinas, and Chaucer. In a twist of irony, they were all the opposite gender to Christine, but that is to be expected since there were very few women writers prior to her time. For this reason, Christine often called upon mythological women and Christian martyrs for inspiration.

Decidedly, she was inspired by two of Augustine's eminent works, *Confessions* and *City of God*. Her most famous work, *The Book of the City of Ladies (Cité)* was based on the concept behind the *City of God* (Richards *Representing Christine*). Augustine is presented directly to the reader in *The Vision of Christine (L'Avison)*. She introduced him as a source of religious comfort, as she pointed to his many references to scriptures and the application of them to life. She then proceeded to admire and respect his inclination toward the philosophy of the classics to

enhance that Christian viewpoint (*L'Avision*). Both Augustine and Boethius had a profound effect upon Christine's philosophical and intellectual development. Although they were very religiously oriented, and "they each offered her a model of thinking about life" (Allen 551) it was Augustine's penchant for the application of analytical thinking for the purpose of justice and societal reform that was particularly appealing to Christine. Boethius, on the other hand, bestowed the lesson on how to apply philosophy and reason to cope with deep human emotions and passions.

### The Greco-Roman Tradition of Rhetoric

Ancient Greece was rife with war and power struggles among the city-states, along with other contentious powerful forces outside of Greece, contributing to the need for rhetoric as a binding force to unite citizens to build strong governments. Although there was no precise moment when the Classical rhetorical era began, it is generally considered to have lasted from the fifth century BCE to the beginning in the fifth century CE (Murphy, *Three Medieval*). Most of the functions of rhetoric were civic in nature, for example, to promote democracy or to argue for legal purposes. Speeches were a significant part of civic life, and three primary types of speech were commonplace, depending upon the various occasions for which they would be presented. Specifically, they are legal speech, to render decision about past actions; political speech, to move people to future actions; and ceremonial speech, to strengthen shared beliefs about the present state of affairs (Murphy, *Three Medieval*).

Before the Middle Ages began, from the first century CE until the fall of Rome in 410 CE, there was a revival period for rhetoric (Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*). This intellectual period in Greece and Rome was termed the Second Sophistic by Lucius Flavius Philostratus, an Athenian sophist who lived between 170 CE and 247 CE. Philostratus, made a distinction

between two types of sophist: the *pure sophist* and the *philosophical sophist*. The *pure sophists*, in the tradition of Quintilian, were the teachers of rhetoric. However, there was a healthy emphasis on the judicial as well as historical and deliberative themes (Kennedy, Aristotle). The *philosophical sophist*, as viewed by Philostratus, used the power of language to explain his or her ideas about political, moral, or worldly subject matter (Wright). Both philosophies relied heavily on the use of rhetoric, but for somewhat different rhetorical purposes.

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE) was a Roman statesman who made vast contributions to the fields of rhetoric and philosophy. The Ciceronian tradition springs from its namesake, Cicero's noted works, *De Inventione* and *De Oratore*, which introduced the student to the five canons of rhetoric: *Inventio* (gathering of material); *dispositio* (the arrangement of the material that was invented); *elocutio* (putting words to the material that was invented); *pronuntiatio* (physical delivery of the material); and *memoria* (the retention of the material) (Rockham). Letter writing, poetry and preaching, the three medieval rhetorical arts described by James Murphy, were a continuation of the Greco-Roman tradition of rhetoric that was initiated by Aristotle and carried through by Cicero and Quintilian (Murphy, *Medieval Eloquence*). Murphy further asserted that the Aristotelian tradition is primarily based upon Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. As a counterpart to dialectic, the Aristotelian tradition took a philosophical approach to rhetoric, applying the art of rational thought to opinion as the basis for all human discourse (*Medieval Eloquence*).

In the early part of the second and third centuries CE, Christianity gradually spread across the Roman Empire, culminating in its formal legalization by Emperor Constantine in 313 CE. As barbarian forces invaded the Roman Empire, many of the Greek and Roman documents were destroyed by the invaders or rejected by Christians as being part of a pagan culture. This

rejection was the direct result of the rise of the Church as a basis for power. With Christianity becoming the dominant religion, manifestations of other belief structures were systematically eliminated to minimize the threat of resurgence (Murphy, *Rhetoric*). The elimination of other viewpoints served to strengthen the power of the church.

### Rhetoric of the Early Middle Ages

Prior to the Early Middle Ages (476-1050 CE) many of the Latin clergy were opposed to the blending of the pagan classics of antiquity with the doctrine of Christianity because they believed that doing so was immoral. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) changed that mode of thinking when he brought about a resurgence of Ciceronian rhetoric. As a scholar of the classics, he recognized the impact that rhetoric could have upon the propagation of the Catholic faith. Augustine, in turn, greatly influenced other rhetoricians from Boethius in 524 through Christine de Pizan in 1405. Augustine effectively reconciled his classical training with his newfound Christian life. The blending of the two perspectives altered the way that rhetoric was viewed in western European intellectualism (Kristeller, *Papers on Humanism*). A proper understanding of medieval literature requires one to have a thorough knowledge of Christian beliefs (Bloomfield). It became relevant that men (and women) of the late Middle Ages also inherited the works and the thinking of antiquity (Bloomfield, *Symbolism*).

Although there were setbacks in the study of rhetoric in the Middle Ages, rhetoric survived the political and social transitions of the era. Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* is largely relevant to the medieval conversation because Ciceronian traditions were placed into the context of Christian scriptures (Baldwin). The melding of rhetoric with scripture was a powerful synthesis that enriched Augustine's three uses of rhetoric—to discover, to teach and to defend (Troup). Augustine's writings espoused the Ciceronian tradition, but he did not consider himself



to be part of the Second Sophistic, which primarily rewarded delivery and style rather than substance. Concerning it as oratorical excess, Augustine distanced himself from the Second Sophistic (Farrell). Augustine placed more emphasis on substance than show, and he considered the content of pagan teachings to be contrary to the tenets of Christianity. Just as Aristotle and Plato were the cornerstones of ancient philosophy, it is widely held that all Christian thought may be viewed as variations on the essential position of Augustine and later with Thomas Aquinas (Magill).

Jacques Le Goff considered four men in particular to be “head and shoulders above the others” in rescuing the essence of ancient civilization into a form “that could be assimilated into medieval minds and give it the necessary Christian clothing” (128). These four men were Boethius (c. 480-524), Cassiodorus (c. 480-573), Isidore of Seville (560-636), and Bede (673-725). Le Goff further notes, “The Middle Ages owes all that it was to know of Aristotle before the mid-twelfth century to Boethius” (128). Of these men, Anicius Boethius had the greatest influence over Christine with his famous work *The Consolation of Philosophy*. He, along with Cassiodorus served in the court of Theodoric the Great, educating his family in the art of letter writing for the illiterate king. Unfortunately, Theodoric had Boethius executed in 424, accused of plotting with the Byzantine emperor, Justin I (Bizzell and Herzberg).

In the Early Middle Ages (476-1000 CE) the status of rhetoric in western Europe was not as highly regarded as it had been in ancient Greece and Rome. This was due, primarily to the disappearance of legislative assemblies and courts of law (Murphy, *Three Medieval*). The political climate and judicial systems that thrived in ancient Greece and Rome no longer existed, and grammar began to play a more significant role in culture, as did logic and theology. Most of the governments in Western Europe were absolute monarchies, so there was little need for

courtroom deliberations, or democratic debates for the enactment of laws. Church and government were closely aligned, so the primary objective of rhetoric was to propagate the faith, often through the written word. The rhetoricians of the Middle Ages found reason to adapt Ciceronian rhetoric to Christian purposes.

The building of Christian monasteries became prevalent across Europe in the Early Middle Ages. Many of the inhabitants of these monasteries adhered to vows of silence therefore, face-to-face dialogue was rendered a lost art. Rhetoric came to be viewed as a one-way system in the form of preaching, poetics or epistolary (Murphy, *Three Medieval*). Scholars of the early Middle Ages disavowed the concept of audience participation in the rhetorical process. While rhetoric became an instrument to clarify scriptural interpretation and remove any ambiguities within it, the Ciceronian patterns of speech were tailored to suit purposes that were designed to move and persuade people toward the tenets of Christianity (Bloomfield, *Varieties*). Yet, the rhetorical process placed little emphasis on audience feedback or communication as a two-way system (Murphy, *Three Medieval*).

### Augustine of Hippo

Augustine lived in the fourth and fifth century of the Christian era, and is regarded for his three best known books, *Confessions*, *City of God*, and *Of Christian Doctrine*. He, along with Martianus Capella, was responsible for the revival of Ciceronian rhetoric in what is considered to be the marriage between rhetoric and Christianity (Murphy, *Rhetoric*). Charles Sears Baldwin, in 1928, commented that *On Christian Doctrine* was likely an attempt by Augustine to rescue rhetoric from the Second Sophistic. The Second Sophistic was based upon the ancient idea of sophistry, considered to be “cooking” by some, including Plato (*Gorgias* 465). With his rejection of the second sophistic Augustine took rhetoric to a new age of persuasive discourse. This is not

to say that the mindset of the Second Sophistic had not influenced the Christian religious traditions. The influence was there, but in a “very subdued form” (Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric* 39).

In 392 CE, Emperor Theodosius issued a decree to formally abolish paganism (Murphy, *Rhetoric*). The challenge for Augustine and his mentor, Ambrose of Milan, was to reconcile the use of pagan rhetoric to promote Christian ideas. As James Murphy wrote, “It was a matter of the greatest moment, for upon its success depended upon the training of future apologists to defend doctrine against heresy, the formation of future poets to carry the word of God to the people through literature and the very education of the people themselves” (Murphy, *Rhetoric* 48). Ambrose had made the determination to refer to the time as *christiana tempora*, or ‘Christian times’ (Murphy, *Rhetoric*). The use of rhetoric to promote and defend Christianity became the basis of all western discourse throughout the Middle Ages, adding to the Aristotelian notions of *genus* (animality) and *differentia*, (rationality) (*Physics*). Augustine introduced the idea of *spirituality*. This relates to the idea that humans are created in the likeness and image of God, and therefore able to commune with God (Allen).

Augustine alluded to the humanist side of life in *Confessions* when he wrote, “And men go about to wonder at the heights of the mountains and the mighty waves of the sea, and the wide sways of rivers and the circuits of the ocean, the revolution of the stars, but themselves they consider not” (*Confessions* 197). Not only was it a rediscovery of the inner world of humanity, but it also was the realization that there was much to be discovered about the existence that God created. Augustine spoke of the internalization of experiences, each building upon the other within the recesses of memory. Further clarity was offered when he stated, “In memory also are all such things that we have learned of the liberal sciences and have not forgotten” (197).

Alluding to Augustine's *Confessions*, Lady Justice, as portrayed in *The Book of the City of Ladies*, made it known that Christine's building project sits clearly outside of the finite nature of human time, and eternally "existing within the mind of God" (Kellogg 132). Augustine's existential ideas about past, future, and present, also point to an existence outside of the finite world. Augustine posits that God dwells, changeless, in eternity, while time changes. "If time did not change it would not be time, for that is its nature" (Augustine, *Confessions* 242).

Augustine is referenced and introduced directly to the reader in *Vison of Christine* (*L'Avision*) where Christine gleans from his words about scripture and his sermons on the word of God. For example, she invoked him when she told Lady Philosophy, "like Augustine you are all of the sciences and you show yourself to those who love" (*L'Avision* 142). From his legacy, Christine accepted the idea of self-governance that can be developed with reason. Augustine was also a man of great faith, which Christine deeply admired. Guiding the society toward a philosophy of moral justice was a concept that was formulated because of her study of Augustine (Allen). His penchant toward balancing faith and reason bestowed Christine with the ability to express her ideas in compelling ways, integrating the work of her religious and philosophical predecessors.

The actual 'City of Ladies' was loosely patterned after the Augustinian idea of a 'City of God' in that it was a symbol of women who have risen above the earthly existence where human conflict prevails (Holderness). Christine believed history to be sacred, as Augustine did (*City of God*) but her focus was on the feminine side of history. Christine gave a nod to Augustine's assertion that it was the devil that tempted Eve, but adds that if Eve had been better equipped, she would have had the resources to outsmart the devil and change the course of history. In other words, Eve had fallen victim to the powers of persuasion wielded over her by Satan. Christine

exonerated her, much in the way that Gorgias exonerated Helen for her betrayal (*Gorgias*), for she too was the victim of the persuasive power of words, and she lacked the appropriate tools to counter the forces that consumed her. Christine's defense of Eve challenged the misogynist tradition in which Eve was villainized. This was a defense that was waged, not only for Eve, but for all of womankind.

Earl Jeffrey Richards argued that, because Christine was so vocal in her defense of women in *Le Cité*, gender polarity comes into play in its relationship to *City of God*, and the idea of a city that is built by women for women (Allen). With all respect to the *City of God*, Christine was compelled to write a book for the sake of women, who throughout history were unfairly represented by the men who wrote about them. Since the City of Ladies is not the 'City of Man' that Augustine references, it therefore must be the 'City of God.' Rather than the masculine gender being the embodiment of all humankind, in the City of Ladies, it is women who are representative of all who are good and virtuous within the standards of Christian living (Allen).

### Anicius Boethius

Anicius Boethius was a stoic Christian living in the fifth and sixth century CE. As a recognized rhetorician he made the clear distinction between grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic (Murphy, *Rhetoric*). While serving as a Roman senator Boethius lost everything, including his property and his governing position. To make matters worse he was exiled from his family and sentenced to death because of unfounded accusations. Boethius wrote *Consolation of Philosophy* in 522 CE to confront his grief and as a catharsis for his own anguish in life. "*Consolation of Philosophy* was extremely popular among monastic and religious leaders during the medieval and Renaissance periods" writes Sister Prudence Allen (553). Today it continues to hold a prominent place in the literature of the Early Middle Ages. In *Consolation of Philosophy*

Boethius created a female representation of wisdom that he named 'Lady Philosophy' (Allen). Her personification had counseled him that what often presents as chance is, in reality, a chain of events that echoes back to the beginning of time, with wisdom and insight at its inception. What appears to be unhampered and chaotic is actually part of a larger plan of God (Griffin). Chance, which Christine often referred to as 'fortune' played a prominent role in many of her works.

Strongly influenced by Cicero and Augustine, Boethius was a notable inspiration to Christine during her time of grief, which was reflected in many of her works. To Christine, the Lady Philosophy of Boethius personified the wisdom of women and worthy of a resurrection into her own allegories. As a philosopher, Boethius saw the prudence of allowing the imaginary character to enter a dialogue with him to discuss the various attributes of grief and the ways that they are presented (Allen). As Boethius sought consolation while he grieved for the loss of all that was dear to him in life, he contemplated the idea that the only thing that is consistent about Fortune is her inconsistency or 'fickleness' (Griffin). In her own allegories Christine called upon the metaphorical Fortune to convey a shift in events that sends her life reeling into turmoil. In both *Mutación* and *Le Chemin* she casts blame upon Lady Fortune for all her trials and tribulations. The capricious nature of fortune was a commonly used theme in medieval literature, and Boethius can be credited with his influence upon the texts of both of those texts. In *Consolation of Philosophy*, Boethius contemplated and reflected upon the true nature of fortune that he explained fortune as *chance*, which is difficult to discern as a cause for something due to its seemingly random nature. To human understanding it can never appear to be anything other than haphazard (Griffin).

Inspired by Boethius, Christine refashions Lady Philosophy as a Christian theologian and a "most supreme dispenser of nourishment and medicinal restorative" (*L'Avision* 142). Written

to offer insights into Boethius's own grief while he lost nearly everything that was dear to him, many, including Christine, found it to be a source of great comfort in times of difficulty.

Boethius had such an influence upon Christine that he is mentioned in many of her works, including *The Vision of Christine (L'Vision)*, *Mutation of Fortune (Mutación)*, *The Path of the Long Study (Le Chemin)*, *The Book of the Deeds and Good Character of King Charles V (Charles V)* and *The Book of Peace (Pais)*. (Allen). It was evident that Christine had a strong philosophic leaning, as she embraced the Boethian notion that philosophy can be valuable in overcoming personal difficulties, such as the shifting of fortune that she experienced with her many losses.

Captivated by the Boethian character of Lady Philosophy, Christine's Lady Philosophy first makes her appearance in Book III of *The Vision of Christine*. She came to Christine in a dream vision and encouraged her to seek the meaning of her own life. As she was guiding Christine, she also talked to her about Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* (Allen). Lady Philosophy had allowed her to gain an alternative voice to defend the honor of women using a fictional story. Embroiled in her struggles as a widow, the persona of Christine received her calling from Lady Philosophy to contemplate loftier ideas about life (Margolis, *The Poetess*). Not only was Boethius responsible for introducing Christine to 'Lady Philosophy,' but also, along with Dante, laying the foundation for her affinity toward the use of the allegory as a tool of persuasion (Willard, *Writings*).

## Rhetoric of the High and Late Middle Ages

The High Middle Ages (1000-1300) was when the Catholic Church held inordinate power over every aspect of life. Because of all the turmoil in Western Europe, including invasions and epidemics, strong social order was a necessity of survival therefore the dogmatic viewpoint of scholasticism was readily accepted. Scholasticism can be described as an analytical method of teaching that uses dialectical reasoning to arrive at the truth and is applied to both religion and philosophy (Murphy, *Three Medieval*). Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) is given credit for the establishment of scholasticism as a school of thought, while other philosopher-theologians, such as William of Ockham (1285-1347), John Dun Scotus (1266-1308) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) were responsible for moving it into the forefront of medieval learning. Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* (1265-1274) is considered by medieval scholars to be the centerpiece of medieval Christian scholastic thought. His thoughts that theology is a supplement to natural knowledge were considered to be radical for his day. A culture of exacting spirit made Paris the center of scholasticism (Murphy, *Rhetoric*).

Between the middle of the 11th century and the end of the 13th century a renewed interest in philosophy began to develop in Italy and France (Kristeller, *Papers on Humanism*). The religious and academic scholarship that emerged placed greater emphasis on the Roman classics. Rhetoric became recognized, along with grammar and logic, the trivium of the seven liberal arts, as a concept that dates to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Religious writers, such as Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and Roger Bacon (1214-1242) both recognized the potential that rhetoric had for promoting the Catholic faith. Aquinas, a doctor of the church from Italy, is recognized for his viewpoint on natural theology, while British philosopher Roger Bacon (1214- 1242) saw



religious doctrine as something that could be entwined with a more empirical approach (Kristeller, *Papers on Humanism*).

### Jean de Meun

Stories about women began to appear on the scene in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14th centuries with increasing regularity. Of note is *Roman de la Rose* (Romance of the Rose). *Romance of the Rose* is a work of fiction that was begun in 1237 by Guillaume de Lorris and completed by Jean de Meun in 1275. Considered to be one of the most important French narrative poems of the Middle Ages (Fletcher) it was widely accepted and praised across France and enabled Meun a wide degree of acceptance as both a writer and a philosopher. More than 22 manuscripts remain of this work, a testimony to its ‘best-seller’ status in its time (Horgan).<sup>4</sup> It was a widely read and acclaimed poetic that did much to define the mindset of the Late Middle Ages.

Frances Horgan argues that the two authors are in opposition to each other, for Lorris’ text spoke of courtly romantic love, while Meun took a more cynical approach. The allegorical work that Lorris had begun was a witty treatise about the aspirations of a young man in love with a rose.<sup>5</sup> “He is a thoroughly graceful medieval poet” (Cazamian 36). The rose was a commonly used literary symbol in the Late Middle Ages, and often portrayed love in its various forms (Tyndal). Lorris had beautifully and metaphorically presented the romantic or courtly side of relationships between the genders (Hult). His version begins with a beautiful walled garden into which the lover enters. As he enters the area, he makes acquaintance with all who live there. This includes the metaphors of ‘Beauty,’ ‘Youth,’ and ‘Leisure,’ among others (Chance). The risk of admission to this magical garden is the Well of Narcissus, in which the lover gazes to see his own image distorted into that of his lady (Meun).

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<sup>4</sup> To offer perspective, only 84 original copies of *Canterbury Tales* survive.

<sup>5</sup> The rose was a commonly used symbol in the Middle Ages to designate romantic love.

Ann Tukey Harrison made the assertion that the original part of *Romance of the Rose* was created in the figurative language of the courtly metaphor. “Cast in figurative language, and often referring to familiar abstractions, without dwelling on their depiction or involving them in prolonged action” (97). Courtly metaphor takes from the language of feudalism and the church as the primary medieval institutions (Harrison). More than an entire generation of time and thought had elapsed between when that Guillaume de Lorris had bestowed his 4,000 lines of allegorical verse and Jean de Meun’s 18,000-line contribution, forty years later. Meun’s addition to the allegory more than quadrupled the amount of text. This much more verbose section of the book was presented in the form of a dream allegory, just as Christine had employed in much of her work. Compared to Lorris’ open and sincere approach to love using lyrical poetry, Meun’s continuation could be read as a counter statement to Guillaume in that he promoted the prevailing misogynistic ideas of the day (Cazamian). Meun wrote in the literary style that was so common in the period but completely shifted the tone and sentiments of Guillaume, to an air of cynicism, adapting the work to an entirely different audience (Bemont). In his section of the manuscript Jean de Meun implied that women are scornful and damaging to the well-being of men and invite rape by their contemptuous behavior. He employed allegory in the form of satire to portray women as detrimental to society (*Romance*). The metaphorical character of ‘Welcome’ is inviting the reader, while the characters of ‘Danger,’ ‘Backbiting,’ and ‘Shame’ are employed as a way of denigrating women to an even lower level of societal esteem. This was effectively accomplished through the guise of a moral and philosophical standpoint with the pulse of his conviction coming across as remarkably sound (Cazamian).

Jean de Meun earned a Master of Arts degree from the University of Paris, where it is speculated that he was also a teaching master (Allen, 2002). He was well respected for his

academic credentials, which were weaponized against Christine during the infamous *Debate of the Rose*. Regardless of the high level of self-education she administered, she was deemed unworthy to make any judgements about his work, all because her education was not formalized. Meun's contribution to *Romance* was his only original work, but he was responsible for translating texts from Latin into French, including, in a slight twist of irony, Boethius' *Consolation*. Because her education was not formalized *of Philosophy*, a work that Christine greatly admired. Meun was a man of great respect, and his work was generally viewed in a favorable light, until Christine took objection to it (Brown-Grant). Meun's contribution was an offering of his personal view of the world. The 400-page satirical poem was structured to conform to a "scholastic debate between masters and students" (Allen 188), giving greater legitimacy to his devaluation of women. To further the point, he presented it as a didactic, to be used for the purpose of teaching. Quoting the narrator of *Romance*: "Will you blame me therefore, nor scorn my book, which is but written for instruction's sake" (Meun 4).

According to Brian Vickers, the Late Middle Ages (also referred to as the 'European Renaissance' or 'Early Modernity') gave rhetoric its greatest range of influence (*Defense*). The European Renaissance was the result of an accumulation of political, social, and economic problems that caused most of Western Europe to fall into a continuous state of chaos. Norman Cantor also noted that "any period of transvaluation, or transition from one set of values to another is generally violent and complicated" (*The Classic* 249). The late Middle Ages were no exception. Cantor further asserted that "the atmosphere of crisis often inspires theoretical work on basic problems that are ignored and taken for granted in happier times" (*The Classic* 251). The transvaluation of the Late Middle Ages opened the doors for a shift in philosophical leanings away from scholasticism and toward the philosophy of humanism. The rise in intellectualism at

the end of the Middle Ages was a palpable influence upon the secularization of many of the institutions and the realignment of power within the social structure (Forhan).

The sentiments of Aristotle were carried through the Middle Ages and into early modernity. In Question 92 of *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas reflected and amplified the notion of male superiority. He helped to perpetuate the idea of woman as a misbegotten male (Aquinas). To that point he did not believe that anything as defective as a woman should have been included in the first production of things (Sterba). Furthermore, because of the great sin that Eve committed, there was even more reason for women to be excluded.

On the other hand, even though he was a follower of Aristotle, Aquinas struggled with the idea of polarity of the sexes in the afterworld. He was a proponent of his ideas about natural philosophy, but his views were divergent on sexual polarity. Following the lead of Augustine, he favored the idea of “reverse sexual polarity” (Allen 10). This is to say that, in the realm of grace women occupied a superior position to man. The rationale was that because women have had to strive to overcome their inferiority in the earthly realm, they earn a special distinction in the realm of God (Allen).

Aquinas defined much of the medieval thinking from the thirteenth century up through the 15th century. His *Summa Theologica*, written in (1265-1274) was the absolute highpoint of scholasticism (Blamires). As the idea of university-style learning spread throughout Europe, so did scholasticism (Berrigan). According to Berrigan, scholasticism was a method that was “used by the Church to safeguard itself and its teachings” (85). By the 15<sup>th</sup> century humanist thought had begun to emerge and a dearth of humanist thinkers with powerful ideas had appeared.

As a prelude to the age of enlightenment and scientific discovery, humanism also contributed to an air of discontent with scholasticism so far as to clear the pathway for the

protestant reformation. Scholasticism came to be viewed with superstition and naivety, and an impediment to intellectualism (Berrigan). With humanism, scholarly endeavors had expanded far and wide, affecting all areas of the knowledge spectrum. The Late Middle Age was a time of intellectual and philosophical transition, which opened the windows of receptiveness to new viewpoints. The kairos of this historical moment offered Christine the opportunity to voice her ideas in ways that would set the tone for a shift in the cultural narrative.

### Geoffrey Chaucer

The English court poet, Geoffrey Chaucer was best known for authoring *Canterbury Tales* between 1387 and 1400. Some insight is offered by Geoffrey Chaucer into the role of women in the Middle Ages. *Canterbury Tales' Wife of Bath's Tale*, the wife of Bath, Dame Alisoun, offered the sage advice that women would be happier if they were allowed the same degree of sovereignty that men have. The point was valid because women were not recognized for their own social status, their occupation, or accomplishments they may have achieved. Rather they were defined by their relationship to men. Females were either, maidens, wives, nuns, prostitutes, or widows. Both the Wife of Bath, and Christine had the viewpoint that if “women themselves had written books, as so many men have, this would give us a very different impression of the vices and virtues of the two sexes” (Rigby 137)

In 1385, twenty years before Christine wrote *The Book of the City of Ladies*, Geoffrey Chaucer wrote *Legend of Good Women*. Although he was an English poet, there is no doubt that he was highly influential in Christine's work. He wrote this poem as a way of confronting the misogynist writing that had become so familiar to readers in the Late Middle Ages (Delaney). He also wrote in the form of the *dream vision*, a rhetorical technique also employed by Christine in her writings to exert ethos into the persuasive power of her work (Delaney). Christine and

Chaucer separately attempted to change the narrative and the image that had been widely disrespecting women. Both Chaucer and Christine defended women against assertions of being fickle, weak, and simple minded. Christine was the more successful of the two. Just as Chaucer's protagonist was visited by a dream vision, so was the fictional character of Christine. In *The Book of the City of Ladies* it was 'Lady Reason' who instructed her to build a metaphorical city that is both a tribute to and a mosaic of women of virtue throughout the ages.

*Legend of Good Women* was also a work that Christine regarded highly. In this literary dream vision, Chaucer used a fictional character to represent himself. He portrayed himself as a misogynist male who is admonished by the God of Love and his queen, Alceste, for his heresy against women (Chance). The God of Love was characterized as a feminist who chastises the character of Chaucer because of various things that he had written in the past that did not present women in the most favorable light (McDonald). As a form of penance, the protagonist Chaucer is instructed to write a book that honors women, hence *Legend of Good Women* was written. This important work by Chaucer provided the foundation from which Christine wrote *Letter from the God of Love* where Cupid dictates a letter to Christine, addressing the misogyny of her time.

