4-2021

A Privileged Equality: The Divisive Ideals of Christine de Pizan and White Feminists

Emilee Gu
Stevenson School

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/aujh>

Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gu, Emilee (2021) "A Privileged Equality: The Divisive Ideals of Christine de Pizan and White Feminists," *Armstrong Undergraduate Journal of History*. Vol. 11 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.

DOI: 10.20429/aujh.2021.110107

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/aujh/vol11/iss1/7>

This article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Armstrong Undergraduate Journal of History by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.

Editorial Introduction

This is the *Armstrong Undergraduate Journal of History*'s first time publishing work by a high school student, and we hope to establish a precedent for publishing more works by high schoolers in the future. History is important because it gives us an understanding of the world, who peoples and places were, and how they came to be. We can see and nurture our successes, as well as learn from our failures. By providing a space for high school students to publish their works, we hope to encourage more young students to engage with history, and to foster a deeper appreciation and a love of learning. (Editor, Sabrina Wade)

“But having resort to many dissolute women for evil life (as lechers commonly do), he thought, or feigned to know, that all women were of that kind; for he had known no others. And if he had blamed only the dishonorable ones and counseled men to flee them, it would have been a good and just teaching.”

Christine de Pizan

A Privileged Equality:

The Divisive Ideals of Christine de Pizan and White Feminists

Emilee Gu

Robert Louis Stevenson High School

(Pebble Beach, California)

Christine de Pizan (1364 – c.1430) was the most prolific female writer of the Middle Ages. Part of how she became famous was through letters exchanged during what came to be known as the “Querelle de la Rose,” as well as her book *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*. In these works, Christine criticizes male authors for their misogynistic portrayal of women, especially Jean de Meun (c. 1240 – c. 1305) who wrote the continuation of the *Roman de la Rose*, the object of the “querelle.” Christine denounces his work for its disrespectful approach to women. Contemporary scholars have examined her effort to establish herself as a representative of all women, and most conclude that her work serves as an early example of feminism and furthers gender equality. However, some scholars have raised questions about the nature of Christine’s feminism, which they have called essentialist and exclusionary. In this paper, I will focus on the *Epistre Au Dieu D’Amours*, Christine’s letter to Jean de Montreuil, and her letter to Gontier Col as the basis of my analysis of Christine’s feminism. Then, I will compare Christine’s ideas with some representative examples of “white feminism” from the second wave. I argue that despite Christine’s contributions in sparking feminist ideas, she created a proto-feminist work that excludes those who do not fit into her ideal of the “good woman.” Christine’s feminism, which operates at the expense of “bad women,” foreshadows the divisiveness that would later surface in “white feminism.” This fifteenth-century feminism is an important forerunner to the problems that second-wave feminism was to face in the twentieth century. By connecting different times in history, we can better recognize patterns of oppression and endeavor towards equality.

The “white feminism” I refer to here is a feminism that was established by assuming the universality of white, middle-class women’s experiences, taking its cue from books like Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), a discourse entailing the struggles faced by miserable white middle-class housewives. These housewives fought for the right to work outside their

homes, but black women and other women of color had been working outside their homes for centuries. This struggle had nothing to do with helping them with their often terrible labor conditions. Furthermore, as Bell Hooks pointed out in her book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984), Friedan fundamentally ignores the question of who would take care of the domestic realm when women go out to work. While white housewives sought liberty in their career, women of color would have to go into the service industry and sacrifice their leisure time taking care of those housewives' children. White feminism prompted women of color to fail in this system with unequal distribution of power affected by race. It is "telling of Second Wave feminism that [it] focused solely on gender oppression," writes Becky Thompson.¹

In the 1960s and '70s, white feminists disregarded the work being done by a multiracial movement for equality. They overlooked the efforts made by many culturally diverse organizations to further gender equality and the voices of "militant" women who battled white supremacy.² Instead, white feminists assumed that the history of the second wave started with white feminism, only evolving later to include "others." However, the existence of black feminist groups that emerged in those decades, like the Combahee River Collective and the national Chicana Feminist conference held in 1971, indicated that women of color were equally as active as white feminists in the early stages of the second wave, or perhaps more so.³ At the core of white feminism lies ignorance about white privilege, which allows white elite feminists to think about gender without having to consider race, class, and other defining factors. Such ignorance

¹ Becky Thompson, "Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 28, no. 2 (2002): 344.

