



## **Letter to the god of love (1399): the first literary quarrel set up by a woman to be found in the French language**

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**ABSTRACT.** *Letter to the god of love* (1399) is the first literary quarrel surprisingly set up by a woman to be found in the French language. Christine de Pizan goes to the palace court to stand for women by replying against the misogyny present in *Roman de la rose* [The Romance of the Rose]. It is our aim to analyze Christine de Pizan's discourse in the Middle Ages context. Due to the long time elapsed from that context and ours, we have included some biographical and historical data. She makes herself heir of the *Courts of love* in which ladies took on the role of magistrates. The letter carries the force of a sentence passed by a judge who has completed judging the offence, culminating with the instruction that the verdict shall be executed. From the magistrate to the teaching role, Christine carries on the Christian civilizing process by proposing new forms of relationship between men and women. The outstanding quality of the author is seen in her ability to conduct the contention and in bringing to light the sophisms included in her opponent's thesis. In accordance with the scholastic dialectical method, she gives the floor to her opponents but is the one who rules the polyphony. The Letter moves beyond the Court setting to reach the French society, gaining supporters and enemies.

**Keywords:** Middle Ages, literature, history, discourse analysis.

## **A epístola ao deus do amor (1399), a primeira querela literária, em língua francesa, instaurada por uma mulher**

**RESUMO.** N' *A Epístola ao deus do amor* (1399), surpreendemos a primeira querela literária instaurada por uma mulher. Christine de Pisan comparece à tribuna palaciana, para combater em favor do feminino na réplica contra a misoginia do *Roman de la rose*, de Jean de Meung. É nosso intuito analisar a carta no contexto medieval; e, em função da distância que dele nos separa, incluímos alguns dados biográficos e históricos antes da análise do *corpus*. Na Epístola, a autora se fez herdeira das *Cortes de amor*, em que a dama correspondia a função de magistrado. A carta tem a força de uma sentença após julgamento do delito, culminando com a solicitação de ser o veredicto executado. Da função de magistrado para a de educadora, Christine dá continuidade ao processo civilizatório cristão, que propôs novas formas de relacionamento entre homem e mulher. Ela sobressai pela habilidade em conduzir o debate até pôr em evidência os 'sophismas' da tese contrária. Na linha da dialética escolástica, cede a palavra aos opositores, mas quem domina a estratégia de converter a agressividade do inimigo em força do aliado é quem rege a polifonia. A Epístola ultrapassará o espaço da Corte para chegar à sociedade francesa, granjeando adeptos e adversários.

**Palavras-chave:** Idade Média, literatura, história, análise do discurso.

### **Introduction**

It is our aim to analyze Christine de Pizan's discourse within the historical and cultural context of which it was part; and, due to the distance in time and space that separates us from that context, we include biographical and historical data before the analysis, in order to provide the reader with a contextualized apprehension of the Letter. Christine de Pizan's writings (1363-1430) are published in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, supported by an important venue for production and dissemination of art and knowledge during the medieval time, the Court of

Appeal of Paris. In the reign of Charles V (1338-1380), reading was proposed as a source of knowledge and studying for the benefit of a good government, and a reference to those in charge of the State administration. By the time of the king's death, the royal library had around 1,200 manuscripts.

Acting as a paradigm to the medieval knowledge, customs and values, the French Court assisted in the broadest process of delimitation of the boundaries of a lay culture, with emphasis on Greek and Latin classic studies, the translation of Aristotle and Plato's

philosophy, and the disclosure of Saint Augustine's work. The habit of reading hagiographies, deeds, chivalric romance and troubadour poetry gains an increasing number of enthusiasts. According to Jacques Le Goff, the 13<sup>th</sup> century will be the reading and writing century (cf. LE GOFF, 2008).

With the opening of universities (1088), we would watch the first steps towards the secular instance of knowledge. Principals, masters and students inaugurated an environment for studying and discussion of controversial themes of religious and profane nature. The search for the truth enforced by the words of Christ "In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. [...]" (John 18, 37), and interpreted in the supernatural and human realms, was not restricted to the academy or to religious orders, expanding as a goal accessible to lay people, especially to those living in the cities: statesmen, nobles, courtesans, doctors, jurists, businessmen and prestigious women.

Philosophical references of faith and of human life expand. Learning is one of them. For one to comprehend natural and revealed truths, it is necessary to study them. From Saint Thomas's perspective (1225-1274), faith does not oppose the philosophical knowledge of ancient times, which served as a foundation to his *Summa Theologiae* (1265-1273). On the contrary, the reading, the study and the cultivation of the human sciences have contributed to the completion of Christianization concerning the ritual and the salvific doctrine. In turn, artistic and literary manifestations, beside philosophical studies, sought to establish Christianity as a reference of human behavior, a harmony that was inherent to the medieval culture that preconized the unity between believing, learning and living. For this reason, it is not strange that monasteries, abbeys and nunneries were shelters for the classic culture, fostering humanistic studies and supporting scientific research (cf. BARBOSA, 2001), or the fact that the first schools were architectonically linked to the main church. From the 12<sup>th</sup> century on, cities with Roman Catholic cathedrals usually had a school for children – including girls – nearby. Those institutions taught how to write and read used to be opened, although such progress reached part of the population only (BAUMGARTNER, 2002).