#### Christine: As Defender of Womankind

Simone de Beauvoir stated that the history of women was written by men, therefore, there were few women who had a voice in their own destiny. This became one of the foundations of the modern feminist movement, that women should be entitled to speak on their own behalf. In 15<sup>th</sup> century Europe, feminism was so far outside of that sphere of thought that even the idea of defending women against the oppressive culture of malignant male dominance was a conversation that most women dared not enter (Allen). As a forerunner to the cause of women's rights, Christine presented the argument that women are not morally depraved as depicted in

popular literature, and for the betterment of society, it is morally imperative that girls and young women have the same rights to an education as their brothers. The education that Christine wanted girls to have was the same education to which the male members of society were already entitled. As de Beauvoir later alluded, women were subjects in literature, but rarely were they ever speaking subjects (*Second Sex*). For this reason, Christine openly advocated for the education of women, specifically so that they would be empowered to become speaking subjects in a culture that had virtually ignored their voices for centuries.

Because Christine never overtly presented the argument that women ought to be socially equal to men, a postmodern feminist viewpoint would likely not recognize her as having risen to meet the terms of its ideology. However, from de Beauvoir's hermeneutic perspective, Christine's role in the modern feminist movement was notably significant in view of the cultural moment in which she lived. When Christine is viewed from the backdrop of a medieval misogynistic, often violent culture, she was a very-strong forerunner to the cause of women's equality to men, speaking her voice through the rhetoric of her literature to a male-dominated culture (*Second Sex*).

Finding the literary vehicle to carry Christine's voice was key to the success of her rhetorical approach to establishing feminine authority. To reach her audience she engaged allegory, shrouded within carefully styled symbolism, along with examples of virtuous women and the commendable behavior of both genders. This resonated with many, even those adhering to the prevailing dogmatically infused values of the day. Because much of Christine's work was under the guise of fiction, even people with rigid beliefs could righteously engage her work from a fictive perspective, yet still hear the voice of change subtly emanating from within the text.

Written texts were a rhetorical empowerment that allowed Christine, a woman without cultural authority, to speak her mind to the dominant powers of her time, including the papacy, the monarchy, and the male intellectuals of 15<sup>th</sup> century Parisian society. Most noteworthy was her response to the prevailing misogynist beliefs that permeated the French narrative of the late Middle Ages. Because of her perceived lack of cultural authority Christine engaged in a more creative form of messaging. Using the rhetorical power of tropes and allegories, she effectively maneuvered the prevailing power structures to create a powerful voice of her own. With this voice she was able to guide the conversation of her day, rendering it less hostile toward the feminine gender.

Using the persona of divine feminine authority in many of her works, Christine spoke her mind. Her voice was disguised as that of more powerful entities, bestowed with authority directly from God (Willard, *Writings*). But most importantly, hers was a voice that was used to overturn the negative roles of women as they were portrayed in literature. Christine's endeavor to defend the female gender was driven by numerous events, including the negative allegations against women by writers from an earlier century, whose works continued to be widely read and lauded in early 15<sup>th</sup> century Paris. Two sources of the mischaracterization of women noted by Christine were Jean de Meun and Mathieu of Boulogne (also known as Matheolus). Both men brutally maligned women with their rhetoric. Meun contributed the second phase of *Romance of the Rose* (c.1270) as a continuation of the dream allegory that was begun by Guillaume de Lorris forty years earlier. Although Lorris wrote about courtly love, Meun's contribution satirized it and portrayed women as inherently deceptive and deserving of sexual assault. Meun and Matheolus both characterized women as evil temptresses who were responsible for the downfall of good men. Knowing this to be a mischaracterization of women, Christine made it her cause to



counteract the culture of misogyny that was fueled by the literary contributions of Meun and Matheolus.

Despite her superior intellectualism and argumentation, she lacked the cultural authority to be taken seriously. Even though she presented a more compelling argument than her male adversaries, they held the power to proclaim who had the authority to speak on a subject and who did not. This was a minor setback that Christine did not allow to hamper her quest to alter the European cultural narrative. This was a narrative that was biased against the feminine gender and supported the concept of male intellectual superiority. Christine came to realize the moral necessity to launch an all-out defense of womankind. At that point in time, she made the decision to set aside her argumentation skills and to engage her most powerful weapons of defense – *symbolism, allegory, and exemplar*.

Matheolus' *Lamentations* disparaged marriage in general and women's role in marriage in particular by memorably referring to a wife as being quarrelsome. In response to Matheolus, in 1405 Christine penned her signature work, *The Book of the City of Ladies* (hereafter *Le Cité*). This was her most influential work in defense of womankind. Her purpose for this masterpiece was to elevate the status of good women after they had been so badly defamed in the literature of the time. Finding power in allegory, Christine embedded her message within it to address the misogynist culture into which she was born, and to speak out against the prevailing negative influences of both papacy and monarchy (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee).

Before Christine could launch a persuasive argument that women had far greater value than was socially believed, she had to first establish herself as a discursive authority (Brown-Grant). To accomplish this, she also had to stand up against the well-regarded texts that served to define women's role as the moral subordinate. Her writing was an evolutionary process that

began with poetic verse about love and sorrow, and slowly began to build up to a powerful defense of womankind in *Le Cité*. Rosalind Brown-Grant refers to *Le Cité* as “the text which, by the end of the 14th century had established itself as the vernacular authority on misogyny” (*Moral Defense* 7). As a testament to Christine’s notoriety, which had become international, she was invited to serve in two royal courts –the court of Gian Galeazzo Visconti, Duke of Milan, and the court of Henry IV, King of England (Hindman). Christine declined both offers, realizing the opportunities that she had to influence the narrative of her beloved adopted country, France.

With an instinct for knowing how to craft the rhetoric of symbolism into a narrative that nudged the boundaries of the societal order of gender, Christine rattled the patriarchal authority of medieval France. Artfully arranged words were Christine’s weapon of defense against the prevailing attitudes regarding the status of women. Her carefully chosen verses were placed into allegorical form, giving her a rhetorical voice from which to combat a male dominated culture that professed that women were inherently immoral. Using the rhetorical power of exemplum, Christine demonstrated the value of women from various cultures throughout history to speak her mind in protection of women against the vicious disparagement of their gender. Secondly, her motive was to further the cause of education for womankind, claiming that women are every bit as proficient as men, when they are given the opportunity.

Having published more than forty manuscripts in her lifetime, the oeuvre of Christine de Pizan is vast, considering the arduous efforts it took to script, bind, illuminate and publish them. Every one of her manuscripts can be evidenced as contributing ideas to support rhetoric as a major field of study. The writings that are further referenced in this dissertation were chosen because they best exemplify her rhetorical skills in the use of tropes and metaphors, including symbolism, allegory, and exemplum. These works were also chosen with the intent of

demonstrating an evolution of Christine's ideas, and the gradual progression of empowerment that she achieved with each individual text. Included in this research is evidence to support the notion of Christine's rhetorical savant as demonstrated by some of her most noted poetry, prose and epistolary.

Christine de Pizan is widely recognized as being the first known European female professional writer, but her contributions were significantly more noteworthy. She was prolific, having penned more than forty works over the course of her illustrious career as a professional writer (Ferguson). Going well beyond that point, she was also a philosopher, who not only addressed political and moral issues, but who also used the power of fictive literature to defend the honor of women, and to speak out against the transgressions of the church and monarchy. Having lived in one of the most tumultuous times in French history when there was both internal and external upheaval, as well as a monumental divide within the Church, the time was right for new perspectives. Christine learned how to shape her rhetorical writing style to fit the prevailing narrative yet open the doors to new cultural viewpoints. As a guardian of humanity, she offered guidance to people on living a productive life, regardless of the station to which they had been relegated through birth or circumstances.

Most importantly, she set down the foundation for a moral philosophy in defense of women against a misogynist society, and to elevate the status of women with the argument that women are every bit as capable as their male counterparts. She believed this to be particularly true regarding their ability to attain an education. Christine's was a voice that resonated for nearly three centuries, before almost disappearing into the cultural abyss of obscurity (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee). Not only had her writing style fallen out of fashion, but it

was also buried beneath the cover of a male-dominant literary field, which was responsible for the lack of recognition of female authors in early modernity.

### Conclusion

Influenced by the strands of rhetorical and philosophical ideas that weave their way through the centuries, Christine established her ground with a strong humanist leaning, and a belief that knowledge should be universal. Most importantly she believed that virtuous women had a place in the world, therefore entitled to a voice. According to her own accounts, Christine's writing career went into full swing in 1399 when she began to gain notoriety for writing poetry about love, loss and a variety of other topics that served her passions (Christine, *L'Avision*). By the turn of the fifteenth century, her reputation as a writer had spread to England and Italy, with the Duke of Milan offering her a substantial income if she would relocate to her former country. As flattered as she was, she decided to remain living in her adopted country of France (*L'Avision*), as that was her home and that is where she had established her reputation. In just five years she had written fifteen major works, combining her own personal story with allegory and political commentary (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee). In that period of time, she was first denigrated for her lack of authority, and then later praised for her insights into what she perceived as a woman's right to be heard.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Christine's Forms of Rhetoric

As a self-educated woman of the late Middle Ages, Christine de Pizan carried with her a literary narrative that was a mosaic of philosophers, theologians, and literary giants that preceded her in time. From the wisdom of the greatest thinkers of the ages, including Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, and Boethius to the persuasive use of language from the most notable humanist authors, Boccaccio, Dante, and Petrarch, Christine learned valuable lessons in the art of persuasion. The most essential part of that rhetorical process, she discovered, was the use of language to evoke emotion and establish the moral truth. Christine learned that, in her prevailing culture, she did not possess the discursive authority to engage in direct argumentation, therefore she would be more effective if she were to follow an alternative path to her voice as a female rhetor of the Middle Ages.

Cheryl Glenn notes that “Medieval culture was wholly and decidedly masculine” (75). She further argues that “The written word was controlled by the clergy, the men of cloth, and the church, who controlled the flow of knowledge” (*Rhetoric Retold* 75). Knowledge was a type of power, and its distribution was limited to the masculine elite. Because of her gender, even though she had self-educated to a level comparable to male aristocrats, Christine had been denied the opportunity to receive a formal education. Consequently, she lacked the necessary credentials to be fully legitimized to speak with cultural authority or philosophical conviction. But the intensity that exuded from her work resulted in her manuscripts having been widely embraced by both men and women across Europe in the centuries that followed (Taylor and Smith). Through her use of fiction Christine gained her legitimacy as a moral philosopher, one step at a time. Gradually evolving her rhetorical skills, she gained the power and the privilege to confront

authority through her carefully crafted allegories. Eventually this led to Christine's recognition as a moral philosopher, gaining the cultural authority that she was without earlier in her career.

Although it was not unusual for non-aristocratic women of the late Middle Ages to be employed, a writing woman was far less common, and was often perceived as a threat to society (Delaney). However, with a family to support, Christine was up against a legal system that did little to recognize the inheritance rights of women (Mirabella). She lived in a world where unmarried women were often forced to survive with little or no financial resources and left in a complete state of disempowerment. Not only were women denied a voice, but they were also subjected to a culture of violence. Consequently, Christine garnered an even greater appreciation of the power of knowledge and language. Finding herself propelled into a world in which male dominance was accepted as part of the natural order, she came to realize that the only way around it was to engage the rhetorical power of her pen.

During the early part of the 15<sup>th</sup> century Christine wrote more than forty texts with a total of fifteen major works, on a variety of topics, including lost love, virtue, praise, and the defense of women (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee). As she gained her cultural authority by playing the role of a silent listener within her allegorical work, she also earned her reputation as a moral philosopher, historian, biographer, and political theorist. Having been inspired by many writers, and philosophers throughout history who did little to support the rights of women, she proficiently gleaned from their words, and applied them to various situations. By doing so she created an appeal to a diverse audience of both genders along the social spectrum (Brown-Grant).

Religious dogma was a powerful force in maintaining a social order in which women were expected to remain silent and submissive. For Christine to aspire to become a professional

writer took profound courage, given the religiously ordained climate of misogyny. As admonished by St. Paul, women were not permitted to teach or have authority over men, but rather to keep silent (I Timothy 2: 11-12). Because of St. Paul's words, many considered Christine's becoming a writer to be a transgression, for it went against the prevailing mode of thought. However, it was a transgression that gave women a voice, and enabled Christine to establish a reputation for herself (Mirabella). As demonstrated in much her writing, she was able to enter the realm of the male-dominated field of writing by taking a humble submissive stance and playing the part of the silent listener, sitting serenely in the shadows, while her divine mentors spoke authoritatively to her persona, and tacitly to her readership.

The voice of a silent Christine projected onto the virtuous characters in her fiction. Her mission was to help women in their quest to preserve their own honor, to enhance and bolster their feelings of self-worth, while at the same time, minimizing the risk of peril to women who opposed the prevailing social order. The patriarchal hierarchy that Christine operated within was a dangerous one that young women must learn to successfully maneuver. Christine viewed the pathway out of oppression as one that offers a semblance of submissiveness (for the purpose of safety against the brutality of the prevailing social forces) as a gradual entryway into the realm of male discourse. Christine recognized that a full-out revolution would be futile and would only serve to further jeopardize the well-being of women. M. Bella Mirabella sums it up succinctly when she paraphrases Christine to say, "Women can attain the [sovereignty] if they learn how to manipulate the male world through female behavior and language, even if it means that at times women must be silent" (Mirabella 17).

A critical moment presented itself to Christine when she responded to the denigration of women, which had become so much a part of medieval culture. The flames of this misogyny had

been stoked by highly acclaimed authors, such as Mathieu of Boulogne who wrote *Lamentations* in 1295 and Jean de Meun, who wrote a major portion of *Romance of the Rose* between 1237 and 1275. Christine first addressed this misogyny through the mythological Cupid, in *Letter from the God of Love*, written in 1399. Using poetics combined with epistolary, in the form of allegory she offered advice on how lovers should be respected and treated with the highest level of regard. This work of poetic epistolary set the tone for much that was to follow in the progression of Christine's literary oeuvre.

With an intuition about the importance of understanding and navigating the prevailing culture before change could be affected, Christine realized she had to tread carefully because accusations of heresy were not uncommon in her time (Kelly). Punishment for heresy often included hideous forms of torture, including being burned at the stake or tied to a wheel. Her very survival as a writer with a message depended upon her ability to be true to the medieval French traditions and values, while gently permeating their boundaries. As she skillfully maneuvered through the cultural system and "persevered by aligning her thoughts, not only with reason, but also with her faith" (Kelly 173) she was among the first, if not the first, to challenge the male dominated cultural beliefs of medieval Europe. Christine de Pizan stands as a cornerstone to all feminist rhetoric that was to follow down through the centuries.

In 1401 Christine altered her approach to persuasion by entering rational, discursive argumentation in *Debate of the Rose*. As a result, she was maligned and disparaged for speaking on subjects to which she was without authority, simply because she was a woman. As Christine's work evolved, she discovered a literary power so strong that it enabled her to speak out, not only to defend the honor of women, but also to call out the conduct of both the monarchy of France and the papacy of the Catholic church. Hers was a voice that was not granted or bestowed from



institutional authority, but rather was earned through the power of the written word, in the form of allegory. These were allegories that contained both an appeal to, and a message from, a higher level of authority by way of gods from ancient mythology, or divine mentors of the Christian persuasion. These mystical voices from on high were humbly received by the fictional character of Christine, who served as the conduit for Christine's real-life intended message.

Because she was of the female gender, when Christine first embarked upon her writing career, she was without cultural authority to express her opinions in her writing. Faced with severe limitations as to what was socially acceptable for her to say, she initially found that her intellectual credibility was almost nil, based solely upon her gender and marital status of widow. Empowered by her confidence in the rhetorical power of words, she did not allow these barriers to stop her, for she knew that her power was in her literary ability to cleverly sidestep the male authority by taking her writing voice under the stylistic control of fiction. Hers was a fiction that was rife with the use of allegory and exemplum, empowered by literary symbolism, engaged for purpose of persuasion. Christine had proven herself to be masterful at "using fiction and fictive figures to do the work of philosophy" (Carr 27). This is most prevalent in her narration of her allegorical dream visions.

Her rhetorical technique within her allegorical dream visions was a four-step process. The inception of a concept was within Christine. Christine then extended her message from her own life to fictional characters of a higher world. Often the characters included saints and other exemplary individuals, including those who worshipped as pagans. All of them stood for higher ideals, such as reason, rectitude, and justice. The divine beings would, figuratively, process the message into allegory, and then deliver the symbol-laden message to the protagonist of the allegory, who was also named Christine, with all her characteristics patterned after the author,

Christine. The fictional protagonist, Christine then humbly conveyed the message to her readers. This was a technique she repeated often in the earlier years of her rhetorical journey, until Christine, the rhetor, eventually achieved the designation of ‘speaking subject’ in her own right.

Before Christine transitioned from an author of fiction as a form of persuasion into that of a highly respected writer of historical accounts and political theory, she needed to first prove herself competent to do so. This was no easy task because, throughout the ages, both history and poetry were concerns that were limited to the purview of men. These were men who wrote of history both as the perceiver and the perceived (Margolis, *The Poetess*). Political theory was also off limits simply because it was a concern that excluded women entirely, and history was written, primarily by men and about men. The few books that were written to include women were also written from a man’s perspective, and generally for the benefit of men.

#### Christine: A Rhetorical Influence

The novelty of being a woman writer caused Christine to be viewed as a curiosity by some people, while she was viscerally maligned by others. The concept of a woman writer, particularly one so prolific, was so peculiar that many people doubted her credibility. She was often accused of plagiarism, or of having monks or male students serve as her writers (Hindman). However, the fact that she was such an oddity may have also contributed to some of her mystique as a writer. She was a writer that became so powerful in her time that her manuscripts were coveted by the highest levels of nobility. The fact that Christine was a female author may have, in a twist of irony, contributed to her success. Christine claimed that her readers were driven to her work because it not only presented an innovative perspective but also because of the novelty of a woman writing in a domain that was controlled by men (Blamires). Christine’s feminine perspective was part and parcel to her work and contributed to an air of

mystery, despite her initial lack of cultural authority. Kevin Brownlee wrote, “Christine de Pizan is the first [French] literary figure whose identity as a woman constituted not just a fundamental but also an explicit and elaborate part of her authorial persona” (*Literary Genealogy* 205). Her identity as a female author began as a detriment to her public perception, but over time came to be accepted as very much a part of her rhetorical influence upon the late Middle Ages.

As Europe’s first professional female author, Christine began writing as a way of earning a living to support her family, which she was able to accomplish through the process of patronage. Late medieval and European Renaissance culture, between the 14th and 17th centuries, defined patronage as that which is given to the artist, poet, or writer in exchange for creative work. Patronage may have been in the form of “food, lodging, clothing, money, and sometimes the possibility of a stable position at court” (McGrady 197). There was generally a level of intimacy between the patron and the artists, and often one had influence over the other in the creative process. Patrons often had control over the content of the work, but on other occasions they did not, particularly if the writer had gained a solid reputation, as Christine had.

Sandra Hindman noted, “Some works Christine wrote on commission and others on speculation” (429). Most were written for members of the royal court of Charles VI and Isabeau of Bavaria. As the king and queen had provided patronage, Christine was also granted commissions by Louis de Orleans, Jean de Berry, and the dauphin, Louis de Guyenne and his wife, Margaret of Burgundy. Because Christine’s patronage came from the highest nobility, it stands to reason that her work was highly regarded by many people and she was handsomely compensated for that which she produced. Often, she was rewarded with money and other times she was bestowed with lavish gifts (Hindman).

Because of the strength of her notoriety across Western Europe, Christine was able to maintain literary control of the content of her writing by emphasizing the close relationship she had with her work (McGrady). This was evidenced by the role that Christine played in her allegories. As the first-person narrator, she played the part of a passive listener who shared valuable lessons from wiser beings of a celestial nature. The humble stance that she took within her allegories allowed her to work within the prevailing system on the receiving end of a literary voice that emanated from an allegorical higher power that had been sanctified by God above.

As the popularity of Christine's works grew, so did her reputation as an intellectual force. Her manuscripts were well received by her patrons, substantiated by the fact that *Mutación* was so highly acclaimed that Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy invited her to commission a biography of his brother, King Charles V, who had died twenty years earlier. This acknowledgement points directly to her recognition as a serious writer, making ripples and waves across the historical narrative. The products of her labor were more than just prose and poetry, but rather the entire package of the female author and her work (McGrady). Christine created what, in modern-day language, would be known as her 'brand,' which not only included her literary works, but herself as well. Her branding was so prominent, and her reputation so solid, that it became widely accepted that she was not at the literary disposal of her patrons. Rather, her didactic style fashioned her patron's relationship with the text into one of a "student and teacher" (McGrady 201). Her patrons may have tendered substantial money, goods, or services, but Christine maintained strict control over her message. Her attention to how she expressed herself within the historical moment advanced her reputation in the Middle Ages.

## Christine's Rhetoric of Symbolism, Allegory, and Exemplum

Kenneth Burke famously stated that “rhetoric is rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic and continually born anew” (*Motives* 43). Using various rhetorical processes Christine was adept at capturing the essence of her time and addressing social issues with a powerful use of her words, carefully strung together, and delivered to her readers in the form of literary fiction. Christine clearly realized the power of words and the human tendency to respond to symbolism on an emotional level. When the use of symbolism was combined with examples of virtuous humans whose good deeds have stood the test of time, rhetoric opened the way for social change. Engaging symbolism and exemplum within an allegorical presentation captured the emotions of humans and opened the patron, or reader, up to the possibilities of change to their world view.

### The Role of Symbolism in the Middle Ages

Human nature, according to Kenneth Burke, responds to symbolic language so that we may cooperate as a society, and take the actions needed to sustain and recreate a preexisting culture. He asserts that the driving force behind action is persuasion: “where there is persuasion, there is rhetoric, and where there is rhetoric, there is meaning” (Burke, *Motives* 172). The symbol “conceals what it carries and resists total explanation because it is founded in analogy” (as quoted in Tindall 12). The symbol is related to the metaphor, partially unstated, and an analogy for the unstated. A metaphor, being a figure of speech that makes a comparison between two concepts, while a symbol is a representation of another idea, generally carrying a level of emotion with it. An example of this will be given in the analysis of *The Book of the City of Ladies*, as presented in Chapter Four of this dissertation. When Lady Justice appeared to

Christine carrying a chalice-like cup in her hands, Lady Justice herself served as a metaphor for righteousness and equanimity, while the cup that she carries is a symbol of justice.

Philosophers have long recognized that symbol making is very much a part of human functionality (Tindall). Ernst Cassirer affirmed, as Burke did, that “man is a symbol using animal whose languages, myths, religion, sciences and arts are symbolic forms by which he projects his reality and comes to know it” (quoted in Tindall 5). As opposed to a sign, which is a direct referent, a symbol is less direct, while carrying a greater level of emotion and meaning. The symbol expresses what logic and direct signifiers are not able to convey. William York Tindall goes on to say that “No image is without context, and every image owes context part of what it bears” (9). This idea gives credence to the notion that the late medieval period, as are all historical periods, was rife with symbolism in all the rhetorical arts, and within the context of all the strife and contention experienced by the French in this particular time period. From an historical standpoint, the Middle Ages supported the idea that Europeans had the tendency to view all symbolism through a Christian lens (Bloomfield, *Symbolism*). Christianity was the perfect source for the literary symbolism and allegories of Christine de Pizan, as she effectively guided a new cultural narrative into French literary society. With her symbolism revealing both a Christian foundation and a humanist perspective, she appealed to both the spiritual inclination and intellectual curiosity of her readers.

Medieval thought included the belief that the mind of God is reflected into the physical world by way of symbols. H. Flanders Dunbar described the importance of symbolism in medieval culture as a “gateway to something beyond” (7). The symbol was believed to express a reality that was far closer to the truth as conveyed by the power of God rather than what one could experience on earth. Dunbar further states that the symbol “conceals what it carries and

resists total explanation because it is founded in analogy” (7). The tendency was for medieval man to categorize everything into terms of Christianity, and very often the symbolism that was infused into all literature pointed to that Christian influence.

Historian Morton Bloomfield once stated, “In the Middle Ages there is at hand a fully-worked-out, even if contradictory, theoretical symbolic system” (*Symbolism* 73). In concurrence with Kenneth Burke, he supported the notion that all literary work, regardless of when it was written, contains referential meaning. Burke emphasized that language itself is a system of symbols (Burke, *Motives*). Therefore, every written word inherently symbolizes something other than itself (Bloomfield, *Symbolism*). Literary symbolism is not something that was unique to Christine, nor to the late medieval era. All literary work contains symbolic meaning on many levels. For the symbols to be meaningful to the text, the interpretation, or coding, of the symbols must be shared within the specific perceiving culture. Once established, the symbols become a binding force to create and recreate that culture.

Bloomfield also related, “Historically, of course, medieval man tended to think in Christian categories, and most frequently the *sententia* [brief moral sayings] he put into or discovered in literature was a Christian one” (*Symbolism* 75). People living in Europe in the Middle Ages tended to view everything through the prism of Church doctrine. In addition to the symbols of Christianity, late medieval culture also inherited many of the ideas of the late antiquarians, and with that some elements of secularism. There were many symbols used in literature of the Middle Ages without an exact science of interpretation, for they held a wide range of meaning (Bloomfield *Symbolism*). For this reason, meaning in literature could only be acquired from its greater social context. Generally, a Christian construct framed the author’s viewpoint, generating the primary meaning of a text in late medieval European culture. Most of

this meaning was conveyed as a form of morality nestled within the symbolism. Throughout most of the Middle Ages there was an element of sin or hope to every medieval symbol, either referencing the original sin of Adam, or the promised land of the future. As the dogmatic framework of biblical exegesis began to erode in the late Middle Ages (1300-1500), the secular aspects to symbolism emerged, adding balance to the tension between faith and reason. Dunbar's concepts of metaphor and analogy are relevant in that symbols make a comparison by drawing the mind to the unspoken similarities between two concepts. For instance, noting that a person is 'Jobian,' one reasons, through shared cultural narratives, that the referent has a level of patience this is comparable to the biblical persona of Job, who persevered in the face of overwhelming obstacles.

The role of symbolism in the Late Middle Ages, addressed the perceiver, both directly and indirectly, through a coded set of social agreements. The interpretation of symbolism was reliant upon these agreements (Tindall). Christine engaged the power of literary symbolism, enhanced by carefully crafted allegory, to create a powerful rhetorical influence. Symbolism and allegory, and exemplum were her way of circumventing a power structure that denied women a voice in society. Consequently, this merited her authority to speak as a philosopher, an historian, and a political theorist. A close examination of the literary work of Christine will show a progression, with each new addition to her literary presence further enhancing her voice and rhetorical influence upon the narrative of her day.

### The Role of Allegory in the Middle Ages

Jean Paul Sartre posited the idea that the writer of any fiction becomes a master manipulator of events and outcomes (*Being*). As an author, one has complete control of the written narrative, and the ability to influence others through the manipulation of symbols that



evoke emotions within the reader. The emotions that are aroused within the reader have their basis in a shared cultural narrative that draws from common experiences. The literary text then reflects elements of the culture, and the culture in turn is influenced by the compelling nature of the text. A reader actively participates in the formation of meaning by emotionally responding to the symbolism within the allegory (Michelson). As a rhetorical trope, allegory conveys a narrative with the understanding that it says or presents something one way but means something on a deeper level. The ambiguity is mitigated by the social agreement that transpires using symbolism.

