

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

Grover Carr Furr III

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## PREFACE

This dissertation began almost a decade ago as an attempt to solve an unsolved problem in the literary history of medieval France. The problem was to present a coherent and consistent explanation of the disagreements between the two sides in the Quarrel of the Roman de la Rose. By "coherent" I mean consistent with those historical facts which have been firmly established by scholars working with primary sources. By "consistent" I mean consistent with some philosophy of historical causation.

It soon became clear to me that a number of scholars were, or recently had been, also engaged in studying the Quarrel and the historical and literary problems closely related to it. These researchers combined great perspicacity with scholarly skills developed over many years. I could not hope to equal their mastery of the skills of primary research: expert knowledge of classical and medieval Latin; of MS analysis, calligraphy, chronology; of familiarity with the primary sources of the time, both historical and literary, humanist and non-humanist. Further, the thoroughness with which they had penetrated the secondary literature convinced me that, in this respect, I could do little more than follow in their tracks.

Yet it was also clear that, despite this erudition, these same scholars had failed to make much headway in giving a coherent and consistent explanation of the Quarrel of the Roman. Since this failure could not be due to lack of skill or effort, I felt it must be due to an inadequate historical perspective. All these scholars, as I came to recognize, have two things in common. First, they do not articulate the philosophy of historical causation with which they approach their primary research. This might mean that they are themselves unconscious of what presuppositions they bring to the task of examining and explaining history. Or--what amounts to much the same thing in practice--they may assume that there is no need to articulate the philosophy of historical causation which they hold, that their assumptions about the nature of the historical process can remain "unspoken" because they will be viewed as "obviously correct" by those who read their works.

Second, all these historians in fact share much the same approach to literary history. In common with other devotees of the "history of ideas" approach they tend, on the whole though not with rigorous consistency, to make an assumption which they leave unspoken and uninvestigated. That is the assumption that an event in intellectual history is adequately explained once the antecedents of the

literary products of that event have been identified. The examination of primary documents is undertaken with the main goal in view of identifying the "tradition," the intellectual influences of earlier primary documents upon those under investigation.

Obviously it is very important (as well as often very challenging) to identify the intellectual tradition in which a given primary document or group of documents stands. The problem arises when the study of the "history of ideas" is confused with the study of history itself. I came to conclude that this had been the case in previous attempts to understand the Quarrel of the Roman. As I show in the Introduction, other contemporary scholars have all made the assumption that, once the intellectual roots of the ideas expressed in the documents in the Quarrel have been properly understood, the documents will then "speak for themselves." This common assumption is reflected in the various positions with respect to the Quarrel which flow from it: (1) the Quarrel is adequately understood at present and is no longer a problem, consequently we should stop treating it as though it were one (Gilbert Ouy, 1971); (2) the Quarrel remains problematic, so our present knowledge of its historical circumstances and intellectual antecedents must be inadequate, and new primary research must be done before it

can be understood (Ornato, 1969; Fleming, 1969).

From my study I have concluded that neither of these positions is correct. What is needed is the willingness to stop substituting the "history of ideas" for the study of history itself. The failure of contemporary scholarship to unravel the Quarrel of the Roman is the failure of the historical methodology most commonly employed in the study of medieval literary history. This thesis suggests that the Quarrel of the Roman is of special interest as an example of a cardinal historical problem--one which, as a review of the history of recent scholarship on the subject reveals, cannot be understood through a "history of ideas" approach. The thesis does not attempt a full-scale investigation of the Quarrel and of the origins of humanism from a materialist standpoint, although it does attempt to show that a materialist approach is likely to shed more light on these questions.

I should like to thank Professor John Vincent Fleming, my major advisor, who gave me the idea for this dissertation almost a decade ago, and also Professor Robert Hollander. I have benefited greatly from their suggestions and criticisms, and above all from their kind encouragement. Naturally they share no responsibility for errors of research or judgment. My thanks, too, to Alkmene Reimer,

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## INTRODUCTION

The exchange of documents known to literary historians as the "Quarrel of the Roman de la Rose" may be one of the most noticed, most read, and yet least understood episodes in medieval literary history. Its fame is guaranteed, in the first place, by the renown of the participants in the debate. Among those involved in the discussion were one of the most prominent theologians and political figures of France--indeed, of Europe--at that time, Jean Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris and of Notre-Dame; Christine de Pisan, a prolific and celebrated woman poet (then at the beginning of her poetic career) in an era which records few female literary figures; several men who have long been recognized as among the first native humanists of France, Jean de Montreuil and Gontier Col; the Queen Regent of France, Isabeau de Bavière; and a well-known Avignon Cardinal. In the second place, the subject of the Quarrel, the Roman de la Rose, is certainly the most famous vernacular work of the brilliant French thirteenth century. As attested by citations, imitations, and reflections in later literary works, as well as by the number of MSS preserved, the influence and popularity of the Roman rivaled that of Dante's Divina

Commedia (to which, in fact, it was sometimes compared).<sup>1</sup>

In a somewhat narrower sense, the Quarrel of the Roman has become notorious for the scholarly confusion surrounding it, and for the difficulties which it presents to the student. The subject of much study and attention in the last century and the first part of the present one, during the past thirty-odd years the Quarrel has endured a scholarly eclipse. Despite great strides in recent years towards furthering our understanding of the historical and cultural context of the late fourteenth century in France and of early French humanism in particular, there has been no attempt to study the Quarrel of the Roman in the light of this new research. The present thesis aims to begin this study.