It is in this broad context, in which knowledge is a goal to be achieved, that *Letter to the god of love* is written, as a reply against *The romance of the rose*<sup>1</sup>, by

Guillaume de Lorris (1200-1238) and Jean de Meung (1240-1305), which is based on a low consideration to women. Christine de Pizan's literary production is not a loose verse: it is part of the set of works and pronouncements of pedagogical nature that, in France, since the Carolingian period, aimed at civilizing the rude and oftentimes barbaric behavior of men towards women. In fact, as early as Hicmar's homilies in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, there is the defense of men-women equal rights regarding conjugal faithfulness in monogamous marriage:

Sexual violence is denounced and equaled to heinous crimes of the public justice. These vehement condemnations in Hicmar, for instance, are the opposite of an abstract moral. They are addressed to a real audience, to those frank aristocrats to which violence and, particularly, kidnapping were a habitual practice. The conjugal model that the clerical elite seeks, at this point, to propose as a sexual violence regulator implies, in addition, a recognition of the woman as a person, as a fully-fledged party within the family society (TOURBET, 1986, p. 137)<sup>2</sup>.

*Letter to the god of love*, the beginning of the Christine's public engagement, as well as *The book of the city of ladies* (1405) and *The book of the three virtues* (1406), in which she equally defends the female gender, follow the Christian civilizing process that transformed men and women relationship, especially with the monogamous marriage. According to Jacques Le Goff, the greatest contribution from the Middle Ages to humankind was the appraisal of women, made official through the sacredness of the nuptial alliance:

[...] what seems absolutely notable to me in those provisions of the Lateran Council is evidently the fact that marriage is impossible without the consent of the husband and of the wife, of man and woman: a woman cannot marry against her will, she has to say yes (LE GOFF, 2008, p. 123).

Consonantly, rational and anthropological arguments are added to the imperative of assigning to the woman a new role and identity within the family sphere and the social life.

In tune with the new paradigm of the female-male relationship, behavioral guides and

loving from the perspective of the 'fin' amors'. The second one, with 17, 724 verses, was written around forty years later by Jean de Meung, which draws itself distant from the courteous love and from the view on women in Lorris. Meung incites eroticism and kidnapping as means to subjugate the woman (MEUNG; LORRIS, 1798).

<sup>2</sup>La violence sexuelle y est dénoncée et assimilée aux crimes majeurs de la justice publique. Ces condamnations véhémentes, chez un Hicmar par exemple, sont à l'opposé d'une morale abstraite. Elles s'adressent bien à un public réel, ces aristocrates francs pour lesquels la violence et, en particulier, le rapt étaient encore pratique courante. Le modèle conjugal que l'élite clericale cherche alors à imposer comme un régulateur de la violence sociale implique en outre une reconnaissance de la femme comme personne, comme 'consors' de plein droit dans la société familiale" (TOURBET, 1986, p. 137).

<sup>1</sup>The allegoric 'Romance' contains two parts written in eight-syllable verses. The first one, composed between 1230 and 1240, with 4,058 verses, by Lorris, is intended to the palatial environment and is similar to a manual about the art of

marriage-related literature were produced from the 9<sup>th</sup> century: the 'specula', the 'exempla', the treatises on love and the troubadour poetry, which reveal the other's way of being (cf. MACEDO, 1995). The rules of the courteous love highlight the need the man has to control his impulses and cultivate the noblest feelings to court a lady (CAPELÃO, 2000). *Cantigas de amor* [literally songs about love] manifest the radical and inflexible passion of the male that is made known to the female, while *cantigas de amigo* [literally songs about a boyfriend] evidence women's sentimental and nostalgic inclination. With effect, the Middle Ages invented the exclusiveness of love, with impacts, also, on the spurious relations between a single troubadour and a single feudal lady. In short, the Literature followed the cultural transformations of social relations; and the love between a man and a woman began to be considered the most profound experience of the human being (cf. HAUSER, 2000).

From the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, there is some intensification, especially in Italy, of the interest in philosophers, literates and orators of the ancient culture. Aristotle, Plato, Ovid, Cicero and Virgil are translated and publicized. The Low Middle Ages was enriched with the study of Patristics, of the Doctors of the Church, and with the increasing appreciation of the literary art. Petrarch (1304-1374) was the most expressive symbol of the 'studia humanitatis' and of a new literary sensibility and taste. According to Etienne Gilson, through the reading of Saint Augustine, the poet linked his admiration for the classic rhetoric to the eloquence of the great Christian orators something which initially had seemed incompatible with the Italian writer (cf. GILSON, 2001). Besides Petrarch, several humanists, such as Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) and Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), managed to harmonize the notable legacy of the Antiquity with the Christian patrimony, something that what Augustine and Aquino did long before. But the convergence between paganism and the Christian culture is not possible in all spheres, especially when it comes to the answer about what the human being is, or what a woman's status in family and in society should be. *Letter to the god of love* stands precisely on the risky articulation between Christian principles and the tendency to the skepticism and hedonism of the pagan world, present in erudite writers of the classic culture, now renowned and made public by humanists due to their stylistic perfection and the rhetoric of Greek-Latin authors.

Thomas de Pizan, Christine's father, was a professor at the University of Bologna, a privileged

venue for the Humanism blooming. In addition to the knowledge of medical sciences and astrology/astronomy, he was an enthusiastic admirer of the classic culture (ROUX, 2006). Invited by Charles V, he left Italy to be the monarch's physician and astrologer. Thomas was the one that encouraged Christine to cultivate a taste for literature and for the study of Christian authors and Greek and Latin civilizations. Therefore, the poetess possessed the conditions of theological and humanistic knowledge to immerse herself into ecclesiastic writings and the ancient culture with a perspective capable of recognizing the benefits and risks for women in that moment of ideological effervescence and contradictions. Christine lived in her routine the experience of appreciating the ancient culture and equally perceiving the harmful influence of *The art of love* (1 BC and 1 DC) by Ovid, and of Jean de Meung's book on the relationship between men and women.

