

THE WIFE OF BATH, CHRISTINE DE PIZAN, AND THE MEDIEVAL CASE FOR WOMEN.*

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“It’s the very finest things which are the subject of the most intense discussion.”

Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies* (CL: 8).

In reading medieval texts, literary scholars are frequently motivated by a desire not only to recover the original meaning of a work but also to show how it “may continue to speak to us” today as modern readers.¹ However, whilst some scholars have been able to pursue both goals, in practice, these two strategies of reading often become mutually exclusive “modernizing” and “historicizing” modes of interpretation. Those critics who emphasize how a text addresses us across the centuries then tend to focus on the modernity of the views expressed by medieval authors and to stress the immediate relevance of medieval texts for modern audiences. Alternatively, those who emphasize the historical context of a work tend to underline the “alterity” of medieval culture and the distance that lies between its underlying assumptions and our own values and ways of thinking.² Scholars who interrogate a text in terms of its modern relevance are likely to be denounced by their opponents for the heresy of anachronism; those who stress a text’s alterity are, in turn, likely to be attacked for the sin of reductionism, for presenting medieval culture in terms of a monolithic, univocal dominant ideology to which all texts necessarily conformed.

A classic instance of these alternative modes of reading medieval texts is provided by critical responses to Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath*. Indeed, if, as Helen Cooper once said, there is less of a critical consensus on what Chaucer was doing “than for any other English writer,”³ then there is probably less agreement about what he was doing in the case of the *Wife of Bath* than for any other part of his work. Famously, scholars have been divided into two irreconcilable camps. On the one hand are those critics who argue that Chaucer intends us to take seriously the *Wife’s* defence of women against their clerical detractors. Critics from a variety of otherwise-opposed critical paradigms, ranging from the humanist to the

feminist, post-structuralist, and Marxist, have been able to find in the Wife's arguments a plausible defence of women against the misogamy and misogyny which were so prevalent in medieval culture. She is thus presented as a perceptive critic of misogynist orthodoxy who beats male scholars at their own game and creates her own authoritative position from which to speak in defence of her sex and to convince us of her views. For such critics, Alisoun is a persuasive defender of the vision of equality in marriage achieved through the surrender of male sovereignty which concludes both her *Prologue* and her *Tale*.⁴ This positive assessment of the Wife of Bath's (and Chaucer's) achievement tends to be qualified by those who adopt it only by a New Historicist pessimism about the possibility of our ever entirely casting off the thought-patterns of society's dominant ideological discourses.⁵ It is an assessment which has proved extremely popular in an age which tends to see literature in general as a "sanctioned space for the expression of social dissidence."⁶

On the other hand are those critics, again drawn from a wide variety of theoretical perspectives ranging from patristic criticism to feminism, who argue that the Wife does not provide a refutation of medieval stereotypes of women but is herself meant as the supreme embodiment and confirmation of such stereotypes. It cannot be stressed too strongly that this does not mean that these critics are themselves sympathetic to these medieval views of women. On the contrary, this school of thought includes those feminist scholars for whom Chaucer's portrait of the Wife is a rehearsal of the male supremacism typical of his works and of medieval culture in general.⁷ In other words, there is no such thing as "the" feminist interpretation of Chaucer for us to agree or disagree with when feminist critics themselves have seen the Wife as an example both of Chaucer's sympathy with women and of his complicity with the misogynist culture of his day.⁸ Here at least, one's choice of literary interpretation cannot simply be read off from one's political preferences.

For this second school of critics, Chaucer means his readers to judge Alisoun by the standards commonly applied to women in medieval culture, such as those of the "perfect wife" of the book of Proverbs (31.10–31), who renders her husband "good, and not evil, all the days of her life," and of the "good wife" of Ecclesiasticus (26:1–4, 16–24), who fills the years of her husband's life with peace.⁹ That Alisoun fails to meet such standards is indicated by her embodiment of many of the faults of the harlot of Proverbs (7:10–12) (unable "to be quiet, not able to abide still at home"), of the wives denounced in misogynamous works such as Matthieu of Boulogne's *Lamentations of Matheolus* (c.1295, translated from Latin into French c. 1371 by Jehan le Fèvre),¹⁰ and of the women criticized with monotonous regularity by medieval preachers for their vanity, lust, disobedience, and garrulity.¹¹ Alison is seen as one of those ruddy-

faced Epicureans attacked by Jerome for sophistically employing scriptural authority to justify their own sexual incontinence: “of the scriptures they know nothing except the texts which favour second marriages but they love to quote the example of others to justify their own self-indulgence.”¹² For such critics, the parallels between the Wife and the Samaritan woman whom Jesus met “Beside a well” (John 4:6–42; *CT*, D 15), both of whom had five husbands, indicate that Alisoun should be equated with the Old Law, with the flesh, and with literal understanding, rather than with the New Law and spiritual wisdom.¹³ Far from expecting us to be convinced by her arguments or to take them seriously, the humor of the *Prologue* lies in Chaucer’s desire to have his readers see through Alisoun’s defence of women as she proceeds to condemn herself out of her own mouth.¹⁴ As Scanlon points out, much of Chaucer studies is structured around an opposition between “the complexity of the textual and the simplicity of authority.”¹⁵ In this case, however, those who adopt an ironic reading of Alisoun’s defence of women would argue that Chaucer’s textual (and inter-textual) complexity is actually employed in the service of authority. The debate thus comes down to the problem of who is speaking in the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue*: is it “quite certain” that Alisoun is the mouthpiece for Chaucer’s own views,¹⁶ or is there a gap between the Wife’s discourse and Chaucer’s own voice, one which allows us to see the irony at work in her prolonged confession?

As Cooper has shown, such disagreements about the Wife go back many centuries, but, as yet, there seems little sign that these contradictory readings will ever be reconciled with one another. The problem is that the very complexity characteristic of literary works, and certainly of Chaucer’s poetry, means that “there is evidence for all these contradictory readings in the text”: it is the multiplicity of cues for interpretation within the text, rather than their scarcity, which makes disagreement so likely.¹⁷ It would seem then that we do not simply discover pre-existing meanings within texts but instead actively construct meanings out of the pliable raw material of the text according to the methods and critical assumptions shared by conflicting “interpretive communities.” As a result, literary critics seem doomed to talk past each other with little hope that, through disagreement, they will eventually reach the consensus which scholars in other disciplines normally regard as the precondition of long-term intellectual progress.¹⁸ One way out of this impasse is to reject both sides of the polarized debate and to search instead for some more nuanced position. For instance, it can be argued that Chaucer’s own position in the Wife’s *Prologue* is equivocal, non-committal, and playful or that the text *does* provide a genuine critique of the misogynist clerks whom Alisoun attacks, even if the Wife herself is also the target of Chaucer’s satire.¹⁹ Certainly, the *Prologue*, like the *Nun’s Priest’s Tale*, does offer a

familiar medieval attack on those scholars who, for all their book-learning, were unable to put into practice their own good advice.²⁰ Yet, such compromises are unlikely to resolve critical disagreements about the Wife since each side of the debate tends to believe that its own interpretation is already sufficiently “nuanced.” In practice, we do not agree with opinions because they are nuanced but rather tend to describe them as nuanced because we agree with them. Another problem is that the claim that in polarized debates the truth must lie somewhere in the middle is “not merely false but demonstrably false.”²¹ It may well be that the “middle” reading of the Wife is to be preferred but, if this is the case, it is not *because* it is “in the middle.” Resolution of critical disagreements about the Wife seems, therefore, to be as far away as ever. As Christine de Pizan put it in the course of the early fifteenth-century debate about the moral meaning of the *Roman de la Rose*: “You understand the book in one way, and I, quite the opposite.” Thus “I don’t know why we are debating these questions so fully, for I do not believe that we will be able to change each other’s opinions” (QR: 125, 140).

Mention of Christine de Pizan’s work is apposite here since, in its rejection of misogyny, the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue* has sometimes been compared to the comprehensive defence of women offered by Christine²² in works such as the *Letter of the God of Love* (1399–1400),²³ her contribution to the “Querelle de la Rose” (1401–03),²⁴ *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1404–05)²⁵ and *The Book of the Three Virtues* (also known as *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*) (1405), her sequel to the *City of Ladies*.²⁶ Certainly, the common starting-point for both Christine and the Wife was that, as the Wife puts it, “no womman of no clerk is preyed” (D 706) and that, in Christine’s words, philosophers, poets, and orators “are unanimous in their view that female nature is wholly given up to vice” (CL: 6).²⁷ Both the Wife and Christine employ the argument that those male authors who attacked women were actually embittered, sexually impotent old men,²⁸ thus exposing the supposedly impersonal authority of misogyny for the self-interested discourse that it was (D 707–10; LGL: 339, 493–506; CL: 18–21). More generally, their joint roots in centuries of writing about women can be seen in a common stock of references and images, including the proverb that “God made women to weep, talk and spin,” a misogynist saying which Christine reinterprets to women’s advantage (D: 400–02; CL: 26–28),²⁹ and in a shared set of inter-textual reference points, including standard misogamous authorities such as Walter Map’s *Letter of Valerius to Ruffinus, Against Marriage* and the extracts from Theophrastus’s attack on marriage preserved in Jerome’s *Adversus Jovinianum* (D 671; CL: 108).³⁰ Both Christine and Alisoun observe that although men are very willing to point out the faults of women, they demand more virtue from women than from their own sex. In fact, as

Christine puts it, after citing examples of evil men, “you would never find even a handful of women who were anything like as perverse as these vast numbers of men” (CL: 34, 151–52, 155–56; D: 695–96). Both agree 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 (D 692–96; LGL: 409–22). Both appeal to women’s personal experience as a means of refuting male book-learning. As Christine put it: “Nothing gives one so much authority as one’s own experience” (D 1, 124; CL: 8–9; QR: 53, 143).³¹ (It should, however, also be stressed that, in practice, much of the fictional Wife’s “experience” is actually drawn from written sources (including Theophrastus and Jerome), whilst Christine ultimately argues that her defence of women is in line with Christian authority).³² Both Christine and the Wife, like other medieval defenders of women, make use of legalistic modes of presenting a case in court in order to present their defence of women.³³ In the course of the “Querelle de la Rose,” Christine even cited the case of a jealous husband who read the *Romance of the Rose* aloud to his wife to prove to her the evil of women and who was provoked by it to violence against her (QR: 136), a scene which parallels that at the end of the Wife’s *Prologue* where Jankyn tries to browbeat Alisoun with the tales of evil wives contained in his book (D 711–96). What then was the intellectual basis of Christine de Pizan’s defence of women? What were the implications of her views for women’s conduct in everyday life? How do the Wife’s behavior and opinions match up to Christine’s prescriptions and how do the latter help us to grasp the intellectual and cultural context in which the Wife would have been received and understood?