#### The Limits of the Quarrel of the Roman

Much disagreement exists in the scholarship as to what documents should be considered as falling within the limits of the Quarrel, and which are peripheral and secondary to it. The literary Quarrel, however broadly defined, itself was only a part of a much wider discussion about the

<sup>1</sup>John Vincent Fleming, The Roman de la Rose: A Study in Allegory and Iconography (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 18, and chapter one, passim.

Roman which included oral conversations involving people (several of whose names we know) who have left us no written contribution, as well as at least several documents which have been lost. The limits of the actual historical debate, of which the documents are the written (and, therefore, surviving) reflection, are correspondingly difficult to define.

However, it is possible to isolate two groups of documents whose place in the central debate has been universally recognized and which are clearly related to one another by internal and MS evidence. They are: (1) the French documents, including the contributions of Christine de Pisan, Gontier and Pierre Col, and Gerson's "Traictie," all extant in one or more of six MSS;<sup>2</sup> and (2) the six

<sup>2</sup>Peter Potansky, Der Streit um den Rosenroman (Munich: Fink, 1972), pp. 175-78, for a convenient list of the MS sources. To this list of "core" documents, but not forming a part of either of these groups, must be added Gerson's "Responsio ad scripta cuiusdam errantis." This is not together with the other collections of documents in the Quarrel in the MSS. But it has long been recognized as part of the debate around the Roman because of its early publication by Ellies Du Pin in the 1706 edition of Gerson's work. For this title and a reprint of the Ellies Du Pin text, see Charles Frederick Ward, The Epistles on the Romance of the Rose and other Documents in the Debate (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1911), pp. 77-82. For a new edition of the MS, without the title (presumably provided by the 18th century editor), Jean Gerson: Oeuvres Complètes. Introduction, texte, et notes par Mgr Glorieux.

letters of Jean de Montreuil, first recognized by Antoine Thomas in 1883<sup>3</sup> as being part of the Quarrel in which the French documents just mentioned were involved.

These documents may be termed the "core" of the Quarrel, as they all have certain characteristics in common with one another, and differ from other materials which may be considered more peripheral. These "core" or central documents are of two kinds. Some are letters clearly related to a single literary dispute. The rest are documents which explicitly discuss the Roman de la Rose and contain references to the aforementioned letters which make it clear that these latter are referring to the same discussion.

On the surface, what appears to be at issue in the Quarrel is the question of whether the Roman de la Rose is an attack upon traditional Christian moral teaching (as the attackers claim), or whether it is a sophisticated defense of that teaching (as the defenders assert). Christine and

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Volume II: L'Oeuvre Epistolaire (Paris: Desclée & Cie, 1960), pp. 65-72; Joannis Gersonii...Opera omnia novo ordine digesta...Opera & studio M. Lud. Ellies du Pin... (Antverpiae, sumptibus societatis, 1706).

<sup>3</sup>Antoine Thomas, De Johannis de Monsterolis vita et operibus (Paris, 1883).

Gerson both believe that the arguments made by certain personages in the poem in justification of sinful behavior are too persuasive. This, coupled with the fact that the Roman ends with a successful assault upon the "rose" by the False Lover, convinces the attackers that readers of the poem will be incited to sinful behavior. They think this is so because "human nature is too inclined to evil." Both Christine and Gerson are aware of the defense put forth by Pierre Col and other defenders of the Roman. They appear to understand the defense when they reject it. As a secondary, though related, point, both Christine and Gerson believe that the use of explicit words for the sexual organs in the poem will promote immodest thoughts and acts in the reader, regardless (basically) of the context in which these words occur. Christine is particularly concerned with putative slurs against the female sex, both in the use of explicit language and in the poem as a whole, which she believes will be read as a kind of titillating textbook of seduction.

The admirers of the Roman hew closely to one line of defense. The poem, they say, must be read in a certain literary context. Careful attention to the poem will reveal that all the personages speak in character. When immoral statements are made, they are made by personages like La Vieille or Faux Amoureux, personages which are

obviously not to be consulted for good advice. Since there is nothing shameful about the organs of sexual generation per se, and certainly not in the mere words used to designate them, the defenders of the Roman deny it is improper for these words to appear. Read in the way they suggest, so the defenders assert, the Roman is full of Christian wisdom, a work of great merit. Those who disagree with this interpretation of the Roman do not read it properly. The defenders do not respond to the argument that the poem will in fact be read as a licentious work, regardless of how one ought to read it. The attackers do not refute the defenders' theory of interpretation.

This is, admittedly, a very brief summary. But it highlights the basic enigma of the Quarrel. Attackers and defenders are "talking past" one another. Neither side accepts the other side's position as a basis of discussion. Scholars have frequently approached the Quarrel with the assumption that this "disagreement" does not have to be explained, is self-explanatory, or "only a difference of opinion." Some have suggested that the defenders were "cooking up" a rationale for reading a poem they knew to be immoral by Christian standards. A few scholars have more recently suggested the opposite--that the attackers were mysteriously ignorant of the traditional medieval literary

conventions Jean de Meun used and the defenders referred to. In other words, the defenders were "correct" in their interpretation of the Roman, the attackers "wrong."<sup>4</sup>

This thesis will attempt to provide an outline of the intellectual and social basis of the very different views set forth in the Quarrel over how to interpret the Roman. I conclude that the roots of the disagreement in the Quarrel are to be found in the disagreements over the emerging Humanist movement, a development which itself was due to the emergence of a new social class as a result of social and economic changes in later Medieval Europe.