### Analysis of *Letter to the god of love*

In a few lines it is possible to summarize the narrated facts and the relevant remarks of Christine's 860-verse letter addressed to Cupid during the Spring Festival of May 1399. Peasant and noble as well as single and married women came to the writer complaining about the defamation that they were continuously facing, especially in France, a nation that once served as a model of women's defense and appraisal. Christine takes on the role of representative of dames and maidens, including, in the refutation against the scolders of the female honor, the emblematic figures of Eve and Mary, together with female characters of classic epopees and tragedies, famous for their faithfulness towards their partners: Penelope, Medea and Dido. To Christine, fiction always has something of truth. In the condition of a critical observer, she repeatedly refers to the bad behavior of false knights and disloyal noblemen, ready to ramble to their own praise and against the ladies concerning matters of love and the idea that women are by nature shallow, malicious and prone to dissimulate. The author addresses *The art of love*, by Ovid, and the second part of *The romance of the rose*, written by Jean de Meung, with harsh words. She states that these books do not treat of the true love but of the art of deceiving those who lack social recognition and perspicacity enough to defend themselves. Justifying herself, she claims that the books are written by men, and that women are frequently simple, tender and generous, inclined to trust in those who deviously attract them. She

does not disregard the existence of a minority of frivolous women; also mentions brave and loyal men, real 'gentilhomme', as they show courage, good feelings and politeness. In her view, fate renders justice to slanderers and hypocritical men: they are the ones at whom futile women cheat the most. Vulgarly always lets itself to be attracted by the lower level. As for religious principles, which serve as a shield to the defense of the female, she alludes to those women who stayed at the Cross of Christ, whereas the apostles betrayed the Master. She praises Jesus' mother, the Christian virtues and doctrine with emphasis on the appreciation that God, for several times, manifested towards women in the history of salvation. Before the king and the palatial society, Christine concludes the *Letter*, requesting a harsh punishment to the abominable behavior of noblemen and literates that, instead of the gratefulness owed to mothers and sisters, practice and praise, under the influence of Meung's book, a variety of methods for scorning women.

In *The letter to the god of love*<sup>3</sup>, we are surprised by the first literary quarrelling in French set up by a woman (ROUX, 2006). The palatial poetry of the Low Middle Ages had already counted, in France, with the female participation in literary debates (BAUMGARTNER, 2002). In the Iberian Peninsula, Garcia de Resende's *Cancioneiro Geral* registers the engagement of thirteen women and fifteen men in a poetic challenge proposed by Francisco da Silveira, and of seven poetesses in the reply by Nuno Pereira to Henrique de Almeida under the rubric: 'help of Lady Felipa's girls' In literary meetings at the Court from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, just as shown by the *Cancioneiro*, women recite and compose ballads, in addition to providing mots to be glossed (CARVALHO, 2001).

However, with the *Letter*, Christine is the one who takes the lead to fight, with words and on behalf of the ladies, the hedonism of the *Romance*, founded on the conviction that women are but complements intended to procreation and to men's instinctive desires, as she had been regarded in Antiquity. According to Massey, in the ancient Greece, notwithstanding the fact that Athenian laws distinguish free and slave women, or Athenian and foreign women, they had something in common: "[...] they possessed no political right and, at whatever stage of their lives, they were under the control of a man" (MASSEY, s/d, p. 1). In the same work, the historian comments that, from the very

first days of life, women carry the burden of their inferiority. To attest it, she cites the fragment from a papyrus letter from Egypt dated back to the first century DC: "If you have a kid who happens to be a boy, good luck! Let him live, but if the baby is a girl, let her outside in the cold" (MASSEY, s/d, p. 2).

In this line of analysis, the male behavioral code of the *Romance* represented a retrocession and despise for female conquests achieved in the Middle Ages (cf. MACEDO, 1995; DUBY, 1997; LE GOFF, 2008). Christine breaks the silence and calls Paris' courtesan aristocracy to stand up and fight defamation and the incentive to women hunt and seduction. To obtain the support of the palatial public, the writer participates as protagonist in the courtesan customs of literary meetings, complying with the current norms of the letter genre. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, letters were collective: they had a social role and, in a first moment, were orally published before the authorities to which they were addressed (cf. WATT, 1990). It is noticeable that Christine would have taken into account the *Dictaminis ephitalamium*, about the art of writing letters, composed by Juan Gil Zamora in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, with special dissemination in France through writing guides (cf. MONGELLI; FRATESCHI, 2003).

In the fourth section of his work, Zamora refers to the parts that should compose letters: greetings, narration, petition and conclusion. According to the rules of the *Dictaminis ephitalamium*, *The letter to the god of love* would configure a letter of exhortation and reproach, including the habitual greeting to Cupid and his vassals, more frequent in love letters. Narration, of didactical and doctrinal orientation, comprehends most part of the *Letter*, taking on a character of argumentation in favor of the female image and identity against the repercussion of Meung's precepts.

It is worth noting that the letter is similar to a lawful petition and that the final plea has the power and formality of a legal sentence uttered after the crime is analyzed and judged, concluding with the request that the verdict shall be enforced without any delay. This nearly-judicial view on the love relationship is nothing but one of the facets of a broader tendency of the medieval civilization: theological, love or anthropological issues being represented in the exercise of justice and treated in the form of a lawsuit, with debate and verdict (BAUMGARTNER, 2002). Here is the end of the letter, when the author adopts the condition of prosecutor in that dispute that would soon move beyond the Court space.