Christine’s work can be seen as “feminist” in the broad sense that she offered a defence of women against their misogynist critics. However, unlike modern feminists, Christine’s purpose was not to alter the structure of society by demanding equal employment opportunities or legal and political rights for women. Rather, in a culture in which women as a sex were frequently attacked on moral grounds, Christine fought the battle for women at the site where they were being assailed by their critics and so had to mount a defence of her sisters in terms of their ability to use their intellect to make reasoned, moral choices.³⁴ In order to prove that they were worthy of respect, Christine showed how, historically, women had created “countless good things” (CL: 142) for human society. They had not only been faithful wives and loving mothers, pious ladies and martyred saints (CL: 31, 108–30, 201–37), they had also been responsible for the invention of agriculture and the Latin alphabet (CL: 68–71) and even of armor and other things “unlikely for a woman to think of” (CL: 74); they had been scholars and artists, warriors, generals, and rulers (CL: 30–33, 58–78, 113–24). Yet Christine does not press for

women to be allowed to carry out such occupations in the society of her own day. Whilst explicitly claiming that women had the intellectual abilities to be judges and rulers, she adopted the standard medieval conception, one drawn ultimately from Aristotle, in which all the members of a society are seen as benefitting when their fellows perform their own specific tasks according to a social division of labor.³⁵ For Christine, God had ordained men and women to “serve Him in different ways” within this division of labor (CL: 29). Thus, instead of demanding the social equality of men and women, Christine concludes her *City of Ladies* with a call for women to demonstrate their patience, humility, and piety and so, through the goodness of their deeds, to make liars of those who attacked them (CL: 237–40). Even though women have the qualities needed to be brave warriors, scholars, or wise rulers, their capabilities would best be put to use within their own sphere of life: “it’s not necessary for the public good for women to go around doing what men are supposed to do” (CL: 57–58). God has “endowed each sex with qualities and attributes which they need to perform the tasks for which they are cut out” (CL: 29). Women should not, therefore, “neglect women’s work” but should apply themselves to “the tasks for which they are fitted” (CL: 58, 64, 89). It is not women’s social role which is to be changed but rather our evaluation of it,³⁶ as when Christine interprets the tendency of daughters to “stay closer to home” than sons as one of the benefits to parents of having female children (CL: 103). Certainly, it is practical advice on how to carry out the duties of their existing offices, rather than seeking to fulfil the offices of others, that concerns Christine in *The Book of the Three Virtues*, her sequel to the *City of Ladies*. Indeed, modern scholars have sometimes been disappointed by the conservatism of Christine’s practical prescriptions to women and have even seen her defence of women as colluding with the patriarchal values and misogynist attitudes of the day.³⁷

Christine was not, therefore, offering a blanket defence of all women but rather of women’s potential to act morally and rationally: “if I claimed that all wives were paragons of virtue, I would be rightly accused of being a liar.” Nevertheless, in order to refute misogyny, Christine *did* claim that “wilful and unreasonable” wives were in the minority: “I’d rather not discuss such women because they’re like creatures who go totally against their own nature” (CL: 110). Indeed, she argued that “there’s nothing worse than a woman who is dissolute and depraved: she’s like a monster, a creature going against its own nature, which is to be timid, meek and pure”³⁸ and such women have no place in her City of Ladies: “It’s honourable women I’d defend” (CL: 18; LGL: 289). She therefore urges women to embrace humility, patience, charity, love, diligence, sobriety, and chastity and to subdue pride, wrath, avarice, envy, idleness, gluttony,

and debauchery (TV: 99, 110). Ironically, although Christine and Alisoun have sometimes been linked as medieval defenders of women, in fact, in urging women to demonstrate their moral worth so as to refute the misogynist charges made against them, Christine actually offered a passionate denunciation of many of the kinds of behavior which are ascribed to the Wife of Bath in the *General Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales* and which are revealed to us in the Wife's own *Prologue*. We tend to remember the Wife and to sympathize with her because of her defence of women against misogynist clerks, yet, as we shall see, the Wife's behavior and opinions would not, for Christine, have made Alisoun into a champion of her sex. In other words, the Wife does not just fail to live up to the standards imposed by male authority,³⁹ she is profoundly problematic when judged against the moral standards of the most forthright and systematic feminist thinker of the day. This is not to claim that Christine was writing in a dialogue with Chaucer or that the two writers were aware of each other's work.⁴⁰ Rather, Christine's work is an example of what a serious defence of women would have looked like when offered by a writer with a similar intellectual and cultural background (from Boethius and sermon literature to the *Roman de la Rose*, the works of Deschamps and the *Lamentations of Mattheolus*) to that of Chaucer. Christine's defence of women thus provides us with a standard by which to judge the Wife's behavior and with which to assess the seriousness with which we are supposed to receive Alisoun's attack on clerical misogyny. The divergence between the Wife's behavior and that recommended to women by Christine is apparent in a number of areas: in her desire for first place at the church offering, in her motives for going on pilgrimage and for attending other religious occasions, in her manner of dress, in her attitudes to sex and marriage, as a widow, and in her use of language.

A classic instance of the detailed correspondence of the Wife's actions with the kinds of behavior criticized by Christine comes in the *General Prologue* where we are told that if any other wife of her parish went up to make her offering to the parish priest before her "so wrooth was she / That she was out of alle charitee" (A 449–52). Chaucer's Parson tells us that such behavior is typical of those guilty of that form of the sin of pride which involves a "desir to be magnified and honoured biforn the peple" (I 407–08; see also A 377; Boece, III, pr. 8: 12). Certainly, a desire for first place at the offering was often used to provide an instance of the pride and envy for which women were traditionally criticized.⁴¹ Christine's own sympathies seem to lie with the opinions expressed by the Parson rather than with the behavior of the Wife. She tells us that, rather than being wrathful with others, women will be saved by being "reserved, cautious and prudent" (CL: 25). We should thus not bear grudges against those who harm us: whoever does not bear patiently the wrongdoing of another

against him is himself impatient and “far from the fullness of virtues” (TV: 48). Christine reminds us of Jesus’ command that we should be humble and meek (CL: 25; see Matthew 18:4; Luke 14:11, 18:14). However, humbling ourselves does not mean that we have to give all of our worldly goods away: only those who seek to live a life of perfection need do this. Amassing wealth is not wrong *per se*: it is what one does with this treasure that counts. Thus “each person can be saved in his own station of life.” Humility does not mean that a woman has to renounce the dignity of rank but lies in adopting a particular state of mind, one in which she refuses to take “personal delight” in the “honour of her position” (TV: 46–47, 54). Rather than arrogantly seeking to outdo our fellows in honor or wealth and enviously eyeing the good fortune of others, we should patiently accept our lot and seek only to surpass others in our virtues rather than in position, honor, or possessions (TV: 118).

More specifically, Christine herself explicitly attacks those women who, instead of being humble, jockey for place on social occasions, a practice which divides women against their sisters and provokes envy and spite. She particularly censures those who, like the Wife, are guilty of the even more serious sin of seeking first place in this way in the church, “a place where more than any other place, all sin ought to be avoided” and specifically criticizes those who “jostle to get in front of each other on the way to the offertory” as “sinful and impertinent.” Such people seem to be making an offering to God but are really “making an offering to the prince of Hell, who is the father of Pride” (TV: 135–36). Nor, for Christine, could the Wife’s desire for first place at the offering be justified in terms of defending her rightful social position.⁴² On the contrary, in her advice to ladies, she warns them *not* to concern themselves with “who goes before and who goes behind.” If someone *does* usurp your rightful place, you should put up with such pride and presumption without showing your irritation so that everyone who sees you “will esteem you for it and love you more” (TV: 121).

In addition to attending her parish church, the *General Prologue* tells us that the Wife has been on a number of pilgrimages, besides that to Canterbury, including to Jerusalem (three times), Rome, Boulogne, Compostella, and Cologne (I: 463–66). Whilst pilgrimage was a perfectly legitimate contemporary form of penance (I 105), the charge that women used pilgrimages and other visits to religious places as a cover for illicit affairs was a stock theme of medieval satires of women.⁴³ Chaucer certainly hints as much about the Wife herself when, after listing her pilgrimages, he goes on to tell us that she knew “muchel of wandrynge by the weye” (A 467).⁴⁴ The Wife confirms as much in her own *Prologue* when she says that she went to vigils, processions, sermons, pilgrimages, miracle plays and weddings not out of any pious motive but rather to see “lusty

folk” and so that others could admire her in her fine scarlet robes (D 555–62, also D 657–58).⁴⁵ Such behavior is explicitly condemned by Christine, who insists that although it is right for women to go on pilgrimages and to visit churches and other holy places, they should only do so “devoutly and humbly” and that such deeds bring no profit unless performed in a spirit of inner charity (TV: 48, 54). In particular, women should “not use pilgrimages as an excuse to get away from the town in order to go somewhere to play about or kick up her heels in some merry company. This is merely sin and wickedness in whoever does it, for it is offensive to God and a sad shame. ‘Pilgrimages’ like this are not worthy of the name.” Nor should women gad about town, they have no need to go from church to church, for “God is everywhere” (TV: 152, see also TV: 168). Christine does not, therefore, attempt to defend women who acted like the Wife of Bath. Rather she sought to counter misogyny by asking how typical such women were in the first place (CL: 25). Modern readers, myself included, are unlikely to take the Wife’s self-confessed sins in this area too seriously,⁴⁶ medieval didactic writers, including Christine de Pizan, had a rather different opinion of their significance.

For most modern commentators, Chaucer’s description of the Wife’s fine clothing (D 550), particularly her outrageous head-dresses consisting of finely-textured Sunday-best “coverchiefs” which “weyeden ten pound” (A 453–54) and her wimple with a hat “as brood as a bokeler or a targe” (A 471) is evidence that we are supposed to see her both as “conspicuously overdressed,” a failing for which women were frequently castigated by medieval writers, and as morally wayward.⁴⁷ Certainly, as Owst and Mann have shown, there was a long tradition of preachers denouncing the fine clothing and the elaborate and excessive head-gear of women, their “grete heedys in array,” as snares of the devil, with English preachers being particularly prone to condemn those women who wore elaborate veils, kerchiefs, and wimples.⁴⁸ These complaints are repeated by Chaucer’s Parson, who condemns the pride and lustfulness of those who adopt “outrageous array” and “superfluitee” of clothing”: “it is a greet folye, a womman to have a fair array outward and in hirsself be foul inward” (I 411–31, 935).⁴⁹ Christine echoes these opinions. Once more, her moral advice does not involve an other-worldly asceticism. Instead, as the remedy for excessive luxury and pride in one’s dress, she offers a policy of moderation, urging the women of each social rank to dress soberly and modestly according to the traditional conventions of their particular station in life (TV: 57). She thus warns against women who seek to ape their betters in their clothing: “There is nothing more ridiculous than a person, regardless of who it may be, dressed with great and excessive pomp” in extravagant gowns and large head-dresses (TV: 133–34). Christine specifically enjoins “women of rank in fine townns” to

wear clothing which indicates the rank of themselves and their husbands, not that of their betters: it behoves “any woman who wants to preserve her good reputation to be modest and conservative in her clothing” (TV: 149–50), a teaching which applies equally to the women of the artisan class (TV: 167). With even greater relevance for the Wife, who was forty when she met her fifth husband and who refers to herself as aged (D 474, 601), Christine advises that the “elderly woman ought to be dressed in well-cut and respectable garments, for there is a true saying: an overdressed old woman makes a laughing stock of herself” (TV: 163). Alisoun is, of course, aware of such teaching, referring explicitly to St Paul’s advice to women to adorn themselves decently, modestly, and soberly (1 Tim. 2:9), but for such teaching she will not, she tells us, “wirche as muchel as a gnat” (D 341–47).

Although the *General Prologue* tells us that Alisoun excels as a cloth-maker, the professional expertise which she sets out for us in such detail in her own *Prologue* lies in the area traditionally associated with women in literature and sermons: love and marriage. Since she was twelve, the Wife has been married five times quite apart from “oother compaignye in youthe” (A 460–61, D 4–6). Referring to her sexual organs, she tells us that “In wyfhod, I wol use myn instrument / As frely as my Makere hath it sent” (D 149–50), insists that her husband pay his marriage debt as her debtor and “thral” (D 152–56), and invokes God’s command to us to “increase and multiply” (Gen. 1:28), along with the argument that there would be no virgins if everyone were celibate, to justify her views (D 28, 71–72). But it is not just within marriage that the Wife freely has sex. She openly admits her adultery when she tells her first three husbands that since they would have “queynte right ynogh at eve,” they should not worry how “othere folkes fare” and that, just as another man lighting a candle at one’s lantern does not deprive one of light, so they should not complain if she has sex with other people (D 330–36). She confesses her own lack of restraint, blaming the stars for her lustfulness and admitting that she “koude noght withdrawe / My chambre of Venus from a good felawe” (D 609–18).

