



# CRITICISM

VOLUME

68



# Poetry Criticism

*Excerpts from Criticism of the Works  
of the Most Significant and Widely  
Studied Poets of World Literature*

**Volume 68**



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## Poetry Criticism, Vol. 68

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 91-118494

ISBN 0-7876-8702-2  
ISSN 1052-4851

Printed in the United States of America  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The first section comprises poetry collections and book-length poems. The second section gives information on other major works by the author. For foreign authors, the editors have provided original foreign-language publication information and have selected what are considered the best and most complete English-language editions of their works.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. All individual titles of poems and poetry collections by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.

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# Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments ix

Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board xiii

<b>Christine de Pizan c. 1365-c. 1431</b> .....	1
<i>Italian-born French poet, essayist, historian, and autobiographer</i>	
<b>Billy Collins 1941-</b> .....	202
<i>American poet and essayist</i>	
<b>Richard Hugo 1923-1982</b> .....	231
<i>American poet, novelist, autobiographer, and essayist</i>	
<b>Ishmael Reed 1938-</b> .....	319
<i>American poet, novelist, critic, editor, essayist, and playwright</i>	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 353

PC Cumulative Nationality Index 453

PC-68 Title Index 457

# Christine de Pizan

## c. 1365-c. 1431

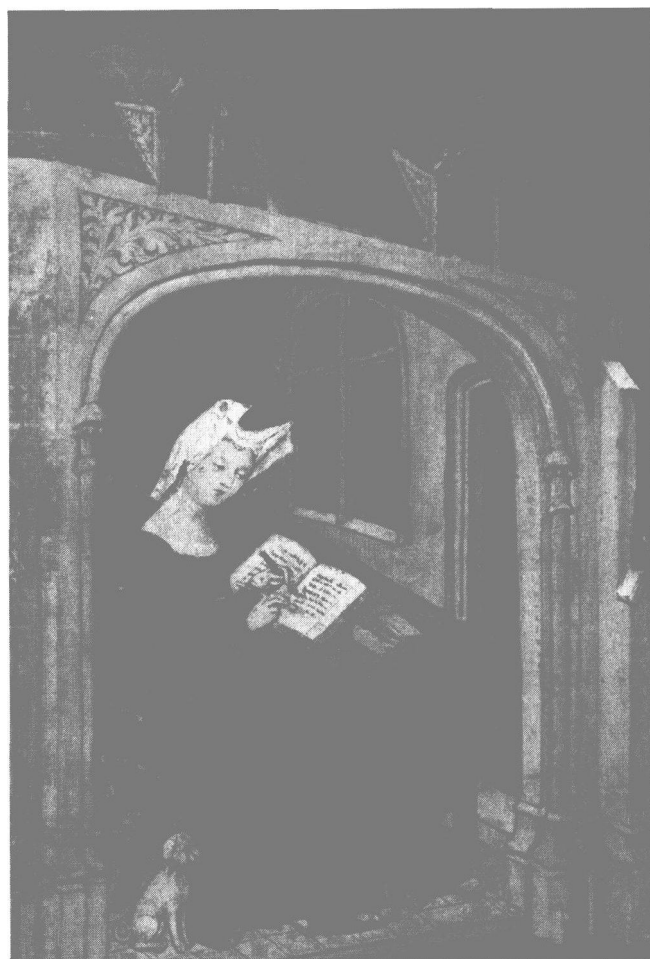
Italian-born French poet, essayist, historian, and autobiographer.

### INTRODUCTION

Christine de Pizan was a prolific writer who began her literary career out of economic necessity and became one of the most influential female writers of the Middle Ages, challenging the misogynist writings of some of her most prominent male literary predecessors as well as male writers of her own time.

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Born in Venice, Italy, in 1364 or 1365, Christine was the daughter of Tommaso da Pizzano, an astrologer, physician, and counselor of the Venetian Republic. When Christine was very young her family moved to Bologna, and shortly after that her father joined the court of France's Charles V, although the family did not join him in Paris until 1368. In 1379 Christine married Etienne du Castel, a secretary to Charles V and to his successor, Charles VI, who came to power in 1380. Christine's father lost his court position when Charles V died, leaving the family with little money. Sometime shortly after 1385, Christine's father died and in 1389 her husband died as well—leaving her as the sole support of her mother and three small children. For the next fifteen years, she fought a series of battles with unscrupulous creditors and lawyers in an attempt to gain access to the estates of both her father and her husband. During this time, out of economic necessity, Christine began writing poetry, much of it autobiographical, describing her grief at the loss of her spouse. Her work was popular almost immediately and she soon moved on to less personal subjects, most notably challenging the negative representations of women in literature and attacking the conventions of courtly love set forth in *Le Roman de la Rose* (*The Romance of the Rose*). She also composed a number of military and political treatises in an effort to improve the position of her adopted country with respect to other European powers. Christine's works were successful and influential in England and Italy as well as in France, and she was offered court appointments by both Henry IV of England and the Duke of Milan. Christine became a leading advocate for peace during the years of the politi-



