

[Further examples of the goodness of women's speech follow. And Reason concludes in paragraph 38.]

"As you can understand now, fair sweet friend, God has given language to women to be served by it. Thus they should not be reproached for something from which much good and little evil comes, for one sees rarely that their language does any great damage.

"As for spinning, truly God wanted it to be natural for them, for it is necessary for the divine service and it is useful to every reasonable creature, for without this kind of work the affairs of this world would fall into great corruption. Thus it is very bad to reproach women for what should be construed to their great credit, honor, and praise."

Christine Asks Reason Why Women Do Not Sit in the Seats of Lawyers; and the Answer

"Most high and honored lady, your excellent arguments completely satisfy me. But tell me still, if you please, the truth about why women do not plead in law courts, know nothing about arguments, and do not render judgments; for these men say that some woman, I don't know who, behaved unwisely in the seat of justice."⁸ "Daughter, the things one says about her are frivolous and cunningly invented. But whoever would ask about the causes and reasons of all things, there would be too many answers to give; not even Aristotle, although he explains many of them in his *Problems* and *Categories*, would be sufficient. But as for that question, fair friend, one might just as well ask why God did not ordain that men do the tasks of women, and women those of men. So this question can be answered by saying that just as a wise and well-organized lord arranges his household so that people do different tasks, one person one thing and another person another thing, and what one person does the other does not do, in the same way God has established man and woman to serve him in different tasks and also to help and comfort one another, each one in what he has been given to do, and to each sex He has given the nature and inclination fitting and appropriate for their task.

[Reason describes the strength and boldness of men that make them fit for upholding the law by force or in court. Women do not have the same strengths.]

Although there are women to whom God has given great understanding, nonetheless, because of the decency they are inclined to, it would not be appropriate for them to go and appear boldly in court like men,

8. A reference to Caesaria, whose outrageous behavior Matheolus discussed in his *Lamentations* 2:177-200.

for there are enough men who do so. What would be the good of sending three men to lift a load that two can carry easily?

But if anyone wanted to claim that women do not have sufficient understanding to learn the laws, the opposite is evident, as is proven by experience, which shows, and has shown this (as I will tell you shortly) through many women who have been great philosophers and have acquired more subtle and more eminent knowledge than written laws and things established by men. And furthermore, if anyone wanted to propose that women do not have a natural sense for politics and government, I will give you examples of several great female rulers from the past. And, so that you will better understand my truth, I will also remind you of some women of your own time who remained widows whose excellent governing of their affairs after their husbands' deaths clearly shows that a woman who possesses understanding is up to all tasks."⁹

[In paragraph 42 Reason tells the stories of Nicaula, the empress of Aethiopia, and in paragraph 43 of Fredegund, queen of France, who, though crueler than women naturally are, was a skilled ruler. She then lists some more women¹ of the French past and present who ruled nobly.]

More Exchanges and Debates between Christine and Reason

[Christine agrees that Reason proved her case for the excellence of women's minds. Yet, they have weak bodies and some people claim that they are natural cowards. Reason invalidates this argument by showing that Aristotle and Alexander the Great, though ugly and even sickly, were nevertheless great men. Indeed, many strong men are cowardly, while some men who appear weak are bold.]

"But as for boldness and bodily strength, God and Nature have done much for women by depriving them of these qualities, for at least through this pleasant defect they are excused from committing the horrible cruelties, murders, and great and serious crimes, which have been and are being done by force throughout the world. Thus they will never have to suffer the punishment that such cases demand; and it would have been better for the souls of many strong men if they had spent their earthly pilgrimage in weak female bodies. And I truly say, to return to my point, that if Nature did not give great bodily strength to women she has well compensated for this by giving them a most virtuous inclination, that is, to love one's God and to be fearful of transgressing His commandments; and those women who do otherwise act against nature.

Nonetheless, there are some women who possess both physical strength and daring. In a return to the building imagery Reason now finds that the

9. This is one of the topics of her *Book of the Three Virtues*.

1. Most of the examples in this section come from Boccaccio's *Concerning Famous Women*.

ditch is deep enough and that the first stone can be laid. Christine is ordered to take up "the trowel of [her] pen" and to place the first stone, which is Semiramis, queen of Nimiveh. She was a conqueror and founder of cities; she also married her own son, something that was then not forbidden by written law.² Next, Reason tells of the Amazons and of other noble queens and military heroines. This section completes the foundations of the City; they can now start on the walls.]

Christine Asks Reason. Whether God Has Ever Wanted to Ennoble the Mind of Woman with the Eminence of the Sciences; and Reason's Response

After listening to these things, I replied to the lady who spoke without error: "Lady, God has truly revealed great marvels in the strength of these women of whom you have told me. But help me to become even wiser, if you please, by telling me whether it has ever pleased this same God, who has done so many favors to women, to honor the feminine sex by giving some of them the privilege of the virtue of high understanding and great learning, and whether women have a mind capable of this? I very much want to know this because men claim that the understanding of women is of little capacity." Answer: "Daughter, by what I told you earlier you can conclude that the opposite of their opinion is true and to make it even clearer to you I will prove it by examples. I tell you again, and do not believe that the contrary is true, that if it were the custom to send little girls to school and have them study the sciences, as one does in the case of boys, they would learn just as perfectly and would understand the subtleties of the arts and sciences as boys do. And as it happens there are such women: for, as I touched on earlier, just as women have more delicate bodies than men, weaker and less able to do various things, so they have minds that are more open and sharper in the cases where they apply themselves."

"Lady, what are you saying? May it not displease you to bear with me a little on this point. Certainly men would never admit the truth of this point unless it is explained more fully, for they claim that one commonly sees that men know more than women." Answer: "Do you know why women know less?" "No, lady, unless you tell me." "Undoubtedly it is so because they do not encounter so many different things but stay in their houses, and it is enough for them to run their households; and there is nothing that teaches so much to a reasonable creature as the exercise and experience of many different things." "Lady, since they have minds capable of comprehending and learning things, why do women not learn more?" Answer: "For the reason, daughter, that public life does not need their participation in tasks that men are meant to

2. On this story see Maureen Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority: Christine de Pizan's 'Cité des dames'* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 69-85.

perform, as I told you earlier. It is enough that they perform the customary tasks for which they are meant."