The outrageousness of the Wife’s confession by the dominant standards of the day hardly needs emphasizing. The Parson not only condemns as “adultery” the “foul theft” by which “a womman steleth hir body from hir housbonde and yeveth it to hire holour (paramour) to defoulen hire” (I 839, 878) but, like the author of the *Fasciculus Morum*, also includes under this heading the lust “bitwixe a man and his wyf . . . oonly to hire fleshly delit” and “oonly for amorous love,” which is a mortal sin (I 904–05, 943).⁵⁰ Sex is only legitimate when it is for procreation, to render the marital debt or, at most (although this is a venial sin), in order to eschew some worse “leccherye and vileynye.” When it is done as an

end in itself, it becomes a mortal sin (I 940–43). Whereas the Wife says that she will have sex as often as she wishes, “If I be daungerous, God yeve me sorwe” (D 151), the Parson specifically tells us that spouses sin and put themselves into the Devil’s power when they think that they can have sex as often as they wish (E 1839–40; I 904–05, 943). Again, Christine agrees with the Parson’s traditional sentiments: “chastity is the supreme virtue in a woman” (CL: 141), even if her own emphasis, as a profeminist writer, is on how chastity actually benefits and empowers women.⁵¹ Like the Wife (D 91–92, 96, 105, 111), she accepts the spiritual superiority of the state of virginity: it is the Virgin Mary who is the queen of the city which she builds (CL: 201–02). She calls upon “martyrs, virgins and celibates” to assist her, argues for the superiority of the contemplative over the active life which she herself was pursuing (TV: 43–44) and, amongst ladies, puts nuns “before all others in honour” (TV: 138). However, unlike the Wife, Christine does not see a rejection of the perfection of virginity as an excuse for lust. Modern scholars have been impressed by the Wife’s question (one drawn from Jovinian) about where virgins would come from if celibacy were universal but Christine’s response to this point might perhaps have been the same as her reply to those who (like the Wife herself) invoked the injunction to “increase and multiply” in order to justify their actions: “it is a foolish waste of time to tell water to follow its natural course” (QR: 138–39).⁵² For Christine, as for Ambrose and Augustine, there was not a binary opposition between virginity and marriage or between the contemplative and the active life, so that the virtue of the former reflects badly on the latter, but rather a hierarchy of virtue. Even if the contemplative life, in which one is separate from the world, is “the greatest and worthiest perfection,” the active life in this world is still “of great excellence and necessary for the help and succour of many” through the performance of works of charity (TV: 44, 60).⁵³ Similarly, marriage, although inferior to virginity, is itself of positive value. Thus, although in order to refute misogynist accusations of women’s inconstancy, Christine cites many cases of women who, like Dido, were loyal and true in love, she nevertheless urges her female readers, single or married, not to follow the example of such women in setting themselves adrift on the “damnable sea of foolish love” (CL: 188–202, 204; LGL: 445–60).⁵⁴ Sexual love was legitimate within marriage and, once married, “no greater honour can be said of a lady or any woman than that she is true and loyal to her husband” (TV: 65).

Nor is adultery by a woman justified even if her husband is unfaithful to her. A woman with an adulterous husband should “bear with him patiently” so that, like the patient poor who eventually obtain their reward in heaven, “her honour and the merit of her soul increase all the more” (TV: 102, 177). She can “admonish” him and have others speak

to him about his behavior but, "If the wife cannot remedy the situation, she must put up with all this, . . . pretending that she does not notice it." If the husband "does not want to change his ways, . . . she will do everything she can to be resigned to the situation without saying anything more to him about it." In the end, he will feel remorse and "she will have won her cause through steadfastly enduring" (TV: 64). Christine even praised the behavior of Tertia Aemilia, the wife of Scipio Africanus, who, despite her husband's adultery with one of her servants, "continued to love, serve and honour" him and revealed his secret to no one, despite the "pangs of jealousy" he had caused her (CL: 118–19). The Wife of Bath, however, follows a rather different course of action when her fourth husband provokes her to a jealous rage by taking a "paramour." Although she tells us that she did not actually commit adultery,⁵⁵ she still managed, by her flirtatious behavior with other men, to pay him back in kind. Rather than "steadfastly enduring," as Christine advises, she tells us that she made herself into his purgatory on earth and that God alone knew how badly she treated him (D 454, 481–94).

This brings us on to the more general issue of the Wife's relationships with her husbands. The standard teaching of the Church on marriage, as inherited from Augustine,⁵⁶ is set out for us by the Parson: marriage may be inferior to virginity but it is still a sacrament ordained by God. Marriage is an honorable state within which Christ was born and it was honored when Christ performed his first miracle at a wedding (I 882–85, 918–24, 947–50). Thus, by the Parson's standards (and, as we shall see, by Christine's), the Wife's defence of marriage against those who extol virginity, on the perfectly correct grounds that marriage is something permitted by God (D 59–61; see I Cor. 7.28), is rather beside the point. The issue is rather whether, once married, husband and wife are in a rightful relationship to one another. For the Parson, as for Ambrose, and for Augustine, this means that "a womman sholde be subget to hire housbonde," in obedience to the man who is "hire lord" (I 925–31).⁵⁷ Nevertheless, if Eve was not made from the head of Adam, which would have signified that woman should have superiority in marriage ("For there as the womman hath maistrie, she maketh to mucche desray"), neither was she made from Adam's foot, which would have signified that a wife should be held low in subjection. Rather, "God made womman of the ryb of Adam, for womman shold be felawe unto man," she should be his companion whom he should love as Christ loves the Church (I 925–31).⁵⁸ Medieval moralists frequently followed the Aristotelian strategy of locating virtue as the mean between excess and deficiency.⁵⁹ As Chaucer put it in the *Legend of Good Women*, "vertu is the mene" (F 165, see also the *Romaunt of the Rose*, 6525–28). It speaks volumes about the distance of the orthodox medieval teaching on marriage from our own

views that the mean between, on the one hand, woman's mastery of man and, on the other, female servitude did not turn out to be the equality of man and wife but rather the identification of woman as man's respected inferior.

The Wife's attitude is, of course, rather different from that of the Parson. She quotes St Paul who "bad oure housbondes for to love us weel" (D 161) (Ephesians, 5:25, 33; Colossians, 3:19) but omits the Apostle's command to wives to "be subject" to their husbands (Colossians, 3:18). Instead, she seeks to make her husband into her "dettour" and her "thral" and claims a power over his flesh (D 155–58), forgetting that in paying the marital debt, each partner is supposed to be the debtor of the other and that "neither of hem hath power of his owene body" (I 940; I Cor. 7:3–4).⁶⁰ Once she has tricked her husbands into giving her power over their land and treasure she has no need "To wynne hir love, or doon hem reverence" (D 206), scolding them cruelly if they did not please her (D 223) and lying to them so cleverly that they would believe anything she said (D 226–34). She has the better of each of her first three husbands "By sleighte, or force, or by som maner thyng,/ As by continueel murmur or grucchyng," refusing to have sex until they have given way to her (D 404–12). She then conquered her fourth husband through jealousy (D 486–89) and finally got the better of her fifth husband through trickery so that he submitted to her governance of his house, land, tongue, and hand and gave her the bridle of marriage (D 813–15). Her own tale generalizes this point: what women most desire is sovereignty "As wel over hir housbond as hir love, / And for to been in maistrie hym above" (D 1038–40).

The Parson's patriarchal views on marriage are abhorrent to most modern readers, even to Christians, let alone to non-believers such as myself. Yet, although Christine certainly would not have accepted the Parson's misogynist claim that experience shows that "there as the woman hath maistrie, she maketh to muche desray" (I 927), her views on marriage are still far closer to his position than to that defended by the Wife. Like the Parson, she sees sex as legitimate when between man and wife and for the purposes of procreation (QR: 139). Like the Parson, Christine explicitly calls on married women not to scorn being subject to their husbands since "it is not necessarily the best thing in the world to be free." Those women with good husbands should thank God for this boon and, in return, should "serve their husbands with devotion, and should love and cherish them with a faithful heart, as is their duty." Those women with husbands who are neither completely good nor completely bad should still thank God for not having given them a worse husband and should strive to moderate their husbands' vices. Finally, women with husbands who are "wayward, sinful and cruel should do their best to

tolerate them. They should try to overcome their husbands' wickedness and lead them back to a more reasonable and respectable path." However, if these men are so obstinate that they will not be reformed, at least their wives' souls will have "benefitted greatly from showing such patience" (CL: 238).⁶¹ She therefore assumes that a woman should normally "obey and comply with" her husband's wishes and that she will "be ruled by him" (TV: 57). Through such behavior, by accepting the "level of submissiveness" which it is appropriate to assume "according to the estate" to which God has called us, even a wealthy princess can be saved. The princess should accept that, for all her wealth and worldly rank, she is a "mere woman" (TV: 45). The use of this phrase does not mean that Christine herself shared a misogynist opinion of her own sex; the phrase is not an empirical assessment of women. Rather, since she repeatedly tells us that her advice to princesses can be profitably adopted by the women of all classes (for instance, TV: 62), seeing one's self in this way is a state of mind which it is profitable for women to adopt, since it embodies the virtues of patience and humility rather than the vices of wrathfulness and pride (TV: 47-48).

Christine sets out in detail the behavior to be adopted by married women who possess such humility. She offers a catalogue of advice to wives, one which constitutes a comprehensive critique of the behavior of which Alisoun boasts to us. The good wife should "love her husband and live in peace with him." She should be "humble towards him, in deed and by word and by curtsying; she will obey without complaint; and she will hold her peace to the best of her ability in the way that the good and wise Queen Esther did." She will care for the good of his soul, urging his confessor to advise him, and of his body, discussing his health with his physicians. "She will be overjoyed to see him, and when she is with him she will try hard to say everything that ought to please him, and she will keep a happy expression on her face" (TV: 62-63). Women who are well-born should not scorn their husbands if they are of lower stock but "should humble themselves before their husbands in obedience and in reverence and the faith that marriage requires." "All women should do this," but well-born women will be esteemed even more for such courtesy and humility (TV: 138). Ideally, then, husband and wife will always have "sweet and loving words" for one another and "do things to please each other" (TV: 89-90). Nevertheless, all women should be obedient and humble in marriage whether their husbands "be old or young, good or bad, peaceable or quarrelsome, unfaithful or virtuous." These virtues should be exercised for the good of women's souls, for their honor in the world and also in the hope that even those men who are "remarkably cruel" towards their wives will, when the hour of death comes, repent and leave their wives "in possession of their whole fortune" (TV: 146). Indeed, as

we have seen, Christine advises that wives should bear themselves in this manner even towards those husbands who are guilty of adultery. A woman in this position should attempt to keep her husband's interest "by being pleasant and kind" and, if she has to admonish him, will do so "sweetly and tactfully when they are alone," but if he will not be reformed by her or by other good people, she must be "resigned to the situation without saying anything more to him about it" and find her consolation by taking refuge in God (TV: 63–64). The contrast between Christine's advice to women and Alisoun's confession that her husbands "were ful glad whan I spak to hem faire, / For, God it woot, I chidde hem spitously" (D 222–23, 404–12) hardly needs emphasizing.

There are many other parallels between the behavior of the Wife within marriage and that condemned by Christine. For instance, the Wife tells her husbands that she will go freely where she pleases, so that even "Argus with his hundred yen" could not keep her at home and prevent her from deceiving them (D 317–22, 357–61, 647–660), and uses trickery to obtain control of their land and treasure (D 204, 212, 308–14, 411, 814). Christine herself has little patience with the men who, like the Wife's first three husbands, allow themselves to be deceived and made fools of by their wives (QR: 52), but targets her advice mainly at her female readers. She recommends that even women who have bad-tempered husbands, men who will not acknowledge their wives' prudence, wisdom, and administrative abilities, "who keep them on such a tight-rein that they hardly dare speak" to anyone, and who keep their wives "so short of money that they don't have a penny," should follow the teaching of Prudence and "endure patiently" such "servitude" and "obey in order to have peace" (TV: 80). Similarly, whilst Alisoun tells us that even if she had been the wife of Metellius, who killed his wife for drinking, "He sholde nat han daunted me fro drynke! / And after wyn on Venus moste I thynke" (D 460–64), Christine criticizes excess and advises sobriety and restraint in all areas of life, including the consumption of food and drink (TV: 40, 56–59).⁶² Whilst Alisoun tells us that she only had a "feyned appetit" for her elderly husbands ("in bacon hadde I nevere delit") and endured their lust only to win control of them (D 416–18), Christine praises those women who even though "young and beautiful" still "adored their husbands even though they were old and ugly" (CL: 120; TV: 90). If the Wife seems superficially to offer an Augustinian defence of marriage as a perfectly legitimate state, (even though one inferior to virginity), the force of her argument is rather diminished, at least by orthodox medieval standards, including those of Christine, when she conveniently forgets Augustine's words that although "marriage is in no place condemned by the scriptures . . . disobedience is in no place acquitted."⁶³ As Augustine put it: "St Paul does not permit a woman to rule over

a man," rather her husband should be her master: "if this order is not maintained, nature will be corrupted still more and sin will be increased."⁶⁴

Nor is it just within marriage that the Wife ignores the advice given to women by moralists. As a widow too, she systematically contravenes the sorts of behavior recommended to women by didactic writers such as Christine, a writer whose status as a virtuous widow was itself a key element in her own literary self-representation.⁶⁵ The Wife tells us that when her fourth husband died, she pretended to weep, "As wyves mooten, for it is usage," and covered her face so as to hide the fact that she "wepte but smal" and, at his funeral, admired the fair legs and feet of the man whom she had already provided as her fifth husband (D 587–99).⁶⁶ Nor does she waste money on her husband's tomb, which, she tells us, was not so elaborate as the famous sepulchre of Darius: "It nys but wast to burye hym preciously" (D 497–500). Christine, by contrast, assumes that a widow will genuinely "lament her bereavement" and will "keep herself secluded for a time after the funeral." She should pray for the soul of her dead husband and mourn his death even if her sorrow, though genuine, should not be excessive. Not to grieve would be heartless and unfeeling but grieving for too long, as Theseus tells us in the *Knights Tale*, can imply a questioning of what God has willed for us (TV: 81; A: 3005–66): once more, virtue is the mean between the two extremes. As instances of the "great love that women have for their husbands," Christine cites the intense grief which loyal and loving wives, such as Argia and Agrippina, felt for the death of their spouses (CL: 108, 114–16). She praises too the devotion of Queen Artemisia, who, after the death of her husband, King Mausolus, not only consumed the ashes of his cremated body but also, unlike Alisoun, "spared no expense" in building "the most splendid tomb of any prince or king" to serve as his memorial (CL: 123–24) .

