I

CHRISTINE AND THE *ROSE* BEFORE THE DEBATE

1. FROM CHRISTINE DE PIZAN, *THE GOD OF LOVE'S LETTER* (*L'EPISTRE AU DIEU D'AMOURS,* MAY 1, 1399)[1]

FRENCH VERSE (RHYMING DECASYLLABIC COUPLETS)

[*Cupid, the god of love, addresses this letter to all who are in his service. Presiding over his court, he has received a complaint from an unspecified group of women, concerning the large number of insincere and devious men who attempt to get their favors but who do nothing but slander women, whatever the outcome. Cupid condemns such men but praises those who are loyal and sincere in their love. He then launches into the more general topic of how men treat women.*]

Still I say that a man who says defamatory, offensive, or disgraceful things about women in an effort to scold them (be it one woman, or two, or categorically) is acting contrary to nature. And even if we assume that there are some foolish ones or ones full of many vices of different sorts, lacking faith, love, or any loyalty, domineering, wicked, or full of cruelty, or with little sense of constancy, fickle and changeable, crafty, furtive, and deceptive, must one, on that account, challenge all of them[2] and assert that they

1. This passage has been translated from *Œuvres poétiques de Christine de Pisan,* ed. Maurice Roy, 3 vols., SATF (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1886–96; rpt. New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1965), 2:7–14 (ll. 181–422). English translations of the complete work are available in *Poems of Cupid, God of Love: Christine de Pizan's Epistre au Dieu d'Amours and Dit de la Rose, Thomas Hoccleve's The Letter of Cupid, with George Sewell's The Proclamation of Cupid,* ed. and trans. Thelma S. Fenster and Mary Carpenter Erler (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 34–75; and *The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan,* ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, trans. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Kevin Brownlee, 16–29.

2. The expression used here is *mettre en fermaille,* the meaning of which is not immediately obvious, although the general sense of the sentence is clear, referring to the idea, repeated elsewhere, that all women are being slandered and mistreated indiscriminately by men. In its literal sense, a *fermaille* is a buckle or a clasp; the few uses of the word I have found in a figurative

are all worthless? When God on high created and formed the angels, the cherubim, seraphim, and the archangels, were there not some of them whose acts were evil? Must one for that reason call the angels wicked? Instead, if someone knows an evil woman, let him watch out for her, without defaming one-third or one-fourth of them, or reprimanding all of them without exception and besmirching their female behavior; for there have been, are, and will be many of them[3] who, kindly and beautiful, are to be praised and in whom virtuous qualities are to be found, their discernment and merit having been proven by their benevolence.

But as concerns those who scold those women who are of but little worth, I still say that they are at fault if they name them and say who they are, where they live, what their deeds are, and of what sort. For one must not defame the sinner, this God tells us, or reprimand him in public. As the text where I read this asserts, one can certainly blame vices and sins harshly, without naming those who are tainted by them or defaming anyone. There are large numbers of people who speak like this, but such a vice is disgraceful in noble men. I say this to those who are guilty of it and not at all to those who have not sinned in this way, for there are many noble men so worthy that they would rather forfeit their possessions than in any way be accused or reproached for such deeds or be caught in the act of performing them.

But the injurious men I am talking about, who are good neither in deed nor in intention, do not follow the example of the good Hutin de Vermeilles,[4] in whom there was such an ample measure of goodness that no one ever had any reason to reproach him, nor did he ever value a slur meant

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sense provide the sense of an agreement or an accord (such as a marriage betrothal) or, more frequently, a wager of some kind, typically involving some kind of dispute or challenge. The online Middle French Dictionary (ATILF, Nancy Université and CNRS, Dictionnaire du Moyen Français, http://www.atilf.fr/dmf, hereafter DMF) provides one example of the reflexive verb *soi mettre en fermaille*, meaning "to engage oneself, to bind oneself by one's word." I have translated the expression according to the latter sense, which suggests that men make all women prove their innocence by swearing to it or by putting up some kind of defense.

3. This is a tacit rejoinder to the famous, highly misogynistic, couplet attributed to the Jealous Husband in the *Rose:* "Toutes estes, serez et fustes, / de fet ou de volenté, pustes" (All you women are, will be, or have been, in deed or intention, whores) (*Rose,* ed. Lecoy, ll. 9125–26; trans. Dahlberg, 165 [altered]).