[Reason goes on to explain that not natural incapacity but a lack of learning is at the origin of what people might consider savage or unwise customs. Just as for men, some women have better minds than others. She will now tell of some women who have the kind of learning that resembles men's.]

She Begins to Speak of Some Ladies Who Were Enlightened with Great Learning, and First about the Noble Maiden Cornificia

"Cornificia, the noble maiden, was sent to school by her parents—through tricks and deception—with her brother Cornificus, still in their childhood. But this little girl had such a wonderful mind for study that through her learning she began to feel the sweet taste of knowledge. It was not easy to take away from her this pleasure to which she devoted herself at the expense of other feminine tasks. And she spent so much time on this that she became a most excellent poet, and her talent and expertise were not only in the learned craft of poetry but it also seemed that she had been nourished with the milk and doctrine of philosophy: for she wanted to experience and know about all kinds of learning, in which she acquired such mastery that she surpassed her brother, a great poet himself, through her superior learning."

"And she was not satisfied with mere knowledge unless she could put her mind to work and her hands to her pen in the compilation of several very well known books. Her books and poems were much appreciated at the time of St. Gregory³ and were even mentioned by him. In this context Boccaccio, the Italian, who was a great poet, speaks in praise of this woman in his book: 'Oh, greatest honor to a woman who abandoned all feminine tasks and applied and devoted her mind to the study of the most eminent scholars.'

"Further, Boccaccio speaks—and in this he confirms what I said to you earlier—of the minds of women who despise themselves and their own judgment, and, just as if they were born in the mountains and did not know what is good and honorable, they become discouraged and say that the only thing they are good and useful for is to embrace men and carry and feed children. And God has given them such beautiful understanding to apply themselves, if they want to, to the same things as glorious and excellent men. Whatever subjects they want to study, they will find that they are just as open to them as to men, and through their honest labor they can acquire a name that will last forever, something that is much desired by the most eminent men. Dear daughter, now you can see how this author Boccaccio testifies to what I have told you and how he praises and approves learning in women."

3. Boccaccio specifies St. Jerome in *Concerning Famous Women*, 188.

[Reason now tells Christine about the Roman poet Proba, author of the *Cento*, which draws on many of Virgil's works; about Sappho, Manto, and the skills of Medea (without mentioning the murder of her children), and Circe.]

Christine Asks Reason Whether There Was Ever a Woman Who by Herself Invented a Science Not Known Before

[Christine agrees that Reason has made a good case for the existence of many learned ladies, but did women ever invent something new? Reason replies that women have invented many arts and sciences, both theoretical and practical. A new series of examples begins, as Reason tells of Nicostrata.]

"And first I will tell you about the noble Nicostrata whom the Italians called Carmentis.⁴ This lady was the daughter of the king of Arcadia, named Pallas. She had an extraordinary mind and was endowed by God with special gifts of knowledge: she was so learned in Greek literature, spoke so beautifully and wisely, and possessed such praiseworthy eloquence that the poets of her time who wrote about her made up stories that she was loved by the god Mercury,⁵ and that a son she had had by her husband, and who was extremely learned in his time, was actually this god's son. Certain changes that occurred in her country caused her to leave and, in a large ship, she transported her son and a great number of people who followed her to the land of Italy and arrived at the river Tiber. There she landed and climbed up on a high hill she named the Palentine after her father, on which the city of Rome was later founded. There, this lady with her son and followers built a fortress. And as she had found that the men of this country were like savage beasts, she wrote certain laws in which she urged them to live by the order of right and reason, according to justice. And she was the first to establish laws in this country which later on became so famous and from which came and issued all just laws.

"This noble lady knew by divine inspiration and the spirit of prophecy, which together with other graces had been given to her and in which she was particularly expert, that this country would become in future times ennobled by excellence and reputation, surpassing all the countries on this earth. It seemed to her that it would not be proper that, once the Roman Empire had attained its superiority, its people should use the strange and inferior letters and characters of another country. And also, in order to demonstrate her wisdom and the excellence of her mind to future centuries, she labored and studied until she

4. On the importance of Carmentis for the creation of a new poetic consciousness in the late Middle Ages, see Jacqueline Cerquigini-Toulet, *La Couleur de la mélancolie: La fréquentation des livres au XIV^e siècle (1300-1415)* (Paris: Haber, 1993), 118-25.

5. This is a euhemeristic (historical) explanation of myth—one of the popular ways of interpreting mythological stories in the Middle Ages. See also n. 4, p. 29.

came up with her own letters that were completely different from those of other nations: that is, the ABC and the rules for Latin, how letters could be put together, and the difference between vowels and consonants, and all the fundamentals of the science of grammar. She presented and taught these letters and science to the people and wanted to make them widely known. The science invented by this woman was neither unimportant nor useless and one owes her no small amount of gratitude, for the subtlety of this science and the great utility and good it subsequently brought to this world justify our saying that nothing more worthy was ever invented in this world.

"And the Italians were not ungrateful for this benefit, and with good reason; to them, these events were so marvelous that they not only held this woman in greater repute than any man, but considered her a goddess, and for this reason bestowed divine honors on her while she was still alive. And when she was dead, they constructed a temple that they dedicated to her name; it was built at the foot of the hill where she had lived.

[Reason now explains not only how the Romans named their country and important concepts with the words she had invented or even after her (such as Latin *carment*, which means "song, poem," from Carmentis) but that her language survives to this day. And Carmentis was not the only woman who invented new things.]

Reason tells the story of Minerva or Pallas who invented shorthand writing in Greek as well as numbers. Among other skills, she also invented the making of armor and musical instruments. For her accomplishments she was worshiped as a goddess. Ceres invented agriculture and Isis taught people how to plant. Reason and Christine now recapitulate the achievements of these women and the benefits humanity derived from their inventions. Reason then tells the story of Arachne, an expert weaver and the inventor of the cultivation of flax and hemp. All this is very useful for civilization, though some authors seem to object to this view.]