Even before the death of her fourth husband, Alisoun has, through "daliance," lined up Jankyn the clerk to be her next husband (D 565, 597–98). As she says "I holde a mouses herte nat worth a leek / That hath but oon hole for to sterte to" (D 572–73). The Wife, at forty, was then twice Jankyn's age but, as she tells us, "yet I hadde alwey a coltes tooth" (that is, youthful tastes or desires) (D 600–04).⁶⁷ Having fallen in love with Jankyn, she marries him only a month after her husband's funeral and gives him control of all her property. She has, however, forgotten her own earlier advice: "With empty hand men may none haukes lure" (D 415) and repents of her folly when she realizes that Jankyn is now free to ignore her wishes. Eventually, however, through her cunning, she forces him to submit to her and, as with her previous husbands, has the upper hand once more (D 599, 630–33, 813–15). Of course, once her husband had died, the Wife was perfectly entitled to remarry as often as she pleased (even if the Church taught that the condition of widowed con-

tinence was superior to that of faithful marriage).⁶⁸ Certainly, Christine herself advises that remarriage “may be a necessity or anyway very convenient” for a young widow. Nevertheless, for those (like the Wife) “who have passed their youth and who are well enough off and are not constrained by poverty,” Christine claims that remarriage is “sheer folly. . . . But the height of folly is an old woman taking a young man! After a while she is singing a different song. It is difficult to feel very sorry for her, because she has brought her misfortune on herself” (TV: 159–60). More generally, Christine teaches that, unlike the Wife with her “coltes tooth,” older women should put their experience to good use: “nothing is more ridiculous than old people who lack good judgement or who are foolish or who commit the follies that youth prompts in the young (and which are reprehensible even in them)” but are all the more shameful in those who should be wiser (TV: 162). In her simile of the mouse with only one hole to run to, Alisoun repeats the words of La Vieille from the *Roman de la Rose*, a character whose confessional monologue was a key influence on the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue*.⁶⁹ For Christine, La Vieille’s advice consists of nothing but “sophistical exhortations filled with ugliness and things horrible to recall” (QR: 49); it is difficult to imagine that her response to the Wife of Bath’s cynical words would have been any different.

For Christine, as a didactic writer, there was, naturally, nothing so abhorrent as those men and women who were “so perverse that whatever good correction and instruction they are given,” they still “always follow their own wicked inclinations. It is fruitless to show them the error of their ways and nothing is gained but their resentment” (TV: 95). It is just this “perverse” response to moral instruction to which the Wife confesses: “I hate hym that my vices telleth me” (D 662). Alisoun is happy to blame her lustful behavior on the effects of drink (D 459–69) or the influence of the stars, claiming that it is by virtue of being a Taurean, and so ruled by Venus, and through the impact of Mars, ascendant at her birth, that she could not resist her desires and loves “ryot and dispence” (D 609–18, 700).⁷⁰ Christine, by contrast, despite her own belief in the influence of the stars on human affairs,⁷¹ retained a faith in human free-will and our power to make rational moral choices: “there is never any excuse for doing evil” (TV: 113).⁷² Significantly, in her *Letter of Othea*, Christine, through the words of Othea, the goddess of prudence, advises her readers not to make Venus into their goddess since Venus represents, as Stephen Scrope put it in his fifteenth-century Middle English translation of Christine’s work, the “influence of lecherie,” the vice which “steyneth alle vertues.”⁷³

Finally, Alisoun is not only renowned for her behavior and her opinions but also for her mode of speech, from the garrulity of her “long preamble of a tale” (D 831), her chiding of her husbands (D 223), the

sophistry with which she defends the superiority of women in marriage (D 441–42), and the frankness with which she refers to her sexual organs (D 332, 444), to her skill in lying, her ability to trick her husbands into excusing themselves for offences which they had never committed (D 382, 391–92), and her love of gossip with her friends (D 531–33). Like the wife of Midas, who, as described in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, cannot keep the secret that her husband “hath longe asses erys two” (D 952–82), Alisoun is unable to keep anything from her fellow “gossips,” whether her husband had “pissed on a wal, / Or doon a thyng that sholde han cost his lyf.”⁷⁴ She often betrayed his confidences so that, red-faced with shame, he regretted revealing his secret to her (D 531–42). Indeed, the Wife not only confesses to such misconduct, she generalizes it to all women, asserting that no man can swear and lie “as a womman kan” (D 227–28, 401–02).⁷⁵

Christine, not surprisingly, recommends a very different manner of speech to her female readers.⁷⁶ In the *City of Ladies*, she defends women’s language as a gift from God which has brought many benefits to humanity (CL: 27–28, 80–01; see Proverbs 31: 26). In particular she catalogues men who “came to good because they did what their wives advised them to do” and, conversely, lists those such as Brutus who “suffered the consequences of not listening to their spouses” (CL: 126, 128). She confronts head-on the misogynist accusation that women are incapable of keeping a secret and concludes, after citing a number of women from Antiquity who did keep their husband’s secrets hidden, that although not all women are wise (“and neither are all men”) there is nothing in the world more trustworthy than a wife who is “dependable, careful and discreet” (CL: 123–25; QR: 51–53). Christine advises older women to be sensible in their actions and speech: the speech of the wise elderly woman “ought to be entirely controlled by discretion” (TV: 162–63). She enjoins widows in particular to be “unassuming in your temperament, speech and bearing” (CL: 238–39). The fact that, in company, the Wife could well “laughe and carpe” (that is, chatter) (A 474) may seem to be evidence that Alisoun is attractive and “fun to be with,”⁷⁷ but Christine may have had a rather different response to the Wife. Just as Chaucer’s Parson recommends humility and moderation in speech (I 405, 481), so in the *Three Virtues*, Christine argues that sobriety will keep the wise lady from “talking too much (which is a most unseemly thing in a noble lady, or any woman of quality).” Instead of lying, “she will love truth.” Prudence and Sobriety “will teach the lady to have controlled speech and sensible eloquence, neither too solemn nor too frivolous, but sweet, calm and composed” and “keep her from laughing too much and without cause” (TV: 57–58, 99). She advises wives to hold their peace and see that their husbands’ “peace and quiet are uninterrupted” and “be cheerful to him all

the time" (TV: 146–47). They should "stay at home gladly and not go every day traipsing hither and yon gossiping with the neighbours and visiting her chums to find out what everyone is doing" (TV: 168). Finally, whereas the Wife speaks freely of her sexual organs, Christine, as part of her advocacy of sobriety in speech, claims that honorable women will not refer openly to their own genitals (QR: 48–49, 122–23). Once more, with regard to their language, as in their behavior, Christine's defence of women is based on their *potential* to exercise their reason and to choose morally; once more, her arguments involve a point-by-point critique of the sins to which Alisoun herself has openly confessed.

In short, whilst the Wife tends to win our admiration today through her desire to tackle male authority head-on, Christine adopted a rather different rhetorical strategy, one which involved an attempt to show how established authority was actually on her side in her defence of women. Whereas the Wife claims that no clerk will speak well of wives in general and rejects those teachings of St Paul which she finds inconvenient (D 347, 689), Christine recommends to her readers the works of St Paul, St Augustine, St Ambrose and St Bernard for teachings on how to "pursue virtue and fell vice" (QR: 55, 132–32, 136). In the *City of Ladies*, Christine de Pizan provided her readers with a "feminine utopia" in which women "exist in a world of dignity and self-respect and have control over their own lives."⁷⁸ Yet, in practice, it is almost impossible to formulate the idea of an alternative utopia "without making use of concepts borrowed from the dominant culture."⁷⁹ In particular, in defending women, Christine was able to draw upon the Christian teaching that the soul has no sex so that, as Augustine put it, in spiritual grace and their potential for salvation, men and women were created as one, equal in mind, rational intelligence, and the capacity to assent to or to refuse sin, even if woman "had been made to be ruled by her husband and to be submissive and subject to him."⁸⁰ As Christine herself said: "It's beyond doubt that women count as God's creatures and are human beings just as men are." They are not "devouring beasts and enemies to human nature" (QR: 136), nor are they "a different race or a strange breed which might justify their being excluded from receiving moral teachings" (CL: 172). Rather both man and woman are creatures with the potential to do good, even if each can let "sensuality block out the light of reason" and fall into inconstancy, weakness, and sin (CL: 155). Man and woman are both "made of equal clay; if she is bad, then he can have no worth" (LGL: 749–54). Christine thus rejects the binary oppositions in which the male was equated with the mind and the female with the body. Rather, by nature, both men and women have a potential to exercise the prudence which allows them to make moral judgements (CL: 78–79). It is this rational faculty which constitutes their shared human essence, not the "accident" of gender.⁸¹

Misogyny was thus a philosophical error, not a revealed truth, a matter of fallible human opinion rather than of true faith.⁸² Christine even argued that it was classical and pagan authors who were the source of misogynist attacks on women and that “you’ll find few negative comments on women in holy legends, in stories of Jesus Christ and his apostles, and even in the lives of saints” (CL: 235; LGL: 557–71). Similarly, whilst the Wife of Bath sees the virtue of the female saints praised by clerks as reflecting badly on the moral status of other women and wives (D 688–96), Christine urged her readers to read improving “holy legends” (QR: 136). She offered an “inclusive” model of sainthood in which the lives of female saints empower women to speak out against misogyny and in which the stereotypes of female garrulousness, inconstancy, and lust are replaced by eloquence, fortitude, and chastity.⁸³ Whereas the Wife of Bath defends women by rejecting the arguments of learned clerks and asserting her right to follow her own desires, Christine argued that it was those women (in her eyes, the majority) who restrained their own desires who gave the lie to misogyny. In doing so, she was able to turn the tables on women’s assailants, claiming that her own views were those of “a good and devout Catholic” (QR: 133). It was, therefore, the misogynists and misogamists who, if their claims were taken literally, were heretics; it was those who attacked women who perverted spiritual truth and were disloyal to God (CL: 9; QR: 132–33).⁸⁴ Christine’s use of this kind of argument helps to explain why her works often disappoint modern feminist critics but, of the two approaches, it was her rhetorical strategy, rather than that employed by the Wife, which was the more likely to have seemed convincing by contemporary standards.