cal turmoil in France caused by Charles VI's madness and by the defeat of the French forces by the English at Agincourt in 1415. At one point she began to fear for her life and fled to her daughter's convent at Poissy, most likely around 1418. Her literary production declined for a number of years until the appearance of a poem, written in 1429, commending the military victories of Joan of Arc. Scholars surmise that Christine died around 1430 or 1431.

### MAJOR WORKS

Christine began writing poetry sometime around 1395, initially as an outlet for her grief. The first twenty ballades—of the three hundred she would produce over the

course of her career—were immensely popular, as were the seventy rondeaux and twenty virelays she went on to write. Written in approximately 1395-1400, *Les Cent balades* (*The One Hundred Ballades*) is a collection of one hundred individual lyric poems which, taken together, tell the story of a series of love affairs told from the female point of view in the first half of the book, and from the male perspective in the second half. Her other two major collections of ballades are *Autres balades* (*Ballades on Various Subjects*, 1402-1407), comprised of fifty poems and an appendix containing nine more, and *Cent balades d'amant et de dame* (*One Hundred Ballades of a Lover and his Lady*, 1407-1410).

*L'Epistre au Dieu d'amours* [*Letter from the God of Love*], written in 1399, was the first of her "feminist" poems challenging negative literary representations of women, particularly those popularized by Jean de Meung in his portion of *Le Roman de la Rose*. Christine's stance embroiled her in one of the most famous literary controversies of the Middle Ages, known as the *Querelle de la Rose* (Quarrel of the Rose). University of Paris chancellor Jean Gerson supported Christine's position, while royal secretary Jean de Montreuil led the opposition—which was considerable. The debate raged for the next three years, during which time Christine was publicly ridiculed by her detractors.

In 1400 she wrote a work of moral instruction, *L'Epistre d'Othéa* (*The Letter of the Goddess Othéa*), based on mythology and drawing on the works of a wide-ranging group of authors, including Giovanni Boccaccio and Dante Alighieri. Some of Christine's work combines poetry and prose, such as *Le Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune* (*The Book of the Mutation of Fortune*), written between 1400 and 1403. The work juxtaposes a universal history with Christine's personal history, detailing her legal and financial troubles following the deaths of her father and her husband.

Christine's last work of poetry was composed in 1429, after a lengthy period of literary inactivity. Entitled *Le Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc* (*The Tale of Joan of Arc*), the work lauded the achievements of Joan of Arc and expressed Christine's hopes for complete victory over the English armies then occupying France. Since Christine's death date cannot be accurately determined, it is uncertain whether she was still alive in 1431 when Joan was captured and executed.

Among Christine's most famous prose works are *Le Livre de la Cité des dames* (*The Book of the City of Ladies*, 1404-05), a didactic work advocating recognition of women's merits, and a companion work, *Le Livre des Trois vertus* (*The Book of the Three Virtues*, 1405), a conduct book for women. She also produced a prose autobiography, *L'Avison-Christine* (1405), written in the form of a dream-vision, a common convention of Latin literature of the Middle Ages.

## CRITICAL RECEPTION

Christine's work was very well received by her contemporaries, and by the early fifteenth century she had become well known far beyond the borders of her adopted country. Charity Cannon Willard reports that Christine herself believed that her work was successful not on its own merits, but "because poetry written by a woman was such a novelty." Kenneth Varty notes, though, that Christine was not just an original writer but a highly skilled one as well. Besides her innovative use of the woman's point of view, she also wrote, at least at the beginning of her career, poetry that was personal and emotional, dealing with her grief as a widow. Varty acknowledges that personal poems were not "entirely without precedent," among her contemporaries, but nonetheless they were "so rare that their very existence at this time indicates an unusual poet." Willard suggests, too, that Christine's originality was more complicated than the poet herself admitted. Even when Christine employed a well-established form such as the pastoral, "she did not blindly follow her models. Instead she made the form her own, giving it an original twist." Barbara K. Altmann points out Christine's innovations in the narrative poem *Le Dit de Poissy* (*The Tale of Poissy*, 1400), in which she juxtaposes the story of a journey to visit the poet/narrator's daughter at the Abbey of Poissy with a debate on love conducted by two of the travelers on the journey home. While the "assemblage of dissimilar segments is not an innovation," according to Altmann, "the surprising aspect of the *Dit de Poissy* is the development of the opening scene to a length nearly equal to that of the debate."