4. Hutin de Vermeilles was a well-known figure in the late fourteenth century, renowned for his chivalric deeds and his courtly qualities; he is best represented in the *Cent Ballades* (One Hundred Ballads), a poetic narrative written in 1389 by a small group of nobles, of whom Jean Le Sénéchal was the principal poet. Hutin is there portrayed as a wise, older knight who gives advice on chivalry and on manners to a younger knight identified as Jean Le Sénéchal. In addition to having had a brilliant military career (he was at the battle of Poitiers in 1356 and fought other battles against the Black Prince), he was related to the royal family through his marriage to Marguerite de Bourbon and served as a chamberlain to the king until his death in 1390.

to defame. He was exceptional in the honor he bestowed upon women, and he was incapable of listening to accusatory or dishonorable things said about them. He was a brave, wise, and beloved knight, and this is why he was and will continue to be glorified. The good, the valiant Oton de Grandson,[5] who ventured out exerting himself so much for military causes, was in his time courtly, noble, brave, handsome, and kind—may God receive his soul in heaven!—for he was a knight with many good qualities. Whoever acted ill toward him I consider to have committed a sin; Fortune, however, did him harm, but she commonly brings suffering to good men.[6] For in all circumstances I consider him to have been loyal, and braver in military deeds than Ajax, son of Telemon. He never took pleasure in defaming anyone, he strove to serve, praise, and love women. Many others were good and valiant and ought to serve as examples for those who fall short; there still are many of them, there truly is need of them, those who follow the good paths of valiant men. Honor trains them, virtue leads them there; they put effort into acquiring renown and praise; they take pride in the noble manners with which they are endowed; their merits are manifested in their brilliant deeds in this kingdom, in others, and beyond the seas. But I will refrain from naming their names here, for fear that someone might say this was meant to flatter, or that it risk turning into a boast.[7] And this is indeed how men of noble breeding must by right behave. Otherwise that very nobility would be lacking in them.[8]

5. Oton de Grandson (1340/1350–1397) was the emblematic figure of the knight/poet in the late fourteenth century. He had a very full military career during the Hundred Years' War. A noble from Savoy whose earlier allegiances were with the kings of England, Oton was later pardoned by the king of France. His fame as a love poet was even greater than that as a knight, and his works remained popular to the end of the fifteenth century. Hutin de Vermeilles and Oton de Grandson are also mentioned by Christine in the *Débat de deux amants* (Debate of Two Lovers), in *Œuvres poétiques de Christine de Pisan,* 2:97 (ll. 1615–19).

6. Oton de Grandson did indeed come to a tragic end. Caught up in some complicated political maneuvers in the 1390s, he was accused of being an accomplice to murder, and, ultimately sentenced to participate in a judicial duel in order to prove his guilt or innocence, he was killed in 1397.

7. One can sense here the dual presence of Christine and the God of Love in this fictional letter. Christine has reason to be sensitive about flattery, an issue that will be brought out later in the debate, but it is the God of Love who is cautious about boasting (worthy men in love being a sign of Cupid's success).

8. What I have translated as "in them" is the indirect object pronoun *y,* which can in Old and Middle French refer to animate or inanimate nouns. It could conceivably be referring to the aforementioned "kingdom" or more generally to the "world," meaning that if noble men do not act in this way nobility would disappear. However, a form of the same word is being used for "noble"/"nobility" (*gentil/gentillece*) in the last two sentences of this paragraph, which would suggest that this sentence is referring pointedly back to the statement in the previous one.

But the above-mentioned ladies complain of several clerics[9] who accuse them of blameworthy conduct, composing literary works, lyric poems, works in prose and in verse, defaming their behavior with a variety of expressions; then they give these materials to beginning students—to their new, young pupils—to serve as a model and as instruction, so that they will retain such advice into their adulthood. They say in their poetry, "Adam, David, Samson, and Solomon, along with a mass of others, were deceived by women morning and night. What man will manage to protect himself from this?" Another cleric says that they are most deceitful, wily, treacherous, and of little value. Others say that they are exceedingly mendacious, fickle, unstable, and flighty. Others accuse them of several serious vices and blame them ceaselessly, never excusing them for anything. It is in this manner that day and night clerics compose their poems, now in French, now in Latin, and they base themselves upon I don't know what books that tell more lies than a drunken man.

Ovid said a lot of nasty things about them (I consider that he did much harm by this) in a book he wrote, which he called the *Remedia amoris* (Remedies for Love)[10] and in which he accuses them of repulsive behavior—foul, ugly, and full of disgrace. That they might possess such vices, this I dispute with him, and I make my pledge to defend this in battle against all those who would like to throw down the gauntlet; I am of course referring to honorable women, for I do not take any account of worthless ones. Thus the clerics have studied this little book since their childhood in their earliest learning of grammar,[11] and they teach it to others with the goal that their pupils not

9. Here and elsewhere in this volume, I translate the French term *clerc* as "cleric," which indicated throughout the Middle Ages a man who had received some measure of learning (in matters both secular and religious) and had some connection with a religious institution, typically marked by the tonsure. The words "lay" and "cleric" designated a major social distinction, the former often associated with a lack of learning and illiteracy (but incorrectly so, as many aristocrats knew how to read but were members of the laity), while the latter (as a group, known as the *clergie*) formed the intelligentsia, functioning not only in religious circles but in the secular world, as teachers, for instance, or as bureaucrats within the royal administration. All of the men participating in the debate with Christine are members of this group.