The use of woman as a debating point by medieval authors meant that individual writers could propound conflicting views of the female sex in different parts of their work.⁸⁵ Ironically, whilst many critics have been prepared to take the Wife of Bath at her own word in her defence of women, rather than reading her satirically, elsewhere in the *Canterbury Tales* Chaucer himself offered a very different kind of justification of woman’s worth, one which in many ways actually anticipated the pro-feminist case which Christine de Pizan was soon to develop. This defence of women comes in the *Tale of Melibee*, a work based on a French translation of Albertanus of Brescia’s *Liber consolationis et consilii*.⁸⁶ Here, Melibee refuses to confide in his wife Prudence or to take heed of her advice on the stock misogynist grounds that “alle wommen been wikked” and that women can never keep a secret (B² 2244–53). Prudence listens patiently to her husband before going on to refute each of his arguments in turn. She refers to the many good women who have existed, citing in her support, as does Christine, not only the Virgin Mary but also Mary Magdalene, to whom Christ first appeared after his resurrection (B²

2264–65; CL: 27, 201; LGL: 572–90), along with Old Testament heroines such as Rebecca, Judith, and Esther (B² 2287–91; CL: 131–34, 143; QR: 53). Prudence thus adopts the course of action advised by Christine and makes a liar of the misogynists through the virtue of her actions. Whereas the Wife of Bath admits to being a “jangleresse” (D 638), Prudence rejects this description of her and instead asserts her quietness and patience (B² 2275–78). Like Christine de Pizan’s ideal wife, Prudence has been the loyal help-meet which God intended woman to be to man (B² 2293–95). Just as Christine argues that since women are “more timid and also of a sweeter disposition” than hot-headed men, they should use their gentle speech to pacify and restrain men’s desire for violent vengeance (TV: 51), so Prudence urges patience on her husband when he seeks to exact violent revenge on those who have offended him (B² 2625–2729).⁸⁷ Thus, even if Alisoun and Prudence “have a great deal in common” in their wifely eloquence, in their moral significance, the two are worlds apart.⁸⁸ Prudence is the faculty which allows us to “distinguish between what is the right and the wrong thing to do” (CL: 78),⁸⁹ and it is Worldly Prudence who teaches women the lesson of how to live morally in *The Book of the Three Virtues* (TV: 55): for neither Christine nor Chaucer’s *Tale of Melibee* was prudence a virtue confined to one sex alone (CL: 78; B² 2274–79). With its words of wisdom from a strong woman of intellectual capability who yet disavows any claim to “maistrie” over her husband for herself,⁹⁰ it is easy to understand why the dialogue between Melibeus and Prudence was included alongside Christine’s *City of Ladies* and *Book of the Three Virtues* in a deluxe manuscript compiled at the Burgundian court c.1450–82. Indeed, at one time, the French translation of Albertanus of Brescia’s work was even erroneously ascribed to Christine.⁹¹ As opposed to the interpretation of the *Tale of Melibee* as a serious moral lesson offered here, some critics have been tempted to “maken ernest of game” (A 3186) by interpreting this tale as Chaucer’s parody of excessive sententiousness.⁹² If this was the case, it is unlikely that Christine de Pizan would have been able to see the supposed joke.⁹³

The Wife of Bath is one of the most famous characters in English literature and how we interpret her is an important issue in its own right. Yet any assessment of Alisoun’s defence of women has much broader implications for how we read Chaucer’s works and, indeed, for how we read and write about medieval literature in general. When, in the *General Prologue*, the Monk tells us that he has no desire to study in the cloister or labor with his hands and that instead he would rather go out hunting (A 177–92), or when the Friar claims that it is not “honest” for men such as himself to deal with lepers and poor people (A 245–48), most of Chaucer’s modern audience will accept that these pilgrims are not supposed to be taken at their own word but are being satirized by the author.

In these cases, we interpret Chaucer's words by way of "antiphrasis," defined by Christine as the practice of interpreting texts as actually saying "the opposite of what they appear to say," allowing us to read "something that is negative in a positive light, or vice versa" (CL: 8–9).⁹⁴ In the case of the Monk or the Friar, modern readers, even those with little interest in or sympathy for medieval monasticism, are likely to ascribe ironic or satirical intentions to Chaucer on the grounds that these pilgrims' attempts to present what is negative in a positive light would have seemed comically ironic or sophisticated to medieval readers familiar with estates satires which set out how the medieval religious were expected to behave.⁹⁵ In such passages, Chaucer's comedy does not detract from his underlying moral message but rather, in satirically deriding human folly and vice and drawing attention to the gap between the ideal and the supposed state of the world (as represented by anti-clerical literary stereotypes), is itself the vehicle for expressing that morality.⁹⁶ The point at issue in such texts is not the relationship between the "real" state of the late medieval religious and their estate ideal but rather the contrast between their estate ideal and the ideological picture of social reality painted by the estates satirists.⁹⁷

The problem in the case of the Wife of Bath is that our sympathy with her views today can often lead us to neglect the gap which exists between her behavior and that prescribed for the estate of women by medieval moralists (including Christine herself). We thus read the Wife's defence of women literally rather than ironically, seeing her as a witty debunker of clerical misogyny rather than as a debunker who is herself being wittily debunked. Yet, in fact, the self-justification offered by the Wife in her *Prologue* can be understood in just the same way, generically and contextually, that we read the spurious self-justifications of the Monk and the Friar. It too can be seen as an example of Chaucer's use of antiphrasis by which the text actually means the opposite of what it explicitly seems to say. Of course, by modern standards it will seem circular to judge characters such as the Monk or the Wife in terms of the values which they themselves have already rejected.⁹⁸ Yet it is just this circular response that medieval social satires were supposed to cue in their readers since the question they raised was precisely whether or not a character's behavior conformed to the externally-validated standards and authoritative conventions prescribed for his or her social estate. Whilst, as Thompson has emphasized, the ethical irony so frequently employed by Chaucer certainly means that readers have to respond actively to his text in order to obtain its moral fruit rather than just passively receiving his lesson,⁹⁹ this ethical irony was not the same thing as an ethical ambivalence, let alone a rejection of ethics altogether. As Dante, Boccaccio, and Christine de Pizan said, part of the beauty of poetry is that it can have "several mean-

ings” and “can be understood in different ways” but this does not legitimate *every* reading of a work. On the contrary, for Christine, only those readings are legitimate which reveal “pure truths” in line with divine knowledge, God’s commandments, and the teachings of Holy Scripture.¹⁰⁰ We might have to read actively to appreciate a text’s multiple lessons but this does not mean that a text is totally open-ended and that we are free to arrive at *any* lesson we please. Indeed, in her *Letter of Othea* and her “Preface” to the *Avision Christine*, Christine explicitly offered her readers a model of how to read texts correctly so as to obtain moral edification and spiritual truth from them.¹⁰¹

Whilst some critics have argued that Christine’s views on women are preferable to those of Chaucer and others have seen Chaucer’s presentation of women as more progressive than Christine’s,¹⁰² here it is the similarity between their work which has been stressed, a similarity between them rooted in a long medieval tradition of writing in defence of women¹⁰³ and in a shared set of cultural and intellectual reference points. This is not to say that the two authors had identical opinions on every issue. For example, Chaucer’s celebration of the morals of a lost, primitive Golden Age in his short poem *The Former Age* presents a marked contrast with the eulogy of the benefits of progress and civilization, many of which were the result of female inventiveness, provided in Christine’s *City of Ladies* (CL: 71, 74).¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the two authors, in embracing a Boethian outlook in which the exercise of human reason allows us to rise above our own lower natures, adopted a similar ethical position, one which then formed the basis for very similar defences of women’s worth. Where the two authors differed most profoundly was not in their moral views but rather in the literary techniques which they used to convey these views. Indeed, one wonders, had Christine been presented with the text of the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue*, whether her response would have been similar to the opinions which she and Jean Gerson expressed in their debate with the Col brothers and Jean de Montreuil on the *Roman de la Rose* in 1401–03. Here Gerson and Christine attacked Jean de Meun’s continuation of the *Rose* as an “exhortation to vice” and, against those who defended the moral intentions underlying Jean de Meun’s depiction of vice, argued that it was insufficient for an author simply to *portray* folly or sin in the hope that readers would therefore eschew such sin themselves. Even *if* Jean de Meun’s intentions were moral (which Gerson and Christine thought was in itself unlikely), the literary techniques he had adopted were ill-suited to such purposes and would lead readers astray, seducing them into the very vices which his defenders claimed he had set out to attack. It is not enough, claimed Gerson and Christine, simply to describe a character’s foolish or sinful deeds, leaving more to be suspected by the reader than is explicitly asserted, a

technique recommended by the writers of medieval rhetorical handbooks such as that of Geoffrey of Vinsauf.¹⁰⁵ Instead, the author himself has the responsibility of unreservedly *condemning* such sinfulness since “mankind is naturally inclined to evil” and cannot be trusted to recognize such folly for itself (QR: 55, 63, 74, 80–82, 130–37, 149).¹⁰⁶

Thus, although Christine advises women, where necessary, to read immoral and misogynist works in such a way that they turn them to women’s own advantage “no matter what the author’s original intention was” (CL: 8–9), she would greatly have preferred it if such works were not read, or had not even been written, in the first place. On the pilgrimage to Canterbury, it is the pilgrim who offers tales of “best sentence and moost solaas” (A 798) who will win the prize. For Christine, however, as for many other medieval literary theorists,¹⁰⁷ it was “sentence” which provided the more important criterion of the value of a work of literature: “a work without usefulness, contributing nothing to the general or personal good (even though we conceded it to be delightful, the work of great work and labour), in no way deserves praise.” Indeed, the expression of immoral views in a poetically pleasing style actually makes a work *more* dangerous to its readers. It is for this reason that Christine condemns those works which mixed moral and sinful subject-matter together without a clear statement of their authors’ own moral attitude, as rhetorical decorum required them to do, and which failed to condemn sins explicitly and “in such a way that they sound unpleasant to all who hear” (QR: 54–55, 131–32). Yet, it is just these literary techniques attacked by Christine which Chaucer himself employs in the *Canterbury Tales*. For instance, he adopts the authorial pose of a mere compiler, one who is simply rehearsing the words, whether good or bad, of others, intermingling good and evil and who thus leaves it to his audience to decide which matter was gentle, moral and holy, and which could be rejected as the words of a churl (A 3170–85). As we have seen, neither Christine nor Gerson believed that readers could be trusted to perform this task for themselves.¹⁰⁸ If she had ever been confronted with Chaucer’s text, Christine might thus have reacted to Alisoun’s words, such as her claim that “For half so boldely kan ther no man / Swere and lyen, as a woman kan” (D 224–32), in the same way that she did to the monologue of Genius in the *Roman de la Rose*: “I do not understand what good purpose this can serve or what good can come of it, save to impede the good and peace that is in marriage and to render the husbands who hear so much babbling and extravagance (if they believe such things) suspicious and less affectionate towards their wives” (QR: 52).

Given that Christine herself appreciated the uses of literary irony,¹⁰⁹ perhaps Chaucer could have defended his ironic intermingling of virtuous and sinful voices in the *Canterbury Tales* by invoking Christine’s own

argument that “a work stands or falls by its conclusion” and that, just as in council, “whatever may have been previously said, people rely on the closing argument.” It may therefore be permissible to have literary characters speak sinfully provided that the writer concludes “in favour of the moral way of life” (QR: 131–32).¹¹⁰ As Pandarus says in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, although men delight to tell tales with subtle art, still they write toward “som conclusioun”: “th’end is every tales strengthe” (II: 256–60). In the *Canterbury Tales*, it is, of course, the *Parson’s Tale* which provides this moral ending. The problem is that, even if Christine would have found many (although not all) of the Parson’s teachings amenable, their effectiveness as a refutation of Alisoun’s arguments tends to be undermined by the fact that they (like the *Tale of Melibee*) are only presented to us many thousands of lines *after* we have encountered the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue*. Furthermore, if, as Christine argued, the omission of explicit authorial guidance and relying on the readers of one’s own time and culture to grasp the moral lesson of a text was a dangerous strategy, how much more problematic does it become when a text’s readers are far removed from the intellectual beliefs, moral attitudes, and literary conventions of the age when it was originally composed? Yet this is exactly the position of Chaucer’s modern readers, the majority of whom (as students) are likely to experience the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue* as a self-contained text in its own right rather than as one which is eventually corrected by the teachings of the Parson. Chaucer scholars are, naturally, well-aware of the ending of the *Tales* yet even they may deny the Parson’s discourse an authority superior to that of the Wife and the other pilgrims¹¹¹ or may question whether his words were ever intended by Chaucer himself to provide the conclusion of the *Canterbury Tales*.¹¹² As a result, modern readers often come to judge the Wife according to their own values rather than by those suggested by late medieval moralists (including in their ranks the foremost profeminist of the day), even though they are happy to apply late medieval standards in order to understand the humor of Chaucer’s portraits of the other pilgrims, such as the Monk or the Friar. We have seen that medieval defences of women, including that offered by Christine, can seem complicit with patriarchy and misogyny when judged by modern feminist standards. However, the converse is also the case so that, as with Chaucer’s Wife of Bath, what was originally meant as a satirical defence of women can come to seem a convincing refutation of medieval misogyny (the claims of which most modern readers are, thankfully, unlikely ever to find persuasive). The Wife of Bath herself tells us that her “entente nys but for to pleye” (D 189–92) and, indeed, her *Prologue* is partly meant as an extended literary joke.¹¹³ Nevertheless, in the final analysis, Chaucer’s joke turns out to be at the Wife’s own expense. Modern readers can grasp Chaucer’s comic satire

but, once understood in this way, it is unlikely that they will approve of the satirical uses to which he puts his humor. Those critics who offer a didactic or moralistic reading of Chaucer are often seen by their opponents as offering an excessively serious interpretation of his work. In the case of the Wife of Bath, however, it is those who take Alisoun's words seriously, understanding literally a defence of women which was meant ironically, who, in this case at least, are guilty of the sin of making "ernest of game" (A 3186).