The word *allegory* has its roots in the Greek language, related to the word *agora*, meaning marketplace. Allegory is the noun form of the word that means ‘to speak in the marketplace’ (Bloomfield, *Varieties*). Cicero also used the Latin term *allegoria*, meaning to ‘speak other.’ Much like metaphor that serves the use of language in representing one idea that alludes to another, the allegory also enhances the power of language. Although it is not entirely a verbal trope, for the most part it is a verbal type of expression (Bloomfield, *Varieties*).

The allegory employs a process of identification with an access to the world through the eyes of the other that one becomes persuaded (Booth). Ann Tukey Harrison states, “the Allegory and metaphor are inextricably intertwined” (99). Allegory allows one to create a story, even a story that permitted women to have a voice. Considered to reside within the world of imagination, the allegory can speak truth to the powerful without fear of reprisal. Umberto Eco referred to allegory as, “perhaps the most typical aspect of medieval aesthetic sensibility. The allegory characterizes the Late Middle Ages above all others, and something that we tend to view as uniquely medieval” (*Art and Beauty* 53). The allegory, most often associated with the Middle Ages, can also be found in pre-Christian Greek literature, such as Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave*,

which uses symbolic fictional figures to reveal realities that are not overtly identified (Plato, *Republic*). Morton Bloomfield further claims that “because of the nature of language and the world, allegory is necessary for living and understanding. The allegory arose out of a need to make use of language to control or understand the world” (*Symbolism* 343). Although the use of literary fiction in allegorical form was nothing new to the late Middle Ages, it certainly came into popularity with the contributions of both Lorrin and Meun to the *Romance of the Rose*.

Without being overtly antithetical there is an odd sense of irony that the truth that is derived from allegory is reflected from the fiction from which it emerged. “Allegory is the disposable, fictional covering. What lies under it must be something that we assume to be real, that is fundamental, non-problematic and irreducible,” was articulated by Carolyn Van Dyke. The search for that concealed realism is often guided by the fixations of the cultural background of the perceiver. Van Dyke further noted. “Thus, medieval exegetes could reclaim pagan, or even scriptural texts for their own philosophic ends” (*The Fiction* 69). Christine often called upon the ancients to serve as actors in her fictional accounts, often weaving both pagan and Christian narratives into the same fictional work.

Alan M. F. Gunn argued “The allegorical story is only a thin disguise for a story of the inner life, and to a lesser degree the outer fortunes” (as quoted in Van Dyke 70). Allegorical story “invites serial interpretations while binding them together; it demands movement from the particular to the universal” (Tarnowski 105). Like the metaphor, it was not used to deceive, but rather to provoke the reader to view his or her own ideas from a different perspective. Allegory was Christine’s primary trope. For her, this was not just a literary device, but rather, an axiom with various levels of meaning. This was her way of presenting the truth in a way that was relevant to the reader, yet open to interpretation.

Unlike Augustine, and other autobiographical authors of the medieval era, Christine was not a theologian, nor even a cleric. In that regard she needed to persuade her princely audience to look beyond her limited credentials and embrace the ethical elucidations that she offered in her own autobiographical narrative (Brown-Grant). Christine advised her royal readers that there are many truths hidden within the shrouded language of allegory, and there are many ways in which that truth can be interpreted. Rosalind Brown-Grant opined that “one of the reasons that Christine used the obscure veil of allegory is because she regarded the intellectual rigors involved in deciphering allegorical texts as morally improving” (94). If her opinions were not couched in allegorical form, she would have taken a substantial risk by proffering criticism of those who held the power and would likely be in jeopardy of harsh retribution (Blamires). Speaking truth to power had its element of danger, but Christine was insightful enough to know that she could cushion her critique beneath the veils of allegory.

James Murphy quoted an unknown Parisian author who wrote *Compendium Rhetorice* in 1332, “Allegory is a trope in which one thing is shown in the words and another in the meaning” (*Rhetoric* 238). Murphy further asserted that “allegory is in the area of figurative language and figurative thought that rhetoric entered the poetic tradition” (*Medieval* 190). This same unknown author that Murphy described also stated that the allegory is useful for speaking and writing, but its primary purpose is for understanding scripture. The fact that allegory was primarily used in scripture, fueled its rhetorical power by virtue of its association with the word of God.

The allegory played an important role in European culture throughout the Middle Ages earning the era the designation of the ‘age of allegory’ (Brljak). Often the allegory is considered to be unique to that era. Allegory was one of the most important and prevalent poetic forms of the time (Willard, *Writings*). Allegorical fiction was, and continues to be, an effective tool of

rhetoric that enables one to get inside the being of the narrator and see the world from that point of view. Symbolic fictional figures were used within the allegory to convey a message or a moral lesson. Literary symbolism gives it an emotional appeal that connects to both the protagonist and the allegorical cause to the reader.

As a woman of the late Middle Ages, Christine primarily worked in the form of allegory, also referred to as literary fiction. Combining allegory with literary symbolism was an art form that Christine perfected, with her prose and poetry becoming increasingly persuasive in the progression of her oeuvre. By serving in the role of a character representing herself, she demonstrated objectivity that enabled her to have didactic influence over the participating reader. Her character, also named Christine, often sat quietly, passively listening to the advice and guidance of her divine and worthy mentors. Her quietude enabled her to convey the idea that the voice was not her own, but rather that of a loftier being, holding the wisdom of the ages as inspired by God above.

Playing the role of passive listener to the much wiser women of authority suggested that Christine was learning, just as her readers were (Glenn and Ratcliffe). Approaching her voice from a place of humility, she often endeared herself to her readers by grounding her character in societal expectations of women, while simultaneously presenting a novel approach to the defense of her gender. The allegory became the vehicle to carry Christine's voice of feminine authority. "Four of Christine's works combined allegory with other elements, including autobiographical narratives and political statements" (Blumenfeld-Kosinski xiii). These four self-disclosing allegories were: *The Path of the Long Study* (1402-03), *Mutation of Fortune* (1403), *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405), and *The Vision of Christine* (1405).

## The Role of Exemplum in the Middle Ages

The Greek philosopher Aristotle noted that the exemplum, which he also referred to as the *paradigma*, was one of the most effective methods of argument (*Rhetoric*). He categorized exempla into that which was ‘real’ and that which was ‘fictional.’ The real exempla were mostly taken from historical accounts and stories of mythology. Fictional exemplum is solely the writer or speaker’s own creation (Suleiman). Much of its effectiveness can be attributed to the fact that it welcomes the reader to identify with another, either through admiration or empathy, and then to pattern his or her own behavior after that of the exemplar (Nordquist). During the Late Middle Ages, exemplum as a form of rhetoric was considerably more formidable than the simple presentation of a paradigm without the human factor. The medieval concept of “imitatio Christi” is a philosophical model in which one lays down a schema based upon the life he or she chooses to follow (De Rentiis 31). No matter how brilliant the concept, the personification of the ideals was an infinitely more powerful form of rhetoric.

As Peter Brown noted, “For the classics, a literary tradition existed for the sole purpose of making persons into classics” (*The Saint* 1). The human beings that were featured in the literature of antiquity were exemplary both ethically and aesthetically, and in their heroic endeavors. They were part and parcel to perfection, much unlike the complicated mix of ordinary human beings. The assumption was often made that those who were engaged as exemplar were decent in every humanly way possible because literature could produce people in their idealized form (Brown). The use of exemplum was common in Christine’s manuscripts. She borrowed from Dante’s *Divine Comedy* the idea of ‘disciple’ who follows and patterns his or her behavior after another (De Rentiis). The decision to include both saintly Christian women and noble pagans to live in the City of Ladies evidenced the influence of Dante upon her work as he too

had referenced a paradise that was inhabited by saints in *Divine Comedy* (Quilligan). To Christine, there was no shortage of exempla in either the Christian or pagan literary offerings, therefore she included both. The Greek and Latin classic literature to which she had become familiarized was a strong source of exemplum.

Christine makes the ultimate use of exemplum to when she chose the Blessed Virgin Mary to reign over the City of Ladies, the idea was to present the ultimate exemplar. As her son had served as the “exemplar of all exemplars” (Brown 6) she personified all that was virtuous in the feminine beings. Because of her virtue, Mary was perceived as the highest level of feminine authority. The symbolism of the blessed virgin represented the absolute pinnacle of feminine virtue and perfection. The City of Ladies was planned as the perfect city therefore, it was most fitting that it would be governed by the most virtuous woman that ever existed.

#### Christine’s Forms of Supporting Rhetoric

Like any other linguistic tropes, symbolism, allegory, and exemplum live within a broader context. Within that context they combine with other supporting rhetoric to bolster the delivery of the message. The supporting forms of rhetoric, such as dream visions and illuminations, are generally culturally based, and bring with them an element of identification as they convey the meaning of a message. The larger context is the shared culture of the readership, which in Christine’s case was 15<sup>th</sup> century Parisian society. This is a type of rhetorical influence that was based solely upon what is familiar and acceptable to a particular historical moment in time.

#### Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts

James Murphy described the medieval rhetorical arts as the primary categories of rhetoric used in the Middle Ages. These rhetorical arts included three separate genres: *ars dictaminis*, or the art of letter-writing; *ars poetica*, or the art of poetry; and *ars praedicandi*, or the art of

preaching. Rhetorical traditions were applied to each of these arts, bringing everyday practicality to the study of rhetoric. These three medieval rhetorical arts were the foundation upon which the precepts of rhetoric were applied to very practical purposes, in business, in historical accounts, and both written and oral forms of communication that were used in the presentation of sermons. Although they were considered by Murphy to be separate genres, there was considerable overlap in the use of these rhetorical genres, for often a letter might include poetry, and a sermon might include a letter. However, there were some specific medieval prescriptive teachings concerning each of these genres.

Letter writing, often referred to as ‘epistolary’ was the first of these rhetorical arts to appear in Western Europe (Murphy, *Three Rhetorical*).<sup>1</sup> During the tenth and eleventh centuries it was evident that there was a strong need to communicate by both the church and the state, and a need to have a record of that communication (Murphy, *Three Medieval*). This entailed a practical application of rhetoric in a form that would not only communicate information and ideas, but also to keep an historical record of the time. Epistolary was one of the foremost developments in medieval discourse. The art of letter writing in its various practices and purposes also combined other rhetorical arts with it, taking into consideration the social status of both the sender and the receiver. Generally, the epistolary included flattering epitaphs from the sender to the receiver, and a display of humility on the part of the sender, interspersed with biblical references to support the purpose of the letter.

A Benedictine monk by the name of Alberic of Monte Cassino (d. 1105) is given credit for taking Ciceronian principles of rhetoric and applying them to the process of letter writing.

The work of Alberic was widely popular in the city of Bologna and became part of the primary

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<sup>1</sup> According to James Murphy, the first to write a major treatise on the art of letter writing was written by Alberic of Monte Cassino, who authored *Radium Dictaminis* in 1087.

education within Bolognese schools, often referred to as studios. This format for the letter writing was systematically used across Europe in the later centuries, and it continues to be referred to as the Bolognese model. The humanist tradition enhanced the Bolognese model by taking it beyond correspondence between church and state and adapting the art to the “creation of elegant and eloquent expression” (Abbott 146).

Christine, who spent the early part of her life near the city of Bologna, Italy was most likely to have been influenced by this model of letter writing through her father, Thomaso. Although the art of letter writing had become much more personalized in the three hundred year that had passed between Alberic and Christine, epistolary was a communication form that often served as the foundation for Christine’s work. For example, *Letter from the God of Love* and *Letter from the Goddess Othéa*, as well as the twenty letters that were exchanged in *Quarrelle* all used epistolary to carry the rhetorical force of her message.

Shawn Ramsey noted a strong relationship between letter-writing and persuasion in the Middle Ages. Manuals that were attributed to Geoffrey of Vinsauf “extend the theory of civic persuasion to the genre of the letter” (*Voices* 477). By the twelfth century, manuals that taught the art of letter-writing, or ‘dictaminal theory’ were shifting their focus toward more deliberative objective, which Vinsauf explains as the temporal relationship of narration to futurity and deliberative decision making (Ramsey). The letter was often used in the engagement of civic rhetoric through the duration of the Middle Ages. Carefully chosen words artfully placed upon a stately or elegant medium, such as parchment, not only was a valuable tool of persuasion, but also served as a record of all that transpired. Of the three medieval rhetorical arts, letter writing was the one that did not completely exclude women. Robert Connors wrote that “the tradition of letter writing always included women” (quoted in Ramsey 473). Connors was also pointed out



that although women were included in the art of letter-writing, it was a repressive form of inclusion. Letter writing was a natural entry point for Christine to engage in the rhetorical process. Epistolary was a culturally acceptable form of expression for women, and Christine clearly understood the power that it held within, particularly when navigating the waters of civic discourse beyond the boundaries that were placed upon her gender.

*Ars poetica*, in the English language is the ‘art of poetry.’ Very often poetica was a foundation for communicating a narrative in a way that was easily memorized and with cadence, verse, and symbolism, evoked emotion within the reader. James Murphy credited Geoffrey of Vinsauf with teaching the basic composition of poetics. He wrote his most famed treatise of poetics, *Poetica Nova* between 1208 and 1213 to serve as a medieval guidebook for crafting poetry. The book itself was a 2,000-line hexameter poem that elevated the art of poetry to an academic discipline that was closely tied to the study of Ciceronian rhetoric. Geoffrey’s influence in the thirteenth century was the most authoritative in connection to the creation of poetry.

Geoffrey of Vinsauf considered *ars poetica* to be closely tied to *ars grammatica*, or the art of grammar (Murphy, *Three Medieval*). However, he postulated that poetica differs from grammatica in that poetica blends rhetoric with grammar to produce meaning. The rhetoric with poetics comes in the way of figurative language, such as the symbolic tropes that Christine engaged in her poetry. The lineage from Geoffrey to Christine comes through the medieval humanist poets, Dante Alighieri, Giovanni Boccaccio, and Francesco Petrarch, who followed the proscriptive of *Poetica Nova*. Much of Christine’s work was closely patterned after their work.

From a classical viewpoint, there was a clear distinction between rhetoric and poetics. Aristotle, as well as other philosophers from the classical era, viewed poetry as having “plot, character, thought, diction, melody and spectacle; while rhetoric entailed the invention, arrangement, delivery, and style” (Armstrong and Kay 130). By the early Middle Ages, poetry became recognized for its principles of rhetoric and less associated with grammar. Armstrong and Kay noted that “Poetry had become a natural outlet for rhetorical training” (131). Much of the transformation of poetry is attributed to Ovid (43 BCE-18 CE), who would often incorporate imaginary speeches within his epic poetry. By the late Middle Ages poetry often contained a focus on history as well as the effect of fortune upon the flow of that history. Armstrong and Kay also point out that the convergence of fortune and history produced “meditation on memory and experience” (200). Authors often played a role in the poetic work as a “discursive interlocutor” (199) that espouses an ideology, a philosophy, or learning experience for the reader.

According to James Murphy, the most influential person writing about the art of preaching, or *ars praedicandi*, was Robert of Basevorn, who wrote *The Form of Preaching* in 1322. This was a preaching manual that dictated the “thematic sermon” that uses “scriptural citation, theme as the base for division and amplification by the preacher” (Murphy, *Three Medieval* 112). The thematic style is also referred to as University Style preaching because it was commonly used in cities of academia, such as Christine’s beloved Paris. The medieval art of preaching was used in an allegorical sense in Christine’s most recognized work, *The Book of the City of Ladies*. Against the earlier teachings of the church, when only men were permitted to practice the art of preaching, Lady Reason instructed Christine to give guidance to both men and women when they stray from the path of righteousness. She advised her to “Come to them quietly and preach to them” (Jansen 35). As a subtle hint that women of the late Middle Ages,

this alluded to the potential of women to hold values and propagate ideas, and the innate ability to preach their ideas to others, if they were to be afforded the opportunity. This was a novel idea, and not one that was readily accepted.

Christine's writing style demonstrated her masterful ability to appropriate all three medieval rhetorical arts as described by James Murphy (*Three Rhetorical*). Fully engaged in the three rhetorical arts, Christine also realized the rhetorical strength of *literary symbolism*, *allegory*, and *exemplum*. These were her rhetorical tools, embedded within poetics, prose, and epistolary. Her rhetorical strategy was a mosaic of approaches to persuasion. Along with dream visions, they gave Christine her greatest voice in guiding the narrative of the late Middle Ages into a new conversation.

#### The Rhetorical Power of Visions and Dream Visions

Although women were making strides in their access to scholarly materials in the late Middle Ages, they were not afforded the opportunity to voice their ideas to society. The ideas and intellectual contributions of women were generally not well-received (Glenn, *Rhetoric Retold*). However, if these ideas came to the woman via a 'divine vision' the words became the gold standard of medieval rhetoric. The assumption was that visions came from a higher authority in the realm of the divine. Often the visions would allow women to comment on the state of the world, make predictions about the future, or proffer stately advice to others. A visionary woman of the Middle Ages could express a host of ideas that would be inappropriate for her to say in her own words. She was merely a channel to convey the words of a higher authority – a silent messenger, just as Christine was in her own allegorical dream visions.

With the division of the church (1378-1417) came those who invoked prophesy and predicted this event was the work of the antichrist (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee).

Prophets began to receive directives from God concerning the Church, and the visionary tradition responded with political actions, which often were the result of the power of visions. The prophets came from all walks of life, but were more prevalent among the poor, the elderly, and other disenfranchised groups (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee). Visionary experience was a phenomenon that was relatively common in the Middle Ages. Although most associated with men, visions were also reported by women as they spiritually communed with God or his sainted disciples. Women often gained their ethos through their visionary experience, because most of the writings of medieval women, from the 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, were from those who experienced these visions.

Among Christine's women contemporaries who evidenced having had visionary experiences were Catherine of Sienna (1347-1380), Julian of Norwich (1342-1416), Margery Kempe (1373-1438), and Constance de Rabastens (d.1386). These women experienced visions. Catherine of Siena began to have multiple visionary experiences as a twenty-year-old Dominican nun (Furlong). Through her visions she prophesized the Great Western Schism of the Church, which would later take place in 1789, a year before her death. Julian of Norwich was an English woman and anchoress who in 1395 published her visionary experience in *Revelations of Divine Love*. In this book she recalls her visionary experience she witnesses the crucifixion and the annunciation. What is known about Margery Kempe was taken from her autobiography *The Book of Margery Kempe*, written in 1438. Kempe told in her writing that her visions began during an episode of post-partum depression. As a married woman, she and her husband attempted to lead a life of celibacy, but instead gave birth to eleven children. The book tells of her mystical visions that included, Jesus and Mary, but she considered herself to be a servant of St. Anne. Margery Kempe was tried for heresy numerous times in her life, but she was never

convicted. Constance de Rabastens was a French mystic whose visionary experiences took on a more political tone. With her visions as proof of her connections to the supernatural, Constance backed Pope Urban VI. Unfortunately, it was not the pope that the French cardinals had chosen, which was Pope Clement VII. This put her out of favor with both the cardinals and the monarchy, who also accepted the Avignon pope. Because her visions did not support the French cardinals and the monarchy she was sent to prison, accused of having a demon in her body (Barstow). Joan of Arc, the Maid of Orleans (1412-1431), was also a visionary. later in the time of Christine. She told of being met by St. Michael the Archangel, St. Margaret. and Catherine of Alexandria. Joan was instructed to back Charles VII in resisting the English in the Hundred Years War. The politics of her vision led her to be burned at the stake by the Burgundian faction of the French monarchy who turned her over to their allies in England, who tried and executed her by burning her at the stake at the age of 19.

Because of the other worldliness of this phenomenon, visionaries of the Middle Ages were often referred to as mystics (Larrington). Women's use of the mystical experience in the way of visions was a means to a voice while dwelling within the grip of a strong patriarchal society (Barstow). This was something that gave women an inroad to having their voices heard. The power of the vision was instrumental in enabling many women to speak up against the forces of authority. The nature of mysticism can be argued as to whether it gave the mystics any insights that were delivered from another world or whether the visions were a product of one's own thoughts and experiences. Regardless, the hearing of voices became a commanding feminist weapon against the imbalance of gender-based power (Barstow). Visions were certainly a product of their time. In modern day parlance, people who hear voices and see things that other people do not see, are generally said to be suffering from extreme cognitive instability, which

typically carries with it a stigma and a compromised level of credibility. Conversely, women living in the late Middle Ages who had visions and heard directives from another world were lauded as carriers of a message that came from a much greater power. As an extension of the concept of visionary experience is the idea of a dream vision, commonly used as a literary form in Latin literature, classic as well as medieval. Often referred to as a *visio*, it allowed the narrator to experience and reveal truths that were not available during the waking state (Gibbons). It was, at times, believed to be of divine origin, therefore resulted in the elevation of the visionary's level of ethos.

### Illuminations as Rhetoric

In the medieval world, there was the written word and the illuminated image, both serving to enhance the learning process. Illuminated manuscripts were prestigious possessions, worthy of their royal patrons. These writings were scripted with the finest ink onto the most luxurious parchment, and then embellished with elaborate borders of silver and leaves of gold, surrounding miniature paintings ornamented with the finest hues of paint. The illuminated paintings were rife with artistic symbolism that related directly to the story that they represented. The words were artfully placed upon the vellum by professional scribes.<sup>2</sup> They were ornately illustrated and embellished with ornamentation before being ceremoniously presented to royalty, or at the very least, the more learned people of the French royal courts (Willard, *Writings*). Often, they contained a rhetorical statement in the way of the symbolic nature of their opulence.

The art of illumination was at its height during the late Middle Ages. Those who specialized in illuminations, or *scriptoria*, fell into two different areas of labor. There were those who *historiated*, meaning that they created the miniature paintings that were relevant to the

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<sup>2</sup> Generally, Christine's manuscripts were written on vellum, which is a high-quality type of parchment.

narrative (De Hamel). Those who worked as *illuminators* provided the decorative work, such as the large letter at the beginning of the first paragraph of a page, or the ornate border embellishments that surrounded the border of the page or the miniature. By the late Middle Ages, the division of these two types of labor became less notable, and often one artist would perform both functions. The fact that the miniatures were small, and a fragment of a larger project made them easily transportable from one region, or country to another and readily understood despite language differences, making them a rhetorical tool that could bridge cultural differences and able to transcend literary deficiencies.

Having a regular working relationship with two scribes in particular, Christine would freely watch over them, guiding them to add words, or to highlight specific parts of the text (Hindman). This reflects how her experience working in a scriptorium was useful to her artform, as well as her understanding that the rhetorical process includes every aspect of what is produced. To complete the process, and to add an even greater hint of reality to her otherwise divine images, she also served as the artistic model for the persona of Christine within the illuminations. It is believed that after Etienne's death and before reaching notoriety, Christine was employed in a scriptorium, overseeing the illustration, ornamentation, and illumination of manuscripts.

In a paradoxical way Christine wanted her veiled messages to be clear enough that they might be universally understood. With illumination and ornamentation enhancing the power of her word and her pen, she was able to accomplish this quite effectively. The fact that Christine's image appeared in many of her illuminations, implied a reality that the voices of the characters in her allegories were her own voice. Often depicted as a slight woman dressed in an unadorned deep blue gown called a 'cotehardie,' with a wimple covering her neck and hair, the image of

Christine is very recognizable among scholars of medieval literature (Willard, *Christine*) (Illumination II). Upon her head she wears a white headdress known as a horned hennin, butterfly hennin or a barrulet, representing the fashion of aristocratic women in France (Regalado).

The visual images that spring from the pages of Christine's manuscripts broaden the scope of interpretation, yet gently guide the reader as an intuitive form of persuasion. The written word, in the form of poetry can be understood within an alternative context when poetically styled illuminations accompany the work. These illustrations would also serve to aid those whose literary skills are not so highly developed, as was often the case of medieval women. Mary Weitzel Gibbons explains that the miniature illuminations that were integral to *Path of the Long Study* "serve as a lens through which we, the audience, can construct additional meaning [to the *Bath of the Muses*] through visual intervention and established hierarchies and fusion of disparate contexts" (Gibbon 130). *The Bath of the Muses* revealed much about the writer's point of reference. The visual image of muses bathing in the 'fountain of knowledge' directly confronts the reader to accept that women are as capable of learning, if they are given the opportunity. (Illumination I) The meanings that are derived from the miniature illuminations such as the bathing muses serve to enhance the narrative while allowing one to see it from a slightly different hermeneutic.

Scholarly research has revealed that Christine was closely tied to the production of her work. She wrote the manuscripts and personally supervised the production of the illuminations that served to amplify her texts, opening them up for a greater level of audience appeal (Gibbons). In *Cité* she specifically mentions a woman by the name of Anastaise who held an unrivaled reputation for her work. Christine is said to have overseen the artistry to ensure that her



work would be understood in the way that it was intended (Willard, Christine). Most notably were the illuminations that embellished *Cité des dames*, *Letter From Othéa*, and *Mutation of Fortune*. In addition to the visual presentation of Christine's work, there was also the more subtle message that is sent when one writes in the language of the people, or what is commonly referred to as the vernacular language.

### The Rhetoric of Vernacular Language

Gerald Hauser described vernacular discourse as the language spoken by the common people, or the language that is understood and used in regular everyday discourse. In the late Middle Ages, vernacular language was not typically used in formal writing. Historian Edward P. Cheyney noted that during the medieval period Latin was the language that was used in universities, government, church, and diplomacy. He stated that "It was as natural to write in Latin as it was to speak in one's mother tongue" (248). Latin, the language of the educated elite, was the written language of nearly every institution of the late medieval era. Second to Latin the Parisian French language was also considered to be almost universal, or at least across Western Europe (Cheyney). The ascendancy of the Parisian French language did not come easily during this great period of transition. After all, it not only had to establish itself against the other dialects of the era, but also had to struggle against its own spiritual heritage, the Latin that was accepted as the language of the Church (Cazamian). The language of the clergy was the language of the lay writers as well. Latin was not only the language of theology, but the language of philosophy, ethics, law, rhetoric, grammar, and history (Cazamian 9). Latin was the language of all serious and earnest work. The gradual transition away from the Latin of the church toward the vernacular use of language can be attributed to the rise in the humanist school of expression,

when work was not only written in vernacular language, but also translated, often by the authors themselves (Cazamian).

The movement toward vernacular language in the late Middle Ages did not immediately open the gates of opportunity for women. Jane Chance observed, “Women writers remained ecclesiasts who created their own form, the spiritual autobiography of life” (*Othea* 3). These works often wove personal experience into their spiritual writing, often including their visionary experiences. Women writing in the vernacular were not particularly revered for their exploits into philosophy, history, theology, and politics. Because vernacular was the language style of the less educated, it was also considered to be a more feminine use of language. Being a woman and writing in the vernacular minimized one’s authority to write about intellectual topics. These topics were outside of the purview of women, and so highly regarded they ought rightly to be written in the Latin language as a symbol of their loftiness. By challenging the old way of thinking Christine was able to overcome that obstacle and become an authoritative voice across a range of scholarly concerns (Blamires). To accomplish this, she pushed the boundaries of societal expectations and studied and wrote using the Parisian French language about philosophy, history, theology, and politics. Elevating the use of vernacular language on scholarly topics facilitated the acceptance of vernacular language into the changing narrative.

Although she was of Italian heritage, Christine is best known as a French vernacular writer. She alluded that she wrote in the vernacular as a gentle form of protest the misogyny of Latin writers. This point was made clear in *The Letter of the God of Love* when she asserts that the Latin textbooks that were used in primary education imparted words of practical wisdom from the exemplum of powerful men who were also brought down by women, such as the biblical greats, Samson and David. Christine argued that, along with the Latin language that they

learn, the young men would also be taught that women were detrimental to society. A young man's basic education offered credence to the idea that women should be mastered, for if they were not, they had the potential to pose a viable threat to society (Blamires).