"And nonetheless, some authors, and even the poet Boccaccio who tells these very stories, have said that the world was faring better when people lived on nothing but hawthorn fruits and acorns and did not dress in anything but animal skins than it has fared since people were taught more refined ways of life. But, while appreciating him and those who claim that the world has been worse off because of the things invented for the well-being and nourishment of the human body, I have to say that the more good things, favors, and gifts human creatures receive from God, the better they are obliged to serve Him.⁶ And if humans misuse the goods their Creator has promised and granted them

6. On Christine's ideas on the Golden Age see Rosalind Brown-Gianti, "Désolence ou progrès? Christine de Pizan, Boccace et la question de l'Age d'Or," *Revue des langues romanes* 92 (1988), 295-306.

to use well and fittingly and that He made for the use of men and women, it is because of the wickedness and perversity of those who misuse them, and not because the things in themselves are not good and profitably when people use them and avail themselves of them in a lawful manner. Jesus Christ Himself demonstrated this to us in His own person: for He used bread, wine, fish, colored garments, linen, and all necessary things, which He would never have done if it were better to live on hawthorn fruits and acorns. And He bestowed great honor on the science that Ceres invented, namely bread, when it pleased Him to give man and woman such a worthy body in the form of bread so that they could profit from it."⁷

[Reason tells the story of Pamphile who invented a way of getting silk from worms; she then speaks of several painters of antiquity.—Thamaris, Irene, and Marcia—who surpassed all others in the world. Christine feels compelled to add a contemporary example.]

Then I said to her: "Lady, by these examples one can see that in ancient times the wise were honored more than at present, and that the sciences were prized much more. But, concerning what you said about women expert in the science of painting, I know a woman today whose name is Anastasia, who is so expert at painting manuscript borders⁸ and illustrating landscapes that there is no craftsman in the city of Paris, where the most eminent painters in the world can be found, who surpasses her, nor is there anyone who paints flowers and small details as delicately as she does, or anyone whose work is appreciated more, however rich or expensive the book may be that those people lucky enough to obtain one get from her. And this I know from experience: for she has done some things for me which are considered extraordinary among the manuscript borders of other great craftsmen." Answer: "I certainly believe you, dear daughter; one could find plenty of intelligent women in the world if one were willing to look. And still in this context I will tell you of a Roman woman."

[Reason now tells of Sempronia who possessed an extraordinary memory.]

7. A reference to the bread equaling the body of Christ used in the Christian ritual of the Eucharist.
8. The French words *vigneteuses* ("vines") and *champaignes d'histoires* ("illustrated landscapes") are interesting technical terms that show how expert Christine was in manuscript illumination. We know that she supervised the illustration of several of her manuscripts. Millard Meiss refers to this passage in *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry*, vol. 1 (London: Phaidon, 1957), 362, n. 3. See also Jonathan J. G. Alexander, *Medieval Illuminators and Their Methods of Work* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992) as well as n. 6 on p. 30.

Here Christine Asks Reason if There Is Any Prudence in the Natural Sense of Women; and Reason's Answer to Her

[Christine observes that many scholars show little prudence in their moral conduct, despite their learning. She now wants to know whether there were any women who were guided in their actions by prudence. Reason responds that there are two forces that produce prudence: natural sense and acquired knowledge. Acquired knowledge should be prized more because it can be transmitted and lasts forever. But this question does not directly relate to the building of the City. Reason therefore returns to her examples and begins to tell of prudent women. After citing the Song of Solomon, she speaks of Gaia Cirilla, wife of King Tarquin, who excelled at both governing and in the administration of her household. In a long chapter Reason tells the story of Dido, emphasizing her skill at acquiring land and retaining power.⁹ Ops, the Cretan queen, and Lavinia, Aeneas's wife, close book 1 as examples of prudent rulers. Reason now summarizes the points of this book.]

"What else would you like me to tell you, dear daughter? It seems to me that I have produced enough proofs for my points: namely to show you, by quick reasoning and example, that God has never had, nor has, any objections to the feminine sex, or to that of men, as it has become clear and will become even clearer in the depositions of my two sisters who are here. For it seems to me that for now the walls I have built for you as the enclosure of the City of Ladies must suffice; they are finished and covered with plaster. May my two sisters step forward, and with their help and advice may you complete what still remains to be done with this building."

Here ends the first part of the Book of the City of Ladies.

Here Begins the Second Part of the Book of the City of Ladies, Which Tells How and by Whom the Houses within the City Walls Were Built and Populated

[Lady Rectitude, the second sister, now approaches Christine and tells her about the ten Sibyls, wise women with prophetic voices.¹ She then tells the stories of more women prophets such as Cassandra, Queen Basine, wife of King Childeric, and Antonia, empress of Constantinople.]

Christine Speaks to Lady Rectitude

"Lady, because I understand and see clearly that women are in the right against the things they are so often accused of, please make me

9. Christine told Dido's story twice: once in the context of abandoned lovers and once showing Dido as a powerful ruler. Aside from Boccaccio, her story was also known from Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Heroides*. See Marilyn Desmond, *Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality, and the Medieval Aeneid* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).
1. See n. 3 on p. 40.

comprehend better the injustice of their accusers. And again, I cannot keep quiet about a habit of thought that circulates commonly among men, and even among some women, which maintains that when women are pregnant and give birth to a daughter, the husbands are unhappy and grumble because their wives have not given birth to a son. And their silly wives, who should be overjoyed that God has safely delivered them and likewise thank Him from their hearts, are upset because they see their husbands unhappy. Why, lady, are they so sad about this? Are daughters more trouble than sons, or do they love their parents less or are they more indifferent toward them than sons?"

Answer: "Dear friend, since you ask me about the cause, I can answer you with certainty that the reason is the extreme simplicity and ignorance of those who are unhappy about this. However, the principal reason that motivates them is the cost of marrying them, which will require a great part of their possessions. And some worry because they fear the danger of their daughters being deceived by bad advice when they are ingenuous and young.