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For the convenience of readers, references to frequently-cited editions or translations of works by Christine de Pizan are given above in the form of an abbreviated title followed by a line or a page reference. These works are: LGL: *Poems of Cupid, God of Love*, T. S. Fenster and M. C. Erler, eds. (Leiden, 1990); CL: *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. R. Brown-Grant (London, 1999); TV: *The Treasure of the City of Ladies or The Book of the Three Virtues*, ed. S. Lawson (Harmondsworth, 1985); and QR: *La Querelle de la Rose: Letters and Documents*, eds J. L. Baird and J. R. Kane (*North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literature*, 199 (1978)). For the original text of works cited in translation, see below, notes 24 to 27. All references to Chaucer's works come from L. D. Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford, 1987).

1. J. Chance, ed., *Christine de Pizan's Letter of Othea to Hector* (Newburyport, 1990), ix; H. R. Jauss, "The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature," *New Literary History*, 10 (1978-79), 182; B. Rowland, "Chaucer's Working Wyf: the Unravelling of a Yarn-Spinner," in J. N. Wasserman and R. J. Blanch, eds., *Chaucer in the Eighties* (Syracuse, 1986), 137, 146; M. Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority: Christine de Pizan's Cité des Dames* (Ithaca, 1991), 192.

2. E. Hicks, "Le Livre des Trois Vertus of Christine de Pizan: Beinecke MS.427," in D. Poirion and N. F. Regalado, eds., *Contexts, Style and Values in Medieval Art and Literature* (Yale French Studies Special Issue, 1991), 59; Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority*, 8, 237; C. Dahlberg, *The Literature of Unlikeness* (Hanover, 1988), ix. Of course, the fact that other societies have cultures very different from our own might itself constitute an extremely "relevant" lesson for modern readers to derive from a text. See P. Zumthor, *Essai de Poétique Médiévale* (Paris, 1972), 7, 19-20; D. W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton, 1962), viii.

3. H. Cooper, *The Structure of the Canterbury Tales* (London, 1983), 2.

4. J. Speirs, *Chaucer the Maker* (London, 1951), 137-38; C. Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning* (Berkeley, 1957), 207, 213; S. Justman, "Medieval Monism and Abuse of Authority in Chaucer," *ChauR*, 11 (1976): 109; K. J. Oberembt, "Chaucer's Anti-misogynist Wife of Bath," *ChauR*, 10 (1976): 287-302; J. Spisak, "Anti-feminism Unbridled: Two Rhetorical Contexts," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 81 (1980): 152, 156-57, 160; B. Gottfried, "Conflict and Relationship, Sovereignty and Survival: Parables of Power in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*," *ChauR*, 19 (1985): 206-07; I. Bishop, *The Narrative Art of the Canterbury Tales* (London, 1988), 121-22; C. Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison, 1989), 114-26; P. Knapp, "Alisoun of Bath and the Reappropriation of Tradition," *ChauR*, 24 (1989): 50-51; R. Hanna, "Compilatio and the Wife of Bath: Latin backgrounds, Ricardian texts," in A. J. Minnis, ed., *Latin and Vernacular: Studies in Late Medieval Texts and Manuscripts* (Cambridge, Engl., 1989), 5-11; P. Martin, *Chaucer's Women: Nuns, Wives and Amazons* (Basingstoke, 1990), 210-17; P. Brown and A. F. Butcher, *The Age of Saturn: Literature and History in the Canterbury Tales* (Oxford, 1991),

41–42, 51–52, 242–43; L. J. Kiser, *Truth and Textuality in Chaucer's Poetry* (Hanover, 1991), 137–41; J. Mann, *Geoffrey Chaucer* (London, 1991), xi–xii, 3–4, 72–73, 78–80, 186–94; L. Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (London, 1991), 316; M. Hallissey, *Clean Maids, True Wives, Steadfast Widows: Chaucer's Women and Medieval Codes of Conduct* (Westport, 1993), xvi–vii, 183–93; T. A. Van, “False Texts and Disappearing Women in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*,” *ChauR* 29 (1994): 180, 191; J. Root, “‘Space to speke’: the Wife of Bath and the Discourse of Confession,” *ChauR*, 28 (1994): 252–74; M. Carruthers, “The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions,” *ibid.*: 26–28; R. Evans and L. Johnson, “Introduction,” in *idem*, eds., *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature* (London, 1994), 2, 8, 15; B. Kennedy, “The Variant Passages in the Wife of Bath's Prologue and the Textual Transmission of the Canterbury Tales: the ‘Great Tradition,’” in L. Smith and J. H. M. Taylor, eds., *Women, the Book and the Worldly*, volume 2 (Cambridge, Engl., 1995), 85–101; J. Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge, Engl., 1996), 166, 185; W. S. Smith, “The Wife of Bath Debates Jerome,” *ChauR*, 32 (1997): 129–30, 143; S. S. Thomas, “What the Man of Law Can't Say: the Buried Legal Argument of the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*,” *ChauR*, 31 (1997): 257; L. M. Bisson, *Chaucer and the Late Medieval World* (New York, 1998), 206, 213, 239–40. See also the references in A. Laskaya, *Chaucer's Approach to Gender in the Canterbury Tales* (Cambridge, Engl., 1995), 177. This list is by no means exhaustive and is intended simply to show how popular this approach has been.

5. D. Aers, *Chaucer, Langland and the Creative Imagination* (London, 1980), 147–50; L. Patterson, “‘For the Wyves love of Bathe’: Feminine Rhetoric and Poetic Resolution in the *Roman de la Rose* and the *Canterbury Tales*,” *Speculum*, 58 (1983): 682; R. A. Shoaf, *Dante, Chaucer and the Currency of the Word* (Norman, 1983), 176, 182–83; H. Marshall Leicester, *The Disenchanted Self: Representing the Subject in the ‘Canterbury Tales’* (Berkeley, 1990), 75–76; S. K. Hagen, “The Wife of Bath, Chaucer's Inchoate Experiment in Feminist Hermeneutics,” in S. G. Fein, D. Raybin and P. C. Braeger, eds., *Rebels and Rivals: the Contestive Spirit in the ‘Canterbury Tales’*, (Kalamazoo, 1991), 119; S. Crane, *Gender and Romance in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* (Princeton, 1994), 119; Laskaya, *Chaucer's Approach to Gender*, 183.

6. John Beverley, quoted in S. Fish, *Professional Correctness: Literary Studies and Political Change* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 28–29.

7. S. Delany, *Medieval Literary Politics: Shapes of Ideology* (Manchester, 1990), 117–8, 143–50; E. T. Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender* (Berkeley, 1992), 26–57. For other critics who see Chaucer as criticizing the Wife of Bath, see notes 9 and 12 to 14, below.

8. E. T. Hansen, “‘Of his Love Daungerous to Me’”: Liberation, Subversion and Domestic Violence in the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale,” in P. G. Beidler, ed., *The Wife of Bath* (Boston, 1996), 273.

9. J. L. Boren, “Alysoun of Bath and the Vulgate ‘perfect wife,’” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 76 (1975), 247–56; C. McCarthy, “The Position of Widows in the Later Fourteenth-century English Community and the Wife of Bath's Prologue,” in D. Mowbray, R. Purdie, and I. P. Wei, eds., *Authority and Community in the Middle Ages* (Stroud, 1999), 106–11.

10. *Les Lamentations de Matheolus et le Livre de Leesce de Jehan de Fèvre de Resson*, 2 vols., ed. A. G. Van Hamel (Paris, 1892, 1905); for translated extracts from Le Fèvre, see A. Blamires, ed., *Woman Defamed, Woman Defended* (Oxford, 1992), 177–97.

11. G. R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (Oxford, 1966), 377–404; S. H. Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Class, Status and Gender* (Basingstoke, 1995), 256–62.

12. P. A. Olson, *The Canterbury Tales and the Good Society* (Princeton, 1986), 238, 243; S. H. Rigby, *Chaucer in Context: Society, Allegory and Gender* (Manchester, 1996), 149; W. H. Fremantle, *The Principal Works of St Jerome* (1892), reprinted in P. Scaff and H. Wace, eds., *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Second Series), vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, 1954), 238, 377–78, 403, 415–16. For similar denunciations by Ambrose and John of Salisbury of those who cite the scriptures to justify their own sins, see S. L. Smith, *The Power of Woman: a Topos in Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia, 1995), 11–12.

13. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer*, 321–22; Olson, *The Canterbury Tales and the Good Society*, 246–47. The Samaritan Woman “Beside a well” and Alisoun “of beside Bath” (I: 445) are also linked by a pun on the name of the double see of “Bath and Wells;” Rigby, *Chaucer in Context*, 147. Like other female exempla, the Samaritan woman could, however, be interpreted *in bono* as well as *in malo*. See A. Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford, 1997), 195–97 and G. McLeod, *Virtue and Venom: Catalogs of Women from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Ann Arbor, 1994), 139.

14. J. B. Allen and P. Gallacher, “Alisoun through the Looking Glass: or Every Man his own Midas,” *ChauR* 4 (1970): 99–106; D. Parker, “Can we Trust the Wife of Bath?,” *ChauR*, 4 (1970); 97; J. J. Mogan, “Chaucer and the *Bona Matrimonii*,” *ChauR*, 4 (1969): 123–41; G. D. Caie, “The Significance of the Early Chaucer Manuscript Glosses (with Special Reference to the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue*),” *ChauR* 19 (1976): 350–60; J. W. Cook, “‘That she was out of all charitee’: Point-Counterpoint in the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue* and *Tale*,” *ChauR*, 13 (1978): 51–65; K. M. Wilson, “Chaucer and St. Jerome: The Use of ‘Barley’ in the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue*,” *ChauR*, 19 (1985): 245–51; Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 198; Rigby, *Chaucer in Context*, 150; S. L. Smith, *The Power of Women*, 56–59, 65.

15. L. Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* (Cambridge, Engl., 1994), 3.

16. Spisak, “Anti-feminism Unbridled,” 152.

17. H. Cooper, ‘The shape-shiftings of the Wife of Bath,’ in R. Morse and B. Windeatt, eds., *Chaucer Traditions: Studies in Honour of Derek Brewer* (Cambridge, Engl., 1990), 168; P. Knapp, *Chaucer and the Social Contest* (New York, 1990), 5–10.

18. S. Fish, *Is There A Text In This Class?* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), 148–49; E. Freund, *The Return of the Reader* (London, 1987), 104–11; C. G. Prado, *The Limits of Pragmatism* (Atlantic Highlands, 1987), 158.

19. A. Diamond, “Chaucer’s Women and Women’s Chaucer,” in A. Diamond and L. R. Edwards, eds., *The Authority of Experience: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (Amherst, 1977), 65, 71, 82–83; D. Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales* (London, 1985), 76, 81, 83, 85, 90; J. Ferster, *Chaucer on Interpretation* (Cambridge, Engl., 1985), 122–38; K. M. Wilson, *Wikked Wyves and the Woes of Marriage: Misogamous Literature from Juvenal to Chaucer* (Albany, 1990), 160; Blamires, *The Case for Women*, 208, 211, 219; Laskaya, *Chaucer’s Approach to Gender*, 178.

20. Rigby, *Chaucer in Context*, 100–01; S. L. Smith, *The Power of Women*, 91–92.

21. A. Flew, *Thinking About Thinking (Or, Do I Sincerely Want To Be Right?)* (Glasgow, 1975), 44–46.

22. See, for instance, L. Lipking, “Aristotle’s Sister: a Poetics of Abandonment,” *Critical Inquiry* 10 (1983): 77; S. Schibanoff, “‘Taking the gold out of Egypt’: the Art of Reading as a Woman,” in R. Evans and L. Johnson, eds., *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature* (London, 1994), 225, 229, 239–40.