<sup>3</sup>The citations of the corpus were extracted from '*L'épître au Dieu d'Amours*' by Christine de Pisan. A translation was provided into Portuguese and into English. Original text by Gállica Bibliothèque Nationale de France (PISAN, 1399).

May they be shamefully insulted, punished/  
Imprisoned and tied with ropes, and may justice be  
served./ With no more suffering and injury./ So we  
desire by law./ Orally published, in our great palace,  
/In May during the solemn fest/ In which lovers  
present us with plenty of pleas, /In the year of grace  
of thirteen and ninety-nine [...] (v. 790-795)<sup>4</sup>.

Therefore, Christine is not only tributary of the letter genre but also of the medieval tradition of the *Courts of love*. The French society, from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, had trusted distinguished women as Aliénor d'Aquitaine, Adèle de Champagne, Ermengarde de Narbonne, or even the very Marie de Champagne, to the possibility of judging love stalemates (PERNOUD, 1980). The public attention turned to men, but women were given the last word in the *Courts of love*: a kind of tribunal in which women uttered the verdict, implementing the norms of a real ethics and jurisprudence of love. Women and men examined the cases that were submitted to them, discussed them, appealing to the arbitration of noblemen but, in special, of women, as the latter were regarded as the most eximious ones in the art of courtesy<sup>5</sup>. As an implication of this privilege entrusted to the female gender, we understand why Christine de Pisan had access to the right to safeguard the female reputation, as well as to judge and punish the followers of the Neopaganism of the *Romance*, work with a vigorous penetration power from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Despite the prerogatives granted to women in the Canon Law and in public administration with resonances within the palatial environment, Christine carefully builds and consolidates her legitimation before the courtesan public. With the status of prosecutor of the female condition, she is urged to reveal, still in the first verses of the letter, the backstage of the enunciation, that is, the circumstances that justified the decision of composing and delivering orally *The letter to the god of love*

We bring to your knowledge, in short,/That, before  
us, very pitying lamentations/ Were brought to  
Court, heavy heartedly/ By dames and maidens/  
Noble, bourgeois and virgin./ And all these women,  
in general./ Requesting our help humbly,[...] (v. 8-14).

It is clear that it refers to delegated narration and defense, which strengthens the representativeness of

the writer for the royalty and for the noblemen. Beside the circumstantial legitimation and, partly, due to it, Christine's speech authority is confirmed concerning her role as women's advocate and prosecutor against the savagery of noblemen and knights. There was no one better than her, who had the trust of dames and maidens, to support the victims and to oppose the current male code.

Another contribution to validate the right to word is the undeniable enunciative qualification of the writer, evident in the literary, religious and historical knowledge present in *The letter to the god of love*. She alludes to the protagonists of *The Odyssey* and of *The Aeneida*, to Medea and to Ovid, about whose work and biography she knows. In the field of biblical culture, she comments and interprets the participation of characters in paradigmatic episodes of the New and the Old Testament, masterfully conjugating originality and appreciation for the ecclesiastic orthodoxy. About the female nature, under the influence of Marian devotions, she will state: "It can be said, and this is not a heresy,/That the God high above with great courtesy has treated it." (v. 695-696). She also manifests her awareness of events of the near past: referring to notable knights and intellectuals in France such as *Hutin de vermeilles* and *Othe de grançon* (PIZAN, 1399). Thus, it is possible to observe throughout the letter the subtlety that the author has in reading the facts of contemporaneity and delimitating the causes of social changes and of customs to the detriment of women.

In turn, the pedagogical orientation of Christine's writing continues the groove forged by other women in centers of religious and lay culture of the medieval society. With respect to this, Verdon states that female writers whose aim was to educate or teach behavioral norms were not rare (VERDON, 1999). Régine Pernoud as well, now citing Karl Bartsch, devoted to the study of manuscripts written by women, registers the surprising information that women in the Middle Ages used to read more than man did. The French historian also comments that she could go further and add that, not satisfied with reading only, they frequently used to write, and that those manuscripts, which testify the knowledge of their time, were oftentimes copied by female hands (PERNOUD, 1980).

In spite of the intellectual path started by women and the representativeness from which Christine de Pisan benefited, the poetess reveals perfect lucidity as for the boldness of her status and the risk she runs, as she has the diligence to develop, inside the text, her self-defense:

<sup>4</sup>Injuriez, punishonteusement,/Priscitez, et justice ensoiffaitte./Sanz plus souffrirnulle injure sifaitte./Ne plus ne soitsouffertellelaidure./Nous le voulonsainsi et c'estdroiture".

<sup>5</sup>In the 'Treaty on the courteous love', André Capelão presents a chapter with the woman's arbitration in complex cases of love-related judgment (cf. CAPELÃO, 2000).

And if, regarding this matter, I wanted to say it all// I would be afraid to expose myself to some of those who read/ Because many are the people who, frequently, faced with the truth/ Feel disturbed and confronted (v. 629-632)<sup>6</sup>.

Actually, *The letter of the god of love* does not originate in the reckless initiative of a woman whose courage derives from her inexperience or emotional precipitation. In several stanzas, we catch her in the delicate tension that marks the spoken and the unspoken word, knowing how to discern between opportune occasions to be silent or to speak:

If praising without criticizing suffices to me;/ If something good can be disclosed [...]// If it is better for me to remain silent/ Then I will not say a word, let each one be their own judge (v. 635-636; 640-642)<sup>7</sup>.