### Conclusion

Capturing the spirit of the three Medieval Rhetorical Arts in her poetics, letters, and even in her prescriptive for preaching the word of God, Christine was greatly revered in her time and for two centuries to follow, until her once ubiquitous presence faded back into the lost annals of feminine discourse (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee). Christine was a scholar of the pagan classics as well as the teachings of Christianity. As a prolific writer her work began out of necessity and then blossomed into a calling to praise and defend, and to entertain, as well as incite emotion in her readership. Using the rhetoric of tropes and symbolism to carry her message, she was able to contribute to a changing narrative of the late Middle Ages. She brought esteem and cultural authority to womankind, which lasted centuries after her time, before fading into the shadow of male dominance.

Influenced by both the secular and the religious, she was a scholar of the pagan classics as well as the teachings of Christianity. As a prolific writer her work began out of financial necessity and then blossomed into a calling to elicit a higher level of esteem for women, to entertain, and to incite emotion in her readership, but more importantly to bring about change in cultural attitudes and behavior, all for the betterment of her adopted country, France. Capturing the spirit of the three Medieval Rhetorical Arts in her poetics, letters, and even in her prescriptive for preaching the word of God, Christine was greatly revered in her time and for two centuries to follow, until her once ubiquitous presence faded back into the lost annals of feminine discourse (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee). Christine was a scholar of the pagan classics as well as

the teachings of Christianity. As a prolific writer her work began out of necessity and then blossomed into a calling to praise and defend, and to entertain, as well as incite emotion in her readership.

Fully engaged in the three rhetorical arts, Christine also realized the rhetorical strength of *literary symbolism, allegory, and exemplum*. These were the rhetorical tools, used within poetics, prose and epistolary, that gave Christine her greatest strength in guiding the narrative of the late Middle Ages into a new conversation. As a humanist her writing resisted the hegemony of the Church, recognizing value in the expression of human experience on the earthly plane as ordained by the divine creator. Christine's writing was without precedent, and her powerful symbolism and use of the allegory gave her the power to approach humanity as a perceiver, rather than as the perceived (Margolis, *The Poetess*).

The weaving of allegory, symbolism and exemplum was Christine's primary rhetorical power. For a woman without cultural authority, this tapestry of rhetoric was the symbolic key to open the locked gates of masculine discourse. This was a discourse from which Christine, among other women, had been excluded. To achieve cultural authority, she needed to first defend women against the misogynist forces that prevailed over Europe in the Late Middle Ages. Her experience in the *Debate of the Rose* had informed her that direct argumentation would be ineffective. With experience as her guide, Christine took a more circuitous approach to establishing the authority to convey her message on the worthiness of women.

Symbolism, allegory, and exemplum became Christine's rhetorical trinity to speak to her patrons on a level that would engage them in her philosophy. Although they were the primary sources of her empowerment, there were more rhetorical elements that nestled within her allegories to bring further clarity and strength to her new-found voice. Combined with other

secondary forms of rhetoric, including dream visions and illuminations; symbolism, allegory, and exemplum enabled Christine to find her voice. Hers was a voice powerful enough to guide the conversation of her day into a new narrative. This, in turn, opened greater opportunities for women, and a receptiveness to new ideas about life in the corporeal world as well as a continued regard for spirituality in the afterlife.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Christine as Moral Philosopher and Pre-Feminist Rhetor

Alasdair MacIntyre explained that “the moralization of medieval culture lies precisely in the creation of general categories of right and wrong, and general modes of understanding right and wrong” (*After Virtue* 166). The codification of morality came with the shift away from the idea of pagan virtue, and the acceptance of scriptural ideals. Biblical exegesis became the foundation of nearly all that was written the Middle Ages. This common basis of belief bolstered a shared narrative to which societal behavior conformed. Although the strong belief system was a bonding factor, it unfortunately condoned the subjugation of women. What we now think of as the misogynistic thinking of the Middle Ages was also very much a product of the early church leaders, who set the baseline for nearly everything that went on in life and society.

St. Augustine, although both admired and revered by Christine, was not a proponent of women having their right to speak, nor their fair appropriation of an equitable standing in the world. He relegated women to second class citizenry when he wrote that women should defer to men because of their weaker minds (*Confessions*). As a doctor of the church, Augustine’s monumental influence over Christianity, and consequently the western world, has lasted well beyond 1,500 years (Blamires). His authority was unquestionable to most followers of the Christian faith. These followers included Christine. However, she did not believe that one must accept everything that Augustine professed. Nonetheless, the admiration that Christine had for Augustine was apparent in the fact that she patterned some of her own work after his writings. Of note was Augustine’s *City of God*, which served as a model for Christine’s *City of Ladies*.

In the thirteenth century the idea of Christian virtue once again looked to the ancients when Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) embraced the Aristotelian notion of virtue (MacIntyre). This

was a significant change in perspective, as it now moved away from an extreme reliance upon faith and called for a balance between faith and reason. As evidenced in much of her work, Christine was also a student of Aristotle. Her great regard for him was reflected in her use of the title ‘the Philosopher’ when she referred to him (Forhan). This was an appellation that was often used about Aristotle in the Middle Ages, as reflected in Aquinas’ use of the term ‘the Philosopher’ (*Summa Theologica*). Although Aquinas was a proponent of scholasticism and Christine had a humanist leaning, she fully accepted the Thomist concept of a tension between faith and reason, which is apparent in her dream vision allegories. Aside from Christine’s great regard for Aristotle and Aquinas, both contributed to the relegation of women to their subordinate role in society. These viewpoints were abhorrent to Christine and she was compelled to challenge them. She asserted that women are equal to men intellectually, but she was, nonetheless a proponent of gender roles within the family. That aside, she wrote of her deep moral obligation to defend and elevate the status of women above the vicious, and often violent way men regarded them. Christine promoted the idea that young girls have the moral and ethical right to an education. She gently, yet openly refuted Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas’s arguments against women when she conceded that these men are to be revered for their wisdom, but it is not imperative that everything they espoused be accepted at face value (*Le Cité*). She argued, instead, that women deserved better treatment than they were receiving at the time. With full knowledge and personal experience of the value of women, she felt that it was her moral responsibility to call upon her own rhetorical skills to defend feminine virtue against denigration in medieval European culture.

Christine, as a secular writer and rhetor, was one of the few exceptions to the medieval precept that the only women that should be permitted to become authors were those who were

cloistered within a religious order. Although there were many women before her that were honored for their virtue or their strength, few had the resources or the platform that Christine had when she picked up her pen and ink to use her rhetorical skills to defend women against the harsh masculine rhetoric of the Middle Ages. To historicize the interpretation of Christine's work, one might recognize that the concept of feminism is one that was not only completely foreign to the Middle Ages, but an absolute anachronism. However, as a feminine apologist and a precursor to the feminism of Simone de Beauvoir, Christine certainly provided the grounding for a study of what may be considered a form of pre-modern feminism (Altmann). Conversely, to label 15<sup>th</sup> century European society as misogynist may also be exerting the values of post-modernity upon a society wherein a strong social order was essential to human survival against the unforgiving forces of man and nature. Nonetheless, from the vantage point of post-modernity and for the purpose of this dissertation, the subjection of women in the late Middle Ages is referred to as 'misogyny.'

Even as a proponent of education for women, Christine accepted the notion of a woman's place in society as being subordinate to men. This was an idea that had been established as something that was in keeping with the natural order of the world, as pronounced by the doctors of Catholicism. Among the virtues of womankind that Christine espoused was the importance of loyalty to one's husband, even going as far as to suggest that a wife who does not love her husband should pretend that she does (Bell). Rather than being purely an act of self-subordination, Christine considered this action to be the means for one's survival in a world where men held almost all the power. Hers was a world where women were subjected to a patriarchal system of denigration and violence (Blamires). As a skilled female rhetor, she felt an ethical responsibility to find her voice and then use it to influence the cultural narrative.



Although Christine was not a feminist and did not promote the idea that there should be complete equality of the genders, she contributed substantially to the awareness that society would be better served if school-aged girls were to be entitled to an education and that women were to be empowered in their access to knowledge and voice. Christine felt a moral responsibility to use her rhetorical voice to convey that idea to the literary members of society. With this articulation of her viewpoint, she strengthened her voice to eventually have considerable influence upon the changing narrative of the day. With this influence she helped to usher in a new era of free thinking and creative expression. Christine clearly understood the correlation between knowledge and power, and for women to be empowered they would first need to have free access to the knowledge that their male counterparts shared so freely amongst themselves. For future generations, her arguments opened minds to the concept that women are as capable as men, if they would only be given the same opportunities.

After her court battles to secure her inheritance from Etienne had failed, Christine was feeling the effects of a male-dominated legal system that denied widows their inheritance rights. She was also deeply dismayed by some of the literature that influenced the narrative of 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century Paris intellectualism. Both Meun's *Romance of the Rose* and Matheolus' *Lamentations* were widely acclaimed literature. To explain the popularity of *Lamentations*, even though it had been written a hundred years prior; it had not been translated into the French language until the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. Consequently, to the Parisian intellectuals of Christine's time, this was something new and exciting that could be read by anyone literate in the French language.

Just as *Romance* had denigrated women, *Lamentations* also furthered the misogynist ideas that were so prevalent in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. Both works were lauded by the intellectuals

of Paris. Several of Christine's works were penned in direct response to the prevailing attitudes that were fostered by Meun and Matheolus. She believed their use of rhetoric was not only detrimental to women but was morally reprehensible to both genders. The creative works that are presented in this section evidence the strengthening of Christine's messaging as she defended the honor of women and gradually established her authority as a female philosopher and rhetor.

### Gaining Cultural Authority as a Rhetor of Moral Philosophy

To understand the development of Christine's oeuvre, as well as her gradual empowerment as a feminine rhetor with cultural authority, her oeuvre must be carefully explored. Upon examination one can see a thematic progression that begins with a gentler rhetorical defense of the virtues of womankind, building momentum with a variety of compelling arguments until the volume and content of her writing merited her the cultural authority to be designated a moral philosopher, historian, biographer, and political theorist (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee). Now, I argue, she must also be recognized for her contributions to the field of rhetoric, as well. Christine began her rhetorical journey defending women with poetics and epistolary within the context of allegory. Through her allegories she gradually earned the legitimation to convey history and proffer advice through treatises and proscriptive writing. By examining the progression of her writing, one can see that there are rhetorical elements in how she conveyed history and moral philosophy in every one of her allegorical works.

With each new text she strategically and incrementally advanced her identity as a rhetorical authority; her strategy was to maneuver around the traditional bastions of masculine control of the cultural narrative through her allegories. To earn her place as a rhetor in a world where rhetoric was off limits to women, Christine began her journey by invoking the authority of a higher power of the male persuasion. By attributing her words to Cupid, the god of love, to

carry her message from the authority of a masculine perspective, she began her defense of the virtues of womankind.

### The Rhetoric of *Letter from the God of Love*

As she began to establish herself as an accomplished writer, Christine used her talents to write literary fiction, or *allegory* to address the malignment of women. This was also to initiate a line of defense against the prevailing misogynist viewpoint. Appealing to a higher authority, Christine called upon Cupid, the god of love to carry her message that women should be cherished, not maligned. As a male god specializing in romantic love, Christine chose him over a female goddess to project greater authority. This was only her initial approach to the establishment of discursive authority, for she rarely called upon male authority in her later texts.

The *Letter from the God of Love* (*Epistré au Dieu d'Amours* hereafter, *Epistré*), dated May 1, 1399, was an epistolary, written in verse, and dictated to the literary character of Christine by Cupid as he was reigning king as the god of love. The letter was penned while he was serving in the 'Court of Love' (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee). Using the rhetorical power of the voice of the divine, Cupid's letter railed against misogyny as a sin that is offensive to both God and society. Cupid was a male god, chosen by Christine to admonish men for generalizations about women based upon the behavior of a few (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee). Through Cupid's voice, Christine posed the rhetorical question as to why men should not be defenders of women and uphold their honor, rather than to defame them. The power of her words exonerated women from the idea that they somehow welcomed rape, an idea that Jean de Meun's *Romance of the Rose* had perpetuated. This was an idea that Christine found to be repugnant and immoral, yet it was accepted as the truth by so many men living in 15<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Speaking in defense of her gender against a patriarchal society, in *Epistré*, Christine

blatantly objected to Canon law that permitted domestic violence against women and that proclaimed that a man's wife is his property (Blamires). This was the first of many stances that Christine took in objection to some of the dogmatic teachings of the Church.

Taking a didactic approach to her rhetoric Christine, through the voice of Cupid instructed men to dismiss some of their old ways and be open to new ideas. Cupid taught them the lessons of proper behavior that men should exhibit in relation to women. Through his voice, Christine countered the prevailing narrative that women were detrimental by stating that women are virtuous and "pleasing to God and beneficial to the community" (quoted in McLeod 13). In condemnation of the depraved level of masculine behavior, Christine's Cupid scolded those men who said defamatory, offensive, and disgraceful things about women, and proclaimed that those men were acting in opposition to what is the natural will of God. Cupid's persona was chosen to present a counterstatement to Meun's own character of Cupid, who regarded women with scorn in *Romance of the Rose*. *Epistré* featured Christine's Cupid playing the role of a benevolent god who defended the honor of women. He did so because he believed he had a moral obligation to uplift the status of women by attaching her argument to a higher level of morality and wisdom. In this work the higher authority was represented by a benevolent Cupid. By weaving otherworld authority of Cupid, into the rhetorical power of allegory, Christine had sowed the seeds to establish a firm foundation upon which to cultivate her cultural authority as a woman.

The impetus for writing *Epistré* stemmed from Jean de Meun's massive contribution of 17,500 lines to the widely read novel, *Romance of the Rose*. In this allegorical text he promoted the misogynistic ideas of the day, even implying that women wanted to be raped. Christine believed that his unethical use of rhetoric must be challenged, and it was her moral obligation to do so. She first confronted this text when she wrote *Epistré*. Guided by an all-encompassing

concern for the fight against the denigration of women, she not only employed her skills in the medieval rhetorical art of epistolary, but also used both verse and prose to guide her readers into a more ethical mode of thought. Her aim was to influence society to adopt the common expectation that women be treated fairly and respectably. Expounding upon the attributes of women and courtly love, she characterized women as having moral courage and virtue, and demonstrated that what was good for men was also good for women, particularly regarding the idea that women should be entitled to an education. This was a personal conviction that she was obligated to employ the ethical use of her rhetorical skills to persuade others into what she perceived to be a moral precept.

Unlike Meun's Cupid, Christine's portrayal of the god was benevolent with wisdom toward the ways of love. Meun's use of the rose as a disparaging metaphor for a woman was addressed and countered by Christine's Cupid:

“My heart rejoices at your coming here  
So much that for you in pure joy it leaps  
Flow'r of beauty, Rose that in freshness steeps  
To whom I am a serf, and sweetly adhere.”

“Lovely lady and one to whom all revere  
As best of all for her beauty so deep  
My heart rejoices at your coming here”  
(*Epistré* as translated in Willard, *Writings* 74)

While a penchant for defending women ran much deeper than her personal need to feel self-worth as a female, Christine was driven explicitly by a moral authority that seeks justice for all of humanity. Continuing to challenge her readers, she instructed them to reach above the cover of allegory and “seek the higher spiritual truths that are concealed” (Brown-Grant 51). She entered her initial stance against malignant male dominance when she wrote *Epistré*, combining allegory and literary symbolism with poetics to issue a statement about the despicable maligning

of women. With the powerful voice of the god of love she decreed that every man should feel affection in his heart for women, because every one of those men had a mother who was kind, gentle, and loving. Through her version of Cupid, Christine declared that women are in the world to offer compassion and assistance to men when they need it.<sup>1</sup> Cupid, as a male pagan deity, represented a much higher level of authority than Christine, therefore he was a worthy choice to serve as a vehicle for her voice. As *Epistré* was one of her initial attempts at establishing credibility, she used a male god to convey the authority of her beliefs. With Cupid being not just a god, but a male god as well, his authority was even greater – a notion that Christine was going to alter in her later texts. *Epistré* provided a backdrop for the subsequent debate in which Christine defended the virtues of womankind against the misogynistic opinions of the most respected scholars in Paris at the time. As Christine progressed in her rhetorical stance, she strategically moved toward the eventual establishment of her cultural authority. Having set her grounding through the voice of Cupid, she found the rhetorical strength to advance divinely sanctioned female authorities to deliver her messages.

As in many of her other works, Christine played the role of a quiet witness to the commanding words of a higher authority in *Epistré*. Through the voice of a mythological goddess, she lamented that France was once a haven to women, offering protection against all threats because it was once a country where courtliness was the norm. She argued that chivalry in France had deteriorated and that needed to be remedied (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee). *Epistré* served as a type of opening statement and primer for her later rhetorical approach to the

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<sup>1</sup> Although this is not a 21<sup>st</sup> century feminist point of view, one must consider that the historical moment in which Christine lived recognized few rights for women. Therefore, the subservience of women was to be appreciated, rather than maligned because their basic survival often depended upon having to maneuver within a narrowly defined patriarchal system.

defense of womankind. Among these was *Letter from the Goddess Othéa*, which not only defended the honor of women, but also served as a mirror for princes to guide them in their courtly behavior.<sup>2</sup> This was one of the few satires to be written by a woman of that time. *Epistré* was what the author herself considered to be her first sincere writing effort, when she began to take her authorial prospects seriously (Critten). This, along with *Cent Ballades* and *Othéa*, were “the literary works that helped to establish Christine as a woman of letters” (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee 15).

### The Rhetoric of *One Hundred Ballads of a Lover and a Lady*

An early penchant for the preservation of history was demonstrated when Christine wrote *One Hundred Ballads of a Lover and a Lady* (*Cent Ballades Pour un Amant et une Dame*, hereafter *Cent Ballades*) in 1395. Because history was a topic that was off limits to women, she skillfully incorporated history lessons into *Cent Ballades*. She told of the days of the ancient city of Rome and imbedded her own experiences of love, grief, and sorrow. The lineage for *Cent Ballades* comes from Ovid by way of Petrarch (Walters *Chivalry*). By relating her own story to a universally recognized narrative, Christine connected her own life to a greater legend. This, arguably, was an opening phase of her gradual empowerment using rhetoric. She further explored the relationship between two Ovidian lovers; Hero and Leander; and acknowledged that their love story had many parallels to her love relationship with Etienne. (Walters).

*Cent Ballades* was Christine’s first collection of lyric poetry after Etienne’s death. She used her own lived experience as a basis for her poetry and the voice that carried it for her (Walters, *Chivalry*). Examining beneath the surface it is noted that she addressed topics that were

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<sup>2</sup> A mirror for princes was a type of literature that was popular during the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance that offered advice to the nobility on comportment in their role as a sovereign ruler.

off limits to people of either gender. One such topic was the mental deterioration of the reigning monarch, Charles VI. The chaos that was displayed in the governing of her country paralleled her own world that has been turned upside down by Etienne's unexpected death. As in many of her later works Christine not only spoke of lost love and the challenges to her basic survival, but she also assumed a didactic, or teaching role to correct some of the shortcomings of male-biased, relationship expectations. Within this poetic allegory her message to her readers was regarding the most beneficial ways to comport within a relationship between lovers. She engaged the medieval rhetorical art of preaching when she stressed the importance of fidelity, comparing the unfaithful lover to Judas Iscariot, as a negative exemplar. She used her poetic voice by invoking the symbolism of the betrayal of Judas to admonish that infidelity is a sin of betrayal in the eyes of God (*Cent Ballades*). With *Cent Ballades Christine* furthered the cause of women regarding their status within relationships. Having elevated the status of women with this poetic text, she was ready to begin asserting feminine authority by calling upon her own creation, the female goddess, Othéa.

#### The Rhetoric of *The Letter from the Goddess Othéa*

In 1400, a year after she penned *Epistré*, Christine expanded her rhetorical efforts by writing *Letter from the Goddess Othéa*, (*Epistré de Othéa*, hereafter *Othéa*). In this work Christine presented a more feminine approach to the defense of womankind than she had in *Epistré* (Brown-Grant). Written in epistolary form, using verse, Christine engaged feminine authority, offering sage advice through the voice of a fictional, pagan goddess whom she referred to as *Othéa*. Othéa's advice was directed toward a 15-year-old hero, Prince Hector of Troy. Hector was a symbolic representation of all adolescent knights and princes as they moved into adulthood. The goddess Othéa represented prudence, or wisdom, and a "spiritual mother" to



Hector (Chance 25).<sup>3</sup> As a work of moral philosophy, *Othéa* offered guidance toward “improving human character” (Chance 25). *Othéa* was also a work that gently departed from the existing masculine narrative by featuring a woman in an authoritative role to impart wisdom upon male perceivers, bringing her one step forward in her establishment as a woman with discursive cultural authority.

Preaching a high morality to the young nobles, Christine used allegories that featured exempla of pagan mythology combined with scriptural models of the proper mindset and approach to life. One such allegory dedicated to the goddess Cassandra, through the voice of Othéa, instructed the young Prince Hector:

“Frequent the holy temple all hours of the day  
And to the gods of heaven fitting honor pay  
Moreover, be sure to assume Cassandra’s guise  
That is, if you want all to consider you wise” (translated in Willard *Writings* 96)

Cassandra was the Greek personification of piety, virtue, and truthfulness. The temple, being symbolic of the Church, conveyed the notion of spirituality, which was kept ever present in Christine’s viewpoint. When Christine, through the voice of Othéa, instructed the young knights and princes to ‘assume Cassandra’s guise,’ she was advising them to pattern their behavior after Cassandra’s example. She specifically addressed this code of behavior by guiding young men to only speak what is true and worship God above all else, as Cassandra did. This served as a prelude to the sagacity that followed, particularly regarding courtly love.

In *Othéa*, Christine’s approach to her feminine rhetoric had become increasingly overt. Wisdom and authority were no longer personified by a male entity, as they were when Cupid was tendering advice in *Epistré*. Christine had begun to sow the seeds of feminine discursive authority through the goddess, Othéa. With Othéa as her mouthpiece, Christine invoked the

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<sup>3</sup> This was a parallel to Christine’s own life because at that time she was raising a 15-year-old son.

wisdom of Augustine to instruct her young readers to not fall victim to foolhardy, lustful behavior, but conveyed it through a feminine voice. She was slowly laying the groundwork for the establishment of her own feminine authority.

The love of a woman should begin and end with the love of God was a notion that Christine professed through the voice of the goddess, Othéa. Charity Cannon Willard explained Christine's rationale by noting, "Just as all things were created by the supreme wisdom and mighty power of God, and because our soul, created by God in His image is the most noble thing created in the world after the angels, it is fitting and necessary that it be adorned with virtues that may convey it toward the end for which it was made" (*Writings* 97). Hector, as the personification of the virtuous male, graciously accepted the guidance of Othéa. As symbolic of male perfection, he served as exemplar for young nobles. Through Othéa Hector's virtue was lauded, making him the ultimate exemplar of the chivalrous male whose qualities were to be emulated. This was the very basis of Christine's quest to elevate the status of women within the French cultural narrative. While she subtly conveyed her viewpoint regarding the governance of France, she was also opening the doors to her future recognition as a political theorist. A relevant example of this is *Letter from the Goddess Othéa*. *Othéa* focuses upon Queen Isabeau's relationship with her son, Louis of Orléans, heir to the throne that was then held by the queen's husband, Charles VI, also known as 'Charles the Mad.' Christine alluded to the responsibility that the queen had toward ensuring a proper education for the dauphin, so that he would be sufficiently prepared for the grave responsibility he would be facing as king. Christine considered *Othéa* to be a turning point in her writing career. This was the point that she turned from the "pretty things of her poetry to more noble subject matters" (Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Selected Writings* 29). *Othéa* was a step forward from the lyric poetry of her past, toward the

future of France, her adopted country. All the allegories that she included in *Othéa* contributed to the study of rhetoric. Courtney Palmbush observed that *Othéa* is a “treatise is about the role of language secured by reason in producing meaning, and the role of language untethered to reason in producing misogyny” (29). Having been established as a credible author with *Cent Ballades*, *Epistré*, and *Othéa*, Christine took her message to a higher level. By challenging the Parisian intellectuals of her day, her public profile was spotlighted to most of the other European intellectuals, all of whom were male. Voicing her objection of Jean de Meun’s position in *Romance of the Rose*, she wrote a formal letter to Jean de Montreuil, who was a royal secretary to the king. Montreuil was joined by two other prominent Parisian intellectuals, the brothers Pierre and Gaultier Col. A very public debate ensued. Although Christine was, arguably, not considered to have won the debate, her notoriety for defending womankind had begun to flourish.

#### The Rhetoric of *Debate of the Rose*

*Romance of the Rose* (hereafter *Romance*), written first by Guillaume de Lorris in 1237, and then later contributed to by Jean de Meun in 1275, was praised by most of its readers as a literary masterpiece. Meun’s portion of the text was in the form of a satire that was considered to have the highest merit in that it delivered a moral lesson to those who pursue sexual love. The object of the pursuit, as well as Meun’s scorn, was women, as portrayed by a commonly used medieval symbol, the rose (Brown-Grant, *Moral Defense*). Christine found the work to be an unconscionable use of rhetorical skills because any belittlement of another was considered immoral behavior to Christine.

Often lauded for its deleterious portrayal of women and courtly love, *Romance of the Rose* was, by consensus, the greatest European poem of the thirteenth century (Cantor,

*Meaning*). Christine took objection to Meun's disparagement of women, which in her view, was completely immoral. To challenge the ideas of Meun, Christine began with the exchange of a series of twenty letters with the most highly regarded intellectuals of the day. This collection of epistolary became known as the *Debate of the Rose* (hereafter *Quarrelle*). Letters between the debaters were exchanged twenty times over the course of two years, between 1400 and 1402.

The *Quarrelle* was, unquestionably, the most public event in Christine's illustrious career as a writer/rhetor (Brownlee). She responded to the misogynistic ideas presented by Meun by engaging in discourse through the medieval rhetorical art of epistolary. In her rhetoric she challenged Meun's portrayal of women as flighty and sexually depraved. She also disputed his idea that relationships between the genders were distrustful and antagonistic (Brown-Grant, *Moral Defense*). Her purpose was to convey her point that women had a much greater worth than they were given credit (Jansen). This epistolary exchange was also a prelude to her universally renowned reputation as the first European female professional writer. She was, in fact, the first writer of either gender to speak of the potential for human development by engaging in direct dialogue with those who thought differently than herself (Allen).

*Quarrelle* presented a different side to Christine's skills as an author and rhetor. With that, she took a more direct approach to the defense of women than she had previously. The letters that Christine exchanged in *Quarrelle* were pivotal to her illustrious career as both a defender of women and a political rhetor. As her writing skills and the strength of her argument evolved, Christine developed a keen understanding of the power of rhetoric. One of her primary objections to *Romance* dealt with the concern of rhetoric itself. Taking exception to the fact that such abhorrent ideas were shrouded in such beautiful language, Christine legitimately objected to the production of something that she considered to be immoral and unacceptable, yet acclaimed

by most of its readers, all because of its lofty presentation and powerful use of language (Kong). She understood the moral function of language, both written and spoken, and therefore was deeply cognizant of Meun's skillful use of it as a way of guiding public opinion against the honor of women.

There were two primary factors that Christine addressed as she entered the *Quarrelle*. Her first objection was the way that women were negatively represented by metaphorical characters. The second issue she confronted was love between the genders to which she directly challenged the misogynistic attitudes regarding women. Christine argued that those attitudes lacked morality of their own (Brown-Grant). Her conviction and resolve on this issue were closely related to her experience with the legal system that denied her a good portion of her inheritance from her husband (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee). Her newly acquired status of widow disqualified her from many of the privileges and protections offered to other segments of society.