23. For the French text, see *Poems of Cupid, God of Love*, eds. T. S. Fenster and M. C. Erler (Leiden, 1990).

24. For the French text, see *Le Débat sur le Roman de la Rose*, ed. E. Hicks (Paris, 1977).

25. For the French text, see M. C. Curnow, “The *Livre de la Cité des Dames* of Christine de Pisan: a Critical Edition” (unpublished Vanderbilt University Ph.D. thesis, 1975) or Christine de Pizan, *La Citta delle Dame*, ed. E. J. Richards (2nd edition, Milan, 1998).

26. For the French text, see Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre des Trois Vertus*, eds. C. C. Willard and E. Hicks (Paris, 1989).

27. Chaucer’s Clerk also agreed that “clerkes preise women but a lite” (E 935–38).

28. This argument had been previously used in Jehan le Fèvre’s *Livre de Leescce*; see Van Hamel, *Les Lamentations de Matheolus*, II 85–86; K. Pratt, “Analogy or Logic; Authority or Experience? Rhetorical Strategies For and Against Women,” in D. Maddox and S. Sturm-Maddox, eds., *Literary Aspects of Court Culture: Selected Papers from the Seventh Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society* (Cambridge, Engl., 1994), 62; Blamires, *The Case for Women*, 41–42; H. Solterer, *The Master and Minerva: Disputing Woman in French Medieval Culture* (Berkeley, 1996), 143–44.

29. See Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 294.

30. *Ibid.*, 70–72, 103–14.

31. On this point, see M. A. C. Case, “Christine de Pizan and the Authority of

Experience,” in M. Desmond, ed., *Christine de Pizan and the Categories of Difference* (Minneapolis, 1998), 71–72.

32. Leicester, *The Disenchanted Self*, 137; Blamires, *The Case for Women*, 223–24; McLeod, *Virtue and Venom*, 120–22.

33. S. S. Thomas, “What the Man of Law Can’t Say,” *ChauR*, 31 (1997): 257–58; M. C. Curnow, “La Pioche d’Inquisition: Legal-Judicial Content and Style in Christine de Pizan’s *Livre de la Cité des Dames*,” in E. J. Richards, ed., *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan* (Athens, Ga., 1992), 161–68; Blamires, *The Medieval Case for Women*, 9, 62–64; Solterer, *The Master and Minerva*, 16, 153 and chapter 7, *passim*.

34. C. C. Willard, “A Fifteenth-Century View of Women’s Role in Medieval Society: Christine de Pizan’s *Livre de Trois Vertus*,” in R. T. Morewedge, ed., *The Role of Women in the Middle Ages* (Albany, 1975), 116; B. Gottlieb, “The Problem of Feminism in the Fifteenth Century,” in J. Kirshner and S. F. Wemple, eds., *Women of the Medieval World: Essays in Honour of J. H. Mundy* (Oxford, 1985), 353–54; H. R. Finkel, “The Portrait of the Woman in the Works of Christine de Pizan” (unpublished Rice University Ph.D., 1972), chapters 3 and 4; R. Krueger, “Christine’s Anxious Lessons: Gender, Morality and the Social Order from the Enseignements to the Avison,” in Desmond, *Christine de Pizan and the Categories of Difference*, 18–19, 27–29; R. Brown-Grant, *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women: Reading Beyond Gender* (Cambridge, Engl., 1999), *passim*.

35. C. G. Osgood, ed., *Boccaccio on Poetry* (Indianapolis, 1956), 130–31; I. K. Knight, *Wimbledon’s Sermon Redde Rationem Villicationis Tue* (Pittsburgh, 1967), 61–66.

36. Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority*, 66–67, 101.

37. Delany, *Medieval Literary Politics*, 88–103; M. Desmond, *Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality and the Medieval Aeneid* (Minneapolis, 1994), 197; Hicks, “Le Livre des Trois Vertus,” 70–71; Blamires, *The Case for Women*, 5, 12–13, 236–38; Smith, *The Power of Women*, 61. See also the debate between Delany and Christine Reno on this issue in M. Brabant, ed., *Politics, Gender and Genre: the Political Thought of Christine de Pizan* (Boulder, 1992), 171–91, 193–206. For further references, see McLeod, *Virtue and Venom*, 117–18; Brown-Grant, *Christine de Pizan*, 129.

38. For a critique of this kind of definitional sleight of hand, see Flew, *Thinking About Thinking*, 47–48.

39. Hagen, “The Wife of Bath,” 111–12.

40. There is, for instance, no clear evidence for the claim made by Chance and Delany that Christine herself was familiar with Middle English texts by Chaucer and Gower. See Chance, *Christine de Pizan’s Letter of Othea to Hector*, 13; S. Delany, “History, Politics and Christine Studies: a Polemical Reply,” in Brabant, *Politics, Gender and Genre*, 198; R. Brown-Grant, “Miroir du Prince, Miroir d’Amour: L’Epistre Othéa and John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*,” in B. Ribémont, ed., *Sur Le Chemin De Longue Étude (Études Christiniennes*, Paris, 1998), 29, n. 16.

41. J. Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* (Cambridge, Engl., 1973), 122–23; M. Bowden, *A Commentary on the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* (New York, 1954), 215–16; M. Andrew, *A Variorum Edition of the Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, Volume II: The Canterbury Tales: The General Prologue, Part One B: Explanatory Notes* (Norman, 1993), 406–07 (cited below as Andrew, *Variorum General Prologue*); van Hamel, *Les Lamentations de Matheolus*, I: ll. 1431–40. For offerings and the frictions they could cause, see E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580* (New Haven, 1992), 125–27.

42. Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, 123.

43. Mann, *ibid.*, 123–24; Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 21, n.17, 126, 155–57, 161. For the ridiculing of those women who wandered from home, particularly those found alone in taverns, see B. A. Hanawalt, “Of Good and Ill Repurte: Gender and Social Control in Medieval England” (New York, 1998), 81, 104.

44. D. Biggins, ‘Chaucer’s General Prologue, A467,’ *Notes and Queries*, 205 (1960): 129–30. It has been suggested that lines 467–68 of the *General Prologue* should be read not as two separate sentences but rather as “She koude muchel of wandrynge by the weye: / Gat-toothed was she, soothly for to seye” so that the lecherousness, boldness, and deceitfulness indicated by her “gat-toothedness” amplify the meaning of line 467. See Andrew, *Variorum General Prologue*, 417–22.

45. For a condemnation of those women who “on feast days wear luxurious clothes on their heads and bodies in order to excite men to sin,” see *Fasciculus Morum: a Fourteenth-Century Preacher’s Handbook*, ed. S. Wenzel (University Park, 1989), 51.

46. C. C. Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* (New York, 1984), 148.

47. Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, 124; Bowden, *A Commentary on the General Prologue*, 216; Andrew, *Variorum General Prologue*, 408–12, 425–26; McLeod, *Virtue and Venom*, 53; L. F. Hodges, “The Wife of Bath’s Costumes: Reading the Subtexts,” *ChauR* 27 (1993): 359–76.

48. Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, 124–25; Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, 399–404.

49. See also Augustine, “Of the Good of Marriage,” in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series, Volume 3, ed. P. Schaff (Grand Rapids, 1956), 405, citing 1 Peter 3:3–6.

50. Wenzel, *Fasciculus Morum*, 681.

51. C. Reno, “Virginity as an Ideal in Christine de Pizan’s *Cité des Dames*,” in D. Bornstein, ed., *Ideals for Women in the Works of Christine de Pizan* (Detroit, 1981), 70, 82–83; Blamires, *The Case for Women*, 138–43; McLeod, *Virtue and Venom*, 45, 130; Desmond, *Reading Dido*, 221; M. Bella Mirabella, “Feminist Self-Fashioning: Christine de Pizan and the Treasure of the City of Ladies,” *The European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 6 (1999): 14; D. Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower: Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women* (Hamden, 1983), 12, 26–29, 52, 55. The contrast between Christine’s views on the benefits of chastity and that of earlier moralists should not be over-emphasized: like Christine, the *Fasciculus Morum* also stresses that lechery robs people of their temporal goods and worldly honor as well as their “spiritual possessions;” see Wenzel, *Fasciculus Morum*, 693–95.

52. Knapp, *Chaucer and the Social Contest*, 121; Fremantle, *The Principal Works of St Jerome*, 344, 353, 356, 360, 364, 373–74, 390; *Dives and Pauper*, I, 2, ed. P. H. Barnum (EETS, OS 280, 1980), 79.

53. Ambrose, “Concerning Widowhood,” in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, eds. P. Schaff and H. Wace (Grand Rapids, 1955), 394, 403. Christine argues that elements of the contemplative life can be mixed with the active life. Indeed, a “proper active life cannot function without some part of the contemplative” (TV: 46, 60).

54. M. Brabant and M. Brint, “Identity and Difference in Christine de Pizan’s *Cité des Dames*,” in Brabant, *Politics, Gender and Genre*, 209–10. More generally, on Christine’s treatment of Dido, see Desmond, *Reading Dido*, chapter 6.

55. Alisoun does, however, arrange a fifth husband for herself whilst her fourth is still alive (D 565–74).

56. Augustine, “On the Good of Marriage,” 399–413; Augustine, “On Marriage and Concupiscence,” in *The Works of Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo*, vol. 12, ed. M. Dods (Edinburgh, 1874), 93–202; Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. J. H. Taylor (2 vols., New York, 1982), vol. 2, IX: 7.

57. Augustine, “On the Good of Marriage,” 405; Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, vol. 2, 170–71. See also Ambrose, “Concerning Widowhood,” 405.

58. This argument was rooted in St. Augustine’s claim that details of Eve’s creation “cannot be senseless happenings” and that “there can be no doubt that they occurred to signify something.” See Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, vol. 2, 86. It was first developed by Hugh of St Victor and Peter Lombard; see E. J. Richards, “In Search of a Feminist Patrology: Christine de Pizan and “Les glorieux dotteurs,”” in L. Dulac and B. Ribémont, eds., *Une Femme de Lettres au Moyen Âge: Études autour de Christine de Pizan* (Études Christianiennes 1, Orléans, 1995), 290–91; Blamires, *The Case for Women*, 101–02; and M.-T. d’Alverny, “Comment les Théologiens et les Philosophes Voient les Femmes,” *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, 20 (1977), 118–19. For other uses of this topos, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: a Concise Translation*, trans. T. McDermott (London, 1989), 143; John Gower, *Mirour de L’Ome (The Mirror of Mankind)*, trans. W. B. Wilson (East Lansing, 1992), 240–41; Barnum, *Dives and Pauper*, vol. 1, part 2, 66–71, 79–92. See also Augustine, *City of God*, 1057.

59. N. S. Thompson, *Chaucer, Boccaccio and the Debate of Love: a Comparative Study of the Decameron and the Canterbury Tales* (Oxford, 1996), 34.

60. Augustine, "On the Good of Marriage," 400–01; Ambrose, "Concerning Widowhood," 403; J. W. Cook, "That she was all out of charite': Point and Counterpoint in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*," *ChauR*, 13 (1978): 56; Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 146; J. Mogan, "Chaucer and the *Bona Matrimonii*," *ChauR*, 4 (1970): 136.

61. The *Fasciculus Morum* also advises wives who are mistreated by their husbands to suffer patiently: see Wenzel, *Fasciculus Morum*, 65.

62. See also Ambrose, "Concerning Widowhood," 398: "Temperance, indeed, is the virtue of women."

63. Smith, "The Wife of Bath Debates Jerome," 129–45; Augustine, "On the Good of Marriage," 400, 402, 411.

64. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, vol. 2, p. 171.

65. K. Brownlee, "Widowhood, Society and Gender in Christine de Pizan," *Romanic Review*, 86 (1995), 339–53.

66. The charge of inappropriate behavior at funerals had been made against widows since Ovid; see Blamires, *The Case for Woman*, 160. For the accusation that widows showed counterfeit grief, see *ibid.*, 136, 185–88; for the proper behavior of widows, see Ambrose, "Concerning Widowhood," 397, 399–400.

67. See Paul's claim that the widow "that liveth in pleasures is dead" (1 Timothy 5: 6).

68. Augustine, "On the Good of Widowhood," in Schaff, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3: 442, 446.

69. *Le Roman de la Rose*, vol. 2, ed. F. Lecoy (Paris, 1973), lines 13120–22; *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. F. Horgan (Oxford, 1994), 202.