Christine's love poetry was also original in that it dealt less with the pleasures associated with the courtly love tradition than with the inevitable pain in store for the women in clandestine affairs. Willard praises her "remarkably independent point of view" which privileged marriage over the extramarital affair so highly regarded by most other love poets. Her challenge to the conventions of courtly love and to negative representations of women in *Le Roman de la Rose* has attracted the attention of several modern critics, who see her as a medieval protofeminist. Kevin Brownlee has examined Christine's response to *Le Roman de la Rose*, contending that she created "a new kind of discourse of the self." According to Brownlee, "her powerful strategies of reading and misreading of the *Rose* function both to establish and to authorize her new identity as woman writer—poet and clerk—within precisely those traditional literary discourses that had seemed to exclude this possibility." Earl Jeffrey Richards suggests that Christine's participation in the *Rose* debate "went far beyond a protofeminist defense of women." According to Richards, "[s]he had to show in her own writings that literary art rather than excluding one gender in favor of the other must transcend gender."



## PRINCIPAL WORKS

## Poetry

- Les Cent balades* [The One Hundred Ballades] 1395-1400
- L'Epistre au Dieu d'amours* [Letter from the God of Love] 1399
- Le Debat de deux amans* [The Debate of Two Lovers] 1400
- Le Dit de Poissy* [The Tale of Poissy] 1400
- Enseignemens et Proverbes moraux* [Moral Teachings and Proverbs] 1400
- L'Epistre d'Othéa la Deesse, que Elle Envoya a Hector de Troye Quant Il Estoit en l'Age de Quinze Ans* [The Letter of the Goddess Othéa, which She Sent to Hector of Troy When He Was Fifteen Years Old] 1400
- Le Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune* (poetry and prose) [The Book of the Mutation of Fortune] 1400-1403
- Autres balades* [Ballades on Various Subjects] 1402-1407
- Le Dit de la Rose* [The Tale of the Rose] 1402
- Le Livre des Trois jugemens* [The Book of Three Judgments] 1402
- Le Livre du Chemin de long estude* [The Long Road of Learning] 1402-1403
- Le Dit de la Pastoure* [The Shepherdess' Tale] 1403
- Le Livre du Duc des Vrais Amans* [The Book of the Duke of True Lovers] 1403-1405
- Cent balades d'amant et de dame* [One Hundred Ballades of a Lover and his Lady] 1407-1410
- Encore autres balades* 1410
- Le Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc* [The Tale of Joan of Arc] 1429
- Oeuvres poétiques de Christine de Pizan*. 3 vols. [edited by Maurice Roy] 1886-1896
- The Writings of Christine de Pizan* [edited by Charity Cannon Willard] 1994
- The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan* [edited by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski] 1997

## Other Major Works

- Débat sur le "Roman de la Rose"* (essays) [Debate of "The Romance of the Rose"] 1401-1402
- Le Livre de la Cité des dames* (prose allegory) [The Book of the City of Ladies] 1404-05
- Le Livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V* (history) [The Book of Deeds and Good Conduct of the Wise King Charles V] 1404
- L'Avision-Christine* (autobiography) 1405
- Le Livre des Trois vertus* (conduct book) [The Book of the Three Virtues] 1405

## CRITICISM

## Kenneth Varty (essay date 1965)

SOURCE: Varty, Kenneth. Introduction to *Christine de Pisan's Ballades, Rondeaux, and Virelais: An Anthology*, edited by Kenneth Varty, pp. ix-xi. Leicester, England: Leicester University Press, 1965.

[In the following essay, Varty provides an overview of the historical and social context of Christine's career as a poet, an analysis of the structure of her verse, and a textual history of many of her works.]