"But all these reasons amount to nothing when looked at sensibly. For, as far as the fear of their daughters doing something foolish is concerned, all one has to do is to instruct them wisely when they are small and for the mother to serve as an example of decency and good teaching, for if the mother were to lead a disordered life she would be a bad example for the daughter, and she should be kept away from bad company, on a tight rein and respectful, for the discipline maintained over children and young people serves as preparation for a lifetime of virtue. Likewise, as far as the expense is concerned, I believe that if the parents looked more closely at the amount their sons cost them — be it for teaching them knowledge or a profession, or simply for living expenses, and even for superfluous expenses (whether they belong to the high, middle, or lower classes), or for foolish companionship or a lot of silliness — I believe that they will hardly find it more advantageous to have sons than daughters. And if you consider the anger and worry caused by many sons and the fact that they often incite rough and grievous brawls and riots or lead dissolute lives — and all this to the grief and at the expense of their parents — I believe that this easily surpasses the worries they have because of their daughters.

"Just see how many sons you can find who take care of their father and mother in their old age as gently and humbly as they should.

[Rectitude observes that many parents make gods out of their sons, and then, when the sons are rich and the father poor, the sons abandon the parents. Or, if the father is rich, they cannot wait for him to die so that they can inherit.]

"And on this subject Petrarch spoke the truth when he said: 'Oh foolish man, you desire to have children, but you could not have a more

mortal enemy: for if you are poor, they will find you tedious and will desire your death to be rid of you; and if you are rich, they will desire it no less, in order to have what belongs to you."²

"I certainly do not claim that all sons are like this, but there are a lot who are. And if they are married, God knows how eager they are to exploit their fathers and mothers: they could not care less if these weary old people die of hunger, just as long as they get everything. What a family! Or if their mothers are widowed, at the moment when they should comfort them and be the support and help in their old age — these mothers who cherished them so much and brought them up to tenderness are well rewarded for all this: for the evil children believe that everything should belong to them, and if the mothers don't give them everything they want they will not spare them their displeasure. God knows how much respect is observed here! And there is worse, for some have no qualms about bringing lawsuits against their mothers and drag them to court. And this is the reward that many people receive after having spent their lives trying to get richer or advancing their children. There are many sons like this, and it is possible that there are daughters like this as well. But, if you look closely, I think that you will find that there are more sons than daughters among these perverse children.

"And let us suppose that all sons were good, one still sees daughters keeping their fathers and mothers company more often than sons, and they visit them more often and give them greater comfort and care in their sickness and old age. The reason is that sons move around the world more, here and there, while daughters keep more quiet and stay closer to their parents, as you can see by your own example: for, regardless of the fact that your brothers were not unnatural children and very loving and good, they went out into the world, while you alone stayed behind to keep your good mother company, which is her greatest comfort in her old age. And for this reason, I tell you in conclusion that those people who are upset and unhappy when daughters are born to them are just too foolish. And since you got me into this subject, I want to tell you about some women, written about among others, who are very natural and show great love to their parents."

[Rectitude tells the stories of Drypetina, Hypsipyle, and Claudine who were good companions to their fathers and even fought for them in battles. Now Rectitude turns to the story of a daughter and a mother in Rome.]

About a Woman Who Breastfed Her Mother in Prison

"Similarly, a woman from Rome showed great love for her mother, as the history books tell. It happened that her mother was condemned to

2. Petrarch speaks on these topics in his *De remediis utriusque fortunæ* [On the remedies of the two fortunes], i.e., good and bad fortune. Christine's father may have known Petrarch.

etic in prison for certain crimes of which she was accused, and no one was supposed to give her anything to drink or eat. Her daughter, moved by great filial love and saddened by this sentence, requested as a special favor from those who guarded her that she be allowed to visit her mother every day, as long as she was still alive, so that she could counsel her to show perseverance. And, to make matters brief, she cried and begged so much that the prison guards took pity on her and gave her leave to visit her mother every day. But before they brought her to her mother, they always searched her very well so that she would not bring her any food.

[This goes on for so many days that the guards begin wondering how the mother can survive so long without food.]

"In fact, one day they spied on the mother and daughter together: and they saw that the unhappy daughter, who had just had a child, gave her teat to her mother until she had drawn all milk from her breasts. And thus the daughter gave back to her mother in her old age what she had taken from her in her infancy. This continuous care and great love of daughter to mother moved the jailers to great pity, and the act was reported to the judges who, moved by human compassion, freed the mother and gave her back to her daughter."

[Griselda is another example of a good daughter.³ Many more daughters could be listed, but Rectitude decides that she has said enough on this topic.

Rectitude explains that the houses of the City are now finished and that the kingdom, for the ladies will not have to leave to give birth in order to perpetuate their realm. Rather, the ladies who will now be put into the City will suffice forever. But only virtuous women of integrity will be admitted. Christine asks Lady Rectitude whether what the books and men say is true, namely that married life is so hard to bear because of women and their great faults. And Rectitude responds and begins to speak of the great love women have for their husbands.]

Then as we were leaving to seek out these ladies by the order of Lady Rectitude, I spoke these words as we were moving along: "Lady, you and Reason have truly found solutions and conclusions to all my questions and queries to which I knew no answer, and I consider myself very well informed on the subject I inquired about. And I have learned from you a lot about how all feasible and knowable things, be they related to the strength of the body or to the wisdom of understanding or to all the

3. Her story, told by Boccaccio as the last in his *Decameron*, was extremely popular in the Middle Ages. Christine tells it at length later in book 2; see E. J. Richard's complete translation, 170-76. Petrarch wrote a Latin version and Philip de Mézières, to whom Christine once sold some property, wrote the first French version in his book on the sacrament of marriage: Joan B. Williamson, ed., *Le livre de la vertu du sacrement de mariage* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1993).

virtues, are possible and easy for women to achieve. But I am still asking you to tell and certify for me whether it is true what men say and so many authors testify to—something about which I am thinking deeply—that for men life within the order of marriage is so filled with and taken over by uproar because of the fault and impetuosity of women and their vengeful bad moods, as it is written in many books? And many people bear witness to this kind of life by saying that women like their husbands and their company so little that nothing else annoys them as much. For this reason many people have counseled wise men not to marry so that they can resist and escape from such inconveniences, and they affirm that no women, or very few of them, are loyal to their partners.

"And in this vein Valerius wrote to Rufinus, and Theophrastus⁴ said in his book that no wise man should take a wife, because there are too many worries in women, little love, and an abundance of idle talk, and that if a man marries to be better taken care of and watched over in his sickness, a loyal servant would serve and watch over him better and more diligently and would not cost him as much, and if the woman gets sick the husband languishes and does not dare move away from her. And he says a lot of things like that, which would take too long to recite; therefore I say to you, dear lady, that if these things are true, these flaws are so shameful that all the other graces and virtues women could possess amount to nothing and are canceled out by them."