70. For the significance of the Wife's horoscope, see C. Wood, *Chaucer and the Country of the Stars: Poetic Uses of Astrological Imagery* (Princeton, 1970), 172–80; and B. F. Hamlin, "Astrology and the Wife of Bath: a Reinterpretation," *ChauR*, 9 (1974): 153–65.

71. C. C. Willard, "Christine de Pizan: the Astrologer's Daughter," in *Mélanges à la Mémoire de Franco Simone*, vol. 1 (Geneva, 1980), 95–111. For Christine on astrology, see R. Püschel, ed., *Le livre du chemin de long estude par Christine de Pizan* (Berlin, 1981), 146–47 (lines 3399–3409); for an English translation, see Solterer, *The Master and Minerva*, 169. In her *Book of the Body Politic*, Christine praises the wisdom of Charles V, who "particularly loved philosophers of the science of astrology." Christine's father had himself been one of Charles's court-astrologers. See A. J. Kennedy, ed., *Christine de Pizan: Le Livre du Corps du Policie* (Paris, 1998), 44; for an English translation, see K. L. Forhan, ed., *Christine de Pizan: The Book of the Body Politic* (Cambridge, Engl., 1994), 45–46.

72. The *Glossa Ordinaria* tells us that those who adopt the false doctrine of believing all human affairs to be governed by Fortune or the stars are like those of Isaiah 65.11 who have "forsaken the Lord" and "set a table for fortune" (*PL*, volume 113, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1879), 1310). See also John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, in G. C. Macaulay, ed., *John Gower's English Works*, volume 1 (EETS, ES 81, 1900), Prologus, lines 529–50.

73. H. D. Loukopoulous, "Classical Mythology in the works of Christine de Pizan, with an edition of *LEpistre Othea* from the Manuscript Harley 4431" (Unpublished Ph. D thesis, Wayne State University, 1997), 153, 169–70; C. F. Bühler, ed., *The Epistle of Othea Translated from the French Text of Christine de Pisan by Stephen Scrope* (EETS, 264, 1970), 4, 17–18; Chance, *Christine de Pizan's Letter of Othea to Hector*, 35, 45–46.

74. See Paul's criticism of women who "go about from house to house: and are not only idle, but tattlers also, and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not" (1 Timothy 5: 13).

75. R. A. Ames, *God's Plenty: Chaucer's Christian Humanism* (Chicago, 1984), 156.

76. L. Dulac, "The Representation and Function of Feminine Speech in Christine de Pizan's *Livre des Trois Vertus*," in Richards, *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan*, 13–27; Brown-Grant, *Christine de Pizan*, 168–69.

77. Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, 126–27. See also T. Whittock, *A Reading of the Canterbury Tales* (Cambridge, Engl., 1968), 124–25.

78. Willard, *Christine de Pizan*, 135; Krueger, "Christine's Anxious Lessons," 28; Mirabella, "Feminist Self-Fashioning," 13. J. Blanchard, "Compilation and Legitimation in the Fifteenth Century: *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*," in Richards, *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan*, 228–49 is a lone voice against the reading of the *Cité des Dames* as a "feminist utopia."

79. N. Abercrombie, *Class, Structure and Knowledge: Problems in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Oxford, 1980), 40; J. L. Kellogg, "Transforming Ovid: the Metamorphosis of Female Authority," in Desmond, *Christine de Pizan and the Categories of Difference*, 181.

80. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin, (Harmondsworth, 1961), 13:23, 32; Augustine, *City of God*, XXII:17, 18; Augustine, "On the Good of Marriage," 399-400; Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, vol. 1, 96-99, vol. 2, 87, 170-71, 175; Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 78-80, 84-86; J. A. Truax, "Augustine of Hippo: Defender of Women's Equality?," *Journal of Medieval History*, 16 (1990), 279-99.

81. Brabant and Brint, "Identity and Difference in Christine de Pizan's *Cité des Dames*," 211; Case, "Christine de Pizan and the Authority of Experience," 76-79, M. W. Gibbons, "The Bath of the Muses and Visual Allegory in the Chemin de Long Estude," in Desmond, *Christine de Pizan and the Categories of Difference*, 142-43; Brown-Grant, "Miroir du Prince, Miroir d'Amour," 43-44; Brown-Grant, *Christine de Pizan*, 119-21; M. Guarinos, "Individualisme et Solidarité dans Le Livre des Trois Vertus de Christine de Pizan," in Ribémont, *Sur Le Chemin de Longue Étude*, 89; E. J. Richards, "Christine de Pizan and Sacred History," in M. Zimmermann and D. De Rentiis, eds., *The City of Scholars: New Approaches to Christine de Pizan* (Berlin, 1994), 28; Richards, "In Search of Feminist Patrology," 287-92; E. J. Richards, "Rejecting Essentialism and Gendered Writing: the Case of Christine de Pizan," in J. Chance, ed., *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages* (Gainesville, 1996), 101-11; Blamires, *The Case for Woman*, 150; McLeod, *Virtue and Venom*, 123.

82. Semple, "The Critique of Knowledge as Power: the Limits of Philosophy and Theology in Christine de Pizan," in Desmond, *Christine de Pizan and the Categories of Difference*, 110-13, 125.

83. K. Brownlee, "Martyrdom and the Female Voice: Saint Christine in the *Cité des Dames*," in R. Blumenfeld-Kosinski and T. Szell, eds., *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, 1991), 116, 130; R. Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "'Femme de Corps et Femme Pars Sens': Christine de Pizan's Sainly Women," *Romanic Review*, 87 (1996): 157-75; McLeod, *Virtue and Venom*, 134. For female readers of the saints' lives which the Wife regarded as implicitly critical of other women, see K. A. Winstead, *Virgin Marys: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca, 1997), 102.

84. Finkel, "The Portrait of the Woman in the Works of Christine de Pizan," 85, 110, 119, 123-26; G. McLeod and K. Wilson, "A Clerk in Name Only—a Clerk in All but Name: the Misogamous Tradition and *La Cité des Dames*," in Zimmermann and Rentiis, *The City of Scholars*, 73; McLeod, *Virtue and Venom*, 116; Brown-Grant, *Christine de Pizan*, 141-3.

85. Gottlieb, "The Problem of Feminism in the Fifteenth Century," 357; Blamires, *The Case for Women*, 31.

86. For an English translation of Albertanus, see Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 237-42.

87. For further references and discussion of the *Melibeë*, see Rigby, *Chaucer in Context*, 155-58. See also Laskaya, *Chaucer's Approach to Gender*, 162-65.

88. D. Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford, 1997), 225-26, 377.

89. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 55, 233-39, 376-82.

90. Laskaya, *Chaucer's Approach to Gender*, 164-65.

91. Curnow, "The Livre de la Cité des Dames of Christine de Pisan," 408-09, 423.

92. Whittock, *A Reading of the Canterbury Tales*, 209-17. For other references, see Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer*, 924.

93. On Christine's humorous dimension, see C. Reno, "Christine de Pizan: Feminism and Irony," in J. Beck and G. Mombello, eds., *Seconda miscellanea di studi e ricerche sul Quattrocento francese* (Chambéry/Turin, 1981), 127-33, and T. Fenster, "Did Christine Have a Sense of Humour? The Evidence of the Epistre au dieu d'Amours," in Richards, *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan*, 23-36. The Goodman of Paris, who invoked the dialogue of Prudence and Melibeus as an exemplum of how wives could prevent their husbands from acting foolishly, also took Prudence's words seriously. See *The Goodman of Paris*, ed. E. Power (London, 1928), pp. 44-45, 188-89, 320n; *Le Menagier de Paris*, eds. G. E. Brereton and J. M. Ferrier (Oxford, 1981), 112-13.

94. Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority*, 56-57, 65; Desmond, *Reading Dido*, 200.

95. As Reno emphasizes, we cannot label (or, it should be added, refuse to label) a work

as ironic without appealing to that "elusive factor known as the author's intention;" Reno, "Christine de Pizan: feminism and irony," 127–28.

96. Alan of Lille, *The Complaint of Nature*, ed. J. J. Sheridan (Toronto, 1980), 47.

97. H. A. Kelly, "A Neo-Revisionist-Look at Chaucer's nun," *ChauR*, 21 (1996), 115–34; S. Crane, "Alison's Incapacity and Poetic Instability in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*," *PMLA*, 102 (1987): 20.

98. Hagen, "The Wife of Bath," 119.

99. Thompson, *Chaucer, Boccaccio and the Debate of Love*, 53, 82.

100. R. P. Miller, ed., *Chaucer: Sources and Backgrounds* (New York, 1977), 79–81; Osgood, *Boccaccio on Poetry*, xvii; C. Reno, "The Preface to the Avision Christine in ex-Phillips 128," in Richards, *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan*, 209, 213, 219; R. Brown-Grant, 'L'Avision Christine: Autobiographical Narrative or Mirror for the Prince,' in Brabant, *Politics, Gender and Genre*, 92, 108; R. Brown-Grant, "Miroir du prince, miroir d'amour," 34–35.

101. R. Brown-Grant, "Illumination as Reception: Jean Miélot's Reworking of the Epitre Othea" in Zimmermann and Rentiis, *The City of Scholars*, 270–71; Richards, "Christine de Pizan and sacred history," 19; McLeod, *Virtue and Venom*, 114; Brown-Grant, *Christine de Pizan*, chapter 2; C. Reno, "The Preface to the Avision Christine in ex-Phillips 128," passim; R. Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery: Some Medieval Books and their Posterity* (Princeton, 1966), 33–41.

102. J. Laird, "Good Women and Bonnes Dammes: Virtuous Females in Chaucer and Christine de Pizan," *ChauR*, 30 (1995), 58–70; Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority*, 45, 54; Mann, *Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2–3.

103. Blamires, *The Case for Women*, passim.

104. R. Brown-Grant, "Décadence ou Progrès: Christine de Pizan, Boccaccio et la question de "l'âge d'or,"" *Revue des Langues Romanes*, 42 (1988), 295–306; R. Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Reading Myth: Classical Mythology and its Interpretations in Medieval French Literature* (Stanford, 1997), 205–08.

105. E. Gallo, *The Poetria Nova and Its Sources in Early Rhetorical Doctrine* (The Hague, 1971), 37, 51, 97–99.

106. A. J. Minnis, "Theorizing the Rose: Commentary Tradition in the Querelle de la Rose," in P. Boitani and A. Torti, eds., *Poetics: Theory and Practice in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge, Engl., 1991), 17, 25, 27; Rigby, *Chaucer in Context*, 71; Smith, *The Power of Women*, 50–01, 59–61; Brown-Grant, *Christine de Pizan*, chapter 1.

107. See, for instance, Osgood, *Boccaccio on Poetry*, 104–05.

108. Brown-Grant, *Christine de Pizan*, 48; A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Middle Ages* (2nd edition; Aldershot, 1988), 198–203. For Christine as a "compiler," see S. Solente, ed., *Le Livre des Fais et Bonnes Meurs du Sage Roy Charles V par Christine de Pisan* (Paris, 1936), 5, 7.

109. Reno, "Christine de Pizan: Feminism and Irony," 127–33.

110. For other medieval uses of this idea, see A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c.1100–1375: the Commentary Tradition* (Oxford, 1988), 231–32; Dante, *The Banquet*, ed. C. Ryan (Saratoga, 1989), 58 (II, viii, 2–3).

111. Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, 190; Root, "'Space to speke,'" 253–54; J. Finlayson, "The Satiric mode and the *Parson's Tale*," *ChauR*, 6 (1971), 94–116; E. T. Donaldson, *Speaking of Chaucer* (London, 1977), 172–73; Cooper, *The Structure of the Canterbury Tales*, 54, 199–201, 243–44; W. E. Rogers, *Upon the Ways: the Structure of the Canterbury Tales (English Literary Studies*, 36; University of Victoria, Canada, 1986); 25, 121; Whittock, *A Reading of the Canterbury Tales*, 293–96; P. Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 179–81.

112. C. A. Owen, "What the Manuscripts Tells us about the *Parson's Tale*," *Medium Aevum*, 63 (1994): 245.

113. However, as Spisak points out, "There is certainly more than play in the Wife's argument" (Spisak, "Anti-feminism unbridled," 152).