## I. THE BACKGROUND

THE POETESS AND HER WORK<sup>1</sup>

Relatively little is known about Christine de Pisan and her family. She was born at Venice in 1363 or 1364. Her father, Thomas, was then a counsellor of the Venetian Republic with a reputation as an astrologer and physician. In 1364 the Pisans moved to Bologna. A year or so later Christine's father was invited by Charles V of France to join his court in Paris. He went there without his family but, in 1368, his wife and daughter crossed the Alps to spend the rest of their lives in France, mostly in Paris.

In 1379 Christine was married to an intelligent young man of a good Picard family, Etienne du Castel. He was a notary and secretary of the king, a post which he retained under Charles VI when Charles V died in September 1380. Christine's father, however, lost his post (or, at least, the income attached to it) on the accession of Charles VI, and he died about 1387 after a long illness.

In 1389 Etienne fell ill whilst accompanying Charles VI on a journey through northern France and he died at Beauvais. Christine was left a widow with three children, a girl and two boys. We know from her writings that she was grief-stricken for a long time, and hard pressed by unscrupulous creditors. She turned to study for consolation, and later she began to compose short lyric poems, *ballades*, *rondeaux*, and *virelais*. The earliest of these seem to date from 1393. By 1399 she had embarked in earnest upon a career as a writer, and by 1405 she had written fourteen or fifteen major works and several hundred short pieces.

Her major works of this period include the *Epistre au Dieu d'Amours*, the *Dit de Poissy*, the *Epistre d'Othéa à Hector*, the *Debat de Deux Amans*, the *Dit de la Rose*, the *Chemin de Long Estude*, the *Dit de la Pastoure*, the *Mutacion de Fortune*, the *Fais et Bonnes Meurs de Charles V*, the *Livre des Trois Jugemens*, the

*Livre du Duc des Vrais Amans*, the *Cité des Dames*, and the *Livre des Trois Vertus*. She also composed many short pieces, *ballades*, *rondeaux*, *virelais*, *lais*, and *complaintes* during this period of intense literary activity.

Meanwhile, in 1396 Christine's daughter became a nun at Poissy whilst her elder son Jehan joined the Earl of Salisbury's household. Her mother and younger son both died in the 1390's. By 1399 Christine's reputation was such that she was invited to live at the court of Henry II of Lancaster. She declined this invitation as well as a later one from Gian Galeazzo Visconti to join his court. In France she enjoyed the patronage of many a nobleman and woman including, first, Louis duc d'Orléans, then Philippe duc de Bourgogne and the queen Isabeau de Bavière.

In the early 1400's, as the struggles grew more bitter and frequent between Armagnac and Bourguignon, Christine turned from the composition of courtly pieces and lyric poems to become almost exclusively a writer of moralizing, historical verse concerned with France's plight. In 1418 the Bourguignons entered Paris forcing the Dauphin (Charles duc de Touraine) and his followers to flee the city. Christine and her son Jehan, now a secretary of the Dauphin, left Paris at this time. Apart from a poem in praise of Joan of Arc which Christine composed in 1429 in an abbey where she says she had spent the last eleven years, nothing more is heard of her alive.

#### THE HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND<sup>2</sup>

Because Christine was so closely connected with the royal courts of France through her father, husband, son, and patrons, and because she wrote so much to please so many courtiers, and because she seems to have been so genuinely concerned for the fate of France, it is important to know something of the history of these courts. Christine's connections with them were closest towards the middle of the One Hundred Years' War when France was troubled much more by internal quarrels and civil strife than by the invading English armies. This war had begun in 1337 when England's Edward III declared war on France who had refused to recognize his claims to the French throne. The French aristocracy preferred Philippe VI de Valois to Edward. The Valois forces were routed at Sluys in 1340, Crécy in 1346, and Poitiers in 1356 when Jean le Bon, successor to Philippe since 1350, was taken prisoner to London. Civil strife broke out in France. The Dauphin, however, gradually took control in his father's absence. By his prudent policy and with the help of brilliant strategists, especially Boucicault and Du Guesclin, he eventually regained much of the territory lost to the English. He became king of France as Charles V (le Sage) in 1364 and died prematurely in 1380. He it was who brought Thomas de Pisan and his family to Paris; he it was