The *Debate of the Rose* pitted Christine against the most powerful men of France. Her adversaries included Jean de Montreuil, a French royal secretary who was the leader of the debate. Montreuil was backed by Gontier Col, Notary to the King, and his brother, Pierre Col, who held the position of Canon of Paris. After the exchange of letters became known to the literate masses, Christine was joined and supported by another highly regarded intellectual, Jean Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris (Hult). Christine's role in the debate was critical, as she was the first person to address the barriers that stood in the way of women being able to develop into what was philosophically defined by humanism as being 'fully-human.'

While engaged in *Quarrelle*, Christine demonstrated the courage to stand up against the denigration of women, using the Aristotelian concepts of logic and reason in her defense.

Unsurprisingly, she was met with derisive commentary that attacked her womanhood and her authority to speak on this topic. Although Christine presented herself as the more competent debater, Pierre Col maligned her for her small intellect and her attempt to disparage Jean de Meun, considered to be a devout Catholic theologian and a perfect philosopher (Allen). Pierre Col characterized Christine as an irrational woman motivated by jealousy. The disparagement was an attempt to discredit her authority to speak and to challenge her “status as a discursive equal” (Brownlee 341). She came to learn that “men, often evil men, ran the world as she knew it because they held the secrets of learning” (quoted in Margolis 362).<sup>4</sup>

Christine’s superior intellectualism and far more rational approach to the debate did not shield her from being maligned and targeted with scorn for her lack of authority to challenge a writer of Meun’s stature. This was an authority that she was denied based solely upon her gender and absence of formal education. Despite the setback, it was not a loss to Christine. After a careful analysis of her role in the debate, she began to recognize that the strength of her words did not rely solely upon rational argumentation. For an argument to be perceived as rational, one must possess the Aristotelian concept of *ethos*, in the form of cultural authority (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*). Christine’s intuition informed her that the barriers to her discursive authority were strong, and her voice was not yet powerful enough to be heard beyond them. She knew that she had a moral obligation to use the power of ethical rhetoric to circumvent these barriers and confront the masculine power structure in ways that did not overtly violate the long-established cultural norms.

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<sup>4</sup> This, incidentally, gave inspiration for *Path of the Long Study*, written from 1402-1403.

After the debate had ended, Christine had truly realized the limitations of her authority when she engaged in direct argumentation. Acknowledging this, it can also be said, that she exercised her discursive voice with the strength of solid premises and rational arguments, only to become the object of disparagement. Kevin Brownlee affirms that, although she was not considered to have won the debate, she was able to firmly establish credibility as an intellectual and to ease into her new identity as a professional writer, poetess, philosopher, historian, and political theorist (*Widowhood*). At this time Christine experienced a turning point in her approach to writing. With the realization that speaking in her own voice would not serve to sufficiently further her message, she turned her rhetorical craft to the empowerment of symbolism, allegory, and exemplum. With these three tropes she used fiction as her shield as she confronted what she considered to be the principles of both misguided and evil men.

In reaction to her experience of not having fully established intellectual authority in the *Quarrelle*, she progressed into writing allegories from a pre-feminist point of view (*Chance*). Her instincts brought her to the realization that directly confronting the prevailing scholastic argument was futile. Consequently, she found an alternative path to her voice by harnessing the power of rhetorical tropes to accomplish the task for her. The result of this tactic was an empowerment that appealed to the emotions of her readers, allowing Christine to discover her voice, and the path to connect her voice to the people of France. Through allegory and finely cultivated speech, she gained the cultural authority to speak as an historian, a biographer, a moral philosopher, and a political theorist.

This chapter will examine specific texts within Christine's oeuvre that not only show a progression of her rhetorical approaches, but also show fitting examples of her use of symbolism and exemplum to support her message. With themes of dream visions and divine mentors within

allegories, Christine took her patrons and readers to a higher level of thinking that transcended the prevailing cultural narrative. By allowing her readers to follow her into a higher plane of existence, partially make-believe, she uses rhetoric to free them from the constraints of their provincial thinking. With each one of Christine's texts, she further opens her readers up to new perspectives from which to view the world. She was strategic in her approach to her voice for valid reasons, given her time and place in history and the scant power that women held.

Particularly noteworthy was Christine's astute incorporation of historical narratives into her texts. These were historical accounts that highlighted women in the roles of virtuous heroines. This not only served to assist the readers to view history from a feminine perspective, but it also allowed Christine to ease her way into the role of historian. Historian, as a role, was suitable for men only.

#### The Rhetoric of *Path of the Long Study*

During the same year that the *Quarrelle* came to completion (1402), *Path of the Long Study* (*Le Chemin de Long Etude*, hereafter *Le Chemin*) marked another transition point in Christine's rhetoric. She redirected her efforts away from both the poetic pondering of love and loss of *Cent Ballades* and the rational argumentation in *Quarrelle*, toward the strength of rhetoric in the form of allegories as the carriers of a stronger message of empowerment to women. Written as a poetic narrative, *Le Chemin* told of Christine's metaphorical journey along the path of knowledge. This was a path that had been previously open only to those of the dominant gender and social class.

As a recurring theme, Christine found her voice through the words of a divine mentor, within an allegorical dream vision. This time her mentor, who served as her guide, was referred to as 'the Cumean Sybil' (*Le Chemin*). Christine, once again, played the role of narrator in her



own allegory, projecting her own voice onto that of the Sybil. Taking a very passive approach to her rhetoric, the character of Christine sat quietly while the Sybil did the speaking for her. Her quietude spoke of her humility, while the Sybil carried her voice. The allegorical dream vision format of *Le Chemin* was a technique that was often used as a rhetorical device during the Middle Ages, including Christine's work. *Le Chemin* was a transition piece that combined the grief that Christine felt at the loss of her beloved husband, Etienne, and the consolation that she garnered from the process of learning. Christine found solace in her writing as well as her studies. Scholarship and learning were processes which Etienne had greatly encouraged. For Christine, writing and scholarship were not only a path toward economic survival but also a coping mechanism to process her losses.

Evidencing the direct influence of Boethius, *Le Chemin* opened with the character of Christine, awake in her study chamber, consumed by inconsolable grief over the harsh reality that Fortune had bestowed upon her. The death of her husband, Etienne and the financial devastation that followed were more than she could bear. Finding a copy of Boethius' most famous book, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, in her study room, she picked it up and slowly began to read. This work of Boethius calmed her to the point where she drifted into a deep slumber, open to the reception of a dream vision. *Le Chemin* was based upon an actual dream that Christine recalled having on October 5, 1403. This dream allegory was, unquestionably, a reflection of Christine's intellectual journey toward becoming a woman of letters and authority (Griffin). Verse was the vehicle for her symbolic sojourn into the cosmos and back again.

As she drifted further into her sleeping state, the character of Christine embarked upon a dream vision journey, where she was greeted by her spiritual guide, the Cumean Sybil. The Sybil took Christine by the hand and led her on a remarkable symbolic sojourn of self-discovery,

philosophical wisdom, and political ideals (*Le Chemin*). Flying across Europe, the Sybil took Christine to see the seven wonders of the world. From there they soared through the Middle East to Mt. Parnassus, the home of philosophers and poets, an allusion to Christine's own transformation into a philosopher poet.

After their visit to Mt. Parnassus, the Sybil guided Christine up to the fifth circle of heaven to marvel at the skies, the planets, and the stars of the entire universe, and then back to the first circle of heaven. The first circle of heaven was where the 'Court of Reason' was located. Here Christine witnessed a debate among world influencers moderated by Lady Reason (*Le Chemin*).<sup>5</sup> Christine called upon her debating skills that she had developed in *Quarelle* to stage a debate within her dream vision. She came to realize that women debating within dream visions and allegories were viewed as being much more credible than if they had debated in an actual lived experience. The contenders included women who were aptly named 'Nobility,' 'Chivalry,' 'Wealth' and 'Wisdom.' Christine acknowledged that these names were chosen because they were the same qualities that were necessary for a ruler to achieve and maintain a successful reign against the problems of the troubled French society (Blumenfeld-Kosinski). The metaphorical names of the debaters were rhetorical components of an allegorical political statement from Christine regarding her adopted country, France, as part of the larger world. This was a transition for Christine. Although she had still maintained her passion for the defense of womankind and history, her rhetorical range had begun to widen to include the concern of political theory.

The purpose of the debate in the 'Court of Reason' was to arrive at a desired outcome for solving the dismal state of the world, and to determine the best way to go about accomplishing this. The court had also met to determine who should become the new leader of the world, and to

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<sup>5</sup> Lady Reason also plays a primary role in Christine's subsequent work, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, written in 1405.

tackle the question of the desired attributes that someone holding the position of World King should possess (*Le Chemin*). This was a subtle suggestion that France, under the leadership of Charles VI was in a state of utter chaos, with dueling factions within his own monarchy and a relentless war between England and France. Collectively, the debaters determined that this was a matter that best be decided by the Court of France. Christine, as witness to the debate, was chosen to deliver the message to the French people. This symbolic bestowal of authority empowered Christine to have an actual voice in political discourse, a voice that was rarely heard from an ordinary woman who was not a member of the royalty.

There were two paths found in *Le Chemin*. The first of the paths, referred to as *Terrestre Paradis*, was “very narrow and verdant” (*Le Chemin* line 762). *Terrestre Paradis* led straight to the being of God, but it was extremely difficult and decidedly not the path that the Sybil thought Christine should take. The second path was not nearly as long, but much wider than the first path. This was the ‘path of science’ and more fitting for Christine, for it was to be her *Chemin de Long Etude*, translated into ‘path of the long study.’ The symbolism is apparent that, in addition to the faith perspective, there is also the viewpoint of reason. *Le Chemin* was a path for women of letters, for which Christine encouraged all women to strive. As the Sybil instructed her to follow the pen, it was taken by Christine as an indication that she should use her writing skills to work toward a more virtuous world by bettering the wrongs in her current world (Gibbons). At that point, she had begun to realize her voice, taking on the role of an emergent philosopher. She also began to further strengthen her reputation as an historian, as this work encompassed the narratives of many of the philosophers from the Age of Antiquity onward (Semple).

Douglas Kelly noted that, not only was *Le Chemin* an autobiographical reflection of Christine’s life, but it also reflected the depths of her scholarly endeavors. Traversing the earth,

she gave an account of her life as it related to people throughout history, again establishing her authority as an historian. Soaring through the cosmos, Christine shifted her focus to that of the philosophers, indicative of their loftier ideals in relation to the universe. The idea of integrating one's personal narrative within a work of fiction was somewhat novel at the time. By closely intertwining her life with that of the fictional character of Christine, she alluded that her fiction, even though it was structured outside of the real world, closely aligned with facts about her own experiences. This was a subtle rhetorical technique that served to enhance the reification of her message with her many crossovers between allegory and actual life.

The power of rhetoric was invoked by Christine as she ascended into the heavens and saw the "sovereign mother of all earthly and worldly creatures" (*Le Chemin* line 2589). The sovereign mother called upon 'Eloquence' and commanded her to read a statement from Mother Earth and speak to her about the travesties taking place there. The metaphor of eloquence offers testament to the awareness that words that are spoken carry with them the power to influence and change one's view of the world and the way others relate to that view. This was a turning point, not only in Christine's professional life, but also in the tone of her rhetoric. Transitioning away from her earlier poetic love ballades, she moved her rhetoric toward political and moral themes (Gibbons). Christine redeveloped her own experience into allegorical narrative poems with the Cumean Sybil and other divinely inspired female figures serving as wise and brilliant mentors who imparted wisdom upon the silent persona of Christine. This was, no doubt, a rhetoric of female empowerment in direct response to the gender belittlement she personally experienced in *Quarrelle*. This was an alternate route for her voice, avoiding direct argumentation, to engage in the power of allegories, rife with lofty symbolism and exemplum of the highest virtue.

Dante's *Divine Comedy* was the primary inspiration for *Le Chemin*, serving as a foundational model for her rhetorical dream journey. Strikingly noteworthy is that the Cumaean Sybil was a feminine modeling of Dante's Vergil, who served as his guide in *Divine Comedy*. By re-gendering Dante's Vergil, as the Cumaean Sybil, Christine established her own feminine authority by reinventing the role of Dante, playing a female version of him in her own allegory. By doing so, she effectively reappropriated Dante's masculine authority by using female characters to represent the virtues of the male characters of Dante (Gibbons). The Sybil was a divine woman of wisdom with philosophical insights into the world, just as Vergil was a man of good character. The personae of Vergil and Dante had been symbolically resurrected as women, granting rhetorical traction to both the narrator Christine and the Cumaean Sybil to speak with philosophical conviction and authority.

Taking on a more philosophical tone, *Le Chemin* was a different approach to rhetoric than Christine had used in the letters that were exchanged in *Quarrelle*. The Cumaean Sybil, served as a teacher who imparted wisdom and knowledge, just as Dante's Vergil had done for him. The reception of this knowledge enabled Christine to assume an authoritative role in her writing. In correlation to her own life, the persona of Christine in *Le Chemin* shared the same personal experiences of the author, Christine. Through the voice of the Cumaean Sybil, she offered a critique of the warfare of which France was involved, and the moral situation, both home and abroad. Christine also endorsed the idea of a universal monarchy, with France in the ultimate position of power. *Le Chemin* and *Vision of Christine (L'Avison)* were the two allegorical works that used the power of rhetoric to address both political and philosophical themes advocating for France.

Christine also adapted Dante's metaphor of a road to her own symbolic path for women to follow in their quest for learning. Her path represented the journey to which women were perfectly capable if they were to endeavor upon intellectual pursuits. The path was open for all women to pursue a life of scholarly learning. The metaphorical 'path' was a symbol of feminine empowerment in the patriarchal realm of intellectualism. This was a path that the persona of Christine followed, as it would bestow authority upon her as well as the other women in the intellectual world. This was a world that was generally secured to the male gender (Gibbons).

The Foucauldian notion that knowledge is a form of power was evident to Christine. She clearly recognized that a major source of the disempowerment that women experienced was the fact that they were not permitted to fully participate in the educational process. By advocating for the education of women, she was also campaigning for the empowerment of her gender and the betterment of French society. The journey along the path of the long study was one of learning that stemmed from Christine's recognition that there was a clear connection between knowledge and power. The further realization that this power had been contained to the masculine elite who were instrumental in limiting the right to that knowledge. By opening the pathways, Christine could help to level the way for women so that they, too, could participate in scholarship. With greater access to knowledge, women would not be so vulnerable to the cultural malignment that they had been experiencing for centuries prior.

One of the more rhetorically poignant events in *Le Chemin* took place when the Cumaean Sybil led Christine into the scene that is often referred to as 'The Bath of the Muses.' Mary Wetzel Gibbons observed that this rhetorical moment was "indispensable to Christine's preparation for civic duty" (131). In this scene, (Illumination I) the Sybil led Christine to a fountain that promoted intellectualism in the women who immersed themselves in its waters.

“Christine’s revisioning of the fountain can also be thought of as curative, in the medical sense, unlike the erotic fountain of the [Romance of the] *Rose*” (Gibbons 142). Her observation was that women were highly underestimated regarding their intellectual capabilities, therefore she deconstructed the idea of females being defined by a sense of eroticism. Consequently, she used the power of her words in an allegorical form to replace the concept of eroticism in women into one of feminine intellectualism. Christine did not attempt to *completely* overpower the notion that a male mind is superior. But rather, she alluded that the female being is capable of housing what was stereotypically thought of as a male mind. With this notion she planted the seeds of change to the discourse of the Aristotelian thinking that “a powerful mind is a masculine attribute, while femininity is defined by the womanly body” (Gibbons 143).

The metaphorical implications of a bath are apparent when one considers that baths have long been valued for their therapeutic benefits and a cure for both physical and mental ailments. By altering the male concept of sexuality regarding the human body Christine brought into focus a new level of intellectualism. This transformed the perception of the body and challenged the established hierarchy of intellectualism in a way that empowered the female ‘other’ against the prevailing ideology. The fountain provided the intellectual stimulation as a form of therapy for Christine’s personal losses in life and served as a metaphor for the rebirth that takes place during the sacrament of baptism (Gibbons). The metaphor of water, having numerous levels of meaning, represented the cleansing of the old ways of thinking, and the life-giving forces of the new thinking.

In the 12th century there was a renewed interest in Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* which brought about a tradition based upon his poetics. Patricia Zalema argued that, according to Ovidian tradition, “Pools became a powerful means for investigating love and self simultaneously” (*The*

*Ovidian* 92). The pool, being representative of the mirror, is a theme that often appeared in medieval literature. For example, in *Romance of the Rose*, the Fountain of Narcissus was featured as “A locus for human vision” (92). This was significant, because the bathing fountain of the muses was the first stop on Christine’s journey around the world with the Sybil as her guide. This event was the defining scene in *Le Chemin*, for it set the tenor for all that was to follow on this metaphorical journey.

While Christine had introduced the idea that history and political opinion were pertinent to her narrative, *Le Chemin* stood on its own as one of Christine’s most relevant works. *Le Chemin* introduced the idea of including historical accounts and political commentary within a dream vision format. By incorporating actual historical events into her allegories, she was gradually establishing herself as a recognized historian by including historical accounts within her allegories. Because of these factors, *Le Chemin* also served as a segue to *Mutación*, which also included an even greater examination of historical events as they were relevant to Christine’s personal narrative.

#### The Rhetoric of *The Book of the Mutation of Fortune*

*The Book of the Mutation of Fortune* (*Le Livre de la Mutación de Fortune*, hereafter *Mutación*), written in 1403, was lengthier than all of Christine’s previous poetic allegories. Her powerful rhetoric engages the use of cultural symbolism within allegory to voice her concerns about the undeserved perception of inequity between the genders. She used the vernacular language of the Parisian French, a language that common people could understand. Once again Christine had broken from the norms because history was typically conveyed in Latin, and therefore, limited to an elite group who had studied and understood Latin, which rarely included



secular women. *Mutación* was instrumental in cementing Christine's identity, both as a philosopher and an historian.

The allegory begins with Christine entering the great round hall of Fortune's Castle.<sup>6</sup> Fortune's Castle was enormous with beautiful paintings upon the walls. Depicted in these paintings were all the most significant events throughout history. The stories of great kings and princes, kingdoms, adventures, and military conquests were held within the walls of Fortune's Castle. The stories depicted were not Fortune's own stories, but it was clear to Christine that Fortune held control over the world's situations and events. Cognizant of her shift in personal fortune, Christine viewed her misfortune as a microcosm of the larger turmoil of her moment in time, which included the Black Plague, the Hundred Years War, and the Great Western Schism of the Church and a very unstable monarchy. This was also a time of significant social oppression and turmoil within the nation, and rulers who were not always scrupulous. In this work Christine was not only telling history from her own time, but she was also retelling events that occurred in the past.

To have the authority to convey history lessons to others, Christine believed that her character needed to first experience a metaphorical gender mutation. With this transformation she could experience the rights and privileges that were allotted solely to men. Doors were opened that were previously locked to her as a woman. The gender mutation took place after Christine, the protagonist left Fortune's Castle and set sail on the 'Ship of Life' only to discover that the helmsman had been thrown overboard and drowned. Christine was forced to take the rudder and steer the ship on her own. This was, no doubt, an allusion to her own situation, in

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<sup>6</sup> This scene is reminiscent of Guillaume de Lorris' section of *Romance of the Rose*, which begins with the central character, Amant, entering a walled-in garden area. Amant finds the outside walls of Lorris' garden containing ten portraits, painted in gold and blue, with inscriptions to entice those who enter (Brownlee).

which Etienne, who she considered to be the helmsman on her metaphorical ship of life, had suddenly died. Metaphorically speaking, Christine was left to navigate the murky waters of life on her own. Symbolically steering the ship of life implied that her gender role had been greatly transformed, giving her authority that she never held as a woman. Women were not afforded the luxury of self-determination, or the privilege of steering their own ship. The idea of gender mutation was not so much a metaphor about her becoming a wage earner through her literary and rhetorical talents, but rather the metamorphosis that occurred when she assumed the role of speaking subject (Delaney 80). In this work Christine had been bestowed with cultural authority simply because the protagonist Christine had transformed her identity from a woman to a man. Being a man merited authority without having to prove one's value. Without a cultural or political voice in her society, Christine created one of her own. By symbolically transforming her gender, she garnered the cultural authority to write about her political and philosophical views within the context of a universal history. This was an authority to which women had traditionally been excluded.

Blumenfeld-Kosinski described the overarching theme as “Fortune’s power in governing history and humans’ individual fates” (quoted in Altman and Grady 11). Within this literary castle, the character of Christine had the authority to examine historical events, and to make social commentary on the events of the moment. She further enhanced her credibility by referring to her name as the name of the perfect being, Christ, to which the letters I-N-E have been added (*Mutación* 371-378). By invoking the son of God, she gave an air of sanctity to her writing. With that sanctity, came the moral authority to use her voice to give commentary on the state of the world as she knew it.

By taking what were traditional icons of masculine authority, such as education, writing, history, and dream visions, and then placing them into an alternative context, Christine was able to transform these male icons into a new type of female authority (Carlson and Weisl). She had gained the authority to speak on behalf of women, rather than submitting to the idea that women should only be the object of discussion. The undertones of her fictive work empowered her to rise against the dominant ideology of her time in a subtle, yet powerful voice of dissent. Christine realized that, as a speaking subject regarding the virtues of womanhood, she was contradicting a solidly established male authority. Through her written rhetoric, she gradually realized her strength as an author of fiction spoke to power with truth and an authority of its own (Gibbons). To quote Christine on the topic, “Nothing gives one more authority than one’s own experience” (*Mutación* 143).

*Mutación* lent itself perfectly as a vehicle for Christine’s own message of truth to power. As Christine transformed into a man, she became authorized to articulate her opinions against nobility regarding a systemic lack of virtue. She proclaimed that the ruling factions had rendered France precarious and fragmented, and unable to maintain any form of cohesion. Emboldened by the success of her previous works, Christine used the power of her rhetoric to decry both Pope Clement VII and Pope Urban VI for their parts in the Great Western Schism (Willard, *Writings*). Her metaphorical mutation had granted her an authority that few women had ever attained. Hers was an authority which, thus far, had resided in the realm of literary fiction, but was gradually making its way into Christine’s personal life, eventually empowering her to speak directly to her patrons in her own voice.

After she had penned *Mutación* in 1403, Christine not only underwent a metaphorical gender transformation, but she also altered her rhetorical forms. As she transitioned from the

traditionally feminine discourse about love and loss, to what was accepted as an area reserved for men, she became known for having rightfully earned the designation of ‘historian’ (Margolis). Christine formally presented *Mutación* to Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy for Year’s Day in the year 1403 (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee). The duke was so impressed with her work that he granted her a commission to write the official biography of his deceased brother, Charles V. Christine considered this commission not only to be a great honor, but an opportunity to expand her role of moral philosopher into the role of biographer and writer of history. Before writing the official story of the King’s life, Christine first wrote her most noted work, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, which also includes a portrayal of women’s history.

#### The Rhetoric of *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*

Feeling dejected by the disparaging words of Matheolus and sensing that she had lost the *Debate of the Rose* on the technicality of gender, Christine was inspired to write her most widely acclaimed compilation, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* (*Le Trejor de Cité des Dames*, hereafter *Trejor*). Comprised of two separate books, *The Book of the City of Ladies* (*Le Livre de Cité des Dames*, hereafter *Le Cité*) and *The Book of Three Virtues* (hereafter *Tres Vertus*), *Trejor* was written in 1405 for the purpose of elevating the societal regard for women, and to exonerate them from all of which they were defamed. In *Trejor* Christine examined the role of womankind from two viewpoints. The first is addressed in *Le Cité*, as Christine offered empowerment to women by persuading them that they are every bit as capable as men. *Le Cité*, reclaimed the feminine side of virtue and empowerment, while, almost as a counterpoint, *Tres Vertus*, offered strict instructions about female comportment in society. This seemingly counters the idea of female empowerment by suggesting that women comport themselves properly and know their place within society. The two books are tied together not merely by their oppositional

viewpoints, but also because both texts included Ladies Reason, Rectitude and Justice, the allegorical divine mentors who bestow guidance for Christine to carry to her patrons and other readers.

### The Rhetoric of *Le Cité*

French post-modernist Michel Foucault acknowledged the subtle permeation of power and the notion that it is ubiquitously embedded in discourse and regimes of truth (*Power*). The discursive nature of that power was evident in the medieval politics of everyday life. Foucault also addressed the concepts of space and knowledge and the political implications of architecture. Architecture can be designed to reflect the freedom of people or the power that is lorded over them. Before the 18<sup>th</sup> century, architecture was not necessarily designed as a reflection of its true purpose, therefore Foucault clarified by stating, “The treatises on politics [in the Middle Ages] on the art of government, on the manner of good government, did not generally include chapters or analyses devoted to the organization of cities or to architecture” (350). *Le Cité*, however, conveyed the idea that architecture is, indeed, representative of power, and that women building a city just for women, would engender the empowerment that they rightfully deserved.

Remarkably, Christine used a similar analogy to that of Kenneth Burke regarding the building of a house as a form of literary symbolism (*On Symbols*). For Christine, it was a city that was built by putting ink to vellum, with her words being her building blocks, strategically placed upon the symbolic Field of Letters. This premise of the city was the praise of the many virtuous women who were exemplary throughout history. Judith Kellogg pointed out that *Le Cité* laid the foundation for power that was enhanced by an “allegorical space” that women could call their own (129). The city also served as a symbolic fortification against the misogynistic

attitudes that prevailed. Within the walls of this allegorical city Christine found discursive authority, an authority that had previously resided, almost exclusively, within the domain of men (Kellogg).

*The Book of the City of Ladies* begins with Christine sitting in her study. Deciding upon some lighter reading after a long day of scholarly endeavors, she picked up a copy of *Lamentations*, written by Matheolus of Boulogne, circa 1295. Matheolus had written about what he considered to be shortcomings of the female gender. He described women as being immoral, weak, and deformed (Kelly). This reflected the widespread opinion of those holding authority in medieval Parisian society. Christine found herself in an ethical quandary, particularly since this was an opinion that was often presented within the Christian framework that was ingrained in her being. This was an authority that had been legitimated before the time of Aristotle and continued though every era of western civilization.

After reading *Lamentations*, the protagonist, Christine became distressed in her own self-doubt. As saddened as she was, she slowly began to question the legitimacy of the time-held masculine authority, but not without trepidation (*Le Cité*). Masculine authority was a level of influence that was so pronounced and pervasive that even women succumbed to its power to proclaim that they were inferior in almost every way. Because this authority was thought to have some divine origin, it made sense in light of the historical moment. Christine appeared to have resigned herself to this, even though it ran counter to her own personal experience (Kelly).

After reading *Lamentations*, Christine dozed off into a deep restful state. Within her slumber she experienced a dream vision in which she was visited by three divine mentors; Ladies 'Reason,' 'Rectitude,' and 'Justice,' also known as the 'Virtues.' The threesome had arrived together to address her concerns about the malignment of women that had become so culturally

imbedded. The fact that there were three of them was most likely an allusion to the Holy Trinity, giving Christine's rhetorical approach an implied approval from a higher source. Each one of the Virtues was carrying an object within her hands. These were gifts for Christine to pass along to the women of the allegorical city that she was about to construct with her powerful words. The city was to be one of perfection, for the most virtuous of women, which in the end included all women (*Le Cité*). This was conveyed with the subtle understanding that all women were capable of greater things, including virtue (Illumination III).

The rhetorical power of the symbol was reflected by the appearance of spiritual guides. Christine took notice of Lady Reason first. The unusual-looking object that she held in her right hand was a shiny, reflective mirror, "like a scepter" (*Le Cité* 10). The mirror would be used to light the way of women along their true path, and if anyone looked in the mirror along the way, they would "see themselves as they truly are" (*Le Cité* 10). In medieval literature the mirror not only represented the symbolism of retrospection, but in this case, it also carried with it the symbolism of "self-worth" (Jansen, 35). This is in stark contrast to the male voices of authority that resonated through her inner psyche, causing her to lower her head in shame, "as she had been convinced to bear that dishonor" (Jansen 38).