10. Although it is Ovid's *Art of Love* that is usually cited for its misogynistic perspectives, as later in this passage, here Christine has the God of Love refer to Ovid's retraction of his earlier text. Part of the advice Ovid gives to the lover who wishes to rid himself of his feelings is to disparage his lady's physical charms and behavior, which is undoubtedly what is being referred to here.

11. The study of grammar, one of the three sciences of language, along with logic and rhetoric, known throughout the Middle Ages as the *trivium*, had become a very sophisticated discipline in the universities, stretching into the domains of philosophy and epistemology. Here, Christine is thinking of the more modest place of grammar in pre-university training, which often used snippets of classical Latin texts as exemplars.

endeavor to love a woman. But as far as this is concerned, they are foolish and wasting their time: to prevent such love would be nothing if not futile. For between myself and Lady Nature, as long as the world lasts we will not allow women not to be cherished and loved, in spite of all those who would like to reproach them, nor will we prevent them from seizing, removing, and making off with the hearts of several of those very people who rebuke them the most[12]—this without any deceit and without any blackmail, but just by ourselves and the impression we make on the mind: men will never be so informed by skilled clerics [as to resist it], not even for all their poems, notwithstanding the fact that many books speak of women and blame them, for they have very little effect in this matter.

And if someone says that one must believe the books that were made by men of great renown and of great learning, who did not give their consent to lies—those who proved the wickedness of women—I respond to them that those who wrote this down in their books did not, I think, seek to do anything else in their lives but deceive women; these men could not get enough of them, and every day they wanted new ones, without remaining loyal, even to the most beautiful of them. What was the result for David and King Solomon? God became angry with them and punished their excess. There have been many others, and especially Ovid, who desired so many of them and then thought he could defame them. Indeed, all the clerics who have spoken so much about them were wildly attracted to them much more than other people—not to a single one, but to a thousand! And if people like this had a mistress or a wife who did not do absolutely all they wanted or who might have attempted to deceive them, what is surprising about that? For there is no doubt that when a man thrusts himself into such an abject state, he does not go looking for worthy ladies or good and respected noblewomen. He neither knows them nor has anything to do with them. He does not want any others than those who are of his station: he surrounds himself with strumpets and commoners. Does such a man deserve to possess anything of value, a skirt chaser who adds all women to his list and then, when he is no longer capable of anything and is already an old man, thinks he can successfully cover up his shame by blaming women with his clever arguments? However, were someone to blame only those women who have given themselves over to vice and who have led a dissolute life, and advise them not

12. The syntax of this very long sentence is tricky. The God of Love's point is that whatever the clerics say, he and Nature will prevail: men will love women and women will steal men's hearts, in spite of what they read. The sentence reads in the original: "we will not allow them not to be cherished . . . and not to seize the hearts." Since this is rather awkward, I have reformulated the second part with the verb "prevent" and a positive verb, which says roughly the same thing.

to continue as they have done, he could truly succeed in his enterprise; and it would be a very reasonable thing, a worthy, just, and praiseworthy teaching, devoid of defamatory statements about all women indiscriminately.

And to say something about trickery, I am incapable of imagining or conceiving how a woman could deceive a man: she neither goes looking for him nor hunts him down; she does not go to his home to beg him or woo him; she does not think of him or even remember him when the man comes to deceive and tempt her. To tempt her how? Truly, he gives the appearance that there is no torment that is not easy for him to endure, nor burden to bear. He doesn't take pleasure in any other activity than in striving to deceive them, having committed his heart, his body, and his wealth to it. This suffering, along with the pain, lasts a long time and is often repeated, even though such lovers' plans often fail, in spite of their effort. And it is of these men that Ovid speaks in his treatise on the art of love; for on account of the pity that he had for these men he compiled a book in which he writes to them and teaches them clearly how they will be able to deceive women with tricks and obtain their love. And he called the book *The Art of Love;* however, he does not teach behaviors or morals having to do with loving well, but rather the opposite. For a man who wants to act according to this book will never love, however much he is loved, and this is why the book is poorly named. For it is a book on the *Art of Great Deception*—this is the name I give it—*and of False Appearances.*

How is it then—since women are weak and frivolous, easy to sway, naïve and scarcely upright, as some clerics claim—that these men have need for so many ruses in their effort to procure this goal? And why do these women not give in instantly without there being any need for skill or cunning in order to capture them? For once a castle has been taken there is no need to start a war. And especially for a poet as clever as Ovid, who was later exiled, and Jean de Meun in the *Romance of the Rose*—what a drawn-out affair! what a difficult thing! He puts in it much erudition, both clear and obscure, and impressive stories! But how many characters are introduced into it and consulted, and so many exertions and tricks invented, in order to deceive just one young girl—and that's the goal of it, by means of fraud and ruse! Is a great assault thus necessary for an unprotected place? What's the use of making a great leap when one is so close? I do not see or understand why great effort, skill or wit, or great cunning would be necessary to take an undefended site. It thus necessarily follows from this that since skill, great ingenuity, and considerable effort are needed to deceive a noble or common woman, they are not at all so fickle as some say or so changeable in their affairs.