<sup>4</sup>Potansky, op. cit., summarizes each document thoroughly. For a detailed discussion of the major arguments of attackers and defenders, see Chapter I of this thesis. The position that "there is nothing to explain" is explicitly taken by Gilbert Ouy, "Gerson et l'Angleterre," in Humanism in France at the End of the Middle Ages and in the Early Renaissance, ed. A. T. H. Levi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970), pp. 43-81. However, it follows logically from the positions of André Combes and the Franco-Italian team of scholars. Those who either state or suggest that the defenders of the Roman were not sincere in their professions of pious intent include scholars who see the Roman as an example of medieval "naturalism" or even Averroism, such as Gérard Paré, Les idées et les lettres au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le Roman de la Rose (Montreal, 1947), as well as those who, like Alfred Coville, view the early humanist defenders of the Roman as basically pagan or anti-Christian. The final category includes D. W. Robertson, Jr., Charles Dahlberg, and John V. Fleming (see below). While this thesis disagrees with all of these scholars to one degree or another, it is also greatly indebted to them. Specific indebtedness will be acknowledged in the pages which follow.



Based upon the irreducible minimum of documents for the Quarrel given above, a brief outline of the sequence of the events in the Quarrel may be given as follows. Sometime during 1399 or early 1400 conversations were held in a literarily-interested circle surrounding the French court in Paris concerning the Roman. The conversations involved at least three, and probably many more, people: the minor statesmen and secretaries, Gontier Col and Jean de Montreuil; and an as yet rather obscure court poet, Christine de Pisan. Stirred to enthusiasm for the Roman by Gontier Col, and perhaps already pricked by Christine's or someone else's dislike for it, Jean de Montreuil wrote a treatise in French in defense of the poem. This document was probably circulated widely in court circles and even beyond. Christine de Pisan responded to Jean with a letter, critical of the Roman, containing certain specific refutations of Jean's arguments. With this letter documentary evidence of the real literary debate begins.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>The documents are listed in the order in which they occur in Potansky. However, this order, and the "core" documents themselves, were established much earlier. Cf. A. Piaget, "Chronologie des Epîtres sur le Roman de la Rose," Etudes Romanes dédiées à Gaston Paris (Paris, 1891), pp. 113-20; Ward, op. cit.; Ernest Langlois, "Le traité de Gerson contre le Roman de la Rose," Romania, XLV (1918-19), 23-48.

Christine's letter was composed sometime before 13 September 1401, the date on which Gontier Col wrote to her asking for a copy of Jean's treatise and defending the Roman. Christine must have responded immediately, for on 15 September 1401 Gontier Col directed another letter to Christine attacking her views and defending the Roman. In this letter he makes it clear that he has read Jean's treatise. In October 1401, Christine sent her response to Gontier. On 1 February 1402 Christine dated two letters, and sent one each to Isabeau de Bavière, mother of the young King Charles VI, and to the respected Avignon Cardinal Guillaume de Tignonville. In each she pleads for support for her position in the Quarrel, and to each she attached the documents already exchanged (except, probably, for Jean's original treatise).

Jean de Montreuil was meanwhile engaged in defending the Roman against at least one further attacker of unknown identity. Three of his Latin letters give certain indications of having been written towards the beginning of the debate, before the definite entry of Jean Gerson into the Quarrel itself on the side of the attackers of the Roman. However, neither these three letters nor in fact any of Jean's letters in the Quarrel can be dated with any certainty even in relation to the altercation with Christine,

in which as far as we know Jean did not participate further.

Jean wrote one enthusiastic letter to some fellow-admirer of the Roman, evidently not Gontier Col (who is mentioned by name in the letter as having stimulated him to read the Roman in the first place).<sup>6</sup> He also composed two letters addressed to assailants of the Roman, and very probably to the same man, a "Lawyer" (causidicus). One of these letters defends the Roman with vigor; the second challenges the recipient either to answer or to admit defeat.<sup>7</sup>

By 18 May 1402 Jean Gerson had completed his "Traic-  
tie contre le Roumant de la Rose." This document refers to Jean de Montreuil's French treatise, and was clearly intended as a part of the ongoing debate, though it was not addressed specifically to any individual (nor, in all

<sup>6</sup>"Cum ut dant sese res," in Jean de Montreuil: Opera, Volume I -- Parte prima: Epistolario, ed. Ezio Ornato (Torino: Giappichelli, 1963), No. 103, pp. 144-45. Numbers in parentheses after titles of letters of Jean de Montreuil's in the body of this thesis are the numbers assigned to those letters by Ornato, and refer to this edition.

<sup>7</sup>The first of these is "Quo magis," No. 118, ed. Ornato, pp. 177-78; the second, "Etsi facundissimus," No. 122, ed. Ornato, pp. 182-83.

likelihood, was the treatise).<sup>8</sup>

Within the next few months Gontier Col, who had replaced Jean de Montreuil as the chief defender of the Roman in the debate with Christine at least, was himself replaced by his brother Pierre. Pierre Col wrote, in the form of a letter to Christine, the longest sustained literary and moral defense of the Roman that the Quarrel produced. This in turn provoked Christine to compose an equally detailed attack in response to Pierre Col, dated 2 October 1402. In it Christine notes that she and Pierre are not getting anywhere in their debate; she will not convince him, nor he her. Only the first part of Pierre's response to this letter of Christine's survives. But it appears to bear out Christine's remark; what remains contains nothing new in the way of arguments in defense of the Roman. With this letter, written (probably) in the late 1402 or very early 1403, the French debate apparently ended.