Lady Rectitude was the second of the Virtues to draw Christine's attention. Carrying a measuring ruler in her right hand, also like a scepter, she told Christine that the ruler was "the yardstick to measure right from wrong and to distinguish between good and evil" (*Le Cité* 13). Lady Rectitude ceremoniously presented the ruler to Christine with the meticulous measure to which Christine must adhere in her carefully chosen words and actions. The measure of her actions would ensure that the city she was about to build would be flawless in every way (Taylor and Smith). Sandra Hindman put forth the idea that Lady Rectitude also represented the measure

of right and wrong and good and evil. Her purpose in passing the measuring ruler to Christine was “so that she can build upon the foundation” that was to be put down under the guidance of Lady Reason (Hindman 465). Also, the ruler symbolized the precision with which the city should be built because the literary persona of Christine was instructed to measure the places to build streets, public buildings, and beautiful dwellings for all the virtuous women who would reside there (*Le Cité*).

The third and final mentor to introduce herself to Christine was ‘Lady Justice.’ She had arrived clasping a golden cup that Christine described as being of generous proportion. The cup was a gift that had been given to her by God the Father. Formed much like the shape of a chalice, the cup further enriched the symbolism that was conveyed by this gesture (*Le Cité*). In keeping with the divine mentor’s name, the cup itself was a symbol of justice. From this cup she projected a higher form of justice that she portions out equitably to all the women who partake of it (Taylor and Smith).

The fleur-de-lis, or ‘flower of the lily’ that was positioned on the cup, is a commonly used late medieval religious and heraldic symbol (Caldwell). Commonly the fleur-de-lis is depicted as a three-petaled flower, either white or gold, up against a royal blue background (Illumination II). This symbolized a wide range of religious and spiritual concepts, but most often the fleur-de-lis was used to invoke the holy trinity when shown in gold. When portrayed in white, it symbolized the sanctity of chastity and purity, both being among the most highly regarded attributes of women, including the Blessed Virgin Mary. Although the origin of the fleur-de-lis can be traced to ancient civilizations, “it flourished in the now-familiar, abstracted fleur-de-lis in medieval France” (Caldwell 2). The symbol was so prevalent that it permeated every level of Parisian society. In literature the strength of this symbol was so regarded that it was



commonly invoked as a shield against sin and evil influences. The lily itself carried its own level of meaning within the fleur-de-lis. It has long been recognized as a symbol of purity, but also a symbol of royalty and the “relationship between the sacred and royal connotations” (Caldwell 4). As early as the twelfth century Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) had referenced the lily as a symbol of feminine virtue when he referred to a virgin’s ability to maintain her purity while living among the wicked of the earth as akin to being a “lily among thorns” (quoted in Caldwell 4). As a symbol of the holy trinity, the fleur-de-lis gave legitimation to the words that were imparted by Lady Justice (Taylor and Smith). She would direct Christine to defend women from all the denigrating commentary that was pronounced by males who were considered authorities.

As a sign of humility, Christine fell to the ground in prayer for the women she met. This show of personal humility was present in all of Christine’s work. Lady Reason explained to her, and ultimately to the reader, that women were also created in the likeness and image of God, as the book of Genesis says of men. She further elucidated that women were not merely created from mud combined with the substance of men, but rather from the actual body of a man, which logically implies that women are therefore not inferior to men (*Le Cité*). The persona of Christine implored the allegorical figure of Lady Reason to enlighten her as to whether it pleases God that women should exercise their minds. Lady Reason responded that women should have access to an education because if women were given the same educational opportunities as men, these educated women would exceed men in their abilities.

Referencing Boccaccio’s words in *Concerning Famous Women*, Lady Reason related, “God has given them [women] such beautiful minds to apply themselves in any of the fields where glorious and excellent men are active” (quoted in Sterba 135). She then argued that women should not be denied access to knowledge, because it was the lack of knowledge that

caused women to buy into the idea that they are not as worthy as their male counterparts. Because of the prevailing prejudice against female learning, women, essentially, were not afforded the opportunity to achieve scholarship, other than what could be garnered from the studies of their male family members.

Christine's resistance to the prevailing misogyny emerged through the character of Lady Reason. Upon meeting Christine, she spoke, "My dear daughter, do not be afraid, for we have come to you from heaven" (*Le Cité* 8). Her mentor was establishing ethos from the very start of her communiqué. She was sent from heaven therefore one can easily infer that what she spoke must have been given the seal of approval from God. She further elaborated and consoled Christine:

"Our aim is to help you get rid of all of those misconceptions that have clouded your mind and made you reject what you know and believe in fact to be true. Just because so many other people have come out with the opposite opinion, does not make your beliefs untrue, if you turn your mind to the very highest realm of all, the realm of abstract ideas. Think for a moment whether those philosophers whose views against women you have been citing have ever been wrong" (*Le Cité*. 8).

Lady Reason had explained to Christine that a *City of Ladies* needed to be built in honor of all the virtuous women throughout history. The city would be a place of refuge to escape from the many derogatory ideas regarding the virtue of women. "So, you see, my dear daughter," Lady Reason stated. "You alone, of all women, have been granted the honor of building the *City of Ladies*. To lay the foundation, you shall draw water from us three, as from a clear spring...your city will be unparalleled in splendor and will last for all eternity" (*Le Cité* 12).

Lady Reason carried Christine's own words when she spoke of how women, without adequate knowledge, were unable to realize their own worth. As a wise mentor, Lady Reason admonished Christine to change her perspective to allow validation of her own personal experience (Kelly). She instructed Christine that together they "would build the *City of Ladies* on flat, fertile ground where fruits of all kinds flourish and fresh streams flow, a place where good things grow in abundance" (*Le Cité* 16). She then guided Christine out into the Field of Letters to begin work on the allegorical city. But first the old way of thinking had to be removed to make room for a fresh perspective on women.

The Derridean notion of deconstruction calls into question our thinking about language and literature. Deconstructionism argues that language is not complete, but rather dependent upon its greater context (Derrida). To understand language completely, it needs to be viewed as a process of human cooperation and social action. Language must be situated in the world, within social contexts and used according to the social codes within the context. As Christine sought to establish a new cultural viewpoint, she first had to deconstruct some of the preexisting ideas, before building upon an already-existent cultural narrative. In the *City of Ladies* this deconstruction was represented by the symbolic removal of dirt. With the help of Lady Reason Christine made a clearing within the *Field of Letters* where the new *City of Ladies* would be constructed (*Le Cité* 8). Together they discarded all the stones, which represented the misogynist works of male authors such as Matheolus and Meun. By doing so, Christine was transforming the terrain of existing culture into one that was significantly more hospitable toward women.

Having been instructed to dismantle the old way of thinking by eliminating layers of 'dirt' where the city was to be built, Christine began the symbolic preparation for a new cultural narrative (Kellogg). Using the "spade of her intelligence" (*Le Cité* 16) she removed layer after

layer of misconceptions about women, and placed these misconceptions, represented by dirt, into baskets. These misconceptions included all the misogynistic beliefs that were melded together to form the existing cultural viewpoint. As each subsequent layer of dirt was removed, it was examined and analyzed, refuted, and then discarded. The vacant area that was left behind provided new space to build upon with fresh ideas about the value of virtuous women. The old ideas had been disassembled, making way for a shift in the cultural narrative (Kellogg). *Le Cité* used the rhetorical power of allegory in the form of architecture to lay a brand-new foundation on which to build a city that was to be shared exclusively by women. The city was built using the symbolism of brick and mortar to convey the power within this city. This was a city built to dissuade the patriarchal forces of the past and to exalt virtuous women, both past and present.

With the help of her three heavenly mentors, Christine addressed what later became the Foucauldian idea of “engendered space” (Kellogg 129). Building the *City of Ladies* would create an allegorical zone in which women were positioned in a more equitable location on the power spectrum. *Le Cité* was a celebration of womankind, from historical figures to fictional characters. For example, Christine referred to all women within the City as *dames*, a term that, in 15<sup>th</sup> century French culture, was a term reserved for virtuous noblewomen. Within the *City of Ladies* all women were considered noble. The women she included within her noble class were from all segments of society and places in time, such as Mary Magdalene, Blanche of Castile, and the Amazonian tribal women.

The *City of Ladies* was a classless society, and women across the earthly strata of social hierarchy were included as equals with only one woman, the Blessed Virgin Mary, reigning above the rest. Mary, who exemplified feminine perfection, had agreed to live happily within the city. The idea of a perfect woman reigning supreme over the virtuous women of the city

enhances the rhetorical power of the metaphor of a ‘city for women.’ Any, and all virtuous women were permitted to enter. This included all women, as professed by Christine, because all women have the capacity to be virtuous simply because they are women (*Le Cité*).

The stones that were used to build the edifice of the city were the narratives of all the virtuous women who were not glorified by the self-serving male writers of the era. Christine’s voice weaved its way through the allegories and metaphors that women are “every bit as capable as the bravest warriors, or the wisest rulers, but their capabilities would be best suited for their own” (*Le Cité* 58). Despite the capabilities of women that Christine espoused, she was a believer in gender-based division of labor, stating that women were “ordained by God to serve him differently” (*Le Cité* 29). From a post-modern vantage point, this might give the appearance of an anti-feminist sentiment, but when one considers the historical moment, she was laying the groundwork to move the narrative forward in the centuries that followed.

After the character of Christine placed the first stone at the base of the fictional city, Lady Reason told her that many more stones must be set to strengthen the foundation and advance the cause of women (Jansen). At this point, Lady Reason began to address the male misconceptions, particularly about the Amazonian women. In their defense she professed that women who exploited male sexuality for their own purposes were often viewed by men as monstrous deviants. Lady Reason offered an alternative perspective in defense of the women of the Amazon. She explained that it became necessary for their society to not rely upon men for their wellbeing because so many of those men had been killed in war, leaving the women and children in an extremely vulnerable situation. The dependence upon men had been their insurance for survival, but with so many of the men dying, they needed to rethink their mode of subsistence. Out of necessity, they learned to live independently of men. Lady Reason continued speaking

about the Amazon women to dispel many of the myths that had developed about their ruthlessness toward men. The idea of the Amazon women behaving savagely against men was a false narrative that was perpetuated by men for the purpose of denigrating women who had achieved independence (*Le Cité*). Through the voice of Lady Reason Christine shared the message of women living in unity but she also recognized the rhetorical components to the telling of history, which had always been told by men. To give history the balanced viewpoint that she felt necessary, she made the decision to retell history from a feminine perspective, again building upon her discursive authority.

After she spoke about women of great physical strength, Lady Reason shifted topic to women who had demonstrated their strength by crafting words to create powerful images, as Christine herself had done. “Their authority derives not from the strength of their bodies, nor from their moral character, but rather from the facility of their script” (quoted in Quilligan 96). Lady Reason further explained that there are two types of wisdom, “One is a gift of God and Nature, and the other is the talent that is delivered through long study” (96). Christine demonstrated through her writing that she was in possession of both of those traits.

Employing the rhetorical force of exemplum, Christine conveyed the historical accounts of many virtuous women through the voice of her three heavenly mentors. Gathering her facts from literature, she uncovered the virtues that could be accentuated, and presented them in a favorable light. This was not done to deceive, but rather for the point of emphasis (Kelly, 2007). By doing so, Christine was able to highlight all that was good about the women included in the city, and then to demonstrate the potential that all women hold within. The women selected to be honored in *Le Cité* were ones that stood out beyond the average. *Le Cité* served the dual purpose

of demonstrating to the world what women had accomplished throughout history and demonstrating that to which all women could aspire (Kelly).

The three sisterly mentors in *Le Cité* implored Christine to accept and understand what they were telling her, and to cast aside what is false so that there can be a solid foundation for inquiry (*Le Cité*). This involved a process of questioning all that she had learned up until this time, including what she was taught by doctors of the Church, such as Augustine and Aquinas (Kelly). At that point Lady Reason also took issue with Aristotle and Plato along with the doctors of the church who had spoken of women in disparaging terms. She conceded that, although they were extremely wise men, they were not “irrefutable at every point” (*Le Cité*. 8).

The City of Ladies was a symbol for women who had risen above the dogmatic constraints of earthly existence. Through the dialogue that ensued between the quiet, passive persona of Christine and the authoritative voices of her heavenly mentors, the reader is persuaded that experience is a much greater source of evidence for validity than that of popular opinion. The mentors were serving Christine as spokespersons for the salvation of womankind, and as liberators from the stronghold of public opinion against women (Kelly). As she was so aptly named, Reason brought grounding to Christine’s argument that women are to be celebrated for their virtue. Rectitude was a symbolic representation of the righteousness and virtue toward which women are naturally inclined, and Justice was representation of equality under the law.

As another effective use of rhetorical technique in *Le Cité*, Christine paid homage to the martyred and dismembered female saints who had experienced violence against their bodies. This was a topic that Christine found to be relevant to the culture of her place and time, for violence against women was often considered to be a right that men legitimately held. By exemplifying the lives of those who endured violence, she makes a plea for the lives that were

taken. By equating victims of violence to sainthood, she emphasized the opposing forces of good and evil, placing the victims on the side of righteousness.

Christine felt a moral responsibility to persuade and educate people of both genders that violence against women is abhorrent. Maureen Quilligan argued that Christine expanded upon Boccaccio's text about pagan female victims of violence and transformed it into a "sacred empowerment of the Christian witness" (196). Among the honored martyrs was Christine's own namesake, a young virgin known as St. Christine. Lady Justice began telling her story of St. Christine with the preface that she would speak in greater detail in this than she would of the other martyrs that she features because she is Christine's patron saint and namesake, and because her story of strength was an exemplar worth noting. The allusion to the power of speech strengthens the argument that Christine deserves prominence as a medieval rhetor.

According to Lady Justice, the 12-year-old Christine was resistant to her father's attempts to convert her into following his pagan beliefs. Because of her refusal to follow his orders, he had her locked up in a tower and tormented. Saint Christine was then accused of witchcraft, and attacked by the judge, who had her breasts torn off. Milk rather than blood poured from the wounds, symbolic of the nurturing role of women. As she called out the name of Jesus, the judge also had her tongue cut from her mouth. Saint Christine continued to speak of Jesus, so her tongue was ripped out even further. She spat the remaining part of her tongue into the judge's face, landing it directly into his eye, permanently blinding him. The symbolism that is apparent is that Saint Christine's speech, represented by the tongue, could not be stifled, for "her spirit would continue to speak and praise God" (*Le Cité* 223). The retelling of the story of Saint Christine had an obvious understory of the oppressed female. The violent removal of her tongue was representative of the silencing of a woman who had then risen above her subjection. The



metaphor of the tongue was an empowerment through language, symbolized by the prevailing tongue that flew into the face of its oppressor. This precisely mirrored the fact that Christine was also using to power of language within her allegories to stand defiant in the face of masculine oppression. The tongue as a symbolic metaphor for the voice, resonates with rhetorical potency as it sends the message that speech is an infinitely powerful force.

There were many other great women who were exemplified in *Le Cité*. All were carefully chosen by Christine to represent various aspects of feminine virtue, most often strength, intelligence, and moral conviction. The stories were both entertaining and morally engaging to the reader, while lessons were taught by divine mentors to exemplify and promote the value of women. Susan Groag Bell pointed out that the biographies that Christine presented served three specific purposes: “To demonstrate the capabilities of women; to teach women by exemplar; and to write the history of women” (Bell 176). Inclusion of the pagan women exalted to the same level of virtue as the Christian women was a novel viewpoint that very few medieval rhetors had previously conveyed. The female exempla that were presented in *Le Cité* were closely aligned to the exempla that Boccaccio used in *Concerning Famous Women* (Willard, *Writings*). Although Christine only borrowed his format as a point of reference, she used that same format to stand up to Boccaccio’s chauvinist viewpoint in terms that he would have understood. It was a pattern of male domination that had filtered down through the rhetorical channels for seventeen hundred years since Aristotle laid claim to the idea that women were a lesser version of men (*Poetics*).

Earl Jeffrey Richards, who translated *Le Cité* into the English language, presented the argument that the city was clearly designed after Augustine’s *City of God*, which Augustine placed on an infinitely higher level than the *City of Man*. The *City of Ladies*, however, was built only for the most virtuous of women, therefore on a higher plane than that of their male

counterparts. Since the women of the *City of Ladies* were adhering to higher levels of virtuous living, they were closer to the *City of God*, if not included within it. Richards further noted that *Le Cité* demonstrated how Christine would often weave the ideas of her religious predecessors into her stories. By doing so she gave further legitimation to her ideas, implying that they had been sanctioned by a higher level of authority than one would find in the world of humans. With further divine guidance, the symbolic walls that surrounded the city were solidly constructed with the power of language, to protect women from the negative rhetorical forces that existed in Christine's time.

In *Le Cité*, Christine developed a feminine cultural authority that slowly evolved by way of the advice she received from her three mentors. She projected a sense of humility as her character sat quietly while the heavenly mentors imparted wisdom. Cheryl Glenn and Krista Ratcliffe claimed that "Christine the narrator establishes a textual barrier between the writer and the reader that allows for the authority of the ladies' teaching and for the reader's association with the narrator" (70). By using the voice of her three mentors she proclaimed that women's minds were created by God and worthy of recognition. The words from these divine women were the words of authority that the narrator, Christine silently accepted. Glenn and Ratcliffe indicated that the silence of Christine spoke louder when it was addressed by the voices of her three divine mentors. Her role was to be humble while the heavenly advisors carried her message. This was her rhetorical strategy to challenge the existing societal values without engaging in direct argumentation. She approached her oppressors from a position of humility and allowed the divinely inspired messengers to carry her voice of authority. Paradoxically it was through her own humility in the presence of allegorical women of divine authority, that Christine had gained her own feminine discursive authority.

### *The Rhetoric of Tres Vertus*

After Christine had waged an all-out defense of women in *Le Cité*, she took a much different approach in its sequel, *The Book of Three Virtues* (hereafter *Trois Vertus*). In this treatise she made, what appears to be, a shift in perspective, possibly causing readers to mistakenly think of it as a counter statement. While *Le Cité* challenges the misogynist mode of thought that was so prevalent, *Trois Vertus* instructs women that they must always be chaste, virtuous, and subservient. But a deeper examination of it evidences it as a follow-up to the dignity that is defended, and arguably instilled to the perception womankind. *Trois Vertus* advises women that they must demonstrate behavior that is worthy of the honor that was bestowed by the three virtuous women that had been sent from heaven to counsel Christine, and ultimately her patrons.

*Trois Vertus* featured the same divine mentors that visited Christine in *Le Cité*, Ladies ‘Reason,’ ‘Rectitude,’ and ‘Justice.’ With the City of Ladies having been built, Christine had assumed that her work was complete, and she could take a well-deserved rest. Exhausted, but in a much better frame of mind, Christine welcomed her mentors. “After I built the City of Ladies with the help and by the commandment of the three Ladies of Virtue, Reason, Rectitude and Justice, in the manner explained in the text of that book, and after I, more than anyone else, had worked so hard to finish the project and felt so exhausted by the long and continued exertions, I wanted only to rest and be idle for a while” (translated in Willard *Writings*, 135). The three Virtues then revealed that building the city was only the beginning of Christine’s work. Her next task was to begin populating it with new inhabitants who merit the standards that were put forth in *Le Cité*. Together the two works sought to enable women to have a respectable place in medieval society, as well as the opportunity to rightfully deserve that place.

*Trois Vertus* was a continuation of *Le Cité*, also written in 1405. It was all part of the endeavor to elevate the esteem of virtuous women, and to instill virtue within every one of her readers so that they might all be worthy enough to be included in the allegorical city. She calls upon women to prove the nay-sayers wrong, letting their actions be their voice, and to lead by exemplum. The dignity of women had been elevated so she the invited women to rise to the challenge of exemplary comportment in everyday living (Brown-Grant). *Trois Vertus* encourages women to use their sense of reason in their choices, which ultimately could sully their reputation on earth and affect their right to enter the kingdom of God, when they leave the earthly realm.

The genre of which *Trois Vertus* was written, a courtesy book of mirrors for women, was a popular format during the historical moment (Brown-Grant). Christine, through the virtues, addressed every womanly walk of life, including nuns, prostitutes, princesses, and artisan workers. *Trois Vertus* became a presence in the lives of middle-class women during the latter part of the 15th century. Rosalind Brown-Grant observed that unlike Christine's previous manuscripts, it was not written as a presentation copy (Brown-Grant)<sup>7</sup>. That *Trois Vertus* was popular with women of the middle class is demonstrated by the fact that it was printed on paper, rather than parchment or linen, with numerous copies in existence. *Trois Vertus* was popular for more than a century until courtesy books went out of fashion in the mid-1500s (Brown-Grant).

Even though she fervently defended women in *Le Cité*, Christine took a markedly different approach in *Trois Vertus*. She advised women to know their places in the world, and to take a secondary role to men. M. Bella Mirabella suggested that this is not a concession to the idea that women do not deserve the same rights as men, but rather instruction on how to survive

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<sup>7</sup> A presentation copy is typically, an elegantly ornamented version of a work, containing colorful illuminations and covered in luxurious materials and binding techniques. These manuscripts were presented to nobility in whose patronage the writer was indebted.

in a world where men hold almost all the power (Mirabella). This advice was for the benefit of women, more than it was in deference to men. She recognized that to change the system, one must first work within that system by acknowledging its existence.

### Interpretation of Christine's Rhetoric

By analyzing Christine's best-known allegorical works individually, the emergence of rhetorical themes is observed. Foremost is her stance as a moral philosopher, and defender of the virtues of womankind. The rhetorical thread that runs through every one of her texts is both the moral and practical need for empowerment of women through access to an education. Christine believed that knowledge is power, and that a better society would result if women were given the same type of education as their male counterparts. The rationality of Christine's argument had generally been disregarded, but the emotional appeal using symbolism was much more effective. The powerful divine mentors had successfully set the stage for Christine's strategic journey into the territory of her discursive authority as a rhetor.

Christine fully realized the relevance of social context in her rhetoric. By engaging the use of symbolism, she presented a philosophical opposition to defy the abstract concept of misogyny while working within the existing social parameters. Through her disassembling of male dominance in *Le Cité*, one shovel at a time, and the exaltation of women, brick by brick, she was offering the idea that to every deriding referent that men can make regarding women, there is a counter referent that can become reified through the power of language. The result for Christine was the power to guide the course of medieval thinking. The city that she was building was a symbolic refuge for women, to protect them from the aggressive forces that lurked outside of its walls (Mirabella). The city was a symbolic empowerment to all women, as they would be

free to express their ideas and to expand their interest in learning all that there is to learn about the world.

Post-modern feminists, such as Simone de Beauvoir, noted that *Le Cité* was the work that sparked a pre-feminist ideology (*Second Sex*). To 21st century readers, these two books, *Le Cité* and *Trois Vertus*, are the most familiar of Christine's oeuvre, and the ones that establish her as a defender of womankind. Charity Cannon Willard noted that "there is no doubt that these are landmarks in women's history." She further asserted, "These contributed to Christine's reputation as a writer who was not afraid to speak her mind" (*Writings* xiii). Because rhetoric was often dependent upon the form of writing in the Middle Ages, Christine must also be remembered as a skilled rhetor who delivered an entire package of strategic approaches to the art of persuasion.

By speaking through divine beings, both pagan and Christian, Christine was able to convey a symbolic air of authority about her message. As her rhetorical approach evolved through time and experience, she began to include divine females with supernatural abilities. This was symbolic of her own assumption of feminine authority, shifting away from the cultural narrative that all forms of authority are based in the masculine gender. Through these sage women Christine set the groundwork for the establishment of her own feminine cultural authority. Having female mentors relayed a message that women are as capable as men in formulating and sharing wisdom to both genders.

Among her other recurring themes is the inclusion of historical narratives within her allegories. This was a two-fold rhetorical approach. The first approach used the persuasive forces of exemplum to examine the virtuous living of women throughout time. Christine not only encouraged women to pattern their lives after those who have lived well, but also, she

exemplified the women who have been deemed worthy of reverence. By deconstructing the prevailing misogynist narrative that women were without virtue, she was able to lay the groundwork for future generations of women to elevate their status within society.

Secondly, by conveying history within her allegories, Christine had expanded the boundaries of female discursive authority. History had previously been written by men and mostly about men, from the viewpoint of men. Because women were generally not included in the writing of history nor in the making of it, Christine researched the resources available to her in the king's library and was able to assemble numerous accounts of exemplary women, many of whom were little known prior to be included in her allegories. This not only served as a defense of women, but also an empowerment of her own discursive authority as one of the first female historians.

Rosalind Brown-Grant explained that Christine de Pizan "was able to draw upon the cultural resources of her day in order to construct an intellectual authority for herself that challenged the prevailing orthodoxy of the Middle Ages" (i). She further noted that Christine is often hailed by modern scholars as one of the first women to speak in opposition to the conventional thinking of the Middle Ages, or clerical misogyny that portrayed women as inherently immoral and unworthy of respect (Brown-Grant). Her stance ran contrary to the masculine rhetorical tradition, yet she held firmly to the notion that women have a legitimate place in the world, and are every bit as capable of learning, voicing their ideas, and imparting wisdom to those who will listen. In a twist of irony, it was her position against the dominant literary gender that opened the doors to her acceptance into that tradition (Mirabella).

In a symbolic sense, Christine was able to fight fire with fire, using the same rhetorical and literary forms that Jean de Meun had used to viscerally malign women. The idea of a dream

vision to elevate the perception of women was a rhetorical technique that Christine effectively used to combat the viscous denigration of women as demonstrated when she responded to Meun's misogynist viewpoint in *Romance*. She accomplished this through her epistolary, both poetic and prosaic, in the *Quarrelle* in 1401, and then more effectively through her literary fiction in *Le Cité* in 1405, which is considered her signature work (Willard, Writings).

Christine discovered her own influence as a rhetor through the authority of allegorical female figures, such as the three divine mentors from *Le Cité*. As one of the few female secular writers, she often invoked the divine as a rhetorical force to carry her own voice. Christine's humanist point of view became apparent in *Le Cité* as well as many of her other writings, as they hearken the ancients in philosophy and mythology. For the most part, Christine's rhetoric was about experiences and concerns regarding humanity. With a richness of symbolism in *Le Cité* she delivered a message that there is a moral component to the respectful recognition of the value of women.

### Conclusion

Powerfully combining history with allegory, Christine became more than just the subject of her story. She became the perceiver, a role that was almost exclusively reserved for those of the male gender (Margolis). Her monumental task was to convince the rest of Europe that her personal experience and feelings were both rational and valid. To many it would have been a hopeless endeavor to persuade the world that misogyny did nothing to support the greater good of society, when in fact, it facilitated the weakening of moral stability on all levels of human interaction. The ethical dilemma that Christine faced was compounded by the fact that the scholars she most respected, such as Aristotle and Augustine, also opined that women are of an inferior nature to men (Kelly). For Christine to even think of voicing her dissent against the



prevailing attitudes about women took great courage and determination, as well as a willingness to face the possibility of unfavorable, and possibly violent consequences.