Yet if people tell me that the books are full of these things—this is a re-

sponse that many make and that I deplore—I respond to them that women did not make the books and that they did not put in them the things that we read there against women and their morals; and those who plead their case without an opponent go on talking to their hearts' content, make no concessions, and take the lion's share for themselves, for combative people easily injure those who do not defend themselves. But if women had written the books, I know in truth that the facts would be different, for they know well that they have been wrongly condemned and that the shares have not been divided equitably: the stronger ones take the biggest portion and he who slices the pieces keeps the best for himself . . .

2. FROM CHRISTINE DE PIZAN, *MORAL TEACHINGS* (*LES ENSEIGNEMENS MORAUX,* 1399 OR 1402?)[13]

FRENCH VERSE (RHYMING OCTOSYLLABIC COUPLETS ORGANIZED IN QUATRAINS)

[*Christine wrote this work to provide teachings to her young son, who had a lengthy stay in England from 1399 to 1402; it is normally assumed that she either gave it to him before his departure or wrote it after he returned in the spring of 1402. In any event, it was written before June 1402, inasmuch as it is included in Christine's first manuscript collection, which was completed in that month. The work consists of a sequence of 113 quatrains, each providing a specific moral lesson or bit of advice concerning such things as dress, speech, charity, and so forth.*]

XXXVIII. Do not believe all the defamatory statements that some books make about women, for there exist many good women; this, experience shows you.

XLI. Flee rowdy company and women who lack modesty, deceivers, people who ridicule and slander, as well as those who harm others.

XLIV. Listen to this lesson and note it down. Do not fall madly in love with a stupid woman if you want true love, for your moral fiber would be degraded by it.

XLVII. Do not be a deceiver of women; honor them and do not defame them. Limit yourself to loving a single one and do not quarrel with any.

LI. If you wish to take a woman as a wife, observe the mother and you can ascertain her moral qualities; this said, there are undoubtedly few rules that do not on occasion prove wrong.

13. Translated from *Œuvres poétiques de Christine de Pisan,* 3:33–41.

LV. If you have a good and wise wife, believe her on the state of the household and trust her word, but do not speak in confidence to a foolish one.

LXVII. Do not reveal your secret to anyone without cause, and do not tell tales of others when there is no point in doing so, for he who reveals his thoughts is enslaved.

LXXIII. Flee idleness if you want to acquire honor, possessions, a reputation, and land; beware of worthless pleasures, and avoid disreputable deeds.

LXXVI. If you wish to flee the domination of love and totally cast it away, distance yourself from the person to whom your heart is most inclined.

LXXVII. If you wish to live well and chastely, do not read the book of the *Rose* or Ovid's *Art of Love,* for their example merits reproach.

LXXX. If your desire is pointed toward love and you wish to love in order to be more worthy, do not work up such a passion in your heart that you might end up being worth less.

LXXXV. If you feel your passions making you impulsive, have Reason take you into her school and teach you to put your feelings in order; in this way you can restrain yourself.

XCI. To the extent that you can, clothe your wife honorably and let her be next to you as the lady of the house, not a servant; make your household serve her.

XCIV. Make your wife fear you as necessary, but make sure never to beat her, for if she's good it would make her resentful, and if she's bad, she'd just get worse.

3. FROM CHRISTINE DE PIZAN, *THE DEBATE OF TWO LOVERS* (*LE DÉBAT DE DEUX AMANS,* 1400?)[14]

FRENCH VERSE (QUATRAINS FORMED BY THREE DECASYLLABLES FOLLOWED BY A FOUR-SYLLABLE LINE, WITH THE RHYME SCHEME *AAAB, BBBC, CCCD,* ETC.)

[*The first-person narrator, identifiable with Christine, presents to Louis, duke of Orléans, this debate between two lovers that she claims to have witnessed, and she asks him to offer his*

14. Translated from ibid, 2:76–79 (ll. 909–1000). A complete English translation is available in *An Anthology of Medieval Love Debate Poetry,* ed. and trans. R. Barton Palmer and Barbara K. Altmann (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 257–305.