Beside the subtle art of making a resource out of discretion, the author attenuates the possible harshness contained in boldness with the ludic character of literary assemblies. It is not about a random expedient or pure fantasy. It is better to convince and gain followers in a relaxing atmosphere, easing the sharpness of the dispute. Christine took advantage of entertainment to elect *Cupid* as interlocutor, and other mythological figures as witnesses of her claim.

Cupid, king by his own grace./God of those who love, without the help of anybody/Reigning in the shiny atmosphere of the skies./ Son of Venus, the powerful goddess. (epigraph)<sup>8</sup>.

In the presence of gods and divinities, /By the grace of the powerful god of love/ With other hundred gods of great power,/ So they confirm and grant our wish (v. 800-804)<sup>9</sup>.

In particular, thanks to the allegorical language of the greetings and of the final petition, the *Letter* configures an ambiguous dialogical relation, implementing two levels of interlocution: the first one is mythological or comical, suitable to palatial hobbies, capable, however, of legitimating the second interlocution: the latter, being a prominent one, has an educative orientation and social repercussion, which confers to the *Letter* the category of concrete, detailed and precise report, without lacking the interpretation of facts and the accusation addressed to a specific target: the knights

and aristocrats from which it demands a change of attitude:

And even so, that is what hurts the most./The noblemen that used to be the kindest./Because at present many are the knights/And pages and several dukes all accused/ Of deceiving them with beautiful compliments./They pretend to be loyal lovers/And cover themselves with various fantasies; (v. 31-37)<sup>10</sup>. They firmly swear and promise and lie/About being loyal, discreet, and then boast about that./About their often back and forth./By foot they walk around here and there./Looking at each other in support (v. 45-49)<sup>11</sup>.

On the opposite way of *The romance of the rose*, in which dissimulation and astuteness are resources necessary for one to subject a woman (MEUNG, 1798), to Christine, these are the vices she most repudiates in knights and literates. She refers, in several stanzas, to the slanders and to the collusion in the perversity with which women are injured. With identical criterion, she describes the traits of the noble character of those who indeed know how to love:

If I prohibit villainy and meanness./And command you to stick to honor truly./To be loyal, discreet and, indeed, to utter kind words./To be generous, courteous and run from slanderers./ Humble, and sweet, gallant and lovely// Firm and frank (v. 75-80)<sup>12</sup>.

The paradigm that Christine sets does not result from her sensibility and perception alone, it rather corresponds to the expectation of the public opinion shaped by medieval institutions. In the shadow of qualities such as honor, generosity, firmness, humility and sincerity, we identify the principles of chivalry, although good manners could be included on this list, since they are part of chivalry morals. In *The book of the order of chivalry*, written in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, loyalty, liberality and mercy come along with courtesy, as a virtue that honors the Institution (LLULL, 2010). In another excerpt of the same work, Llull characterizes the knight's temper, highlighting that his lineage, horse or skills are not enough for him to deserve the honor of belonging to the Order:

Thus, if you long to find nobility of courage, consider faith, hope and charity, justice, strength,

<sup>6</sup>Et se sur ce je vouloie tout dire//Doubtearoid'encorird'aucuns'l'ire;/Car moult souvent pour dire verité/Mautalentvient et contrarieté".

<sup>7</sup>"Si me souffist de louersanzblasmer;/Car on peutbienquelqueriens bon clamer [...]//Si se vault mieulz du dire reposer. Pour ce m'en tais, si en soit chascun juge".

<sup>8</sup>"Cupido, roy par la grace de lui,/Dieu des amans, sanz aide de nullui/Regnant en l'air du ciel très reluisant,/Filz de Venus la deesse puissant,".

<sup>9</sup>"[...] present dieux et divins/ par le dieu d'amours puissant / A la relacion de cent/ Dieux et plus de grant pouoir./ Confermans nostre voloir".

<sup>10</sup>"Et meismement, dont plus griefment se deulent./Des nobles gens qui plus garder les seulent./Car a present sontpluseurs chevaliers/Et escuiers mains duis et costumiers/D'ellestrayrbeaulxblandissemens./Si se faignenttestreloyaul xamans/Et se cueuvrent de diverse faintise".

<sup>11</sup>"Et jurent fort et promettent et mentent /Estreloiaux, secrez, et puiss'envantent./D'alersouvent et de venir se peinent,/Par cesmoustiersça et la se pomenent/Enregardant, s'apuientusaultelz".

<sup>12</sup>"Si leurdeffensvillenie et meffait,/Et leurcommanspoursuivrebonneur de fait,/Estreloiaux, secrez et voidisans./Larges, courtois, et fuirmesdisans./Humbles et douiz, jolis et assesmés,".

loyalty, and the other virtues, because in them you find nobility of courage, and by those the noble knight defends himself against misdeeds and deceit and the enemies of Chivalry (LLULL, 2010, p. 54)<sup>13</sup>.

Both *The letter to the god of love* and Llull's book prioritize, as a foundation to acting, the Christian spirituality, and merit as a value judgment. Kindness of heart should precede initiatives and audacity as to implement justice and social order. The ideology of knights stresses the defense of widows, orphans, elders and all those incapable of standing against injustice for themselves. In consonance, the *Letter* fights in favor of the female reputation in a historical moment in which honor was valued above material goods, and to be like Christine was an exception.