² *Ibid.*, 341.

³ E. Frances White, *Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and Politics of Respectability* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 39.

led white feminists to exert oppression against members of their own sex, whom they perceived as being of a different race. Fashioning themselves as “leaders” of the movement, white feminists produced hierarchies that deterred other women from entering the front lines of feminism.⁴ These were the exact hierarchies that feminists tried hard to unmake. The toxic divisiveness that scholars identified and criticized in “white feminism” had already shown its roots in Christine’s writings.

As a woman in the Middle Ages, Christine de Pizan enjoyed a privileged life. She was born to a family with close ties to the French court. At a time when women rarely received an education, Christine’s father supported her studies and her passion for Latin and rhetoric. Although Christine entered an arranged marriage with Etienne du Castel (1356 – 1390), her writings describe her as deeply in love with her husband. Her very first works were lyrics and narrative poetry written after her husband’s death, lamenting the loss of her beloved.⁵ She became a widow when she was twenty-five.⁶ According to Christine, the reason she became a professional writer was to support her household.

Christine de Pizan’s letter exchanges with scholars debating the significance of the *Roman de la Rose* became famous. The *Roman de la Rose* was written in the 12th century; Jean de Meun was long dead by the time Christine and others were writing about his book. The critiques of the book from Christine and scholars like Pierre Col clashed with Jean de Meun’s

⁴ Stephanie Gilmore, ed., *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-wave Feminism in the United States* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 24.

⁵ Roberta Krueger, "Towards Feminism: Christine De Pizan, Female Advocacy, and Women's Textual Communities in the Late Middle Ages and beyond," *Oxford Handbooks Online*, January 28, 2013, 593.

⁶ Sheila Delaney, "'Mothers to Think Back Through': Who are They? The Ambiguous Example of Christine de Pizan," in *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers*, by Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 182.

supporters like Jean de Montreil (1354 – 1418) and Gontier Col (c. 1350 – 1418). The letters were made public and collected, and this debate was referred to as the “Querelle de la Rose.” During this fervent debate, Christine criticized Jean de Meun’s negative representation of women in the *Roman de la Rose*. She specifically objected the use of obscenity by Lady Reason in her section of the romance. Medieval European literature, almost solely composed by white male authors, had a tradition of misogyny. Christine identified the root of this systematic misogyny as the lack of female writers during her time. Drawing on her own experiences, she attacked the *Roman de la Rose* for untruthfully generalizing all women as bad and dishonest.

Considering the historical context of Christine’s writing, I want to first define and discuss the feminism I refer to in her works in order to avoid anachronism. According to historian Christine Bard, in France, the word “feminism” was first associated with women’s emancipation in the 1880s.⁷ Therefore, Christine would not have been familiar with this word.⁸ Furthermore, (as many feminists say) the definition of feminism is constantly evolving.⁹ Thus, scholars argue that we should approach Christine’s work with historical sensitivity and consider feminism in the broadest possible sense of the word.¹⁰ For the purpose of this paper, I am defining “feminism” as the act of asserting gender equality. Otherwise, analyzing Christine according to modern feminist standards would be unfair to her work.¹¹ Here, I will specifically examine how Christine treats

⁷ According to Bard, Hubertine Auclert was the first French woman to declare herself a feminist; Christine Bard, *Les filles de Marianne: Histoire des féminismes 1914–1940*. (Paris: Fayard, 1995), 12.

⁸ Keiko Nowacka, "Reflections on Christine De Pizan's 'Feminism,'" *Australian Feminist Studies* 17, no. 37 (March 2002): 82.

⁹ Elizabeth Grosz, "What is Feminist Theory?," in *Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory*, ed. Carole Pateman and Elizabeth Grosz (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 193-96.

¹⁰ Nowacka, "Reflections on Christine," 82; Krueger, "Towards Feminism," 591.