Answer: "Certainly, friend, just as you yourself said earlier on this topic: whoever brings a lawsuit without opposition, pleads at his own convenience. And I assure you that the books that say this were not written by women.⁵ But I have no doubt that whoever were to inquire into the debate on marriage in order to write a new book in accordance with the truth, would find some news! Dear friend, how many women are there, and you yourself know this, who because of their husbands' hard-heartedness spend their weary lives in the bonds of marriage under greater punishment than if they were slaves among the Saracens? Oh, God! How many harsh beatings without cause and reason, how many gross insults, how much nastiness, how many injuries, humiliations, and outrages have many good and upright women suffered of whom not one cried out for help. And what about those women that die of hunger and misery with a house full of children and their husbands go rabble-rousing about town or in taverns, and what about the poor women who are beaten by their husbands upon their return, and they are supposed to count this as their supper—what do you say about that: am I lying? And have you ever seen any of your female neighbors treated like that?"

4. Rufinus was mentioned by Jean Le Fèvre in his *Book of Joy*. Walter Map wrote an anti-marriage text in the twelfth century featuring these characters who were mentioned by St. Jerome. See Wilson and Malowski, *Wicked Wives*, 51-53 and 87-98.

5. Christine made the same argument in her *The God of Love's Letter* (see p. 15).

And I said to her: "Certainly, lady, I have seen many, and I pity them greatly." "I believe you, and to say that men are so saddened by their wives' illnesses, I beg of you, my friend, where are they? And without telling you any more, you can well see that this nonsense spoken and written against women is invented, biased, and untrue. For men are masters over their wives, and wives are certainly not mistresses over their husbands: they would never let them have such authority.

"But I assure you that not all marriages are filled with such quarrels, for there are people who live together in great peacefulness, love, and loyalty because the partners are good, considerate, and reasonable. And although there are bad husbands, there are also very good ones, valiant and wise, and the women who encounter them were born lucky with respect to the glory of this world, because God pointed them in the right direction. And you know this very well by your own example: you had such a husband that, even if you could have had your heart's desire, you could not have asked for a better one; in your judgment no one surpassed him in goodness, peacefulness, loyalty, and true love, and the grief over death having taken him away from you will never leave your heart. And although I am telling you, and it is true, that there are many good women badly mistreated by their wicked husbands, you should know nevertheless that there are also wicked and unreasonable women, for if I were to tell you that they are all good, I could rather easily be accused of being a liar—but that is the least of it. And I have no business with those, for such women are like beings removed from their own nature.

"To speak of good women: as for this Theophrastus who said that a man will be just as loyally and diligently taken care of in his sickness and worry by a servant as by his wife: ha! How many good women are there who are so concerned in serving their husbands, healthy or sick, with a love so loyal as if their husbands were gods? I do not believe one could find such a servant. And because we have broached this subject matter, I will give you many examples of the great love and loyalty shown by wives for their husbands. And now, thank God, we have returned to our City in the noble company of the beautiful and virtuous women that we will settle there."

[The first inhabitant of the City is a loyal wife: Rectitude tells of Hypsira-tea, the wife of king Mithridates; she dressed like a man to follow him through war and sweeten his exile. Her devotion refutes the misogynistic prejudices of Theophrastus.]

Of the Empress Triaria

"Quite similar to the above-mentioned queen's were the circumstances and the loyal love for her husband of the noble Empress Triaria,

156

the wife of Lucius Vitellius, emperor of the Romans.⁶ She loved him so greatly that she followed him everywhere, and in all battles, armed like a knight, she remained courageously at his side and fought vigorously. One day, at the time of the emperor's fight against Vespasianus for the rulership of the empire, when he attacked a city of the Volscians at night, he managed to enter it and found the people asleep whom he attacked cruelly. But this noble lady Triaria, who had followed her husband throughout the night, was not far off so that, ardently wishing for his victory and fully armed and girded with a sword, she fought fiercely among the troops next to him, now here, now there, in the darkness of the night. She showed no fear or horror, but rather such force that she was praised by everyone for this battle where she had truly done marvels. Thus she demonstrated well, as Boccaccio says, the great love she had for her husband, sanctioning the bonds of marriage that others so strongly object to."

[Rectitude adduces more examples of good wives: Artemisia, queen of Caria; Argia, King Adrastus's daughter, taking care of the body of her husband, Polynice, after the Theban war; the stories of a number of Roman ladies prove that, contrary to what the misogynists say, women can be trusted with secrets and are capable of giving good advice to their husbands. More Roman ladies are cited as well as women from the Old Testament, such as Judith and Esther. This section culminates with the story of the French king Clovis who was converted to Christianity⁷ by his wife Clotilda.]

Against Those Who Say That It Is Not Good That Women Should Pursue Learning

After hearing these things, I, Christine, spoke as follows: "Lady, I see well that many good things have come about through women, and if any evil resulted from evil women, it still seems to me that the good things brought about by good women, and also by the wise women and those learned in literature and the sciences I mentioned above, are more numerous. For this reason I am extremely amazed by the opinion of some men who say that they do not want their daughters, wives, or female relatives to study the sciences and that their morals would worsen through this."

Answer: "In this you can clearly see that not all the opinions of men are based on reason and that these men are wrong. For it should not be assumed that knowing the moral sciences, which teach the virtues, would worsen morals, rather, there is no doubt that they improve and

6. Boccaccio states that Triaria was the wife of the emperor's brother, see *Concerning Famous Women*, 217.

7. The conversion to Christianity of King Clovis in 496 was an important part of late medieval national ideology (see also n. 7 on p. 162). See Colette Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology: Myths and Symbols of Nation in Late-Medieval France*, trans. Susan Ross Huston (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), chap. 2.

ennoble them. How is it possible to believe that a person who follows good teaching and doctrine could be the worse for it? Such a thing cannot be uttered or supported. I do not say that it would be good for a man or a woman to study the science of sorcery,⁸ or those areas that are forbidden—for the Holy Church did not remove them from common usage for nothing—but that women should get worse by knowing good things is not believable."