whose life-story and praise Christine was later to write for Philippe le Hardi. The new king of France, Charles VI, was only twelve at the time of his accession, and he began his reign under the guardianship of his uncles, the dukes of Anjou, Berry, Bourbon, and Bourgogne. They immediately started to intrigue and they caused, by their extravagance and ambitions, much internal unrest. Gradually Philippe le Hardi, the duc de Bourgogne, emerged as master of France, but not for long. As Charles VI grew older he asserted himself and might eventually have reunited his uncles under him if he had not been stricken with madness in 1392. Again the royal family began to intrigue, the chief intriguers being Louis duc d'Orléans and Philippe duc de Bourgogne. The assassination of Louis in 1407 by Jean sans Peur, son of Philippe (who had died in 1404), divided France into two enemy camps now called the Armagnacs and the Bourguignons. In 1409 Jean sans Peur gained control in Paris by engineering the execution of the most powerful of the king's politicians at court, Jehan de Montaigne. The dukes of Berry, Orléans, and Bourbon together with the counts of Alençon and Armagnac (the latter was their military chief) joined together at Gien in April 1410 and decided to advance on Paris to deliver the unhappy Charles VI from the clutches of the Bourguignons. Christine then began to compose the *Lamentation sur les maux de la France*, an epistle which she destined for the Armagnacs, in particular for Jean de Berry. The Armagnacs reached Paris in October 1410, but peace was made between the opposing forces at Bicêtre in November 1410. Trouble soon broke out again, and peace was again agreed upon, at Auxerre in 1412. Christine began her *Livre de la Paix*, but the peace lasted only three months. In 1413 there were popular uprisings in Paris, then came the Paix de Pontoise, still in 1413. In 1414 another series of popular uprisings began, followed by persecutions and reprisals. Meanwhile the English, led by Henry V, renewed their attacks on France, encouraged by all this civil strife. Agincourt was fought in 1415 (Charles d'Orléans, the poet-prince, being one of the most illustrious prisoners) and Normandy was completely occupied. In 1417, Charles duc de Touraine, the eleventh child of Charles VI and his queen Isabeau de Bavière, became Dauphin on the death of his elder brother. He was to be Charles VII. In 1418, the forces of Jean sans Peur occupied Paris, compelling the Dauphin and his supporters to flee. A bloody slaughter of all Armagnac sympathizers in Paris immediately followed. Then Jean sans Peur was assassinated in 1419, and, in 1420, his son Philippe le Bon, the new leader of the Bourguignons, signed the Treaty of Troyes which declared amongst other things that Henry V or his heir should be king of England and France when the next vacancy to the throne of France occurred. Although the Dauphin refused to recognize this treaty it is doubtful if he would ever have won the title of *le Victorieux* if it had not been for the inspiring

apparition and leadership of Joan of Arc who, in 1429, at the head of a French army, forced the English to raise the siege of Orléans and then had Charles crowned king of France in Rheims (his father, Charles VI, had died in 1422). To Christine's great credit, she wrote her poem in praise of Joan in that same year of victory.

#### THE SOCIAL AND LITERARY BACKGROUND<sup>3</sup>

It is especially important to know something of this aristocracy's literary preferences and tastes if one is to appreciate the themes, style, and form of Christine's lyric and courtly poetry.<sup>4</sup> The courts of Charles V and VI, and of all the royal princes of their time, still honoured the chivalrous ideals of the late twelfth and the thirteenth century. In almost every way it was a backward-looking aristocracy. Earlier it had employed an outdated strategy at Crécy and Poitiers; it was to do the same again, later, at Agincourt.

The chivalrous spirit first appeared in southern France in the eleventh century. Here it was felt that the warrior-knight should be courteous as well as brave; he should be merciful, generous, polite, elegant, and pleasing to women as well as courageous. His image was partly reflected in the love-songs of the *troubadours*, the poet-musicians of this southern French society. They depicted him and his lady in a way which rapidly became conventional. He placed his lady on a pedestal, high above him. He served her as if she were his feudal lord, and did all in his power to be worthy of her. He did all she asked him to do, however whimsical her demands might seem to be. He waited patiently for his reward, some sign of her love for him. He chose to serve her because of her extraordinary physical and moral qualities which inspired him to perform great deeds of valour. Usually she was married. Marriages were, of course, arranged at this time for practical reasons. Sentimental attachments were therefore likely to form outside marriage. Courtly love was, then, an adulterous, furtive love. It had to be kept secret to protect the woman from her jealous husband and the man from his jealous rivals who might spread malicious gossip about him to make the woman think he was unworthy of her or unfaithful to her. (Infidelity in the code of courtly love occurred only when a man or woman had more than one lover. True love could be experienced only by those who gave themselves freely to each other; it could not therefore be experienced within marriage because the woman was then her husband's property.) Courtly love was chiefly an intellectual, spiritual experience rather than a physical one. The lover savoured the secrecy, the longing, the agony of waiting. He believed the reward, the realization of his desires, would be all the more pleasurable for the waiting and suffering. Indeed, he often seems to have enjoyed the suffering more than the realization, the sickness of unrequited love more than the curative effect of requited love.