¹¹ Nowacka, "Reflections on Christine," 82.

women in her writings. By connecting contemporary feminist theory to Christine's work, I intend to bridge the gap between historical female thinkers and feminists today.¹² Despite being aware that Christine seems to only write about white people, I do not condemn Christine's feminism based on modern notions of diversity, since perceptions of race and ethnicity were very different in medieval Europe. Instead, I will identify how her writings portray the stark difference between "good women" and "bad women," noting that this is a simplification of how women live. Maybe from the very start, in medieval Europe, feminism came in a divisive form, which later evolved into the problems we recognize in the "white feminism" of the second wave.

Scholarship on Christine's feminism published after 2000 has leaned towards the pro-Christine side. Drawing from my experience with five pro-Christine articles, I identified six common characteristics that these scholars focus on in Christine's writings. Pro-Christine scholars emphasize these traits of Christine's writings and use them as evidence to indicate that Christine had a positive impact on the equality of all women. First, pro-Christine scholars often mention the historical context in which Christine composed her work: the Middle Ages.¹³ They often use the fact that Christine was writing in the fifteenth century to account for Christine's somewhat divisive feminist ideas. Second, all of them praise her attempts to make women's voices heard and her efforts to assert women's equal intellectual capabilities.¹⁴ Third, the

¹² Penny A. Weiss, "The Politics of Ignorance: Christine de Pizan," in *Canon Fodder: Historical Women Political Thinkers* (n.p.: Penn State University Press, 2009), 34.

¹³ Krueger, "Towards Feminism," 591; Douglas Kelly, "3 Misogyny, Introspection, and Radical Opinion," in *Christine De Pizan's Changing Opinion: A Quest for Certainty in the Midst of Chaos* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007), 78; Sarah Gwyneth Ross, "4 Models of Feminist Argument," in *The Birth of Feminism: Woman as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 132; Nowacka, "Reflections on Christine," 92.

¹⁴ Krueger, "Towards Feminism," 593; Kelly, "3 Misogyny," 80; Karen Green, "Isabeau de Bavière and the Political Philosophy of Christine de Pizan," *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 32, no. 2 (2006): 250; Ross, "4 Models," 132; Nowacka, "Reflections on Christine," 84.

presence of a proficient female writer in the patriarchal Middle Ages is itself deemed feminist by some pro-Christine scholars.¹⁵ In other words, Christine herself serves as an example that women are equally capable when faced with intellectual challenges. Furthermore, pro-Christine scholars remark on Christine's advocacy for women as those who are necessary for creating domestic life and her argument that women are often "victims" in their marriages.¹⁶ Scholars believe that her arguments challenge patriarchal family stereotypes and the defamation of married women. According to these scholars, Christine gives honest advice to women who might be suffering from domestic violence. Additionally, in the five articles I examined, all authors praise Christine's use of historical female figures to illustrate women's equal intellectual competence and laudable virtues.¹⁷ These authors often point to Christine's book *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* and her creation of the imaginary "Cité des Dames," which housed celebrated women throughout history, as evidence of her positive impact. Lastly, pro-Christine scholars champion her audacity in challenging male authority in the fields of literature and philosophy.¹⁸ In her works, Christine questions the validity of misogynistic statements from some canonical authors, including but not limited to Aristotle (384 – c. 322 B.C.), Ovid (43 B.C. – c. 17 C.E.), and the famous French poet Jean de Meun.

Many of the above characteristics serve as valid evidence that Christine supports gender equality, but the pro-Christine authors fail to notice that her distinction between good women

¹⁵ Krueger, "Towards Feminism," 592; Ross, "4 Models," 132.

¹⁶ Krueger, "Towards Feminism," 596-98; Ross, "4 Models," 138.

¹⁷ Krueger, "Towards Feminism," 597; Kelly, "3 Misogyny," 83; Green, "Isabeau de Bavière," 267; Ross, "4 Models," 134; Nowacka, "Reflections on Christine," 92.