Likewise, the *Letter* highlights the requirement for refined gestures and words. The attributes of the male standard – 'discreet, sweet, gallant and lovely' – manifest the appreciation for the courtesan elegance. The entanglement of the chivalry paradigm with the essence of courtesy norms stands out. In the courteous love, it is necessary to hold the reins of the horse to tame the immediacy of the instinct and reach the virtue (BURIDAN, 2000). The love feeling is ennobled when impulses are contained and the desire is disciplined; and when the reason and high concept of women subjugate impulsiveness the sublimation of love is conquered (CAPELÃO, 2000), implicit in the obeisance of the human relationship: in special, in the art of courting women. Summarily, in Ramon Llull, Capelão and Christine there is a noticeable intention to instruct or to rescue the behavior of lovers and knights according to the Christian asceticism and to the courteous love in a period marked by the decay of foundations and guidelines that have built the Western Civilization (COULANGES, 2003).

In *The letter to the god of love*, Christine expands her role as educator: she does not report to men only, but also addresses herself to the female audience to alert against the naïve and simpleton attitude that made maidens an easy prey of men's seduction strategies. She is aware that by unmasking the male debauchery she also contributes equally to the maturity process and capacity of perception of women: "For virtues dominate vices./And, if there are among women some that are naïve./This Letter can serve them as teaching"(v. 767-769)<sup>14</sup>. Christine's perspicacious remarks did not spare futile women, to which the exemption of judgment

by the poetess imposed energetic reprehension. The frivolous ones also violate the laws of courteous love, which does not release women from taming passion and the overflowing of emotions. The zeal for privacy, circumspection and discretion were so inherent to the female identity that André Capelão speaks of these virtues only in an indirect manner, when he demands from men the appreciation for the delicate spirit of women. The exposure of that which is intimate does not coadunate with the female and medieval status of masterpiece of the creation attributed to Mary, the New Eve (PELIKAN, 2000), and from Mary, by transmission, to all other women.

The intellectual touch of Christine called our attention, patent in the logical and dialectical construction of the letter. The text reproduces the structure of academic debates (NUNES, 1978; ROPS, 1993), stressing the delicacy and subtlety of the writer's argumentation. In harmony with the scholastic dialects, Christine proposes the issue: women are being defamed by noblemen, literates and knights, who deem them as vulgar, frivolous and unstable. After the fact is narrated in detail, the proponent formulates the 'questio', that is, the controversial theme responsible for the divergence of opinions. Are women, by nature, inferior in relation to men? Are those who diminish them right or not?

Christine examines the arguments of the misogyny-based thesis:

In verses they say: Adam, David, Samson,/And Solomon and others have been fully seduced by women; (v. 267-268) Others say that many are the liar/Variable, unstable and frivolous women. (v. 273-274)<sup>15</sup>.

Several voices take part in the scenography of the *Letter*, establishing an authentic polyphony, in which the author gives the floor to the opponents, and then, in the Thomist line of argumentation (GILSON, 2001), alludes to the sophisms of the reductionist view on women. Here is the reply she addresses to those who mentioned the kings of Israel to highlight the harmful female seduction:

By failing to keep their loyalty, seduced by the most beautiful ones/What, in this sense, have David and Solomon, the king, dared?//God himself punished their wrongdoing (v. 318-312, )<sup>16</sup>.

Now, the blame God placed on men, not on women. The thesis on the female frivolity, the

<sup>13</sup>"On, si vols trobar nobilitat de coratge, demana a fe, speranza, caritat, justícia, fortitudo, leyaltat e a les atres virtuts, cor en aquelles stà noblea de coratge, e per aquelles noble cor de cavayler se deffèn a malvestat e engan e a los enemics de cavayleria" (LLULL, 2010, p. 54).

<sup>14</sup>"Car les vertus si enchacent les vices./Et, s'il est des femmes aucunes nyces./Cest' Epistre leur puist estre dotrine".

<sup>15</sup>"Enversdient, Adam, David, Sanson,/Et Salemon et auitres a foison/Furentdeceuz par femme [...] //Autresdient que trop sontmencongieres, /Variables, inconstans et legieres".

<sup>16</sup>"Sanzloiaulténir, nez aux plus belles./Qu'enot David et Salemon le roy?/Dieus'encourça et punileurdesroy".

agenda in men's assemblies, echoes Ovid<sup>17</sup> and Jean de Meung's misogyny<sup>18</sup>. The voices and arguments of the opponents resonate in *The letter to the god of love*. However, Christine proves eximious in the rhetoric technique of taking the inconsistency of the opposing hypothesis to its ultimate consequences:

And if they are fragile and frivolous, // And unstable, simpleton and totally naive // Just as men say that women are, / why do the men who preach find the need / To invest themselves with caution? / And why do those women not subject to them quickly? / Without the aid of art or skills to capture them? / Because if a castle is already taken, meaningless will be war (v. 379-386)<sup>19</sup>.

In the reference to literates and in the allusion to the castle and to art, the inter-textual dialogue of the *Letter* with *The romance of the rose* surfaces. The satire of the courteous love in Meung reproduces an upside-down asceticism: the adventure and risks in the forest to reach the castle and pick the rose, the virgin girl, do not represent the heroism of the one who serves the woman. The obstacles work as an initiation ritual to overcome the rational balance, the fear and the shame. The carnal desire should impose itself over the voice of consciousness in the capture of the maiden. The author subverts the religious sermons and teaches how to listen to temptation and win the inner conflict between respecting the woman's freedom and obeying Jupiter's lust and Venus' instinctive impetus. There is no appreciation for the sensibility and for the intelligence of single or married women. He highlights the man's sagacity that manages to justify, in his own eyes, the use of ambush to conquer the young girl through a prejudicial conception of women: they are all perverted, indiscreet and malicious (MEUNG; LORRIS, 1798).