<sup>8</sup>Text in Langlois, op. cit. That Gerson refers to Jean de Montreuil's treatise is most persuasively argued by André Combes, Jean de Montreuil et le Chancelier Gerson (Paris: Vrin, 1942), p. 117. Combes makes it clear, however, that Gerson is replying in general, and not specifically, to Jean de Montreuil. Christine de Pisan later refers to this document as Gerson's first contribution to the debate; see Ward, pp. 185-86, 11. 109-22.

Sometime after Pierre Col's first letter to Christine Gerson obtained a copy of it. Whether Pierre had sent it to him directly, or, as is more likely, Gerson had seen Pierre's letter, which was no doubt circulated among interested parties, is not certain. The "next day" (as he informs us), he composed a Latin response to Pierre. This work, the "Responsio ad scripta cuiusdam errantis" (so called in the MS) is clearly directed specifically at Pierre Col and intended as part of the ongoing debate.

Jean de Montreuil, meanwhile, contributed at least four further documents to the Quarrel. Two of them, "Ut sunt mores hominum" and "Scis me, consideratissime magister," are to supporters of the Roman. They may have been written to the same person; if so, that person may have been Gontier Col. If they are to the same person, "Ut sunt" is the earlier, and must have been written after 1 February 1402, since Christine's writings are referred to as having been published. With the letter Jean includes a French treatise on the Roman, probably the one mentioned above.<sup>9</sup>

The recipient of "Scis me" was in all likelihood

<sup>9</sup>Ed. Ornato, No. 154, p. 220, ll. 2 ff.

Gontier Col.<sup>10</sup> "Scis me" contains a further defense of the Roman and a plea for the recipient to intervene in the Quarrel, lest the righteous defenders suffer defeat (we should recall that Gontier had written nothing since the publication of Christine's documents or Gerson's entry into the debate). Though not dated, this letter of Jean's was probably composed after 18 May 1402, and--as Potansky suggests--perhaps after October 1402.<sup>11</sup>

One final extant document in the dispute is illustrative of Jean de Montreuil's attitude. In "Ex quo nuge ille," Jean asks a higher-placed clergyman for help in perfecting his Latin style and encloses two letters as samples. One of these letters is in praise of the Roman. This letter could be any one of the five already mentioned, but most likely it was one of the first three. The second is one which (Jean tells us) is on the same subject, in satirical form, "against the man who attacked you under another name."

<sup>10</sup>As noted above, Gontier Col had stimulated Jean de Montreuil's interest in the Roman and had initiated the debate with Christine. The recipient of "Scis me" is called dux princeps rectorque huius cepti (ed. Ornato, P. 180, l.47), which probably means he was the leader of the defenders of the Roman and the initiator of the defense. If so, this is most likely Gontier Col.

<sup>11</sup>Potansky, pp. 164-65.

This suggests that it may have been directed against Gerson's "Traictie," wherein the Roman and its defenders are attacked by "Dame Eloquence Theologienne" and other allegorical personages.

This description of the second letter enclosed with "Ex quo nuge ille" does not fit any of Jean's extant contributions to the Quarrel. Nor can it refer to Jean's lost "treatise"; since that was in French it would not have been sent to an expert in Latin style for criticism. Clearly Jean de Montreuil composed at least one further Latin document on the Quarrel--a highly interesting, literary work, it appears,--which is now lost.<sup>12</sup>

Such, at present, is the basic core of the Quarrel of the Roman. The documents which contain references to the Roman and/or to the Quarrel in general terms, but are not themselves part of the literary debate in the same sense as those above, include: (a) several poems of Christine de Pisan's; (b) some sermons by Gerson; and (c)

<sup>12</sup>"Ex quo nuge ille," ed. Ornato, No. 152, pp. 218-19. Potansky, pp. 164-65, gives up trying to identify this second document enclosed with "Ex quo nuge ille," but seems to forget that Jean de Montreuil says explicitly it is super eodem, satire formam tenentem (p. 219, ll.5-6), i.e. also in defense of the Roman. None of Jean de Montreuil's extant letters about the Roman are in satirical form. Therefore, this must refer to a document no longer extant.

one poem by the English poet Thomas Hoccleve, recently identified by Prof. John V. Fleming as an implicit criticism of Pisan's view of the Roman as expressed in her "Epistre du Dieu d'Amours."<sup>13</sup>

#### The Problematic Nature of the Quarrel

Until the 1930s scholars of the Quarrel assumed implicitly that it could, practically speaking, be fully explained and understood by a close analysis of the documents actually exchanged during the Quarrel. Charles Frederick Ward, who edited and published most of the documents, confined his discussion of the historical context of the Quarrel to a brief introduction. Alfred Coville was the first scholar to attempt to provide a discussion of the Quarrel in the framework of the literary and historical context of the time. This he did in a series of books on literary activity and writers of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries in France.<sup>14</sup> However,

<sup>13</sup>John V. Fleming, "Hoccleve's 'Letter of Cupid' and the 'Quarrel' Over the Roman de la Rose," Medium Aevum, XL, No. 1 (1971), 21-40.