[Rectitude tells the story of Hortensia, daughter of the rhetorician Quintus Hortensius, who through her rhetorical skill supported the cause of women against a tax on jewelry in a time of financial crisis.]

"Similarly, to speak of more recent times, without looking about in ancient histories, Jean André, the solemn legal scholar in Bologna the Fat⁹ not quite sixty years ago, was not of the opinion that it was bad for women to be learned. His beautiful and good daughter, whom he loved so much was called Novella. He had her educated in the law to such a high level, that, when he was occupied with some business which prevented him from lecturing to his students, he sent his daughter in his place to present the lectures to the students from his professorial seat. And so that her beauty would not distract the listeners from their thoughts, she had a little curtain in front of her. And in this manner she aided and lightened her father's work. He loved her so much that, to commemorate her name, he gave a notable lecture on a law book he named after his daughter, *Novella*.

"So not all men, and especially the wisest, are of the above-mentioned opinion that it is bad for women to be learned. But it is quite true that some men, who are not wise, say this because it would displease them if women knew more than they do. Your father, who was a great scientist and philosopher, was not of the opinion that women were worth less by learning the sciences, rather, as you know, he derived great pleasure from seeing you inclined toward learning. But the feminine opinion of your mother, who wanted to keep you busy with stuff like spinning as is the common custom of women, was the stumbling block that kept you from being thrust further and deeper into the sciences when you were still a child.¹ But, just as the proverb says, 'What Nature gives, no one can take away,' your mother could not put a stop to your feeling for the sciences which you, by natural inclination, had at least gathered in little droplets. I believe that you do not think you are of less worth because of these things, but rather consider it a great treasure for yourself; and there

8. The word in French is *science des sorcs*, literally "drawing lots," i.e., prophecy or sorcery.

9. In French, it is *Bologna le Gras*. "Bologna the Fat" or wealthy, a common way to refer to Bologna at the time. Jehan Ardy (as Christine spelled it) was Giovanni Andrea (1275-1347), a legal scholar in Bologna. He was mentioned in Le Fevre's *Book of Joy*, lines 1140-54.

1. On the theme of Christine's inadequate education, see p. xii. "Spinning," the word in French is *filsse* from *filer* ("to spin"); the suffix *-esse* expresses the worthlessness of an activity.

is no doubt that you have grounds to do so." And, I, Christine, responded to all this: "Certainly, lady, what you say is as true as the *Pater Noster*."²

[Christine now addresses the question of whether those men are right who say that there are no chaste women. Rectitude replies with the stories of some biblical women like Susanna, Sarah, Rebecca, and Ruth, as well of Roman women like Lucretia who killed herself after being raped. The next topic is inconstancy: women are not fickle, says Rectitude and proves it through the stories of several ancient ladies. She also demonstrates that there were plenty of men who were inconstant and untrustworthy, like the Roman emperors Nero and Galba. Then she tells the story of Griselida, Florence of Rome, and others.]

After Rectitude has told of constant ladies, Christine asks her why so many valiant ladies of the past have not contradicted the books and men that spoke ill of them, and Rectitude answers. Why did women not protest against this slander when they knew the men were wrong? Christine asks.]

Answer: "Dear friend, this question is rather easy to answer. You can see through the things I told you earlier that the ladies whose great virtues I described to you occupied their minds with tasks that differed from one to the other, and not all with the same things. To build this work was reserved for you and not for them³ for these women's work garnered them enough praise among people of good understanding and true discernment, without their writing anything else. And as for the length of time that has passed without women contradicting their accusers and slanderers, I can tell you that in the long run things come together at the right time. For how is it possible that God permitted heresies against His holy law to exist in this world for such a long time, which were stamped out with such great effort and would still last to this day if they had not been disproved and vanquished? The same goes for many other things that were tolerated for a long time and are then debated and rejected."

[Christine anticipates objections to her work: will people not say that her praise of women is exaggerated? They will only admit that there are some good women and that not all women are good. Rectitude sweeps these worries aside by showing that there were a lot of bad men (like Judas) and that generalizations about women or men serve no purpose.]

Rectitude now tells of women faithful in love. She refers to Christine's own works, *The God of Love's Letter* and the *Debate on the Romance of the Rose*. In these works Christine has proved that women are not deceitful. Dido, Medea, Thisbe, Hero, Ghismonda, Lisabetta, Yseult, and others are exemplars of constant love.⁴ Other stories disprove claims that women are

2. The Lord's Prayer (Latin).

3. Christine is indeed the first woman writer explicitly to address women's role in society.

4. These examples range from ancient literature to almost contemporary literary heroines from Boccaccio's *Decamerone*.

flirtatious and greedy. Generosity is indeed the virtue of many French ladies, including contemporary ones like Margaret of Riviere. The City is now filled with houses and inhabitants. But it is not yet perfect: Lady Justice will have to finish the job. Thus ends the second part of the book.]

Here Begins the Third Part of the Book of the City of Ladies, Which Tells How and by Whom the High Tops of the Towers Were Completed and which Ladies Were Chosen to Live in the Great Palaces and High Fortresses

[Lady Justice brings forward the queen, the Virgin Mary, who will reign over all ladies of the City, that is, Christians and pagans alike. Whether the misogynist slanderers like it or not, the Virgin now resides with all women in the City. As examples of constancy Justice now tells of women saints.⁵ The first is Catherine of Alexandria, a learned young woman who debated so well with a group of wise pagans that she converted them. She was then cruelly put to death by the Romans and thus became a holy martyr.]