In contrast, Christine denounces, as a sophism, the vilification of dames and maidens in the *Romance* and in the Court of Paris, which will strength the thesis she defends. Here is the rhetoric strategy of converting, in this verbal war in which the female honor is at stake, the enemy's aggressiveness into strength and conquest of the ally:

What a long process! / What a tough thing! / And light and dark sciences / Are introduced in this [art] and

great adventures! / And how many people to which one has to plea and contest / And how much suffering and obstacles one encounters // To seduce nothing but a virgin, / This is the only goal, by fraud and with caution! / Does an unprotected place require a strong attack? / Why would one put some much effort into that which his hand can reach? / I cannot conceive or understand it. (v. 390-399)<sup>20</sup>.

The author seems to savor the masterstroke with which she injures the opponent, from which the irony and redundancy of the text derives, which do not add new facts to the report, for the sole purpose of revealing the vibration of the one who attacks with jubilation, exulting in the conviction of the victory: "What a great effort one needs to take over an unprotected place, / Or art or skills or great subtlety" (v. 400-401)<sup>21</sup>. Here is now the decisive blow, built with words and delicate mastery to knock the antagonist down: "

To whom all is necessary, / Because it requires art, great ingeniousness and great effort, / To deceive the noble or bourgeois woman, // That is because they have nothing of unstable, / Just as someone would say, and do not take them as so flexible neither (v. 403-406)<sup>22</sup>.

A worthy conquest, even more valuable, being against a strong interlocutor in an uneven battle:

And if someone tells me: all books are full of these qualifications, / That is the answer I most lament, / I answer to you that the books did not do so // The women [...] (v. 407- 410)<sup>23</sup>.

Once again we are before the veiled interlocution of the *Letter* with the *Romance*, in which women are said to be unfaithful and dissolute and do not deserve a man that commits with them in marriage (MEUNG; LORRIS, 1798). To this disdain towards women, Meung adds that, once and unhappily married, the man shall not spend money his wife; on the contrary, he should take possession of her assets and never allow her to have more education than him, under the threat to being subdued by his wife's great knowledge (cf. MEUNG; LORRIS, 1798). In fact, as Christine comments, it is lamentable that the literature is ruled by men. However, this is not the last word. The poetess, who was the first woman to defend the right of women in written and to live off

<sup>17</sup>In *The Art of Love*, Ovid stresses that promises attract women. He advises, therefore, that the male lover should promise and, to have credibility before the loved woman, invoke every and any god, because high above in the skies Jupiter laughs at the oaths of lovers and commands the winds of Aeolus to nullify them (OVID, 1992).

<sup>18</sup>*The Romance of the Rose* also proposes the presents and deception as a means for the man to conquer sexual satisfaction (cf. MEUNG, 1798). Meung was a reader and admirer of Ovid.

<sup>19</sup>"Et comment donc quant fresles et legieres, / Et tournables, nyses et pouentieres / Sont les femmes, si com aucuns clers dient, / Quel besoing doncestil a ceulz qui prient / De tant pour ce pourchacier de cautelles? / Et pour quoy tost ne s'accordentelles // Sanzqu'il faille art n'engin a elles prendre? "

<sup>20</sup>"Quel long procès! quel difficile chose! / Et sciences et cleres et obscures / Y met il la et de grans aventures! / Et que de gent soupploiez et rovez / Et de peines et de baraztrouvez // Pour decevoir sanz plus une pucelle, / S'enest la fin, par fraude et par cautelle! / A foible lieu faut il donc grant assault? / Comment peut on de près faire grant saut? / Je ne sçay pas ceveoir ne comprendre".

<sup>21</sup>"Que grant peine faille a foible lieu prendre, / Ne art n'engin, ne grant soubtiveté".

<sup>22</sup>"Dont convient tout de neccessité, / Puisqu'art convient, grant engin et grant peine, / A decevoir femme noble ou villaine, / Qu'elz ne soient miesi variables, ".

<sup>23</sup>"Et s'on me dit li livre ensont tuit plein, / C'est le respons a maint dont je me plain, / Je leur respons que les livres ne firent // Pas les femmes, ne les choses n'imirent".



the financial return of her works, will not keep her mouth closed until the end of her life.

Christine's virtuosity serves as a counterpoint to the male hegemony. And the fragment that we consider to be the checkmate of the *Letter* evidences the intellectual skill of the author who, according to the medieval religiosity, elects as a premise of her reasoning Christ's statement saying that the good tree can only bear good fruits (Mt. 7, 16-19). First, she applies to the genesis of the woman, that is, Eve, the mentioned axiom, coming up with inferences in favor of the female:

For [God] has configured [the woman] nobly, /And she was created out of a very noble matter, /Not out of the mud/ But out of the very back of the man,/ Whose body already existed, the woman is the sum of him/ The noblest of all things on the surface of the earth (v. 598-604)<sup>24</sup>.

The syllogism that culminates in the praise to the female nature is perfect, taking as a basis the appraisal of men: Adam, 'a very noble matter' from she originates and with whom constitutes the integrity of the human gender. It is possible to notice how flawed and little intelligent the disregard for the female nature is, because the latter implies the disqualification of the man. To Christine, just as in the Genesis, man and woman are two faces of the human nature that are reciprocally complementary.

In a second moment, the author proposes an identical premise, expanding it in a greater universe of causes and effects that includes all humankind: man and woman rescued in their original entirety in the redemption work through the New Eve (BURIDAN, 2000; PELIKAN, 2000; VERDON, 2006). Mary, in the female ascension, began to be an icon of the egalitarian force of Christianity (BASCHET, 2006).

