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Christine de Pizan is one of the earliest women in history to have openly spoken out for the involvement of women in male-dominated fields. It is her voice in *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* that spoke on how women should act when orating before women were even considered to be taken seriously in this position. The decision to work with something written by Christine de Pizan was initially due to her protofeminist views on women in the field of rhetoric, as many, if not most, authors of this topic at the time only referred to men when addressing how to orate. Her ideology was not widely accepted during the 14th and 15th centuries, yet it was pivotal in introducing this aspect in the medieval world. It was during this time that women did not receive the same treatment or access to education that men did by any means, and were to be viewed as wives and mothers before anything else. Though it took quite a while for the acceptance of women in this field, and as it continues to reach the same equality in today's world, Christine de Pizan's framework of thinking became one of the first examples for women to look for in the modern world. This essay will explore the framework of Christine de Pizan as applied to the Depp v. Heard trial to claim that the use of slander in this highly-publicized defamation law-suit case ultimately ruined the careers of two prominent actors, led to an increase in defamation in opposition to its use, and even further contributed to discrediting of the "Me Too" movement as a result of the settling of the trial. As a result of this analysis, I plan to argue even further why

Christine de Pizan's framework and texts still reign relevant to women today, specifically when it comes to women in media who are always under the close lens of the public.

First, I will introduce context regarding the life of Christine de Pizan, leading up to the framework she provides in *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, as well as throughout her work as an orator. Next, I am choosing to analyze the facts of the Johnny Depp defamation case, as documented in an online article published by NBC News and other relevant sources. I have chosen to analyze this source and event because the charge itself comes about from a woman, Amber Heard, who used slander in rhetoric when accusing her ex-husband, Johnny Depp, of assault and other crimes. This highly publicized case involves two prominent figures in Hollywood, both actors, which led to an extremely detrimental downward spiral of harmful and suggestive language on both ends of their testimonies. This trial, which was televised, created a massive shift in opinion on both of these famous figures, which inherently negatively affected the careers of both individuals. I believe that I can employ the framework of Christine de Pizan to the testimonies of both Amber Heard and Johnny Depp to show the negative effect that the use of slander can have in today's world. I plan to explore specific quotes and evidence from this case, as well as a timeline of how this affected both of their careers, to further prove what Christine de Pizan states in *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*. By discussing specifically the actions taken by Amber Heard, I will explain why her specific use of slander has contributed to how women are perceived when in situations of abuse, and why her false testimonies and use of slander will only harm, quiet, and dismiss the voices of women in legal, professional, or conversational spheres. I will also discuss how her initial statements made about Depp are what ultimately led to his action of filing a lawsuit against Heard, which in turn led to an accumulation of negative publicity being released about her actions throughout the relationship.

Christine de Pizan was born in 1364 in Venice to a wealthier family with connections in education and politics, which led to her later moving to France with her father's appointment to the royal court there. Due to her status, she was privileged enough to receive a pristine education including literacy in multiple languages and the study of rhetoric itself. She went on to pursue writing after the tragic and untimely deaths of those closest to her as a means to provide for her children. During this time, she wrote *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* as a companion piece to *The Book of the City of Ladies*, which was intended to instruct women of social ranks in the "ideal female community." *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* was directed to women of all ranks, not just those of higher status, which we confirm in Part Two of the text when she states, "We come now to the second point, which is the other vice, that the lady, maiden, and woman of the court and all others ought to guard against, that is, the sin of slander..." (page 548, Pizan). It was critical for the author to direct this piece to all kinds of women due to her own experiences, her religious tone, and in accordance with the key themes of this text.

One of the key ideas and concepts of this piece is the theme that women should avoid slandering one another when orating or practicing rhetoric. She argues many reasons why it is detrimental for women to speak ill of one another or in general, however the most notable is that it discredits the speaker and it has the potential to encourage the use of slander against one another. The first is best supported when Christine de Pizan states, "But he who slanders out of envy does it for no other reason than sheer wickedness, which exists and flourishes in his heart, and therefore it is more damnable for the man or woman who says it and the more perilous to him or her of whom it is said than any other kind of slander" (Pizan, 551). Here, she introduces the importance of morality in relation to rhetoric, similar to the ideas of Quintilian, who believed that good orators have to be moral in nature in order to speak well. This mention of morality

being detrimental to the speaker also plays into her Christian beliefs that she uses as her own framework for *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*. Also, by stating that slander is “more damnable for the man or woman who says it”, she is instructing her audience that its use will only lead to defamation for the speaker themselves. In reference to the encouragement of slander in return, the author states, “For assuredly, the person who knows that someone is defaming her will also slander that person, and she may even make up stories” (Pizan, 550). Christine de Pizan takes a logical approach when instructing her audience here. She is making the argument that not only will slander defame the speaker, but it will encourage a cycle that can only be harmful. She says to avoid retaliation and to keep an inviting environment, one must choose not to start this cycle in the first place. Christine de Pizan appeals to the strong sense of virtue and the values of Christianity to justify her content. She references the Church and the righteousness of the soul as she argues why the morality of the speaker and their choice not to entertain slander is critical to orating. This is further supported when she states, “God wishes you and expressly commands you to love your enemy and render him good for evil. Whoever acts against God’s commandment damns himself and therefore gains nothing, and so it would be more to his advantage to hold his tongue.” (Pizan, 548).