This code of courtly love was imitated by the *trouvère* (the northern French counterpart of the *troubadour*) during the late twelfth century and it continued to be imitated right into the fifteenth century. The same ideas and sentimental attitudes appear again and again. The lover pleads with his lady, describes the distress he feels, voices his fears, his jealousy, his hatred for his rivals; he stresses his constancy and sings her praises. Sometimes she exhorts him to be patient or to prove his worth, flatters him or accuses him of infidelity. On rare occasions she grants him a favour which he then joyfully proclaims.

As time went by there was a tendency to exaggerate these attitudes, to turn the lover's distress into a death agony, his timidity into a complete abnegation of self; the beloved's superiority into a tyranny, her remoteness into inaccessibility, and so on. This is especially true of the late thirteenth- and the fourteenth-century poets. Some also began to modify the concept of courtly love with hints of impatience, humour, or earthiness which reflected their personality, but personal revelations were rare. They are therefore all the more to be savoured when we find them in Christine's courtly lyrics.

In Christine's day two literary models embodying the concept of courtly love were especially influential. One of these was the story of *Lancelot* in its thirteenth-century prose version, and the other was the thirteenth-century *Roman de la Rose*.

When the concept of courtly love penetrated from the south to the north of France, one of the first writers to employ it in his works was Chrestien de Troyes. It appears in his lyric poetry and in his *Lancelot* (c. 1168), a verse romance which illustrates most vividly that the man who loves must prove himself worthy of his lady by overcoming every obstacle and submitting completely to her whims. Lancelot's lady, Queen Guinevere, has been taken as hostage by the evil giant Meleagant. To find her he has to ride in a peasant's cart, a most undignified thing for a knight to do. He hesitates to get in, but Love demands that he should, so he does. Then he has to cross a deep ravine over a sword which cuts him badly. But Love comforts him and makes his suffering bearable. Then he has to fight Meleagant in single combat. He shows signs of weakness because of all the blood he lost in crossing the sword-bridge. Just then he sees Guinevere in the distance, and this gives him courage and strength to fight ferociously. Guinevere, however, requests Lancelot to spare his enemy's life. Lancelot immediately stops fighting, allowing Meleagant to strike him freely. When eventually he reaches Guinevere, all he asks for as his reward is a smile, but it is refused him because she knows that he had hesitated to enter the peasant's cart. As Lanson says "l'idéal de la galanterie chevaleresque, c'est Lancelot, et le roman de la Charrette en explique le code, mis en action et en exemples."<sup>5</sup>

The story of Lancelot was told, retold, and imitated throughout the Middle Ages. Charles the Bold made his attendants read it to him.<sup>6</sup> Froissart imitated it to some extent in his *Méliador* written in the years following 1365 and re-edited c. 1389 when Christine was about nineteen. It was one of Christine's contemporaries who wrote "Amour oste peur et donne hardiesse, faict oublier toute peine et prendre en gré tout le travail que on porte pour la chose aimée. Et qu'il soit vray, qui veult lire les histoires des vaillans trespassez, assez trouvera de ce preuve. Si comme on lit de Lancelot . . ."

The *Roman de la Rose* was begun by Guillaume de Lorris about 1230. It is a poetic art of courtly love:

Ce est li Rommans de la Rose  
Ou l'art d'Amors est tote enlose.