¹⁸ Krueger, "Towards Feminism," 595; Kelly, "3 Misogyny," 79-81; Green, "Isabeau de Bavière," 252; Nowacka, "Reflections on Christine," 88.

and bad women can be oppressive. All five of the pro-Christine authors examined here touch on this distinction of Christine's in their works.¹⁹ However, they praise such a distinction, arguing that it furthers moral development in her readers (because otherwise, do those readers not know good from bad?) and describe this act as an expression of gender equality (because Christine argued that there are not only bad men but also women who are immoral). There are no specifications of the standards by which these critics judge the moral righteousness of the female characters in Christine's writing. In other words, they merely adopt "a hierarchy of virtue" of Christine's, an evaluation system designed by Christine's personal beliefs regarding virtue.²⁰ However, the definition of virtue is constantly changing, just like the definition of feminism is, and cannot be objectively assessed. Essentially, Christine established the quality of "good" as the defining quality of those who participate in her feminism. The discriminatory nature of Christine's feminism surfaced during her arguments made in the "Querelle," coinciding with the exact problems in "white feminism" of the second wave Anglo-American feminism.

Christine does not define what she means by "bad women," but she relates such women to professions like sex work. At the core of Christine's prejudice against "bad women" is her ignorance of her own privilege. While Christine was educated to write and provided the opportunity to socialize with the nobility, "prostitutes and whores" had no other options to sustain themselves.²¹ They did not have similar privileges to pursue such moral rightness as that

¹⁹ Krueger, "Towards Feminism," 597; Kelly, "3 Misogyny," 83-84; Green, "Isabeau de Bavière," 253; Ross, "4 Models," 139; Nowacka, "Reflections on Christine," 87.

²⁰ S. H. Rigby, "The Wife of Bath, Christine De Pizan, and the Medieval Case for Women," *The Chaucer Review* 35, no. 2 (2000): 144.

²¹ Joseph L. Baird and John Robert Kane, *La Querelle De La Rose: Letters and Documents* (Chapel Hill: U.N.C. Dept. of Romance Languages, 1978), 35.

which was championed by Christine since they could barely feed themselves. The ignorance of her privilege led Christine to discriminate against “bad women.” We have no way of knowing whether Christine willfully ignored such a distinction, sacrificing some women to uphold the gender equality of the few, or unintentionally overlooked experiences different from her own. Nevertheless, Christine silences “bad women” the same way patriarchy marginalizes women’s experiences. On the one hand, she champions virtuous female characters from history and discusses female sovereignty to debunk patriarchal misogyny. On the other hand, she lets the men “possess bad women” as if they are no more than objects and rejects discussions about feminism that include “bad women.”²² She even applauds misogynistic attacks in the name of “just, noble, and praiseworthy teaching.”²³ Innately, Christine’s feminism has a double standard.

In her writings, Christine willfully avoids discussions of “bad women” and makes gender equality a privilege only afforded to “good women.” Christine divides women into “bad” and “good,” and any woman she disagrees with becomes “bad.” During her attacks on Ovid in her poem *Epistre Au Dieu D’Amours*, Christine briefly mentions her reasons behind the exclusion of “bad women”: “He [Ovid] accused them [women] of immorality, leading lives full of filth, ugliness, and wickedness. I deny that they have such vices, and I promise to champion them against anyone who may throw down the gauntlet: I mean, of course, honorable women -- I include no worthless ones in my account.”²⁴ In a straightforward manner, Christine clarifies that her feminism does not celebrate or discuss “worthless bad women.” This is because she defines “bad women” as the polar opposite of “good women.” If a woman has any connection to “vices,”

²² Ibid., 36.

²³ Ibid., 36.

²⁴ Ibid., 35.

just as misogynistic literature describes all women, she would not belong in Christine's "good women" category. In addition, Christine does not specify the standards by which she judges between "bad women" and "good women." She merely uses the bad moral influence of "bad women" as an excuse to marginalize them. To her, because "bad women" are so bad, they should not have any rights or be protected by equality at all. By excluding "bad women" from her feminist discussions, Christine marginalizes types of women who are different from her, thus silencing their voices in the name of virtue.