By analyzing each of the primary allegorical texts of Christine, her proto-feminist message becomes increasingly clear. She very strategically uses the rhetoric to send a subtle yet powerful message. Her inclusion of history in all her allegories is also a form of feminism in that she not only offers lessons in history but does it from a distinctly feminine perspective. By examining each work individually, it becomes evident that Christine was a powerful rhetorical force in the late Middle Ages. This chapter evidenced the need for further study, in general to the rhetoric of the late Middle Ages, and in particular, the rhetorical themes of Christine de Pizan as one of the most significant feminine influences upon the medieval conversation.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Christine's Range of Influence as a Pre-Feminist Rhetor

Up until the late Middle Ages, theology, philosophy, and rhetoric were areas of discipline that were very closely related to each other. Augustine and Ambrose, known for both their philosophical and rhetorical contributions, were primarily theologians before they were philosophers, or rhetors. The difference between the three categories of thought is that theology relies upon revealed truth, while philosophy is dependent upon truths that are discovered using one's own natural sense of reason (Semple). Rhetoric calls upon both the strength of one's faith and the capacity of one's reason. One does not guarantee the other, but together they work to create human knowledge. There must be vigilance on those who practice these areas of study because "they become instruments to wield power, rather than ways to seek the truth" (Semple 109). Christine presented the argument that the study of the humanities should not be a purely academic endeavor, exclusive to those with specialized education. Rather, they should be open to those who do not officially bear a title of influence (*L'Avision*). This was an interesting argument from the perspective of Christine as a rhetor, demonstrating her regard for the ethical components of rhetoric, that speech should be open to all, regardless of gender or formal level of education.

Having earned her mark as a rhetor through the power of her allegories, Christine had assumed the power to voice her ideas and concerns as a speaking subject, both despite and because of her gender. She moved her rhetorical skills in a new direction, away from her poetic musing about love and loss, toward writing about topics that were on a higher level of intellectualism, therefore studied mostly by males. This transformation was driven by her wish to solidly establish her reputation as a female rhetor of cultural authority. By demonstrating her knowledge of a wide range of topics and concerns, her feminine voice resonated on several

fronts. Through her understanding of rhetoric, Christine delivered strong messages regarding moral philosophy and proffered sage advice as a rhetor of politics. She was also entrusted by the deceased king's brother with the honor of recording the history of events that took place in her own lifetime. From the details of Christine's biographies, the reader gains insight into life as it was in the late Middle Ages. Initially Christine's rhetoric was in the form of allegory. This is clearly demonstrated in many of her works, but most pointedly in *Mutación*, *L'Avision*, *Cité*, and *Chemin*. Most of her work contained elements of every genre of writing and rhetorical form. Her most significant texts cannot be separated into specific categories of thought. A considerable number of them not only contain proto-feminist ideas, but also historical accounts, political theory, moral philosophy, and the list goes on. She expanded the scope of her genre to include topics that were beyond that which was culturally acceptable. All her accomplishments were reliant first and foremost upon her understanding of the rhetorical process. As a rhetor, she first circumvented, and then permeated the prevailing misogynist cultural authority. This included her self-bestowed authority as a female rhetor, to tell the story of history as she viewed it, and to record history as it happened in her lifetime. By penning the official biography of Charles V, she not only contributed to the official historical accounts of life within his court while he reigned, but she also engaged her skills as a rhetor to persuade future monarchy to pattern their behavior after the benevolent king. Christine also used the power of her rhetoric to glorify the reputation of a young Joan of Arc. *The Tale of Joan of Arc* (hereafter *Ditte*) is the only book written by anyone about Joan of Arc in her lifetime, providing a feminine perspective on Joan's historical narrative as it was occurring.

## The Transformation of Christine's Approach to Rhetoric

Through the power of her rhetoric, woven into her earlier texts, Christine had earned the cultural authority to move beyond the veiled cover of allegory. Having gained the authority to give true-to-life accounts of people and events, from her own feminine perspective, Christine had earned her place as a rhetor to make direct commentary on a variety of political and theological concerns. This is quite astonishing, given the cultural constraints against women in the Middle Ages. Christine's approach to rhetoric can best be described as brilliantly strategic. Guided by her instincts as a rhetor, she developed her initial strength with her allegories serving as the carriers of her messages. Through her allegories she gained the authority as a rhetor to eventually speak in her own voice to further the cause of womankind as well as that of her beloved adopted country, France.

This chapter will examine the transformation of Christine as a rhetor, beginning with her initial role as the humble recipient of wisdom from divine authorities, toward boldly speaking in her own voice as a rhetor who had attained feminine cultural authority. This chapter spotlights Christine's individual texts, again because each one of them contains a compendium of approaches to the delivery of multiple messages, particularly about her rhetoric of symbolism, allegory, and exemplum. The progression of Christine's metaphorical journey can be observed as she delves deeper into her role as a rhetor. Before completely transitioning her voice into one with direct authority on its own, she issued her last major allegorical text, *The Vision of Christine* (hereafter *L'Avision*) written in 1405.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The year 1405 was also the same year that she produced her magnum opus, *The Book of the City of Ladies*.

## The Vision of Christine

*L'Avision* reads like a biography of Christine's life, to which the reader is forewarned not to take it at its literal meaning, but to look deeper. *L'Avision* is included in this chapter because this was Christine's transition piece that bridged her allegories to defend the virtues of womanhood to her prosaic rhetoric to espouse her political and moral philosophies. This text also serves as a compendium of historical narrations that further enhance her credibility as a rhetor of history. The inclusion of history was important because, as a rhetor, she could highlight little known women of strength and virtue to be shown as examples of feminine virtue. As a proto feminist rhetor, she argued before the learned class that all of France would benefit if girls were to be entitled to the same education as their brothers.

The character of Dame Philosophy appeared in Book I of *L'Avision* to counsel Christine that she would be best served to look more intently at the events of her own life and to interpret them with a higher level of meaning. With that advice Christine threaded her personal narrative into the broader context of a nation in turmoil. Christine was able to address some of the turmoil through the voice of Dame Philosophy. Under the persona of Dame Philosophy, Christine was able to critique the people of France for their moral decay, and she included herself as part of that body. Using the story of her own widowhood as a metaphor for the death of Charles V, she described the bereavement of the people of France, along with the grief of 'Libera,' her symbolic personification of France (Brown-Grant). Speaking to a once again, passive Christine, she engaged the power of rhetoric by having Dame Philosophy persuade her that often it is better to change one's perception of life and circumstances, rather than attempt to alter them (*L'Avision*). By this Christine understood that her own life had different levels of meaning that could be

viewed from a loftier perspective, and there were things that could be changed, and other things could be accepted.

Recognizing the rhetorical power of the dream vision, Christine transferred that rhetorical power into many of her allegories as a way of lending itself to the authenticity of her narrative. In *L'Avison* she experienced a dream vision in which she was visited by a wise mentor by the name of Lady Wisdom (Allen). This was a turning point for Christine because this occurrence transformed Christine's narrator persona into a philosopher, or carrier of wisdom. This also coincided with the author Christine's own transformation, as she moved her rhetoric from that of a poetess who wrote about love and loss as a form of consolation to others, to being a vital intellectual force of the Middle Ages. This cultural empowerment bestowed her with the authority to speak not only on her own behalf, but for others as well. Christine had become a speaking subject, and revered rhetor, as she was commissioned to write her biographical account of the life of Charles V.

*L'Avison* is presented in three separate books. In each of the books the narrator, Christine, was met with one of three womanly personifications of princely attributes.<sup>2</sup> In Book I she met 'Dame Libera' who spoke of the history of France in allegorical form (*L'Avison*). In Book II Christine met 'Dame Opinion' who related Christine's insights and commentary of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. In Book III she encountered 'Dame Philosophie.' In this section Christine offered a personal account of her own life, in the style of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. The combination of these three books established Christine as a rhetor of history and moral philosophy. *L'Avison* was also the introduction of Christine as a rhetor of political theory.

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<sup>2</sup> The repeated use of the number 'three' throughout many of Christine's manuscripts may have been a veiled allusion to the holy trinity, further enhancing the legitimacy of her work.

Astonishingly, through her three spiritual women philosophers she tendered advice and guidance to the ruling factions of the French monarchy about the governance of France.

Rosalind Brown-Grant aptly noted that *L'Avision* provided its readers with “a hermeneutical methodology, which, allowing for a plurality of interpretations, points the readers resolutely away from the literal level of the text and toward its moral and spiritual dimensions of meaning” (Brown-Grant 95). *L'Avision* most defined Christine’s credibility as a female rhetor in that it gave her the footing to explore the field of political theory (Reno). In this literary work the character of Christine had a visualization experience of Dame Opinion soaring through the air as a shadowlike figure. This metaphorical experience exemplified the power that came to her through the rhetoric of symbolism that flowed through her pen and onto the parchment of a changing narrative.

Christine presented three levels of interpretation in Book I of *L'Avision*, which not only relied on biblical exegesis, but also led the reader to consider other authors of her time who explored the dream vision technique (Brown-Grant 93). She was not the first to address the chaos that had embodied France under the rule of Charles VI but nonetheless she took a significant risk by approaching such a sensitive topic. Recognizing the need for moral reform, she addressed this in *L'Avision*, which cleared the way for Christine to not only assert her role as a speaking subject in a world where few women had legitimate authority, but also to address the most important political matters of the day. Foremost among these matters were the chaos within the monarchy and the schism of the Church.

Containing all the elements of an autobiography, *L'Avision* presents itself as an assertion of Christine’s ideas in the form of a “mirror for princes” (Brown-Grant 89). Mirrors were a commonly used guidebook to instruct the readers regarding proper behavior. The

autobiographical aspect of this work is a representation of Christine as a worthy exemplar of proper behavior that a prince should exhibit while serving the greater good of his country. This text was a turning point in Christine's rhetorical oeuvre. She incorporated her own lived experience into her work. Deviating from her previous work, she used her voice as a political rhetor to confront the rapidly declining political circumstances within France. With an impending civil war between opposing factions of royal dukes within the royal family of King Charles VI, the political situation had become dire, and Christine felt morally obligated to use the power of her words to voice her concerns.

In *L'Avision*, the Christine's wise mentor, Dame Opinion, proscribed that humans must be inspired and enlightened by faith as a remedy for the conflicts that are inherent to the human condition. Dame Opinion divulged that her function was to inspire the humans to seek greater knowledge. She was the messenger of Christine's belief that more people being educated, regardless of gender, is better for the good of society. Dame Opinion offered wisdom within the domains of metaphysics, politics, and morality. Even though she was on a higher level of existence than humankind, Dame Opinion was susceptible to human imperfections. Her philosophical reasoning was that human intelligence is confined within a human body, which greatly limits the scope of knowledge (Brown-Grant). Opinion was an area that Christine firmly perceived as an important aspect to many of the realities in life. She also acknowledged that all the conflict and strife in the world comes from opposing opinions (Kelly). But there will always be opposing viewpoints, as Lady Opinion pointed out, "while some will give opinions on the language that is used in her work, and will opine that it is course or strange, but those who understand it will speak well of it" (*L'Avision* 59). This is a direct reference to the value of



dialectic conversation within human discourse, and possibly an allusion to Christine's use of the vernacular French language in a philosophical-political.

Through Dame Opinion, Christine admonished the princes that they should be looking after their spirituality, while engaging in the earthly realm that surrounds them. She further advised that when one must take up arms, it should never be done for personal benefit, but rather for what is best for the body politic. Within *L'Avision* Christine legitimated her role as a female rhetor by using the metaphor of birth to describe the ideas that she produced. The female act of giving birth allowed her to lay claim, not only for herself, but for all of womankind, that all people, regardless of gender, have a valid authority to have opinions and to write about them. Giving birth was unquestionably a feminine concept, symbolically linking a strictly female function to create life with the power to produce ideas. Her rhetorical use of the birth metaphor was one of the many incremental points that Christine made as she used words to build upon her reputation as a feminine rhetor.

Christine had taken a bold step with her rhetoric to shed light on the prospect of an impending civil war between royal factions within the French House of Valois. Through the voice of Libera, a female personification of France, Christine brought to light the issues that were dividing the nation. Calling upon the reader, presumably a prince, to take an ethical stance, she instructed him to examine his own behavior in alignment to her autobiographical rendering. In a didactic role, she advised the young royals to look for exempla in good men, like St. Augustine who contemplated his own transgressions in *Confessions* (Brown-Grant).

Christine engaged the power of her rhetoric to praise the then deceased Charles V for being a benevolent ruler who showed a deep concern for the well-being of all, women included. Libera demonstrated the point in Book I that the most exemplary forms of government are those

in which the monarch has the attributes of both faith and wisdom. Christine believed that the French monarchy previously had rulers who fell into that category, such as Charlemagne in the eighth century and Charles V, in whose court her father had served in the late 14th century. Christine viewed Charles V among the most honorable and learned kings ever to have served the French people. The metaphor of a garden described the reign of Charles V. Symbolically, he was a skilled gardener who was able to stave off dissent by clearing out the weeds and watering or nourishing the good plants within the garden, to foster unity and growth (Brown-Grant). Libera had referred to the national state of health as having been sound and thriving before the death of King Charles V. The moral disarray that followed came about when his mentally disabled son, Charles VI, ascended to the throne. Both *Vision of Christine* and *Book of the Deeds and Good Conduct of the Wise King Charles V* “represent Christine’s efforts to forge a collective memory worthy of the ideology of France, an evolving system of royal beliefs and doctrines” (Walters, *Fama* 120). Through her power as a skilled rhetor she notably contributed to the cultural narrative that carried over for the next two centuries.

#### Christine as a Rhetor of History

History is told not just by those who are witness to events, but also those whose command of rhetoric is most dominant. Those who speak most powerfully are most likely to be heard and their words remembered. Like the study of philosophy and rhetoric, the study of history in the Middle Ages was also considered to be a masculine endeavor, and generally considered to be off limits to women. The idea that history was a male subject likely began with the Romans more than 1500 years earlier. This was because of their association to politics, which empowered them to record history from their own point of view (Margolis *Poet’s Passion*). Because politics were limited to men, very few women had the understanding or the opportunity

to have political ideas or even the foundation to learn political theory or history in the Middle Ages.

The retelling of history was thought to be even further outside the boundaries of acceptability for the female gender. However, history was a field that Christine found to be fascinating, and she took great satisfaction in learning about it in the books that were made available to her from the king's library. She believed that history held the keys to comportment in her own time, and that it was something that should be studied by people of both genders, so that all can be given the opportunity to learn from past experience. With the realization that as a woman, she lacked the authority to outright convey history, she once again began her journey by taking an alternative route to her voice. By incorporating the lessons of history into her allegorical works, she was able to gain notoriety as a woman with a vast knowledge of European history, which eventually earned her the cultural authority to speak as a legitimate historian. Many of her writings included both moral philosophy and history combined into a single allegory. From a post-modern perspective, this illuminated the fact that she was not merely a purveyor of history, but more specifically a female purveyor of history. Christine was a woman whose rhetorical insights gained her the cultural authority to, not only retell history, but also to record history from a feminine perspective. This was a type of authority that had little recognition before Christine had taken on the role of a female rhetor of history,

After securing her reputation as a serious writer of various topics and concerns, Christine was emboldened to venture into territory that was strictly reserved for her male counterparts, history. History was an area that was off limits to women. Knowing that she would have to tread softly into the inner sanctum of those who offered testament to the lives and events of the past, she also knew she had to plan her strategy. This was to be a subtle and gradual process, one that

incrementally tested the waters of societal expectations. Every step of the process led to the empowerment of Christine's voice and the advancement of the female gender. Within her earlier allegories she had already hazarded into some areas of history. *Chemin, Le Cité*, and *Mutación* included the historical narratives of many virtuous women whom Christine held up as exemplum for others to pattern their lives.

In 1395 Charles VI of France ordered all poets and balladeers to refrain from mentioning the Great Western Schism (Ferguson). He believed that it would be detrimental to the well-being of his already floundering kingdom and the touchy relationship it had with the Church. This was in opposition to the king's late father, Charles V, who had been openly in full support of the French pope, Clement VII, believing him to be the true pope (Blumenfeld-Kosinski 16). Christine wholeheartedly approved of the deceased king's stance on maintaining a French pope, seated in Avignon. The schism was far more political than theological, as demonstrated in the return of the papacy from Avignon to Rome. This was an emblem of defeat for the French people by another rival, Italy (Margolis *Poet's Passion*). The forfeiture of the papacy resulted in a significant loss of respect, not only from other nations, but for the French national image, as well.

As a testament to the power of Christine's rhetoric and the widespread acclaim she had experienced, she blatantly spoke out about the schism in defiance of the king's orders, without fear of retribution. Emboldened by her previous successes, she keenly addressed the issue of the schism to her readers, which included members of the royal family and other French aristocracy. Disregarding the dictate of Charles VI, Christine wrote extensively about the Great Schism in *Book of Good Deeds and Character of Charles V the Wise* (hereafter *Charles V*). Using the symbolism of a "poisonous, contagious plant" and "pestilence" that was "thrust into the bosom

of the church” she described the internal strife of the church (translated in Blumenfeld-Kosinski 16). Although she preferred that the French Pope be recognized as the legitimate head of the church, she was also fair to admonish both pontiffs for their part in dividing the church. As she suggested that the Church was open to corruption, from her perspective, both popes were to blame for their role in the schism. To comprehend the power of Christine’s rhetoric, one must also consider the risk that it entailed. To offer some historical perspective, this was a time in which Joan of Arc was atrociously burned at the stake for the crimes of heresy, witchcraft, and dressing in men’s clothing.

#### Christine as a Rhetor of Political Theory

Having been influenced by Aristotle, Christine observed that the functionality of government is dependent upon moral philosophy (*Politics*). Virtuous attributes that are often attached to men, are also commonly held qualities within women. Karen Green noted that this was a theme that Christine carried from *Cité*. Featured within the City of Ladies were exempla of women who were effective rulers throughout history (267). Green further stated that “while the full extent of Christine’s influence remains to be charted, it is clear that her works were available in libraries for at least the next three generations of powerful women” (271) and that “Christine’s oeuvre reveals the development of a political philosophy in a distinct feminine register” (250). That is to say that Christine wrote from an unmistakably feminine point of view. Her allegorical texts all include women in political roles, sending a subtle message that women are every bit as qualified as men to participate in the governing process.

Maureen Quilligan noted, “Christine de Pizan was not a political revolutionary. But she was one of the first women to assume a position of literary authority and to write about women and about large political issues” (9). Having written more than nine treatises regarding political

theory, Christine was one of the most prolific political rhetors of either gender in the Middle Ages. However, she also remains one of the most under-recognized (Nederman). Perhaps some of this could be explained that, initially, Christine's political theory was thinly veiled within the cover of allegory. The truth that she spoke came through very clearly to her followers, but her writing remained outside the limits of the male-dominated field of political theory. Because her political rhetoric had slowly emerged through her allegorical work and her poetics about love and loss, she was not typically discussed throughout history as being a political theorist.<sup>3</sup> Her allegories often revealed Christine's personal life and struggles, as well as other relevant issues. They were difficult to categorize into one genre. The political theme is carried throughout many of her allegories, but these works were not initially represented in the field of political theory. However, her political treatises opened the doors to the reception of her transitioning style from poetics to prose, writing not only as a woman writing about women, and astonishingly as a woman writing about the life of a man, who was to be remembered as *Wise King Charles V*. Much of the king's legacy was preserved through Christine's own prosaic words. Through this work and the other texts that she penned before it, she had begun to establish feminine cultural authority, and with it the entitlement to convey wisdom to the masses.

Christine's transition into the genre of political theory was an incremental process that further advanced when she wrote *L'Avision*. As in earlier works, such as *Cité*, she employed the idea of a dream vision allegory to convey her message. In *L'Avision* she also engaged in the process of self-legitimation in the world of male discourse (Brown-Grant, 1999). At first glance it appears to be autobiographical, but a deeper look reveals more. Rosalind Brown-Grant argued

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<sup>3</sup> The author of this dissertation notes that, during the early research phase of this project she found Christine's *The Book of the Body Politic* catalogued in the Political Science section of an academic library as a testament to her legitimacy as a political theorist.

that within it lies a treatise that addresses an array of political matters. Although her self-depiction is gendered, her autobiography presented her in the desexualized role of a widow (Brown-Grant). The authority of any woman to write as a woman had been deeply damaged by Jean de Meun's contribution to the *Romance of the Rose*, therefore Christine felt an obligation to regain the ground that had been lost to misogynist authors, such as Meun. This was an entitlement that had to be reclaimed through the establishment of her own feminine authority before she could earn the social legitimacy to write about a masculine topic, such as political theory.

### The Book of the Body Politic

After Christine had earned her place in the conversation through her allegorical texts, she became recognized as a creditable intellectual force. This enabled her to move her philosophical ideas forward to become distinguished, not only as a viable rhetor of history and biography, but as a political rhetor, as well. *The Book of the Body Politic* (hereafter *Polity*) was written at the request of the Duke of Burgundy as a type of guidebook for the young dauphin, Louis of Guyenne. *Polity* was written as a way of educating the future monarch about the proper way to conduct himself as a head of state and as inspiration to Louis and other young aristocrats to comport in a proper manner (Ferguson). This work offered a widely accepted proscription about government and decorum, which interestingly, continues today to be shelved in the political theory section of modern academic libraries.

In *Polity* Christine used the medieval metaphor of the political body to symbolize the three segments of French society in her time. The princes, such as the young Louis, hold the dominant position as head of the body while nobles and knights are represented by the allegorical arms and the hands. Common people, which included the clergy, were symbolized by

the legs, the feet, and the underbelly (*Polity*). All sections of the body must work together for the system to function effectively. In all three parts *Polity* addresses the behavior of three segments of medieval society – the princes, the knights and other nobility, and the common people. Her prototype was that of the Roman Empire, which bestowed value upon virtuous rulers as well as those who possessed military prowess (Ferguson).

Relying heavily upon the use of symbolism, Christine shifted to a more formalized writing style, known as *style clerical* (Forhan). This was done in consideration of her intended audience, which included royalty, as the first section of the book was written as proscriptive advice for them. *Polity* engaged in allegory less than her other works. In that she had earned the authority to write directly about topics that were formerly off limits to female writers. This was an authority that was rightfully bestowed upon Christine as she pushed the limits that had previously held her back from directly voicing her concerns. In her advice to those who take care of the children of royalty, she admonished that they must instill good habits by seeing that the children “rise early, hear Mass, and say their Hours” (*Polity* 8). As one who lived within the royal court as a child during the reign of Charles V and as a writer within the court of Charles VI, Christine was in a good position to proffer commentary on the situation, which she often did in the form of letters.

Although the *Polity* was dedicated to Charles VI, Christine acknowledged that she had written the book for the sake of Louis de Guyenne, the fourteen-year-old son of Charles VI and heir to the throne (Forhan). In this book Christine captured and conveyed many of the ideas about politics that were held by the ancient Greeks and Romans. She called upon the medieval rhetorical device of *exemplum* to draw from the past to demonstrate what could be applied to the



current state of affairs. Revering the ancients and their contributions to every aspect of life, Christine had a particular affinity toward Aristotle, Seneca, and Cicero (Forhan).

Among the many examples of literary symbolism in Christine's work is the analogy she used to convey the idea of the virtuous or noble lie, which, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century rhetorical parlance might be referred to as a form of spin. She fully acknowledged that to be noble is to be virtuous (*Polity*). On the one hand, she quotes Aristotle's words from *Metaphysics* by reiterating, "All moral philosophy is founded on truth, and without it all that we can do in this mortal life is vain and without profit" (76). However, she does recognize that there is occasion to shine a different light on the truth, for the sake of the greater good. Moral responsibility was an essential trait for a philosophical writer such as Christine. The importance of this is demonstrated in the power that she had to influence the attitudes of her readership. She used the power of symbolic analogy to demonstrate the concept of a noble falsehood when she told the story of a Roman knight who led his soldiers into battle. On the way to fight the Persians, he was met by a returning knight who said that "the Persians shot so many arrows into the air that the sun could not be seen" (73). It was clear to the knight that his soldiers were very frightened, and he realized that the noble action would be to console them with an alternative view of the truth. He explained to them that the menacing arrows were good news "because they would be able to fight better in the shade" (73). This was an analogy that was devised by Christine to recognize that the image of thousands of arrows flying through the air was a sign of a dangerous situation. Through understanding of the power of language she transformed the concept of the arrow from a representation of danger into one of shielded protection for the soldiers so they could face battle with an element of reassurance.

The *mirror* genre, previously used in *Epistre and Trois Vertus*, was used in *Polity* as a way of viewing the present political life as a reflection of the authority of the ancients (Forhan). It combined the practical wisdom and philosophy of a different age with the active political life of what was the present time in late medieval France. *Exemplum*, as a mode of persuasion, gave authority to an argument and was considered a primary source of evidence. The wisdom of the ancients set to the prose of the Middle Ages were combined. This was not only for the purpose of entertaining, but also for persuading readers toward various political thoughts and ideas. Much in the way of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Christine offered advice to princes, knights, and other nobility about virtuous living. She gave similar lessons to common people as well. Taking exemplar from the ancients of Rome, Christine used storytelling to demonstrate the qualities of good leadership, often citing the ideas of Aristotle to promote virtuous living within the kingdom of France. Christine believed that rule by a single sovereign was the most efficient form of government. Religion, to Christine, was also deemed an integral part of that government, and she believed that virtue should become habituated as a higher form of action. The body metaphor demonstrates how the head, limbs and belly should all work together as part of the larger entity for what is the greater good of the nation.

### The Book of Peace

Written between 1412 and 1414 during a time of civil unrest and widespread corruption, one of Christine's most noted political treatises entitled the *Livre de Paix*, or *Book of Peace* (Hereafter *Paix*). With *Paix* she proclaimed that the formula for peace is the synchronized functioning of all parts of the body politic. She said that this was particularly so for the prince who serves as the head of the body. In this mirror for princes genre, Christine directs the young prince to recognize that he must develop a virtuous character to competently govern the people

of his nation (Green). Christine directly addressed the civil war by proclaiming that “No kingdom divided can stand, nor can cities and households divided against their own good endure” (translated in Willard *Writings* 310). She also stresses the importance of prudence in governing, calling it the “virtue of the greatest necessity” and instructs the princes that “all of your actions should be governed by circumspection” (Willard, *Writings* 312).

This work was written for the dauphin Louis of Guyenne, whom Christine believed to have the moral composition to bring peace and honor back to the Kingdom of France. She also believed that for a government to thrive, it was imperative that the rulers adhere to a strict code of moral and ethical conduct. Christine approached her task from two positions, one of them guided by biblical scriptures and the other by the men of antiquity, such as Cicero, Caesar, and other men of noble stature. This was innovative in that it directly addressed the Civil War between two opposing factions within the Valois monarchy, as the upheaval was occurring. *Paix* was written not only as a guidebook for the young dauphin, but also as a form of intervention to the unrest that had besieged her beloved country of France.

#### Christine as a Rhetor of the Biographical Narrative

After securing her reputation as a serious rhetor of history and moral philosophy, Christine was emboldened to venture into another territory that was strictly reserved for her male counterparts. Having already hazarded into some areas of history when she spotlighted the lives of many virtuous women throughout the ages in *L’Avison*, *Le Cité*, and *Mutación*, she was more than willing to take on the role of biographer. By writing the biography of Charles V and then by authoring the only book written about Joan of Arc while the subject was alive, Christine became instrumental in recording much of what we know about early 15<sup>th</sup> century France. Maureen Quilligan notes, “Christine de Pizan was not a political revolutionary. But she was one of the

first women to assume a position of literary authority and to write about women and about large political issues” (9). She had transitioned from writing in allegorical format into writing the more serious prosaic treatises while gaining the rhetorical, cultural authority to write about topics from which women had been traditionally excluded.