Guillaume goes on to describe a dream he had when he was twenty. He dreamt he was admitted to a garden called the Verger de Deduit by its keeper, Oiseuse. In this garden he discovered Deduit, Amour, Beauté, and Doux Regard dancing. Leaving them he came upon a beautiful rose with which he fell in love after being struck by five of Amour's arrows called Beauté, Simplesse, Franchise, Compagnie, and Beau Semblant. Amour then taught him the rules of love, of the need for discretion, politeness, elegance, generosity, devotion, and, above all, patience. Help would be given him by Esperance, Doux Penser, Doux Parler, and Doux Regard. Led on by Bel Accueil, Guillaume then tried to reach and pluck the rose, but Danger intervened and Guillaume was forced to withdraw. Raison and Ami came to advise him. After receiving the support of Franchise, Pitié, Bel Accueil, and Venus, and after apologizing to Danger, Guillaume was allowed to kiss the rose. Soon, however, Male Bouche and Jalousie separated the lovers. Bel Accueil was taken prisoner and guarded by Jalousie, Danger, Honte, Peur, and Male Bouche. Here Guillaume's poem breaks off.

It was continued and completed about 1280 by Jean de Meung in a completely different, didactic spirit. He continually digressed from the love story to consider theological, philosophical, scientific, and social subjects. He wrote much about women. Jean was an antifeminist. He considered women to be dangerous and cunning. He thought of love as a natural force meant to propagate the species. He therefore ended the poem by describing the plucking of the rose and its union with its lover.

Christine knew the *Roman de la Rose* very well; indeed she became involved in a fierce debate about it at the turn of the fourteenth century. (See Poems 115 and 116 in this anthology.) In 1399 she composed an *Epistre au Dieu d'Amours* (in volume two of Roy's edition) which is a spirited plea for the weaker sex. In the course of this poem she attacks men for their cavalier attitude to

women and denounces both Ovid for his *Ars Amatoria* and Jean de Meung for his part of the *Roman de la Rose*. She condemns both these poets' works as being immoral. In 1402 she renewed her attack on Jean de Meung with her *Dit de la Rose* (also in volume two of Roy's edition).

The vivid personifications of the *Roman de la Rose* made a great impact; they appear in courtly love poetry from the mid-thirteenth century onwards, but chiefly in the fourteenth century. They are not, however, all that common in Christine's fixed-form poetry, perhaps because of her antipathy for the *Roman de la Rose*. Nevertheless, many parallels exist between the sentimental attitudes and situations of the lovers in both Guillaume's and Christine's work, and Christine's language is often strikingly reminiscent of Guillaume's.

The code of courtly love was bound to have a strong appeal to Christine the feminist. In any case, it was still fashionable in the court circles in which she worked and for which she composed to make her living. The aristocrats of Christine's time were expected to be able to write *ballades*, *rondeaux*, and *virelais* embodying the code of courtly love.<sup>8</sup> It was a pastime for them, an intellectual game at which they all tried their hand. It was one which Christine played with the greatest skill and individuality.

Much of the difference in emphasis in Christine's work, much of its freshness, is undoubtedly due to the fact that she wrote from the woman's viewpoint. She depicts the woman hesitating before an admirer's declaration of his love (9, 78), refusing his advances (15, 50, 56, 59), admitting her love for him (10, 47, 79), comforting him (17), and praising him (11, 69, 78). She portrays the man declaring his love (28, 46, 49, 55), asking a favour (52, 58), and singing his lady's charms (30, 31, 32). Love sickness affects both, but chiefly the man (25, 28, 46, 99). Even so, the curative powers of love are not entirely forgotten (12), nor are the joys of love (29, 34, 48, 68) though the pains of love, especially of love scorned or rejected, are more frequently described, mostly from the woman's viewpoint (26, 27, 33, 37, 38, 39, 40, 57, 83, 84, 85, 88, 99). The dreams dreamt by Christine's lovers are, as often as not, unhappy ones (24, 36). Fidelity and its rewards are the subjects of several poems (20, 52, 79) but more frequent are the subjects of infidelity and the distress it causes (24, 26, 53, 87, 89, 90, 97, 98, 99). Many facets of secret, adulterous love are depicted (71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 43, 44, 45, 80, 81, 82, 92), especially the difficulties made by the interfering gossip, the *mesdisant* (14, 16, 54, 77, 78, 80, 81, 82, 92, 96, 101, 103, 108), and the jealous husband (75, 76, 92) although there is one remarkable poem in which a wife sings of the happiness she has known with her husband (1). The sweet sadness of being parted and the misery of absence are



often retold (13, 18, 19, 21, 23, 25, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 83, 92, 93, 94). Finally, descriptions of the joys of reunion (68, 91) are counterbalanced by accounts of quarrelsome meetings (52, 53, 95, 96, 98).