Author Nadia Margolis writes about Christine de Pizan, “The French feminist poet would devote her entire literary career to developing a discursive style for conveying spiritual and intellectual insight in an agreeable, accessible manner, without losing argumentative persuasiveness” (Margolis, 361). This quote here, in my opinion, describes perfectly how to view the framework of Christine de Pizan from a wider perspective, and how I plan to analyze the Depp v. Heard case in the following paragraphs.

In accordance with the law of the United States and as documented by Middle Tennessee State University, libel and slander both fall under the scope of defamation, which is relevant to the case I will be examining, and are subject to lawsuit claims. By definition, libel refers to written defamation, whereas slander refers to oral defamation (Hudson Jr, 2020). Christine de Pizan refers to the act of orally defaming others in rhetoric, but for the sake of applying this to the modern day, it is critical to define the law. The First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition, however, individuals possess a right not to be subjected to falsehoods that defame their character, and inherently their livelihood (“Constitution of the United States,” amend. 1). Though the author of *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* was clearly not inspired by the law of the United States, much of her framework for speaking influentially was motivated against the use of slander, as established earlier in this piece. The definition of the law is also prevalent when taking into consideration the Johnny Depp and Amber Heard defamation trial, as both were at some point enacted either before the trial or during.

Depp and Heard, both well-known by the mass media, first met on the set of a movie film, which sparked their initial interest, leading to their marriage to one another in 2015. Only but a year later, Heard filed a motion for divorce from Depp under the circumstances of emotional and physical abuse. She states under a sworn declaration that “During the entirety of our relationship, Johnny Depp has been verbally and physically abusive to me.” (Rosenblatt, 2022). In this claim, she states that he would inexplicably terrorize her and wishes to see him attend a year of anger management classes as a result of the finalized divorce. During this period of time, it was, and still is, critical to hold a woman’s testament to abuse to the same standard as a man’s, as women have been silenced throughout history in this particular topic and beyond, and

are often expected to keep peace and silence their own voices to maintain this. The context of the situation is crucial here because this statement occurred before evidence was revealed through the following defamation suit that Depp filed, meaning that despite her testimony, Heard was not granted justice for the alleged abuse that she experienced when the judge dismissed her case and the divorce was left to be settled outside the courtroom. Though this piece is to analyze the ways in which Christine de Pizan would view the slander being used before and during this trial, she paradoxically supports this misogynistic reasoning, despite her proto-feminist views. She states, “And so this lady will be, by pure, mild, and holy charity, an advocate and mediator, between the prince, her husband, and her people...Sometimes it may happen that the prince, by bad counsel or from some other cause, will try to oppress his people with some expense...she will excuse her husband and speak well of him.” (Pizan, 546). I found this important to note because despite her views being far beyond what was considered liberal at the time, they are still complacent with misogynistic ideals, placing the reputation of the man at a higher priority than the woman.

As time continued, Heard went on to release a statement of the alleged abuse she endured in the Washington Post in 2018. Though no further legal action or naming was taken by her against Depp, she heavily implied Depp’s alleged contribution to this abuse in this personal interview. Specifically, there are three statements she makes that ultimately led to Depp taking legal action for defamation of character against Heard. These statements were; (1) “I spoke up against sexual violence -and faced our culture’s wrath. That has to change.” (2) “Then two years ago, I became a public figure representing domestic abuse, and I felt the full force of our culture’s wrath for women who speak out.” (3) “I had the rare vantage point of seeing, in real-time, how institutions protect men accused of abuse.” (Heard, 2018). This moment in the timeline of the case is what ultimately leads to exactly what Christine de Pizan warned women

about when speaking in a stance of influence. As a result of Heard's subsequently proven false statements, she became subject to trial; a trial in which her own abuse against Depp was revealed, and her reputation as an actress was completely destroyed by the media.