<sup>14</sup>Alfred Coville, Gontier et Pierre Col et l'Humanisme en France au Temps de Charles V (Paris: Droz, 1934); Recherches sur Quelques Ecrivains du XIV et du XV siècle (Paris: Droz, 1935); La vie intellectuelle dans les domaines d'Anjou-Provence de 1380 à 1435 (Paris: Droz, 1941).



the fruitfulness of Coville's approach was undermined by a series of flaws in his interpretation of the primary documents. These were brilliantly exposed by André Combes in his 1942 work, Jean de Montreuil et le Chancelier Gerson.<sup>15</sup> Combes successfully demolished all previous conceptions of the Quarrel, of which Coville's work was the continuation and high-water mark.

Since Combes' conclusive demonstration of the carelessness of Coville's research, scholars have tended to keep studies on early French humanism rigidly free of any speculation about the Quarrel of the Roman, and to pass over the Quarrel itself. The one study of the Quarrel since that time, Peter Potansky's Der Streit um den Rosenroman, is little more than a formal description and summary of the documents involved. This state of affairs is very largely due to the virtually unanimous acceptance of Combes' conclusions, especially by the "team" of Franco-Italian scholars investigating early French humanism (to whose work the present thesis is greatly indebted, however much it may differ in some of its conclusions).

The present thesis does not, however, agree with Combes' results in many respects. Since Combes' work has

<sup>15</sup>See note 8 above.

largely fixed the terms in which study of the Quarrel, and even of early French humanism itself, has been continued, a very brief discussion of those conclusions follows here.

On the one hand, Combes exposed important errors in Coville's research. He showed Coville's claim that Jean de Montreuil and Gerson corresponded with one another was entirely unfounded. Coville seriously mistranslated a letter of Montreuil's ("Etsi facundissimus") and asserted Gerson was the addressee, as had been done by all scholars since Thomas in 1883. Combes proved the letter in fact addressed to some defender of the Roman. He also proved that not a single letter among those of Montreuil's which survive can be to Gerson.

More than this: Combes attempted to show that--with the sole exception of their differences over the Roman de la Rose--there appears to be no opposition between Jean de Montreuil's opinions and those of Gerson's at all (except an implicit opposition concerning the behavior of Pope Benedict XIII).<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, Combes attacks Coville's characterization of the Quarrel of the Roman--a characterization

<sup>16</sup>Combes, Jean de Montreuil, pp. 1-39; Part II, ch. V; and passim.

which Coville again accepts from earlier scholars--as a conflict between a pagan, Burkhardtian humanism, and Christian piety. Coville poses it thus:

Ce sont au fond deux conceptions morales qui s'affrontent dans le débat, la morale chrétienne avec toutes ses conséquences dans la vie et la coutume, et une morale libre, qui s'excuse encore de sa liberté, mais teintée de paganisme et qui prend volontiers le contrepied des idées reçues.<sup>17</sup>

Coville sees a striking similarity between a semi-pagan morality on the part of the defenders of the Roman and the morale attitudes of Jean de Meun, author of the greater part of the Roman:

Ils [i.e. the humanists, Gontier Col and Jean de Montreuil, to whom Coville assimilates the much less-well known Pierre Col] admiraient en lui [Jean de Meun] sa connaissance approfondie des auteurs anciens, la pénétration de sa pensée par l'esprit de l'Antiquité païenne, ce je ne sais quoi de libre, d'audacieux et aussi de plus humain qui impregne son oeuvre, à la fois scepticisme et ce recours passionné à d'autres autorités que celle des Pères de l'Eglise et des théologiens, qui étaient, plus ou moins consciemment, au fond de leur mentalité d'humanistes. Par là le débat sur le Roman de la Rose se rattache à l'histoire du premier humanisme français.<sup>18</sup>

Combes attempts to show: (1) that there is no evidence for considering Jean de Montreuil anything but a rather conventionally pious Christian (though he proves

<sup>17</sup>Coville, Gontier et Pierre Col, p. 224.

<sup>18</sup>Coville, Gontier et Pierre Col, pp. 225-26.

this negatively--by demolishing Coville's assertions to the contrary); and (2) that Gerson was admired for his classical style by the humanist Montreuil, and so should be considered a humanist as well.

Only one conclusion can be drawn based upon Combes' analysis. It is that, whatever the opposition between the attackers (especially Gerson) and the defenders (especially Montreuil) consisted in, it could not have been over "humanism," since this was one area in which Gerson and Montreuil appeared to be in complete agreement.

The present study accepts with admiration Combes' analysis of the texts and his conclusions concerning Coville's errors. Combes' book is a model for careful textual analysts in this regard. Coville refuted, the study of the Quarrel must be "done anew."

However, the present study concludes that the second set of Combes' conclusions--those concerning the relationship of the Quarrel with the development of early French humanism--are not correct. In particular, this study reaffirms the existence of an opposition between humanists and non-humanists, and sees this opposition mirrored in the Quarrel.

Future historians of the Quarrel of the Roman must, I conclude, abandon Combes' notion of the

impossibility of any opposition between humanists and theologians if the Quarrel is to be understood properly. It is principally the unwillingness to abandon this viewpoint which has kept very able scholars of early French humanism from correctly evaluating the Quarrel, despite their erudition and many striking successes in solving other textual and historical problems.