There were, of course, other poetic traditions besides that of the courtly love lyric. Some of these possibly originated in the serf's way of life rather than in the aristocrat's. In particular, there were poems about the seasons, especially about the advent of spring and summer. One of the earliest subjects treated in lyric verse was the *chanson de mai*, inspired by May Day festivities. "Aux jours du renouveau, et particulièrement le premier mai" wrote Gaston Paris "on allait au bois quérir le mai, on s'habillait de feuillages, on rapportait des fleurs à brassées, on ornait de violettes les portes des maisons; mais c'était le moment où, sur la prairie verdoyante, les jeunes filles et les jeunes femmes menaient des rondes pour ainsi dire rituelles."<sup>9</sup> Long before Christine composed her poetry, this traditional theme had been elevated into the courtly sphere and given an aristocratic cloak. Examples of it in this disguise are to be found in her work, e.g. Poems 19 and 94.

Another popular theme raised to aristocratic heights long before Christine's day is that of the *maumariée*, the unhappily married woman. She usually bewailed her lot in a frank and unrestrained manner. She made it clear that she would not let an uncouth, unwanted, inconsiderate husband prevent her from sleeping with her lover. Poems 75 and 76, 71, 72, and 73 are refined variations on this theme.

Many of Christine's *rondeaux* seem to stem from another semi-popular tradition, that of the simple love-song sung by the woman as she thinks of her lover, e.g. Poems 62, 63, 64, and 65. Here, however, they are clothed in courtly language and style.

Even if the personal note was rare in medieval lyric poetry, it did occur from time to time.<sup>10</sup> In the thirteenth century Colin Muset occasionally wrote about his work, his dreams and material pleasures; Jean Bodel bade goodbye to his friends before entering a lepers' colony; Adam de la Halle was forced to say farewell to his native town for political reasons; and Rutebeuf frequently described his few pleasures and his many griefs. In the fourteenth century the personal note in lyric poetry was perhaps rarer. Froissart spoke of some happy childhood days, youthful reminiscences and adult experiences, whilst Deschamps often aired his views about food, wine, women, and hygiene. Christine's personal poems are not, therefore, entirely without precedent, but personal poems were so rare that their very existence at this time indicates an unusual poet.

The most personal of Christine's poems are those in which she expresses her feelings as a widow (see Poems

1-8). Her grief was intense and enduring. Unlike so many widows of her time she did not remarry; she preferred to remain faithful to the memory of her husband:

Seulete sui, et seulete vueil estre . . .

It seems that emotional pressure had to be very great indeed before a poet ventured to write about his feelings. It also seems that the public was not very interested in his feelings, because Christine soon found it necessary to hide her grief and write her poetry in the traditional manner to please her public.<sup>11</sup>

Christine's other personal poems are those in which she expresses her religious convictions, moral principles, or patriotic feelings, her admiration or concern for certain people, events, or attitudes. Some of these are just as personal as the widow's poems, especially those like Poem 112 in which she cries out in distress, or 113 and 115 in which she appeals for help, or 116 in which she comments on those who attack her for her views about the *Roman de la Rose*. Her religious convictions (especially her belief in the supreme importance of spiritual rather than material, temporal happiness) are evident in Poems 100, 107, and 110. Other personal traits are also revealed here and there as, for example, her love of learning in 106. Her image of the ideal knight is depicted in 102 and 119 and against this she sets portraits of the unchivalrous knight in 101, 108, and, to some extent, in 103 and 104. These last two poems are really attacks on certain unchivalrous characteristics, especially selfishness and deceitfulness. In 111 she flatters a knight whom she particularly admired, and in 114 she celebrates the formation of a new order of knights. Christine's poetry leaves little room for doubt that she greatly admired the man we would call a true gentleman and that she felt nothing but scorn for his opposite. Her patriotism and loyalty are made abundantly clear by poems like 118 in which she attacks those who criticize their leaders, the royal princes; by 105 in which she regrets the king's illness; and by 117 in which she mourns the death of the Duke of Burgundy. These poems are, of course, circumstantial, reflecting contemporary events and her feelings about them.

Religious, moralizing, and patriotic poems were written long before Christine composed hers. There is no originality here. One can say, however, that Christine's poems of this kind seem particularly sincere, sometimes vehemently so, whereas this impression is rarely given by her predecessors.

About seventy-eight per cent of Christine's *ballades*, *rondeaux*, and *virelais* are courtly love poems; about six per cent are *poèmes de veuvage*, and about nine per cent are moralizing, reflective poems. The remainder