

THE QUARREL OF THE ROMAN DE LA ROSE AND
FOURTEENTH-CENTURY HUMANISM

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

This dissertation sets out to provide a coherent and consistent explanation for the disagreements between defenders and attackers of the Roman de la Rose in the literary debate known to history of the "Quarrel of the Roman de la Rose." It concentrates upon studying similar literary debates engaged in by earlier and contemporary Italian humanists, and all known literary disputes which involved any of the defenders of the Roman.

The Introduction reviews the history of recent scholarship on the Quarrel and notes its shortcomings. The methodological approach taken in the dissertation is explained and defended, in particular the fact that the dissertation really examines only those who defended the Roman in the Quarrel, and not those who attacked it (except peripherally).

Chapter I demonstrates that both attackers and defenders of the Roman agreed that what was really in dispute was whether it was proper to compose or to study poetry

which did not conform to Christian values in its literal sense. The contributions of the defenders of the Roman are shown to be drawn from, and to be part of, a single fourteenth-century humanist tradition of defenses of poetry which, in turn, was really a defense of humanism itself.

Chapter II shows that the defense of allegory, of literature without an explicitly Christian literal sense, is the essence of both the Quarrel and of all fourteenth-century humanist defenses of poetry.

Chapter III shows how the political and intellectual climate of late fourteenth-century Paris gave rise to anti-humanist attitudes which could naturally have been translated into anti-Roman attitudes.

Chapter IV reveals how the seemingly traditional arguments used by humanists in defense of classical literature and by the defenders of the Roman in defense of that poem were really a mask to conceal new views concerning the secular nature of literary activity which were bound to be disturbing to more traditionally minded persons. A real conflict between humanists and theologians is shown to have existed.

Chapter IV shows that the Quarrel of the Roman

tells us little about the Roman itself, but a great deal about early humanism and the development of a "nationalist" sense of French culture. It also suggests that the phenomenon of humanism ought to be viewed as a product of a single class of men, secretary-notaries, whose origins in the social and economic developments which led to the nation-state ought to be investigated in the future.

The three Appendices give a detailed study of all the known literary disputes (other than the Quarrel of the Roman itself) which involved any of the defenders of the Roman. Certain conclusions are drawn which are relevant to the study of the Quarrel and which are utilized in the main body of the thesis and confirmed by a study of the humanist defenses of poetry. These Appendices represent the first detailed study to be devoted to these important literary disputes.