CHAPTER 4

The 'Livre de la Cité des Dames': generic transformation and the moral defence of women

The *Cité* (1405) is Christine de Pizan's most famous work, yet despite, or perhaps because of, this fact it is also the most controversial. In this text, Christine tackles the problem of misogyny head-on, offering an alternative view of history in which women's contribution as historical figures is fully recognised.[1] It also marks an important genre shift from Christine's previous works such as the *Othéa* and the *Avision*: from the instructive mirror for male readers she switches to a commemorative catalogue of women's laudable deeds addressed to a female readership.[2] Moreover, whereas in the *Othéa* and the *Avision* Christine was concerned to encourage her reader to look beyond gender for the essential humanity embodied in her female exemplars, in the *Cité* she attempts to valorise what women have achieved as a sex in their own right.[3]

This text enjoyed great popularity among Christine's immediate contemporaries and had a substantial readership well into the sixteenth century, although the actual number of complete extant manuscripts of the work (twenty-five) is only about half of that which survives for the *Othéa*.[4] The *Cité* was translated into Flemish in 1475

[1] All page references in the body of this chapter are to the *Cite*, vol. 2, unless otherwise stated. For modern English translations of the text see Earl Jeffrey Richards, trans., *The Book of the City of Ladies* (London: Pan Books, 1983), and Rosalind Brown-Grant, trans., *The Book of the City of Ladies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999).

[2] On the catalogue genre, see Duane Reed Stuart, *Epochs of Greek and Roman Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1928); Arnaldo D. Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography: Four Lectures* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971); and Ruth Morse, 'Medieval biography: history as a branch of literature', *Modern Language Review* 80,2 (1985), 257–68.

[3] For a general introduction to the *Cité*, see Willard, *Life*, 135–45.

[4] *Cité*, vol. 1, 346–589. See also Kennedy, *Guide*, items 386–91.

and English in 1521, and had a considerable influence on French writers such as Martin le Franc who contributed to the developing 'querelle des femmes' of the mid-fifteenth century.[5] The text even provided the subject matter for a series of tapestries, now sadly lost, which was presented to Margaret of Austria in 1513.[6]

Paradoxically, given the favourable reception that the *Cité* received in a period when the misogynist tradition was still so influential, it is amongst twentieth-century readers who have long since rejected misogyny as a respectable doctrine that the *Cité* has provoked the most controversy. The question of its feminism has been hotly debated by modern scholars, with some, like Delany, criticising the text's conservatism in presenting examples which are almost exclusively aristocratic,[7] whilst others, such as Quilligan, have praised its ability to anticipate 'modern feminist critiques of Freudian theories about the oedipal complex and female sexuality'.[8] However, in judging the *Cité* according to their own, modern criteria such critics have failed to study the text in its own *medieval* terms.[9] A more historical approach has been provided by those scholars who have analysed how Christine's *Cité* re-works the stories of famous women

[5] See *Cité*, vol. 1, 269–89, for a discussion of the text's influence on French, Spanish and English literature; and 300–45, for a discussion of the translations.

[6] See Susan Groag Bell, 'A lost tapestry: Margaret of Austria's *Cité des Dames*', in Dulac and Ribémont, *Une femme*, 449–67; and Bell, 'A new approach to the influence of the *Cité des Dames*: the lost tapestries of "The City of Ladies"', in Ribémont, *Sur le chemin*, 7–12.

[7] Delany, '"Mothers"'.

[8] Maureen Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority: Christine de Pizan's Cité des Dames* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 42n; Quilligan, 'Allegory and the textual body: female authority in Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la Cité des Dames*', *Romanic Review* (1989), 222–48; and Quilligan, 'The allegory of female authority: Christine de Pizan and canon formation', in Joan DeJean and Nancy K. Miller, eds., *Displacements: Women, Tradition, Literatures in French* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 126–43. See also Lynne Huffer, 'Christine de Pisan: speaking like a woman/speaking like a man', in Edelgard E. DuBruck, ed., *New Images of Medieval Women: Essays toward a Cultural Anthropology*, Medieval Studies, 1 (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 61–72.