Christine's ideologies described later in this poem further explain how she establishes that when she refers to "women," she always means "good women" and is never referring to the "bad women" she excludes from consideration. "Bad women" are not even considered to be women at all. In a paragraph, Christine explains her reasoning behind her discriminations against "bad women":

For there can be no doubt that when a man plunges into such vileness, he certainly does not seek out well-bred ladies or reputable women: he neither knows them nor has anything to do with them. He wants only those who suit his purpose, prostitutes and whores. Is a debauché worthy to possess anything of value? Such a man pursues all women and then believes he has thoroughly concealed his shame by condemning them with his subtle reasoning once he has grown old and impotent. But if someone attacked only evil women, and, as these men have done, advised against pursuing them, then some good could come of it. This --- which is not to degrade all women indiscriminately -- would be a reasonable act, a just, noble, and praiseworthy teaching.²⁵

In this excerpt, Christine argues that not only do "bad women" deserve to be in relationships with misogynistic male authors, they also partially account for the negative writings against "well-bred ladies or reputable women." Christine believes that the patriarchal attacks in medieval literature could be justified if only directed against "bad women." She even asks a rhetorical question in the following sentence, implying that "bad women" are "possessed" by men and are

²⁵ Ibid., 36.

considered as “nothing of value.” Thus, we can conclude that to Christine, the misogynist descriptions of women, such as “vices, filth, ugliness, and wickedness,” truthfully describe her idea of “bad women.”²⁶

In addition, “bad women” do not even belong in Christine’s interpretation of the term “women.” In the same poem, *Epistre Au Dieu D’Amours*, Christine starts speaking for the entire female sex: “Women kill no one, wound no one, torture no one; they are not treacherous; they set no fires, disinherit no one, poison no one, take neither gold nor silver, cheat no one out of his wealth or inheritance, make no false contracts, nor bring any harm to kingdoms, duchies, or empires.”²⁷

If Christine’s notion of “bad women” is centered upon evilness and “vices,” according to her earlier statements in this poem, how could she all of a sudden assume that “women” are innocent of any harm? This is because “good women” assumes the place of “women” while “bad women” becomes “the other” in Christine’s writings. As a result, “bad women” are not included in discussions of misogyny and patriarchy because “women” has been defined to mean only “good women.” Christine entirely overlooks the fact that her very concept of “women” is discriminatory. Christine’s feminism, which was built to protect “women” according to Christine, only defends the good ones in reality. It becomes a privilege for some instead of a necessity for all. Furthermore, Christine’s assumption that her voice represents the whole female sex brings out the question of who gets to speak about and for women?²⁸ Ironically, many pro-

²⁶ Ibid., 36.

²⁷ Ibid., 38.

²⁸ Judith Evans, *Feminist Theory Today: An Introduction to Second-wave Feminism*, reprinted ed. (London: Sage, 1998), 21.

Christine scholars highlight Christine's effort to shed light on the significance of female representation when she pointed out the lack of female writers in the Middle Ages. However, it seems a rather arrogant claim considering the lack of representation of so-called "bad women" in her writings.

In the second wave, Christine's exclusion of "bad women" would look like the marginalization of women of color, and the absence of discussions about different experiences. Speaking on all women's behalf, second wave white feminists focused solely on white, middle-class experiences, thus contributing to a troublingly narrow representation of women. They failed to address how race and other components affect gender. Yet, according to *The Combahee River Collective Statement* (1977), the combination of multiple oppressions (race, gender, sexuality, and class) affects the lives of many other women who consequently share starkly different life experiences. White feminists' failure to acknowledge these differences made the struggles of these women virtually invisible.

For both Christine and second wave white feminists, upholding their exclusionary feminisms required reinforcing the mainstream image of a single group of women. This way, they alienated voices from women of diverse backgrounds. In Christine's case, it was to promote the virtuous "good women," who were from aristocratic backgrounds and were often well-educated. For second wave white feminists, it was to assume the middle-class experience of white housewives as the universal.²⁹ Second wave white feminists marginalized black women so that feminism could never be "narrated" from their experiences.³⁰ The roots of both feminisms

²⁹ Dreama G. Moon and Michelle A. Holling, "'White Supremacy in Heels': (white) Feminism, White Supremacy, and Discursive Violence," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 17, no. 2 (April 2, 2020): 254.