It is good and rightful (let no man be offended by it)/For if there is kindness and value in the woman/Neither shame nor defamation will reach the man, /Because He was born by means of another mother: Mary/If she is of poor quality, He will value nothing, /Because no good fruit comes from a bad tree, /Just as the latter is, [the fruit] shall be as well, /And if she is good, He owes it to her, /Because sons are very similar to their mothers [...] (v. 750-759)<sup>25</sup>.

This argument denounces the stratagem of the opposing thesis. The spell turned against the

sorcerer. Or better: there is no spell or sorcerer. Preconizing the inferior nature of women or insisting on defaming her presupposes despising the historical figure of Christ referenced in the metaphor and periphrasis with which the Master is designated in the people's collective imagery: fruit of Mary's womb. The sacred and the profane conjugate to consolidate the teaching of educator Christine de Pisan, which will not lack affectivity: "Because every man must have a tender heart/ for every man there is a mother" (v. 168-169)<sup>26</sup>.

The last citation constitutes one of the moments when the poetess deviates from the energetic and incisive 'ethos' of the *Letter* to impregnate with softness the rhythm of the verses. Here speaks the mother, Christine de Pisan, entrusted with the education of her brother and kids after the premature death of her husband (ROUX, 2006). The affective bonds that she evokes are dense with signification and history and find an authentic sense in the nuclear family composed of father, mother and children, and set by the Christian marriage, in which the wife began to be the cell 'mater', stable presence and source of the human cohesion and formation of the family.

The woman was the great educator of the Western world. Hers was the duty to expand the dimension of her social influence, assigned with the role of civilizing not only her children, but also her boyfriend, her husband, the vassals and chivalry candidates; and to impregnate internal political relations and diplomacy with affectivity (MACEDO, 1995). In this way, the status of the writer reconstitutes and completes itself with one of her most relevant faces: the moral authority of the mother, with which she attempts to humanize the palatial world. And from the Court, Christine will migrate to the greater space of the French society.

## Conclusion

The literary quarreling, once deflagrated, without this being the initial aim of the author, grew stronger and broke chains, being at the center of public debate from 1401 and 1404. Analogously to newspaper editorials of our days, the writer defined and interpreted the social changes in progress, not perceptible with the naked eye yet. The observation of the everyday life and the knowledge of classic literature served for her to identify the roots of a veiled tension between two lines of force. On one

<sup>24</sup>"Si lui donna fourmemoult noblement, /Et fut faite de moult noble matiere, //Car ne fu pas du lyon de la terre/Maisseulement de la costee de l'omme, /Lequel corps ja estoit, c'enest la somme, /Le plus noble des choses, terriennes."

<sup>25</sup>"Bien et a droit, n'endesplaise a nulz homs, /Car se bonte et valeur a en femme/Honten'est pas a homme ne diffame, /Car ilest né et fait d'autelmerrien, /Se mauvaieseestil ne puetvaloirrien, //Car nul bon fruit de mal arbre ne vient, /Telle qu'elleestressemblerluconvient, /Et se bonne estilendoitvaloirnieulz, /Car aux meres bienressemblent les feulz."

<sup>26</sup>"Car tout homme doitavoir le cuer tendre/ Envers femme qui a tout homme est mere".

hand, the female dignity, traditionally presupposed in the courtesan environment; and, on the other hand, the prejudicial view on women introduced by the reading and production of books inspired in authors of the Antiquity. The harsh words of Christine against Ovid and Meung shook the palatial worldliness and resonated in academic and cultural circles of France, instigating the public opinion to stand for the *Letter* or the *Romance*. It is worth highlighting the social dimension of the art and the author's commitment with defending the virtues of women. Dames and maidens, who Christine did not only represent but equally elevated, thanks to the human vigor and to the emblematic nature of her work.

The plastic beauty of the allegories and of the spaces of Meung's *Romance* and the expressive satire of the female flaws have also gained disciples among youths and prestigious intellectuals. They include Jean de Montreuil and Gontier Col, in addition to the French poet Rabelais. Christine, in turn, counted with allies in the academic and religious world, such as Martin Franc and Jean Gerson – being the latter a chancellor at the University of Paris. Renowned teachers wrote dissertations in the defense of the female honor and of the Christian marriage against the misogyny of the *Romance of the Rose*. However, it was Christine who led the litigation orally and in written against her opponents. The controversy exacerbated: Gontier Col demanded that Christine withdrew the criticism against *The romance of the rose*, which she did not do (ROUX, 2006). On the contrary, Christine did not act under pressure and kept thinking by herself. In the poem: *Le ditié de Jeanne D' Arc* (PISAN, 1429), with which she says goodbye to life, and in the opposite way of the current trends, the writer also gives the floor to Jeanne D' Arc (1412-1431), who will not have a voice or turn to defend herself and, with the lies and the ignominy of the political interest, would be sentenced to death in the simulacrum of the judgment that did not happen<sup>27</sup>. Christine spoke for her!<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Jeanne D' Arc foi capturada em Paris em 1430, vendida aos ingleses pelos burgueses e queimada viva, em 1431, por um tribunal eclesiástico manipulado pelos ingleses, falsamente acusada de heresia. Contou com a defesa de Gerson (cf. BAUMGARTNER, 2002). Em 1920, foi canonizada pela Igreja Católica.

<sup>28</sup> The original text *Le ditié de Jeanne D'Arc* can be found in Gállica Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 2014.

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