After Combes' masterful demolition of all previous conceptions of the Quarrel, of which Coville's work represented the most developed statement, succeeding scholars have been reluctant to begin the task of re-interpretation of the Quarrel. In fact, after Combes, in a judgment unanimously accepted by all investigators, concluded that "l'histoire du débat sur le Roman de la Rose est entièrement à refaire,"<sup>19</sup> only one full-length study has been devoted to the Quarrel. A consideration of the achievements and shortcomings of this study, then, will serve as introduction to the problems discussed in the thesis.

Peter Potansky's Der Streit un den Rosenroman is mainly devoted to a summary of the contents of the documents in the Quarrel. Potansky lists and summarizes twenty-nine documents in all (including his reconstruction of the

<sup>19</sup>Combes, Jean de Montreuil, p. 39.

parts of Jean de Montreuil's lost treatise in French from references to it in Christine de Pisan's and Gerson's contributions). To the list of documents actually exchanged in the course of the Quarrel he adds several new ones.

First, there are several sermons of Gerson's which refer, or are thought to refer, to the Quarrel.<sup>20</sup> These sermons are a mixed bag. Some of them do not in fact mention the Roman at all, and only more or less explicitly raise concerns also expressed by Gerson in connection with the Quarrel (all, however, were composed during the years when the Quarrel was taking place). Even those sermons by Gerson which specifically mention and discuss the Roman are not, properly speaking, part of the Quarrel, as they were

<sup>20</sup>These sermons are: "Considerate lilia agri" (Potansky, pp. 77-79); "Tota pulchra es" (Potansky, pp. 86-89); "Videmus nunc per speculum in enigmat" (Potansky, pp. 112-14); the sermon "poenitemini" of December 17, 1402 (Potansky, pp. 157-59). Of these sermons, the first contains only a discussion of the sinfulness of naming shameful things--a matter raised by Gerson and, more forcefully, by Pisan in criticism of Jean de Meun's practice in the Roman. The second mentions "Oyseuse, la fole," "beau semblant," and "fole amour" in general, but without explicit reference to the Roman, much less to the Quarrel. The third contains a discussion of physical lust only faintly, if at all, reflecting the issues of the Quarrel. The last refers to books which lead to immorality shortly after mentioning poets who always portray lovers as "Folz Amoureux."

not exchanged as part of the debate among defenders and attackers of the poem. In none of the sermons does Gerson state anything really new about the Roman. And in fact, the sermons are not mainly concerned with the Roman; rather, references to the Roman are used as illustrations of the subject matter of the sermons themselves.

In addition to these sermons of Gerson's, Potansky adds to his list of documents several works of Christine de Pisan's which refer to the Roman and to the Quarrel. Once again, these documents were not exchanged as part of the Quarrel, and do not add anything new in the way of argument to what Pisan states elsewhere about the Roman.<sup>21</sup>

As a summary of the contents of the documents directly or indirectly connected with the Quarrel, Potansky's work is serviceable. These summaries comprise the greater part of his work. The rest of his study consists of: (1) brief biographies of the major figures in the Quarrel, drawn from earlier scholarship and not at all exhaustive (pp. 24-26); (2) brief references to nine other documents, whose relation to the Quarrel is, at best, hypothetical (pp. 169-74); (3) a rapid and superficial discussion of the literary forms (poetic, epistolary, sermon, etc.) involved

<sup>21</sup>These are: "Le Dit de la Rose" (Potansky, pp. 93-101); "Autre Balade Nr. 37" (Potansky, pp. 149-51); "Autre Balade Nr. 36" (Potansky, p. 169).

in the Quarrel, remarks on style, a summary of the major points in dispute among the adversaries, and so on (pp. 179-94); and, last, (4) a consideration of the Quarrel from a historical and literary viewpoint (pp. 195-232).

Of these sections of his book, only the last goes beyond a reading of the texts themselves and attempts to examine the Quarrel in an historical sense. As the years since Combes' work have seen a great deal of fundamental research published on the cultural and historical context of late fourteenth-century France, on Gerson and Christine de Pisan, and especially on the early French humanists who defended the Roman in the Quarrel, a new synthesis would indeed appear both possible and highly desirable.

Potansky does not, however, present such a synthesis. He limits himself to a superficial summary of recent research on these topics. The few conclusions he does derive from his brief review of scholarship add little to the picture of the Quarrel which he has already drawn from yet another careful reading of the documents themselves. Evidently he has not studied this literary and historical background himself, and confines himself to a review of a selection of secondary studies. Furthermore, he omits much that is important and relevant to the Quarrel of the Roman in this secondary research because of a superficial



approach to it (naturally, he cannot be blamed for the fact that some very significant work was published after his own study was virtually completed).

In sum, Potansky briefly reviews what might be examined in a study of the literary-historical context of the debate. This work reflects the unspoken assumption that the Quarrel can be sufficiently explained through a close reading of the documents themselves, and that no major problems or areas of significant obscurity remain.

Potansky's work is the only extended discussion of the Quarrel of the Roman since Combes. Though the Quarrel has been discussed elsewhere, these treatments are briefer still. In fact, scholars have conspicuously avoided any extended attempt to grapple with the problems posed by the Quarrel since Combes' work.

