

Douglas Kelly. *Christine de Pizan's Changing Opinion: A Quest for Certainty in the Midst of Chaos.* D. S. Brewer, 2007. Pp. xiv + 226. ISBN: 978-1-84384-111-1.

DOUGLAS KELLY'S *Christine de Pizan's Changing Opinion* is an important work that considers the evolution of Christine's opinions on three important issues in the course of her works. Kelly ultimately demonstrates that being able to lay bare these changes in her opinion marks her work as important for understanding the development of subjectivity as a concept. Kelly also unfolds descriptions of Christine's rhetorical techniques (chapter one), including her practice of topical invention for her personified allegories such as Lady Opinion and Lady Philosophy. In this manner, Kelly provides a map for how Christine's opinions are shaped and can alter over time. In chapter two the change—what Kelly calls “the major breakthrough in her world view” (77), largely attributable to her study of Boethius and Aquinas—is presented and examined alongside the rhetoric of the *Advison Cristine*. Christine's thought shifts blame for her “political, intellectual, and personal difficulties” (3) from Fortune to Opinion. It is also in the first and second chapters that we find distinctions between true opinion, or opinion reached through the intellectual virtue of discretion (22-23) and exercise of faith, and false opinion or presumption (*cuidier*).

Kelly goes on to discuss three main topics, each occupying a chapter of the book and about which Christine has changed her opinion over the course of her literary works: misogyny; chaste, chivalric love; and self-interest. Each of these chapters considers multiple works by Christine as appropriate to the topic so that one emerges from the book with an expansive sense of the breadth of her literary production. Chapter three addresses Christine's struggle to reject misogyny as presented in the *Cité des dames*. This rejection entails confronting accepted authorities and opinions that confirm misogyny and differ from Christine's own passionate feeling and experience as a woman. Kelly lays out specifically how in the *Cité des dames* and *Le Livre des trois vertus* Reason, Rectitude, and Justice become not only allegorical hostesses but the intellectual virtues with which Christine is able to evaluate opinions; through these three mental processes then, she can come to the conclusion that her own *vray sentiment* that denies misogyny is true opinion (105). Chapter four plots the shift in attitude toward ideal love in Christine's work, which extends from acceptance and praise in her early lyric cycles to a complete rejection of ideal love in the *Duc des vrais amants*. Kelly attentively clarifies that this shift in opinion has nothing to do with either prudish rejection of consummated love or frigidity, but rather an acute awareness of the dangers and difficulties that faced women

who might be merely suspected of lacking chastity—something she herself was accused of and vehemently denied after her husband's death (126). Thus, while majority opinion may have thought ideal love could inspire greatness in knights, Christine rejects this idea because it is both unreliable and changeable and may pose dangers to women, who are particularly at risk of rape and other maltreatment should their chastity be questioned.

Chapter five turns from the personal and explicitly gender-related realm to the political, and it plots the progress of her opinion about self-interest, ultimately showing that Christine approves of enlightened self-interest that considers the good of all, something she finds modeled explicitly in the life of Charles V. This chapter is also particularly insightful in terms of uncovering parallel structures in Christine's works that might not be readily recognizable, such as the strong emphasis on order and structure that unite both the architectural metaphor in *Cité des dames* and the selective biography of *Le Livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V*. The final chapter of Kelly's book shifts away from the content of Christine's writing, developing instead an argument that situates her work within current scholarship on literary subjectivity, such as that by Michel Zink. This chapter additionally situates Christine within a tradition of works that address opinion and evaluation thereof as a topic, a tradition that comes to fruition in Montaigne.

Kelly's work on Christine reflects an immense amount of knowledge not only about Christine's own works but also their rhetorical and historical milieux. That knowledge is masterfully arranged so that those approaching the book can easily access the later chapters once the foundations of the argument in the first two have been absorbed. The concluding chapter flows naturally out of the previous chapters when it repositions Christine in the French canon, not as a woman but as an author whose writing reflects important moments in the development of the concept of opinion in the French canon. The range of Christine's works investigated by Kelly should be celebrated, but it may also make this book less accessible to scholars who are familiar only with *Cité des dames*. Such issues of accessibility are generally avoided with regard to language as the French from the primary sources is always readily translated, either in brackets within the main text or in footnotes, though one might note that French secondary sources are untranslated. In the end, however, the strengths of Kelly's monograph far outstrip in value any issues with accessibility. The book makes a significant contribution to Christine de Pizan studies by bringing a close analytical study of her rhetoric into conjunction with socio-historical information as well as contemporary theories of the mind. And while this work is not explicitly feminist

in approach, as Kelly himself admits in his introduction (4-5), it is nonetheless important for feminist scholars in its reaffirmation of Christine de Pizan as an important author of the Middle Ages and in its discursive mapping of Christine's own thought on the subjects of misogyny and love.

Marisa S. Sikes
University of New Mexico