³⁰ Sari Biklen, Catherine Marshall, and Diane Pollard, "Experiencing Second-wave Feminism in the USA," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 29, no. 4 (December 2008): 460.

are similar: they come from a shared ignorance (whether intentional or not) of “the needs, desires, and concerns of” women who were not born into the same level of privilege.³¹ From the very start, Christine took a wrong approach to advocate for gender equality.

By examining how Christine argues against the ideas of Jean de Meun’s character, Reason, we can also see how Christine dismisses any voice that is different from hers. In her letter to Gontier Col, she mentions her opposition to the use of obscenity by the goddess Reason. To Christine, Reason is dishonorable when she names Jupiter’s testicles directly. To express her displeasure and attack Jean de Meun’s support for Reason’s words, she says: “In God’s name, what can one find there but sophistical exhortations filled with ugliness and things horrible to recall?”³² This was not the first time Christine mentions words such as “ugly” and “evil” to attack the language of her opponents (this includes “bad women”). Regardless of the validity of her argument about obscenity, she attacks the language used by her opponent to appeal to her audience ethically and emotionally, rather than logically. In other words, she would apply such a strategy to anything that displeased her. The fact that she establishes one kind of voice as the only legitimate voice that is allowed to be expressed is very troubling.

Lastly, Christine attempts to classify “good women” as victims and strengthen her “good women feminism” at the expense of “bad women,” which foreshadows the problems with second wave feminists who sought to establish the image of the “white victim.” Christine’s writings reveal how she experiments with a “good woman victim” image: “But let’s speak for a moment of deceit. I simply cannot comprehend how a woman can deceive a man. She never pursues him,

³¹ Moon and Holling, “White Supremacy,” 254.

³² Baird and Kane, *La Querelle*, 49.

begging after him at his house; she doesn't give a thought to him, nor even remember him; whereas men come to deceive and entrap women."³³

Christine believes that "bad women" are liars who hurt people, just as they are described by misogynistic writers. Again, the term "women" could only refer to "good women" here. In this way, Christine throws "bad women" out of the picture and focuses on discussing the power dynamics between two players: male oppressors and good women victims. According to Christine, men are to account for all forms of oppression while "good women" suffer and remain innocent of any harm. Little does she acknowledge her own contributions towards discrimination against women who deviate from her "good woman" ideal. Similar to how the patriarchy oppresses the female sex, she imposes the same kind of misogyny against "bad women," one which she fiercely tries to debunk for "good women." By drawing a clear-cut boundary and polarizing the "good" and the "bad," Christine defends a limited gender equality only afforded to the women who are educated to be virtuous enough to fit her standards.

Christine's "good women" image is a prototype of the "white women as victim" ideology.³⁴ The toxicity of such an ideology is shown in the disproportionately high media coverage on missing white, middle-class women, and the American society's overwhelming sympathy and blindness when it comes to a case of a white woman raped by a black man. Portraying themselves as victims incapable of hurting others, white feminists were indifferent to "white women's allegiance" to racist oppression.³⁵ They ignored their own racial discrimination against feminists of color within their organizations, holding white men as solely responsible for

³³ Ibid., 36.

³⁴ Moon and Holling, "'White Supremacy,'" 256.

³⁵ Ibid., 256.

both racism and sexism. In fact, those who exercised this “white women victim” image not only brew racist ideals themselves, they also harm the interests of women of color, whose voices were thus silenced from speaking out against the double oppression they experienced. The Combahee River Collective illustrates how double oppression plays out for black women: according to their statement, growing up, black women were told by white people to stay quiet to appear more “lady-like” and less objectionable to white people. Reinforcing the “white women victim” ideology led society to deem women different from the mainstream image to be “unwoman like.” Portraying a selective group of women as absolute victims would only result in the oppression of others.