As discussed in the framework analysis above, a significant argument for why slander should not be used in rhetoric is due to the risk of losing a pristine reputation. As a result of Heard's initial statements, Depp's career took a significant toll in Hollywood. Variety magazine states in an article, documenting his resignation from multiple films as a result, that, "Almost three years later, on November 6, Depp announced on Instagram that Warner Bros. had asked him to 'resign' from playing Grindelwald in the third 'Fantastic Beasts' film. 'I have respected and agreed to that request,' the actor wrote. Warner Bros. confirmed Depp's withdrawal with a brief statement, thanking Depp 'for his work on the films' and confirming 'the role of Gellert Grindelwald will be recast.'" (Vary, 2020). During the trial itself, multitudes of troubling new information, in regard to both parties, was publicly revealed. For instance, Depp was said to have written multiple misogynistic reminders along the lines of calling Heard "easy" and suggesting that she be "careful" when working around other men in films in regard to her sexual relation to them. Multiple audio recordings and videos were presented in the trial displaying alleged abuse that Depp dealt with from Heard, along with the allegation that Heard left her own fecal matter in the bed that they shared in their penthouse. Vivid details of Depp's struggle with alcohol and drug abuse were also rehashed during this trial after reaching his point of sobriety, which were all open to the public domain since the trial was televised (O'Kane, 2022). In addition to the information revealed during the trial, social media applications, specifically Twitter, had been blowing up with trending posts in support of Depp, focused mainly on attacking Amber Heard. *The Los Angeles Times* states, "Some 627 Twitter accounts were dedicated primarily to tweeting

negatively about Heard and her supporters, the company found. And almost 3,300 accounts were tweeting the hashtags #AmberHeardIsAnAbuser, #AmberHeardLsAnAbuser, #AmberHeardIsALiar, and #AmberHeardLsALiar, with the misspellings perhaps intended to get around Twitter filters.” (D’Zurilla, 2022). Whether or not these accounts were of personal use or robotic users by way of buying into social media platforms meant to gain public support back for Depp, they were heavily influential in turning the tides in this case against Heard outside of the courtroom and in relation to her career. These actions were exactly those that Christine de Pizan warned would occur when stooping low enough to employ slander when discussing opposing orators or debaters, which we see in the loss of positive reputation that Depp and Heard previously had, and in encouraging the use of slander by one’s opponent. This continuous cycle of disturbing revelations after another was due in part to how prominent of a figure they are in Hollywood, but more so in relation to the continued slanderous accusations that they held against one another.

As documented by the NBC news platform in the summary of the trial, “The jury unanimously finds that Heard defamed Depp, awarding him \$5 million in punitive damages and \$10 million in compensatory damages.” (Rosenblatt, 2022). With Heard unanimously losing this trial, it was determined by the United State justice system that Depp was to be considered innocent, and that Heard had defamed him by slandering his name in her interview with *The Washington Post*. Despite the confusion and chaos of this case, Heard’s actions taken during it had much larger implications affecting the reputation and the validity of the “Me Too” movement. Having risen to prominence in 2017, the “Me Too” movement began as an encouraging platform for survivors of sexual and other physical assault to finally begin to speak out against men in powerful positions in Hollywood. Their official website notes, “As a global,

and survivor-led, movement against sexual violence, we are dedicated to creating pathways for healing, justice, action, and leadership. If your life was forever changed by sexual violence, you are not alone. Wherever you are in your healing journey, we are here to help.” (metoomvmt.org).

Women were finally being given the voices and encouragement from one another to stand up against a silenced cycle of assault in Hollywood, which received heavy opposition from the prominent men in Hollywood that were subject to receiving the judgment that would come with the revelation of women speaking out against them. This would lead to figures of high influence in Hollywood, looking to cover up their own crimes, to look for any reason possible to discredit such a movement by claiming false accusations. With the settling of the Heard v. Depp trial, the realization that someone could lie about the abuse that they allegedly faced would become an all too real scapegoat for other men to claim the same about their own cases. Heard employed the momentum of the “Me Too” movement to further her own claims during this trial, which were found to be false under the law, and this action not only affected her own reputation but the reputation of countless women who had survived abuse and also felt safe enough to speak out under the protection of this campaign. Christine de Pizan predicted this effect in *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* and warned that the voices of women, though repressed during her time, were under constant scrutiny, and would be picked apart to discredit them at any moment, which is exactly what would happen during the Depp v. Heard defamation trial. Heard even stated in a tweet after the decision of the case was revealed that reads, “I’m even more disappointed with what this verdict means for other women. It is a setback. It sets back the clock at a time when a woman who spoke up and spoke out could be publicly shamed and humiliated. It sets back the idea that violence against women is to be taken seriously.” (Savin, 2022).

This trial is one that will go down in history as messy, confusing, and debatable among anyone who studies it. Public opinion will remain to be split between the two parties, though seemingly more in support of Depp in accordance with the final decision. However, in this essay it was analyzed under the scope of the framework of Christine de Pizan as presented in *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*. Her takeaway is clear; slander will only further complicate and harm that of which who employs it.

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