Some examples of more important remarks culled from recent scholarship may serve to illustrate this fact. In the course of a very sensitive discussion of the nature of medieval allegory, Rosamonde Tuve expressed agreement with Combes and noted that "Chas. F. Ward's old partial treatment of the quarrel (1911) needs to be superceded..."<sup>22</sup> John V. Fleming, author of the most perceptive treatment

<sup>22</sup>Rosamonde Tuve, Allegorical Imagery (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 274 n.

of the Roman, says much the same thing:

The last generation of readers who could read the Roman for pleasure and profit without humanistic self-consciousness was that of Geoffrey Chaucer, through whose works Jean's old poem echoes and re-echoes. Even as Chaucer lay dying there was taking place one of those affaires for which the French are famous: the well-known Quarrel of the Roman de la Rose. I say well-known, not well-understood, for it still awaits a thorough explanation of its historical setting and significance.<sup>23</sup>

Prof. Fleming's further remarks about the Quarrel, and indeed his whole book on the Roman itself, serve only to demonstrate convincingly that the Quarrel remains as problematic as ever.

D. W. Robertson, Jr., from whose initial insights has sprung so much of the work which has revolutionized our understanding of the allegory of the Roman itself in recent years, called the Quarrel, and the role of Gerson and Christine in particular, an "indication of a change in taste which took place in certain quarters after the death of Chaucer."<sup>24</sup> Fleming elaborates this point somewhat, noting that

hardly less violent [than Gerson's hatred of the Roman] has been the quarrel about the Quarrel, as any one who

<sup>23</sup>Fleming, The Roman de la Rose, p. 47.

<sup>24</sup>D. W. Robertson, Jr., A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 364.

has read Andre Combes' arraignment of Alfred Coville must agree.<sup>25</sup>

He calls Gerson "a marked case of another kind of stylistic change":

the first person to whom it must patiently be explained that Jean de Meun was a 'true Catholic, the most profound theologian of his day, versed in every science which the human mind can grasp.'

But neither Robertson nor Fleming suggest why a change of taste occurred, or why this must be explained to Gerson-- much less why even the explanation does not satisfy Gerson.

Research on the Roman itself further complicates the question of the Quarrel. Robertson, and after him Fleming and Dahlberg, have established that Jean de Meun's poem is exactly what the defenders of the Roman made it out to be--a sophisticated allegorical affirmation of traditional Christian values.<sup>26</sup> Now, both Christine de Pisan and Gerson wrote allegorical poetry themselves. Gerson, at least, was learned in precisely the Christian exegetical

<sup>25</sup>Fleming, The Roman de la Rose, p. vi.

<sup>26</sup>Robertson, Preface; Fleming, The Roman de la Rose, and "The Moral Reputation of the Roman de la Rose before 1400," RPh, XIX (1965), 430-35; Charles Dahlberg, "Love and the Roman de la Rose," Speculum, XLIV (1969), 568-84; and Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, The Romance of the Rose, tr. Charles Dahlberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

and Patristic tradition which is presupposed by Jean de Meun's poem. As will be shown, neither Gerson nor Pisan are ignorant of the possibility of understanding the Roman allegorically.

Why, then, do Pisan and Gerson persist in "misinterpreting" or "misunderstanding" the poem? In what does their antagonism to the Roman and its defenders consist?

Recent scholarship has posed, but failed to solve, this problem. Fleming concludes:

Let me now summarize my conclusions regarding the moral reputation of the Roman before the Quarrel. The publication of Jean's poem caused no furor; for three generations it failed, so far as we know, to elicit even what might be considered a mildly unfavorable review. On the other hand, there is significant evidence to show that his work was warmly approved in morally conservative circles throughout the 14th century. When Gerson and Christine turned on the Roman at the time of the Quarrel, they were offering a novel critical review of a poem which had enjoyed not only extraordinary popularity but articulate, responsible approbation for over a century. I submit that these are facts, and facts that critics must take into account if they are to present satisfying answers to the problems which the poem raises.<sup>27</sup>

Charles Dahlberg's valuable annotated translation of the Roman (to take a final example) avoids any mention of the Quarrel whatever. Thus, those scholars who have advanced our knowledge of the Roman so much in recent years have had little to say about the Quarrel. At the same time

<sup>27</sup>Fleming, "The Moral Reputation," p. 435.

the researchers who have provided us with so much knowledge concerning the activities of the early French humanists have avoided any new study of the Quarrel, despite the fact that at least some of these French humanists were deeply involved in it. Ezio Ornato, editor of Jean de Montreuil's works and perhaps the most authoritative scholar on the circle of French humanists who were engaged in the defense of the Roman, deliberately omits the Quarrel from his discussion of literary activities of these men. As he indicated in his important 1969 monograph:

Nous ne tiendrons pas compte, dans cet appendice, du débat sur le "Roman de la Rose," qui nécessiterait une nouvelle étude très approfondie.<sup>28</sup>

Most recently, Gilbert Ouy has denied any "profound antagonism" between Gerson and the defenders of the Roman, since he is unable to find any reason for the antagonism which appears to exist. His argument that Gerson should really be considered one of the group of early French humanists is, in essence, a reaffirmation of Combes' conclusions of 1942.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, as the only contribution

<sup>28</sup>Ezio Ornato, Jean Muret et Ses Amis Nicolas de Clamanges et Jean de Montreuil (Paris: Droz, 1969), p. 233.

<sup>29</sup>Ouy, "Gerson et l'Angleterre."

to the study of the Quarrel by any of the members of the Franco-Italian team of scholars studying this period, Ouy's work must be examined carefully. I have reserved this task until Chapter IV.