At the core of both Christine’s feminism and second wave white feminism was an advocacy of equality that sustains itself by reinforcing the oppression of marginalized groups. In the fifteenth century, Christine built her own moral hierarchy which excluded certain groups of women, the “morally bad” ones. In the twentieth century, this oppressive form of advocacy for gender equality would emerge in the writings of renowned second wave feminists. One example would be Elaine Showalter who attempted to create a literary canon of female writers, one, as Toril Moi pointed out in her book *Sexual/Textual Politics*, that would ultimately result in another kind of oppression by producing a hierarchy of writers and their works. Building up hierarchies just to combat another hierarchy would only result in endless cycles of oppression. I hope to have illuminated the problems within early forms of feminist writings instead of blindly celebrating any forms of writing that support gender equality. If we leave such historical works uncriticized, it would only lead to the encouragement of more divisive ideas. Scholars have already recognized the divisiveness in many works created in the twentieth century, but discrimination existed far earlier than white feminists of the second wave. If we look further

back in history, to the works that shaped the fundamental ideals of our societies, we can continue to draw connections between different times in history and work on combating the deep-rooted divisiveness in our modern world. In this way, we can endeavor to shorten our own distance from true equality.

About the author

Emilee (Jiahui) Gu is a senior at Robert Louis Stevenson High School in Pebble Beach, California. She wrote this paper as part of her independent study during the summer after her junior year. She looks forward to exploring gender & history research in college next year.

Bibliography

Baird, Joseph L., and John Robert Kane. *La Querelle De La Rose: Letters and Documents*. Chapel Hill: U.N.C. Dept. of Romance Languages, 1978.

Biklen, Sari, Catherine Marshall, and Diane Pollard. "Experiencing Second-wave Feminism in the USA." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 29, no. 4 (December 2008): 451-69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596300802410185>.

Delaney, Sheila. "'Mothers to Think Back Through': Who are They? The Ambiguous Example of Christine de Pizan." In *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers*, by Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman, 177-98. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987.

- Evans, Judith. *Feminist Theory Today: An Introduction to Second-wave Feminism*. London: Sage, 1998.
- Gilmore, Stephanie, ed. *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-wave Feminism in the United States*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008.
- Green, Karen. "Isabeau de Bavière and the Political Philosophy of Christine de Pizan." *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 32, no. 2 (2006): 247-72.
- Gross, E. "What Is Feminist Theory?" In *Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory*, edited by Carole Pateman and E. Gross, 190-204. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986.
- Kelly, Douglas. "3 Misogyny, Introspection, and Radical Opinion." In *Christine De Pizan's Changing Opinion: A Quest for Certainty in the Midst of Chaos*, 77-106. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007.
- Krueger, Roberta. "Towards Feminism: Christine De Pizan, Female Advocacy, and Women's Textual Communities in the Late Middle Ages and beyond." *Oxford Handbooks Online*, January 28, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199582174.013.031>.
- Moon, Dreama G., and Michelle A. Holling. "'White Supremacy in Heels': (white) Feminism, White Supremacy, and Discursive Violence." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 17, no. 2 (April 2, 2020): 253-60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420.2020.1770819>.
- Nowacka, Keiko. "Reflections on Christine De Pizan's 'Feminism.'" *Australian Feminist Studies* 17, no. 37 (March 2002): 81-97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164640220123470>.
- Rigby, S. H. "The Wife of Bath, Christine De Pizan, and the Medieval Case for Women." *The Chaucer Review* 35, no. 2 (2000): 133-65. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25096124>.

- Ross, Sarah Gwyneth. "4 Models of Feminist Argument." In *The Birth of Feminism: Woman as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England*, 131-90. N.p.: Harvard University Press, 2009.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjk2vmx.8>.
- Thompson, Becky. "Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism." *Feminist Studies* 28, no. 2 (2002): 337-60. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178747>.
- Weiss, Penny A. "The Politics of Ignorance: Christine de Pizan." In *Canon Fodder: Historical Women Political Thinkers*, 30-55. N.p.: Penn State University Press, 2009.
<https://doi.org/10.5325/j.ctv14gp6fg.6>.
- White, E. Frances. *Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and Politics of Respectability*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010.