#### Book of the Deeds and Good Conduct of the Wise King Charles V

After penning *Mutación* in 1403, in which her gender was metaphorically transformed, Christine also altered her rhetorical forms. Speculatively speaking, this may have been symbolic unto itself, as at this point in Christine’s literary career she had transitioned from the traditionally feminine discourse about love and loss to what was accepted as an area reserved for men. Her use of historical narratives and exemplum earned her a reputation for having rightfully earned the designation of ‘historian’ (Margolis). The Duke of Burgundy, Philip the Bold was so enthralled with *Mutación* that he offered Christine a commission to write an official biography of his brother, King Charles V, who had died more than a decade earlier. Because she deeply admired Charles V, this was a project that she embraced, as she was exceedingly grateful to him for being allowed access to his library as a young girl. Already having established herself as an historian and a moral philosopher, Christine was traversing into the uncharted territory of a biographical rhetor. Having written about various people and events from history, she had some insights as to how, and by whom, history was recorded.

She understood the power that she held in the position of being entrusted to write this official biography, and the ethics of properly recording an historical narrative that would be read and studied for countless centuries to follow. This was Christine’s entry into a different, male-dominated genre, the biography. The commission to author *The Book of the Deed and Good*

*Conduct of the Wise King Charles V* (hereafter *Charles V*) in 1406.<sup>4</sup> was a definite turning point in her career. The duke was compelled to commission this work because of his indebtedness to his late brother from whom he received a great part of his fortune (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee). He also recognized that the House of Valois was in a state of turmoil and saw the importance of memorializing the better times under the rule of his deceased brother.

*Charles V* takes the format of a biography, but it was also written as a celebration of the king, whom Christine found to be most honorable. The celebratory tone of the book may have put Christine's objectivity in question, but it was proven to have been completely true. And as history shows, Charles V was considered "a superior ruler" with extraordinary qualities, "particularly when compared to his son Charles VI, who led the country into a state of disarray" (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee 113). Charles V's life was so virtuous that Christine styled this biography to also serve as a mirror for princes with the good king serving as the exemplar.

*Charles V*, being Christine's first book written entirely in prose, was a completely new venture for her. With this biographical account of the king's life, she transported her skillset into entirely new territory, casting her into the almost exclusively male role of biographer. *Charles V* was also considered to be an historical account as well, dealing with aspects of the most recent past leading up to its presentation in 1404. By authoring this work, endorsed by the good king's brother, Christine's notoriety flourished and her reputation as a serious biographer and historian was rightfully earned. Christine had successfully advanced her writing craft away from allegory

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<sup>4</sup>Philip of Burgundy had died amid Christine's work on this project. However, she was paid by his son, John the Fearless, when the book was completed in 1506 (McGrady 198). Following *Charles V* Christine dedicated many of her works to John the Fearless. Burgundian records indicate that John the Fearless was her most loyal patron, and conversely Christine was represented in his collection more than any other author (McGrady 199).

and into treatise genre, which also included the *Book of the Body Politic*, written between 1404 and 1407.

Christine chose the metaphor of ‘chaos and nature’ to describe the upheaval in the government of France. These two terms allude to the distinction between faith and reason that Aquinas spoke of in *Summa Theologica*. (Aquinas). More precisely, she also referenced the chaos of creation as held within the scriptures, and the notion of science as the other way of explaining the world. She referred to the crown that Chaos wears as the “stars of creation” (Brown-Grant 99). Brown-Grant further noted that Chaos received nourishment from nature “corresponding to the ideas of birth and death” (99). In her mention of the body and soul there contained a metaphor for both the temporal and spiritual powers that were held by the French monarchy. This serves as a metaphoric revelation as to how everything is interconnected, and that an honorable government is based upon the personal salvation of the prince (*L’Avison*).

Amazingly, Christine was able to persuade the reader, likely to be a prince, to disregard her gender and look to the moral and ethical solutions she offered to address the question of ineffective leadership that was the source of many of the social ills of the day (Brown-Grant). Being that she was not a mystic or a theologian, the challenge to convince future princes to follow her exemplum was monumental. Yet, she very effectively provided the tools and methods necessary for her work to be viewed as a mirror for princes. Christine demonstrated, by use of exemplum, that the actions of a leader are deeply connected to the well-being of a political body.

As Christine gained intellectual grounding as a noted author and rhetor, she expanded her political treatises to include the subject of war, which was and continues to be considered to reside within the purview of male subject matter. Her political work entitled *Livre de faits d’armes et de chivalrie* addressed the notion of there being a rationality to war, or as it was

deemed, 'just war' (Forhan). Her patronage for this book came from the Burgundian duke, who oversaw the dauphin to the throne, Louis de Guyenne. Interestingly, the duke had entrusted Christine with this commission because Christine had proven in her earlier works that she could rise to the challenge as well as any man. The duke's purpose for the commission was to school the young dauphin, who was apparently "lazy and spoiled" (Forhan 21). The dauphin also had little interest in becoming a military leader, a topic that Christine was asked to address.

### The Tale of Joan of Arc

As a female author writing about a female subject in *The Tale of Joan of Arc (Le Ditte de Jeanne d'Arc*, hereafter *Ditte*) in 1429, Christine attained prominence as a rhetor in the conveyance of history that had rarely been accomplished. Up until her time, literature about women had always been written by men, from a man's point of reference. But, as rarely before accomplished, Christine wrote the poetic tale of the young woman who delivered France from the British during the Hundred Years War. As a contemporary of Jeanne, hereafter Joan, and quite possibly an associate, she was able to put her talents to work in capturing a segment of history. Christine de Pizan composed the only book that was ever written about Joan of Arc in her lifetime, before Joan was martyred two years later, in 1431 at the age of 19 (Margolis *Poet's Passion*). Using the medieval genre of the poetic tale, she portrayed the virtuous life of Joan, the 'Maid of Orléans.' The notoriety of Joan was strong during her lifetime, much the result of Christine's writing as a rhetor of history, which also facilitated her legend to live on for more than 600 years after her death. Through this biography of Joan's life, Christine elevated the awareness of Joan as a female savior, creating her as an icon or symbol of the strength and valor of France.

In the poetic biography, *Ditte*, Christine highlighted Joan's strengths as the battle leader in the French Army in its victory at Orléans. Christine praised the leadership of Joan by comparing her to other great leaders throughout history, such as Moses, Joshua, and Achilles, as well as the legendary women of the Amazon. But she exalted Joan to an even higher level because of her tender age of sixteen. According to Christine, Joan had the greatest human strength, even greater than that of the men she led into battle (*Ditte*). For Christine, Joan's victory at Orléans was as much an honor for the female gender as it was for the glory of France. And in keeping with the notion of medieval feminine virtue, Christine bestowed Joan with the appellation 'The Maid of Orléans' as a tribute to the power of her virginity (Margolis, *Poet's Passion*)<sup>5</sup>. For an unmarried, medieval woman, virginity was a trait that was foundational to all other forms of virtue.

Nadia Margolis theorizes that there was a sense of urgency in the writing of *Ditte*. This is evidenced by the fact that there were no presentation copies of the manuscript, suggesting that, perhaps, it was delivered as a public speech to defend Joan against the growing rumors and suspicion among the Burgundians that she was a witch (*Poet's Passion*). Even before her trial for heresy, Joan was being judged in various regards to belittle her achievements. Much of this was the result of the politics between the Burgundians and the Armagnacs, as well as resentment for the fact that Joan was a female acting in the role of a man. Joan's loyalties were with the Armagnacs; so, when the Burgundians formed trade alliances with the English, they were more than willing to turn her over to the English.

Christine's rhetorical competence served to guide the discourse of the French Civil War and the Hundred Years War toward the idea that Joan of Arc was truly an agent of God and

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<sup>5</sup> Joan's virginity had been confirmed by Yolanda of Aragon, the dauphin's mother-in-law who strongly supported the cause of the Armagnacs.



should have been given full homage and recognition that her mission to serve God was by returning France to its rightful lineage. By managing the narrative, Christine not only guided the conversation, but also the course of history by bestowing Joan with the authority to lead the Armagnac French into a decisive victory at Orléans. Christine further enhanced Joan's divine mission by projecting that Charles VII, with Joan's support, would unify the Church and bring peace to all the followers of the Armagnac king.

By penning the biography of Charles V and then authoring the only book to be written about Joan of Arc during Joan's lifetime, Christine became instrumental in providing an abundance of insight into what we know about early 15<sup>th</sup> century France. Natalie Margolis claims that "Christine's *Ditte* is a humbly clad summa of her oeuvre, that "merges the cult of Joan with the cult of the nation of France" (Passion, 7456). The convergence of these two concepts serves to reinforce the significance within the French cultural narrative.

Ann Llewellyn Barstow made the assertion that, although Joan found her power as a visionary leader, the politics of religion led her to be accused of heresy and burned at the stake. Barstow further noted that her conviction and death sentence may well be indicative of the late medieval mindset that fears the power of women. The story of Joan continues to stand as a testament to women who had attempted to establish their authority by overstepping the conventional boundaries of a male-dominated society. For Joan, this ultimately led to serious consequences, which in her case was execution by burning at the stake.<sup>6</sup>

*Ditte* was Christine's final text before she died. This work was written after she had retired from Paris. Her accolades for Joan helped to make her the heroic legend for which she is

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<sup>6</sup> In a rather strange paradox, it was one of Christine's former patrons, Isabeau of Bavaria, who imprisoned Joan under the authority of the English crown, leading to her horrific death by being burned at the stake (Margolis). Isabeau was the Queen of France, by reason of marriage to Charles VI.

now recognized. This was momentous for Christine, as a woman to bear testament for another woman who was thought to have saved France from English tyranny. Christine looked to Jeanne d'Arc as the savior who could mend the damages that ensued after the schism. *Ditte* was instrumental in casting Joan as an ever-lasting symbol of French national identity.

Christine most likely did not live to witness Joan's fall from good grace, nor her ensuing execution when Henry VI of England became provisional king of France. For that reason, she wrote only about Joan's life and nothing about the horrific betrayal by the Burgundians that resulted in Joan being burned at the stake in 1431 at the age of 19. For Christine, Joan represented the consummate virtuous women. Through her resolute strength and conviction, Joan was deemed worthy of the exaltations that Christine had bestowed upon her.

The political viewpoint of *Ditte* carried over into modernity. During the post World War II era some French Resistance authors such as Bertolt Brecht, a well-known German playwright of the Marxist philosophy (Margolis, *Poet's Passion*). He was the author of *St. Joan of the Stockyards* (1959). In Brecht's adaptation of the *Ditte*, is set in a modern-day stockyard. Much as Joan of Arc did, the story's protagonist, Joan Dark also revolted against the powerful stockyard owners in defense of the overburdened laborers. Brecht also wrote *The Vision of Simone Machard*, the story of a young women who finds herself transformed into the being of Joan of Arc, having what she perceives to be visionary experience, just as Joan had. Jun Ishikawa (1899-1987) was an antiwar novelist who included both Christine de Pizan and Joan of Arc in his 1936 award-winning novel, *Bodhisattva*. In this work the author calls upon both Christine de Pizan and Joan of Arc, as Joan was portrayed in Christine's novel, *Ditte*. Ishikawa writes them both into the story as being transposed onto the being of a Buddhist figure by the name of Fagen. This novel portrays an unflattering depiction of an older, fading, Christine, who once held

wisdom and influence in the background of a much younger and vibrant Joan of Arc. Ironically, the Joan that Ishikawa describes was based upon Christine's own biographical description of Joan (Margolis *Poet's Passion*).

*Ditte de Jeanne d'Arc* (1429) was Christine's most overtly political work (Green). It was published ten years after her previous known work. Up until the time that Christine wrote *Ditte* in 1429, *Hours of Contemplation and Passion of our Lord* (1419) (hereafter *Hours*) was her last known work. As the result of Christine's rhetoric, Joan of Arc represented a beacon of hope for the Kingdom of France. *Ditte* expresses Christine's own optimism that her country would be delivered from the English stronghold. Equally important was Christine's belief that her France would be saved by a woman. In a metaphorical sense this could be considered an exoneration for the misdeed that Eve was reputed to have committed. Eve, the first woman, was the designated cause of the downfall of mankind as they were banished from the garden. This was a notion that had been perpetuated by leaders of the church for centuries. It was a belief that Christine felt was unfair to the perception of womankind. "The utility of *Ditte* is that it could be studied from a variety of vantage points, including history, religion, political science, women's studies and rhetoric" notes Nadia Margolis (*The Ditte*). *Ditte* also gave legitimacy to the reign of Charles VII as the true heir to the governance of France. After using her rhetorical skills to praise the virtues of womankind and the glory of France with *The Tale of Joan of Arc*, Christine took her last breath around 1430, most likely while living in the convent of Poissy with her daughter.

### Summary

Women throughout history have been denied access to knowledge and given limited opportunity to obtain a formal education. In French medieval society, chastity and virginity were the utmost virtuous qualities a woman could possess. Knowledge, along with power and speech, was often associated with an unchaste state of being in women (Griffin). Because of the negative

association between knowledge and chastity, many women were deterred from scholarly pursuits for fear of inferences being made about the state of their virtue. The exceptions were those women of the convent whose chastity was protected under the auspices of the Church. Because they were cloistered, nuns and anchoresses were bestowed with the privilege of attaining an education. Through the process of de-sexualization through vows, or commitment to a solitary lifestyle, in return they were afforded the privilege to engage in scholarly endeavors. Christine, as a widowed woman with family to support, felt that she had no real choice but to challenge those norms with her rhetorical skills. She not only proved to be a successful author, but a powerful rhetor as well. By entering areas that were generally inaccessible to a woman of her situation she eased the way for other women to follow. Christine boldly, yet strategically crossed a cultural demarcation that had inhibited women before her from voicing their ideas, regardless of how brilliant they may have been.

Because her texts had been translated into the English language and read for nearly two centuries after she authored them, she not only crossed the boundaries between cultures and nations, but also those of historical periods, taking her dialogue from the late Middle Ages into early modernity. The advent of the printing press in 1440 by Johannes Gutenberg also facilitated the mass distribution of Christine's work translated into various languages. Theresa Coletti observed, "By crossing borders of historical periodization, Christine's English texts further call attention to her affinity for the authorial self-definition and the values and rhetorical modes of a Continental humanism to which Christine legitimately laid claim by birth as well as by education" (4313). Christine's political treatises and vernacular epistolary have a large degree of rhetorical continuity as they traverse the division between the late Middle Ages and early modernity.

Having established herself as an authoritative writer, Christine had proven her worthiness as an intellectual force. This earned her the privilege of being able to expand her limits as a rhetor and delve into other endeavors, including biography, history, and political theory. Kate Langdon Forhan offered, “Christine’s legacy as a political theorist could be judged on the basis of three criteria: first her place in the development of western political ideas; secondly, her contribution to the gradual development of modern democratic institutions and values; and thirdly, her legitimacy as a political theorist as well as a prolific political writer” (160).

Christine’s impact upon Western political theory has not yet been proven, although she was highly influential in her own time. Forhan further argues that Christine indirectly affected the momentum of European political ideas. She was one of many great intellectuals in this tumultuous time in French history to contribute their thoughts and opinions on the state of affairs in 15th century France, but only one of a few women. During a time of great upheaval, national tragedy, and ineffectual leadership, Christine showed her deep concern through the powerful language that sprang from her pen. Noteworthy is the fact that she was the first woman of France to author political treatises (Forhan). As a political rhetor she had created a voice to speak out against the political upheaval that was leaving France in a state of disarray.

Christine was very strategic in her pursuit of rhetorical authority. According to Karen Robertson and Christine Reno, “Strategic describes the rhetorical stance of the writer as she attempts to guide and bridle a young woman with little evident reason to behave with restraint (Robertson and Reno 4154). She established her identity as a sage counselor to young princes, promoting a type of feminine wisdom that was only available through a women’s perspective (Coletti). This was not only a tactic of self-promotion, but one that elevated the cultural status of

her entire gender. With this notion she began the process of establishing feminine authority, only available from words that were conveyed by women.

Christine's approach to rhetoric was used by many medieval writers before her, but her ingenuity in using a familiar method is what gave her a voice of authority to speak on matters typically reserved for the masculine gender. The level of humility with which she wrote was the product of a social system of class distinction and gender expectations, particularly in political writing. Christine was extraordinarily innovative in her ability to eventually transcend her assigned gender and class distinctions to gain the authority to speak out against political situations in her own voice, rather than as a character in her own fiction. In her later works, including *The Book of Peace* (1413) and *The Tale of Joan of Arc*, she used her newly found voice to speak out against war and, paradoxically, to praise a female heroine who led the French troops in the Hundred Years War.

In 1418 when the Burgundians defeated the Armagnacs at Agincourt, Christine, as a public supporter of Charles VII, was forced to flee Paris as there was an imminent threat of death to the literati of Paris. A commonly held belief is that she retreated to the Dominican Abbey of Poissy to be with her daughter who had previously joined the convent. Having left Paris in a state of desperation at the fall of France, Christine felt that her attempts to intervene with the chaotic monarchy for the good of her country had fallen on deaf ears. Her time at the convent was for the most part spent in seclusion. For eleven years she resided there before writing her final work, *The Tale of Joan of Arc*. With Joan, she felt a glimmer of hope that France could be saved, and that it was a woman who would be the savior. Christine was so inspired by the young maiden who took up arms against the English. Inspired by the feminine authority that Joan exuded,

Christine felt a moral obligation to memorialize her for posterity with her biographical tale of Joan's life.

Going forward six hundred years after Christine's initial rhetorical contributions to the western world, we examine our emergent post-modern identities and reflect upon that moment in time to recognize how our own narrative has been influenced. I put forth the notion that Christine's ideas as a philosophical rhetor helped to usher in a new era where the human experience was illuminated, and reason began to guide the conversation. She was a rhetorical force that contributed to a shift in the cultural narrative, sparking the agents of change to usher in a new era of creativity and reason.

The rhetorical contributions of Christine de Pizan are profound in that they set the groundwork for much of the philosophy of human experience that followed through the renaissance, the enlightenment, modernity and on through to post-modernity. I submit that Christine's powerful use of rhetoric was instrumental in laying the foundation for the post-modern feminist movement that was initiated by Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) centuries later in time. I argue that hers was not the proper historical moment to espouse a post-modern feminist viewpoint, but rather, it was an opportune time and place in history to introduce the idea that society had a moral responsibility to treat the female gender with respect and to afford them the right to access the same knowledge that men of the upper echelons had secured as a basis for their power.

Christine took many of her cues from the ancient men of wisdom, such as Aristotle and Cicero, early medieval religious scholars Augustine and Boethius, and Italian humanists Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. She used the knowledge that she had gained from those who came before her to craft her own style of persuasion. Most importantly she was a woman who

understood that the cultural authority that she lacked as a female could be reinstated through the power of rhetoric, and by keenly recognizing the Kairos of her symbolism to guide the conversation of her historical place and moment in time into a new age of Renaissance Humanist philosophy.

Equipped with the rare ability to read her audience, Christine was able to work around the institutional support that was not afforded to women. This type of support was generally reserved only for men of society. The allegory was her weapon of defense against the male misogyny that ran roughshod over medieval western culture. Her allegory was her rhetorical call to arms for her readers to defend the virtues of women, and to sway their thinking on a wide variety of other topics, as well. “Christine creates an unprecedented portrait of a woman of letters assuming ambitions and modes of authority commonly reserved for men” (Ferguson 181). “In shaping words for different audiences, she constructed various writing persona to legitimate her own authority” (Ferguson 179). She brilliantly used fiction to reveal the moral truth, regardless of what was presented by men of wisdom and authority through the ages.

Rosalind Brown-Grant commented that “Christine’s text allows her to make capital of her lowly status as a woman in order to propose herself as a Boethian model of moral consolation and third institution for the princely reader” (Brown-Grant 5). French medieval society constituted a strict social order, of which Christine was most respectful in that it was believed to have been divinely designed, and each person had their position and purpose along its lines. Her rhetoric, however, unquestionably defended women and the virtue that they hold, and she saw no place for the maligning of women in a world where there was an abundance of them who had demonstrated accomplishments and virtue in a variety of areas.



The rediscovery and revival of Christine's works in the 1980's has opened up a completely new area of study. Much research is being accomplished on the study of her life, however, there has been little research into the rhetorical contributions that she made to the study of human communication. Christine is earning her place in both medieval literature, history, and women's studies. From a history of rhetoric viewpoint, her contributions continue to be relatively unstudied. I submit that Christine's rhetorical contributions were profoundly insightful as a window into the rhetorical scholarship of the late Middle Ages. Further consideration is necessary to explore that her depth of understanding of her culture and how her carefully formed rhetoric exerted a potent ethical influence and feminine awareness over much of western Europe.

Through her own self-legitimizing words Christine gained the cultural authority to become not only a purveyor, but also a recorder of history, giving us much of what we now know about Joan of Arc as well as King Charles V and the French House of Valois. Christine clearly recognized that knowledge is power and those who are in a position of dominance will attempt to disempower others by denying them access to knowledge. She boldly spoke against misogyny, advocating for the value of educating both boys and girls. Although female equality was not achieved during her lifetime, the groundwork was arranged to be appreciated hundreds of years later. In the centuries that followed, opportunities such as those taken by Christine were very gradually made available to many women of the western world (King and Rabil).

Although she unquestionably left her mark on the narrative of society, Christine did not consider herself to be a revolutionary. This was a time when the commonly held belief was that society, as it stood, was ordained by God (*Willard Writings*). As a self-described pious woman, she ascribed this to be true, but at the same time she was able to engage the power of speech and the emotive use of symbols to expand the boundaries of the conversation and shine an alternative

light on the prevailing social order. As a woman who was both knowledgeable and appreciative of lessons learned from history, she effectively seized the moment to present the right words at the right time to guide the conversation and extend a positive moral philosophy to the people of western Europe.

Earl Jeffrey Richards noted that Christine was a highly respected and widely circulated voice on the status of women. She was a rhetor and a scholar, melding her deep love of learning with an immense spark of creativity and a deep love of the learning process. (Richards). The legacy that she leaves behind is paradoxical, in the sense that she often had a multifaceted perspective on life. For instance, she morally defended the honor of all virtuous women, often praising women who otherwise were not considered to be so honorable, yet she emphasized the virtues rather than the faults. On the other hand, she was intuitive enough to know not to forge ahead too ferociously with her ideas, because they were novel, and her ideas were strategically infused into the cultural narrative through her creative use of symbolism and exemplum carried within allegory. This leaves her in an ambiguous area of women's studies. Her humility did not allow her to rise to the level of 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist, yet her stance as a pre-feminist rhetor was making a difference in the cultural viewpoint of her own time, opening the door for more progressive ideas to enter the conversation (Forhan). This underscores the importance of realizing that the historical moment may be completely foreign to those who view her work at face value.

Martin Le Franc (ca. 1410 – 1461) a Provost of Lousanne and French poet of the late Middle Ages, spoke praisingly of Christine when he honored the fame that she had achieved in her lifetime (Margolis, 1986). In his treatise, *Champion de Dames*, he “admired her rhetoric, the polished nature and ornamentation of her language...and her eloquence and wisdom, comparing

her to Cicero and Cato” (Altmann 3). “Christine stands as a figure worthy of study (if not emulation), a pivotal early character crucial to any accounting of women’s achievements, as well as one of the first women writers of their neglected history” (Forhan 283).

James Murphy noted that the Middle Ages are often considered to be a time where there was little contribution to the study of rhetoric (*Three Medieval*). The texts of Christine de Pizan are invaluable to the study of medieval rhetoric within a post-modern construct. She contributed vital insights into the rhetoric of her time, particularly regarding the formation of her own ethos and the voicing of ideas that ran counter to the prevailing misogynist narrative. Hers was a rhetoric of imaginative language that used the fiction of allegory to effectively argue for the defense of womankind. Her humanist approach to rhetoric helped to soften the locus of domination held by the Church and the powerful men who were at its reigns.

The texts of Christine hold the keys to understanding the rhetoric of women, or other classes of human beings that have been culturally and theologically subordinated. Examination of her strategy and techniques offers insights into the avenues of persuasion that were available during the late Middle Ages. Going forward it is important to recognize the rhetorical courage Christine exhibited in her defense of womankind. Equally notable was her influence upon the perception of the monarchy and papacy, at a time when women were not entitled to voice their ideas regarding politics or theology. It is also imperative to the study of human communication that Christine’s texts be given a closer examination to better understand her use of rhetoric to establish cultural authority as a woman at a time when women had very few rights.

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## ILLUMINATIONS

Illumination I. From *The Path of the Long Study*



Bath of the Muses Illustration from 'The Path of the Long Study' Christine de Pizan Collected Works, London, British Library, Harley MS 4431. f.183



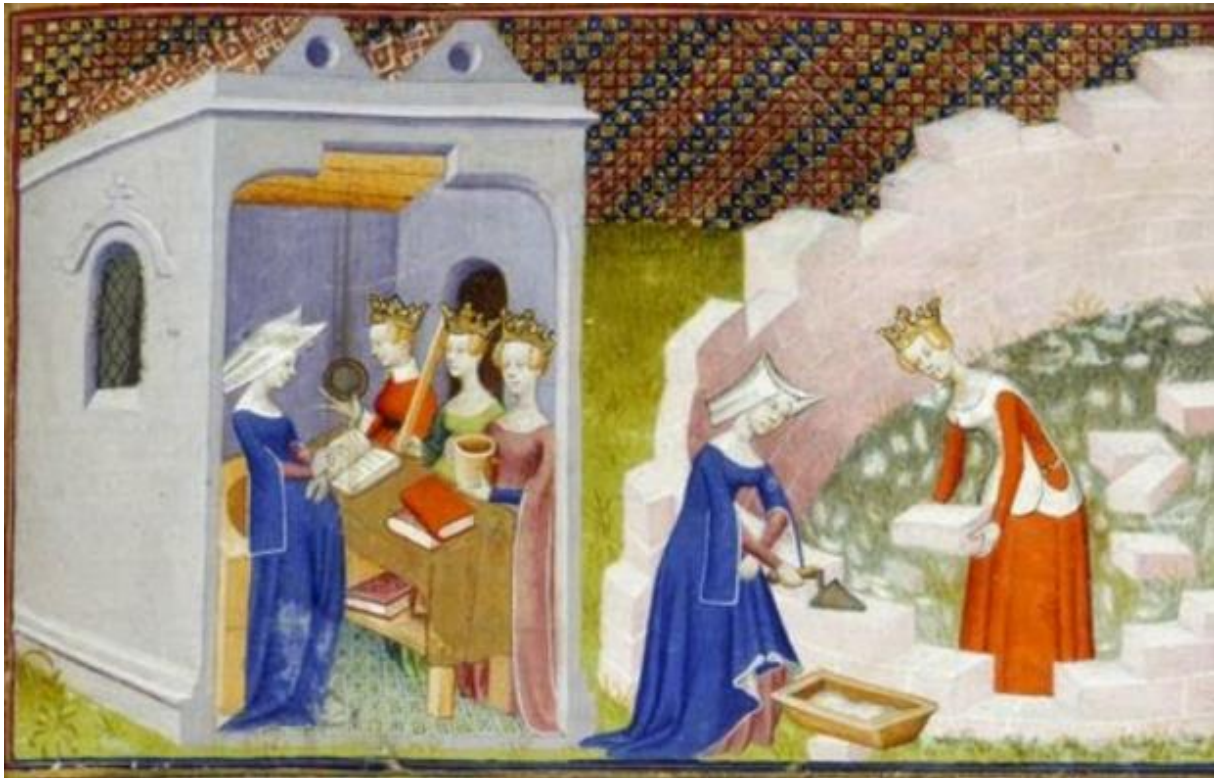
Illumination II. Christine in her study writing *The Book of the Mutation of Fortune*



Christine in her study. Collected works British Library Harley MS 4431 f.4r.



Illumination III. From *The Book of the City of Ladies*



'The Book of the City of Ladies' Christine de Pizan, Collected Works, London, British Library, Harley MS 4431. f.290r.