Of St. Margaret

"Let us also not forget the blessed virgin saint Margaret, whose legend is rather well known. It tells how she was born in Antioch of noble parents and was as a young girl introduced to the faith by her nurse, whose sheep she humbly guarded every day. On these occasions Olybrius began to lust after her and he had her fetched to him. And, to make matters brief, because she would not submit to his will and because she confessed to being Christian, he had her harshly beaten and thrown into prison. And in this prison, because she was feeling tempted, she asked God to grant her the sight of the one who was causing her so much wretchedness. And immediately a horrible dragon appeared which frightened her horribly and swallowed her; but she, making the sign of the cross, split open the dragon. And afterward she saw in a corner of the prison cell a figure, black like an Aethiopian. And right away Margaret went boldly toward him and stretched him out under her; she put her foot on his neck and he cried loudly for mercy. The prison filled with light, and she was consoled by the angels. Thereupon Margaret was again brought before the judge, who, when he saw that his admonitions had no effect, had her tortured even more than before. But God's angel came and destroyed the torture machines, and the virgin emerged unharmed and a great many people were converted. And when this deceitful tyrant saw this, he ordered that she be decapitated. But first she said her prayers and prayed for those who would remember her suffering and would ask for her in their tribulations, for pregnant women, and women giving birth. And God's angel appeared,

5. These stories come from Vincent of Beauvais. On book 3 of the City see Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority*, chap. 4.

who told her that her petition had been granted and that she should go and receive the victory palm in the name of God. And then she stretched out her neck: she was beheaded and the angels carried away her soul.

"This deceitful Olybrius in the same way had the holy virgin Regina, a young girl of fifteen, tortured and beheaded because she would not submit to him and converted many people with her preaching."

[Justice offers other legends as proof of women's steadfastness: saints Martina, Lucy, Benedicta, Fausta, Justine, Barbara, Dorothy, and others. The center of book 3 is occupied by the legend of St. Christine.⁶ She is persecuted by her father, who wants her to worship pagan idols, and a series of judges. After many tortures her tongue is cut out. St. Christine throws her tongue into the tyrant's face and thus blinds him. Two arrows finally kill her and make her a martyr. The legend ends with a prayer by Christine to her namesake in which she expresses joy at being able to include the saint's legend in her writings. Justice continues.]

Of Several Sanctity Women Who Saw Their Children Martyred before Their Eyes

"Oh, what feelings could be more tender in the world than those of a mother for her child, and what greater pain could her heart suffer than when she sees her child in pain? But, from what I see, faith is an even greater matter, as it is demonstrated by many valiant women who, for the love of Our Lord, offered their own children up to torture: as, for example, the blessed Felicia who saw her seven sons, beautiful young men, martyred in front of her. And the excellent mother comforted them and admonished them to be patient and firm in the faith. Thus the good lady had forgotten her maternal heart, as far as the body was concerned, for the love of God."

[Other stories of such mothers follow. Justice then turns to legends of holy women who disguised themselves as monks.]

Here She Speaks of St. Marina, Virgin

"One could tell about many virgin martyrs, and also about others who lived a holy life in the cloister and in other circumstances. And I will tell you about two in particular, whose legends are very beautiful and again confirm our argument on the constancy of women."

6. On this important figure see Kevin Brownlee, "Martyrdom and the Female Voice: Saint Christine in the *Cité des dames*," in R. Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Tmesa Szell, eds., *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 115-35; and Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority*, 213-22.

7. On cross-dressed saints see John Anson, "The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif," *Viator* 5 (1974), 1-32.

"A layman had an only child, a little daughter named Marina, whom he gave into the care of a relative while he entered a monastery and led a most holy life. But nonetheless, nature drew him to his daughter, and grief about her troubled him greatly. Thus he was weighed down with thought, thereupon the abbot asked him about the cause of his sadness, until he told him that his thoughts were heavily occupied with a son whom he had left behind in the world and whom he could not forget. The abbot told him to go and fetch him and to bring him into the monastery with him. Thus this virgin lived with her father, dressed like a little monk, and she was very good at disguising herself and at observing the discipline. And when she had reached the age of eighteen, being more and more steadfast, her father, who had instructed her in the most holy life, passed away. And she remained alone in her father's cell, leading such a holy life that the abbot and all the others praised her saintly way of life and took her for a man.

"This abbey was three miles away from a market town, and every so often the monks had to go to this market to buy their necessities. On these occasions it sometimes happened that it would be dark before they had finished their business, so that they stayed at an inn in town. And Marina, who was called Brother Marinus, would, when it was her turn, stay in the particular inn where they usually took lodging. At that time it happened that the innkeeper's daughter was pregnant, and because she was forced by her parents to tell who the father was, she blamed Brother Marinus. The parents complained about this to the abbot who summoned him,⁸ and the abbot was very much grieved about this matter. And the holy virgin preferred to accept the guilt rather than to reveal that she was a woman in order to excuse herself. She knelt down, weeping, and said: 'Father, I have sinned, pray for me, I will do penance.' Then the abbot, who was furious, had him cruelly beaten and threw him out of the abbey and forbade him to enter. And he threw himself on the ground in front of the door and lay there in penance, and begged from the brothers a single morsel of bread.

"And the innkeeper's daughter gave birth to a son, whom her mother brought to Marinus in front of the monastery and left him there. And the virgin welcomed him; and with the morsel of bread that the people entering the monastery gave her, she fed this child as if it were her own. And some time later, the brothers, moved by pity, begged the abbot to take Brother Marinus back, for mercy's sake—and they could hardly persuade him—for he had already done penance for five years. And when he entered the monastery, the abbot ordered him to perform all the dirty and filthy tasks inside and to bring water to clean their latrines and to serve every one of them. And the holy virgin did all this humbly and gladly.

8. Christine uses the masculine pronoun here, reflecting the point of view of the abbot, for whom Marina was Marinus, the male monk.

"And some time afterward she fell asleep in Our Lord. And when the brothers had announced this to the abbot, he said to them: 'Although his sin does not deserve forgiveness, wash him nevertheless and bury him alongside the monastery.'⁹ And when they undressed him and saw that it was a woman, they began to beat themselves and to cry out in pain and confusion over the harm they had done without reason to such a holy creature; and they marveled at her way of life. When this news was reported to the abbot, he came running and threw himself sobbing at the feet of the holy corpse, beating his chest for his guilt, crying for mercy, and begging for forgiveness. And he ordered her tomb to be placed in a chapel inside the monastery. There all the monks came; one of them, who had sight in only one eye, bent over the corpse, kissing it with great devotion, and immediately his sight was restored to him. That same day, the woman who had had the child, lost her mind and cried out her sin; and she was led to the holy corpse and recovered her health. And she performed and still performs, many miracles in this place."¹

[Justice now tells of St. Euphrosyna who also disguised herself as monk to live with her father; however, she does not reveal her identity to him. Saints Anastasia, Theodata, Natalia, and Afra (a converted prostitute) lead to the stories of women who helped and lodged the Apostles. [These last will serve as the gates of the City, which is now finished. The three allegorical ladies now take leave of Christine.]