#### The Method of the Present Study

The present thesis does not directly undertake to solve the question of Gerson's and Pisan's rejection of the value of the Roman, although I do hope to provide some insight into their persistent (and, it will be shown, willful) misinterpretation of the Roman.

The procedure chosen in this thesis is to examine the historical and literary context surrounding the Quarrel of the Roman, a task not attempted since Coville and passed over superficially by Potansky. The study bases itself primarily upon a careful reading of many primary documents in the light of the considerable body of research upon the works of, and relations among, the early French humanists. The focus of the thesis, therefore, is an inquiry into the circumstances and manner of the defense of the Roman, rather than into the attack upon it.

I do not doubt that a close study of Gerson's position in the Quarrel in the light of the evolution of his theological thought might help to clarify his motives

for the impassioned attack upon what had hitherto been considered a thoroughly pious work. However, so extensive is Gerson's surviving work, the scholarship upon it and the familiarity with late medieval theology required to understand it, that I must leave this task to some more qualified student. As for Christine de Pisan, modern scholars have examined her work with great thoroughness, and it appears that the views she expounded in the Quarrel are thoroughly consistent with those she expressed elsewhere.

No person's thought or ideas can be satisfactorily understood outside the framework of a broader social, historical, and literary tradition. Insofar as this thesis contributes somewhat to outlining such a framework, it may, however indirectly, also prove useful to students of Gerson and Christine de Pisan as well.

No attempt is made in this thesis to examine the writings of any author, whether Pisan, Gerson, or any of the early French humanists, in search of some hitherto overlooked personal idiosyncracies or literary pronouncements which might "explain" their position vis-à-vis the Roman. In fact, the dubious procedure of reconstructing the "personalities" of the individuals involved in the Quarrel in order then to "explain" their opinions is avoided here at all costs. I assume that: (1) the

psychology of people long dead is unreconstructible; and (2) there are historical factors which condition even those aspects of individuals which are sometimes cherished as unique. All students of the Quarrel of the Roman, including Coville, Combes, and most recently Gilbert Ouy, have had recourse to this kind of "psychologizing." Ouy's use of it will be examined in its place.

Perhaps some will object that anyone who believes the Roman to be highly sophisticated, but thoroughly Christian, allegory untainted by "paganism," "naturalism," "Averroism," etc., should not find it surprising that some medieval French writers defended the Roman as exactly such a work. If the Roman was generally accepted as a highly moral poem until the Quarrel, as Fleming claims, one may wonder why the fact that some readers insisted upon reading it as such be at all surprising? It might seem that this problem should trouble only those who, like Ouy or Potansky, consider the defenders of the Roman to be conventional Christians and the poem itself a rather cynical, naturalistic, and (on the whole) secular work (Coville and his predecessors, who thought the Roman to be more or less un-Christian and its defenders to be paganizing humanists, likewise spent little time in showing why the latter defended it; this seemed self-evident).



To this objection I would respond that the defense of the Roman is not so much surprising or unexpected as it is incompletely understood. The defenders of the Roman themselves have only recently begun to be properly studied (Coville's extensive early works having proven untrustworthy). The work done in recent years on early French humanism has made it clear that the Quarrel of the Roman was but one of many literary "quarrels" or debates, over literature as well as other matters, in which these humanists were engaged. Defenses of poetry and of the study of poetry were a very common kind of "literary debate" for these humanists. In fact, as will be shown, such literary debates and defenses of poetry were a common activity for all fourteenth-century humanists, whether French or Italian. And attacks upon humanists from various quarters for their interests and activities in poetry were also common.

The present investigation shows that the Quarrel of the Roman is not at all sui generis<sup>30</sup> in the sense in which it has been assumed to be. The defense of the Roman shows a great many similarities to other humanist literary activities. This thesis begins with an investigation of these similarities, which in turn suggest that Gerson, one

<sup>30</sup>Potansky, p. 234, calls it that.

of the attackers of the Roman and--according to such as Combes and Ouy--a humanist himself, held a position very similar to that of anti-humanist writers in similar debates. The notion that Gerson is just another "humanist" is inevitably brought into question.

In short, an investigation of the "humanist" tradition of the Quarrel of the Roman does much, I believe, to clarify the circumstances surrounding the Quarrel, circumstances which are not comprehensible otherwise. It also helps clarify, both directly and indirectly, the motives of the attackers of the Roman as well as those of its defenders, who are the main concern of the thesis.

The thesis will be divided into five chapters and three Appendices. Chapters I and II will examine the humanist context of the Quarrel of the Roman, the earlier and (approximately) contemporary attacks upon the study of poetry, the humanist defenses of poetry, and the results of this study for the understanding of the Quarrel. Chapter III will examine the problem of Gerson's position in the debate, and resolve the question of whether or not he is to be considered (as Combes would have him) a humanist. Gilbert Ouy's 1971 article, the most recent in which the Combes' position, together with recent research on the French humanists, is used in order to explain the Quarrel

of the Roman, will be criticized in Chapter IV. Chapter V will present the results of an exhaustive study of the other literary debates which our French humanists engaged in, and sum up the results of the thesis as they help us to understand the Quarrel of the Roman. The close examination of these literary debates is relegated to the three Appendices. It has been thought best to do this because of the relatively meagre harvest of results useful for understanding the Quarrel in relation to the amount of space and care needed to complete the first (and, I believe, the only) close study of these debates.