The End of the Book: Christine Speaks to the Ladies

My most revered ladies, God be praised, for now our City is all finished and completed, where all of you who love virtue, glory, and praise may be lodged, ladies from past times just as much as from the present and future, for it has been constructed and founded for every honorable lady. And my dearest ladies, it is natural for the human heart to be joyful when it finds itself to have gained victory in any enterprise and the enemies are confounded. Thus you have reason to rejoice virtuously in God and in good comportment when you see this new city perfected, which can be not only the refuge for all of you, that is, virtuous women, but also the defense and protection against your enemies and assailants, if you keep them up well. For you can see that the material from which it is made is entirely of virtue, indeed it is so resplendent that you can all mirror yourselves in it and especially in the upper structures built in this last part, as well as in the other parts that might apply to you.

And, my dear ladies, do not misuse this new heritage, like the arrogant people who become proud when their prosperity increases and their riches multiply, but rather live by the example of your Queen, the

9. I.e., not in the consecrated ground of the cemetery.

1. Vincent of Beauvais assigns this miracle to St. Euphrosyna, another woman disguised as a monk. "She": i.e., Marina.

sovereign Virgin, who, after the great honor of her being the mother of the Son of God was announced to her, humbled herself all the more by calling herself the handmaiden of God. Thus, my ladies, as it is true that the greater the virtues are in human beings the more humble and kind they make them, may this city be the reason for you to have good morals and to be virtuous and humble.

And you, married ladies, do not resent being subject to your husbands: for sometimes it is not the best thing for a human being to be free. And the angel of God testified to this to Estras.² Those, he said, who used their free will fell into sin and despised Our Lord and oppressed the just, and for this they were destroyed. And those women who have peaceful, good, and discreet husbands that love them greatly, should praise God for this favor, which is not a small thing, for a greater good in the world could not be given to them. And they should be diligent in serving, loving, and cherishing them with all their heart, as it is fitting, keeping their peace and praying to God that he maintain and safeguard it for them. And those that have husbands in between good and bad should also praise God that they do not have worse ones, and should try to moderate their perverse behavior and pacify them, according to their condition. And those that have husbands who are evil, cruel, and savage should make an effort to endure them so that they can try and oppose their evil ways and lead them back, if they can, to a reasonable and good life. And if the husbands are so obstinate that the wives cannot succeed, at least they will acquire great merit for their souls through the virtue of patience. And everyone will bless them and be on their side.

So, my ladies, be humble and patient; and God's grace will increase in you, and praise will be given to you as well as the kingdom of heaven. For St. Gregory says that patience is the doorway to Paradise and the way to Jesus Christ. And may none of you be obstinate or hardened by holding frivolous opinions that have no basis in reason, or by jealousies, or by a disturbed mind, or by haughty speech, or by outrageous actions. For these are things that corrupt the mind and make a person crazy. Such conduct is improper and unseemly for women.

And you, maidens in the state of virginity, be pure, simple, and peaceful, without vagueness, for the snares of evil men are set for you. Your gaze should be lowered, few words should be in your mouths, respect should govern all your actions. And be armed with the virtuous strength against the ruses of the deceivers and avoid their company.

And, widowed ladies, may there be modesty in your dress, behavior and speech; piety in your actions and way of life; prudence in your conduct; patience, which is so much needed; strength and resistance in

2. The Book of Estras is one of the Old Testament Apocrypha, covering similar material as the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The quote comes from 2 Estras 56-58: "For though they had received liberty, they scorned the Most High and despised his Law and forsook his ways."

tribulations and important affairs; humility in your hearts, countenance, and speech; and charity in your works.

And, to make matters brief, all women, whether of the upper, middle or lower classes, be well informed in all things and take care in mounting a defense against the enemies of your honor and charity. My ladies, see how these men accuse you of so many vices from all sides. Make liars of them all by showing your virtue and prove by your good actions that those who reprimand you are lying, so that you can say with the psalmist: "the wickedness of the evil will fall on their heads." Chase away the deceiving flatterers who use various tricks in their intrigues to try and get that which you should supremely guard, that is, your honors and the beauty of your reputation. Oh, ladies, flee. Flee the foolish love with which they beseech you. Flee it, for God's sake, flee: for nothing good can come of it for you.³ Rather, you can be certain that, with all its deceptive attractions, it will always end badly for you. And do not believe the contrary: for it cannot be otherwise. Remember, dear ladies, how these men call you weak, light-minded, and quickly persuaded; and how, nevertheless, they make a great effort to seek out all sorts of strange and deceptive tricks to catch you, just as one does in trapping animals. Flee, flee, my ladies, and shun the kind of companions under whose smiles are hidden grievous poisons that kill people. And so may it please you, my most honored ladies, to increase and multiply our City through the adherence to virtues and the rejection of vices, and to rejoice and act well. And may I, your servant, be commended to you by praying to God, who by His grace has granted me to live in this world and to persevere in His holy service, and at the end may He be merciful toward my great sins and grant me the joy that lasts forever, which by His grace He may grant you as well. Amen.

Here ends the third and last part of the Book of the City of Ladies.

FROM THE BOOK OF THE THREE VIRTUES

(Christine had built the City of Ladies with the help of three allegorical women—Reason, Rectitude, and Justice—and the city is now complete and populated by virtuous ladies. *The Book of the Three Virtues* (1405) is presented as the continuation, or the "treasury," of the city. The Three Virtues appear once more to Christine and rouse her from bed to drag her back to her desk. But this text's nature and style are quite different. It is a handbook for women in society—not in the idealized society of the city but in the dangerous courts, cities, and countryside of Christine's own time.

3. Christine here mocks the *Romançe of the Rose*, where the character Geignis repeats the word *flee* six times, advising men to flee the beast, meaning woman, if they wish to preserve their bodies and souls. See Daniel Porron, ed., *Le Roman de la Rose* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1974), lines 16577-583.