[9] For assessments of Christine's feminism which pay closer attention to her historical context, see Susan Schibanoff, 'Comment on Kelly's "Early feminist theory and the *Querelle des femmes*, 1400–1789"', *Signs* 11 (1983), 320–6; Beatrice Gottlieb, 'The problem of feminism in the fifteenth century', in Julius Kirschner and Suzanne F. Wemple, eds., *Women of the Medieval World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 337–64. For an idiosyncratic view of Christine as a compiler merely adopting the mask of feminist reader in order to legitimate the re-working of her sources, see Joël Blanchard, 'Compilation et légitimation au XVe siècle', *Poétique* 19 (1988), 139–57.

which she had drawn from earlier texts, of which the most important is Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus*.[10] Yet in discussing solely the *content* of these stories, such scholars have neglected the fact that in order to conduct her critique of misogyny, Christine was also obliged to modify the formal and generic framework which she took from her source material.[11] Only Glenda McLeod, in an important and insightful study, has attempted to analyse the *Cité* from this perspective and shown how Christine's work re-casts the generic conventions of the biographical catalogue in her efforts to combat anti-feminist views.[12] For McLeod, Christine's innovations anticipate the form, if not the substantive arguments, of the catalogue genre of the Renaissance period.

If the criteria by which modern scholars have assessed the conservatism or radicalism of Christine's feminist ideas have shed little light on what she was actually attempting to achieve in the *Cité*, on what grounds *did* she seek here to refute misogyny? How did Christine's re-working of the generic context of her sources enable

[10] See, for example, Alfred Jeanroy, 'Boccace et Christine de Pisan', *Romania* 48 (1922), 93–105; Carla Bozzolo, 'Il *Decamerone* come fonte del *Livre de la Cité des Dames di Christine de Pizan*', in Franco Simone, ed., *Miscellanea di studi e ricerche sul Quattrocento francese* (Turin: Giappichelli, 1967), 3–24; Christine M. Reno, 'Christine de Pisan's use of the *Golden Legend* in the *Cité des Dames*', *Les Bonnes Feuilles* 3,2 (1974), 89–99; Liliane Dulac, 'Un mythe didactique chez Christine de Pizan: Sémiramis ou la veuve héroïque (du *De Claris Mulieribus* à la *Cité des Dames*)', *Mélanges de philologie romane offerts à Charles Camproux* (Montpellier: Centre d'Etudes Occitanes, 1978), 315–43; Patricia A. Phillippy, 'Establishing authority: Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus* and Christine de Pizan's *Cité des Dames*', *Romanic Review* 77 (1986), 167–93; Kevin Brownlee, 'Il *Decameron* di Boccaccio e la *Cité des Dames* di Christine de Pizan: modelli e contro-modelli', *Studi sul Boccaccio* 20 (1991–2), 232–51; Carol M. Meale, 'Legends of good women in the European Middle Ages', *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 144,1 (1992), 55–70; Jean-Claude Mühlethaler, 'Problèmes de récriture: amour et mort de la princesse de Salerne dans le *Decameron* (IV, 1) et dans la *Cité des Dames* (II, 59)', in Dulac and Ribémont, *Une femme*, 209–20; and Anna Slerca, 'Dante, Boccace, et le *Livre de la Cité des Dames* de Christine de Pizan', ibid., 221–30. For studies comparing the illustrations of manuscripts of the *Cité des Dames* with those in the French translations of Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus*, see Sandra L. Hindman, 'With ink and mortar: Christine de Pizan's *Cité des Dames*: an art essay', *Feminist Studies* 10 (1984), 457–84; and Maureen Quilligan, 'Translating dismemberment: Boccaccio and Christine de Pizan', *Studi sul Boccaccio* 20 (1991–2), 253–66.

[11] On the significance of Christine's rhetorical style in the *Cité des Dames*, see Maureen Cheney Curnow, '"La pioche d'inquisicion": legal-judicial content and style in Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la Cité des Dames*', in Richards, *Reinterpreting*, 157–72; Glenda K. McLeod, 'Poetics and antimisogynist polemics in Christine de Pizan's *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*', ibid., 37–47; Kevin Brownlee, 'Literary genealogy and the problem of the father: Christine de Pizan and Dante', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 23,3 (1993), 365–87.

[12] Glenda K. McLeod, *Virtue and Venom: Catalogues of Women from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991).

her to conduct a defence of women in this text?[13] In order to understand the significance of Christine's rhetorical strategies in the *Cité*, we need to contrast her work not just with Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus* but also with two other key texts in the catalogue genre with which she would have been familiar: Boccaccio's *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*[14] and Petrarch's *De Viris Illustribus*.[15] On the one hand, as McLeod has pointed out, the *Cité* is similar in structure to the *De Casibus*,[16] although, as we shall see, it differs markedly from Boccaccio's text in terms of its aims. On the other hand, Petrarch's *De Viris*, though concerned almost exclusively with famous men, was the *auctoritas* upon which Boccaccio claimed to have modelled his catalogue of women.[17] Yet whilst ostensibly basing its treatment of women on Petrarch's enthusiastic *celebration* of men, Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus* in fact provides a very ambiguous view of the female sex, since its criteria for inclusion are much less positive than those put forward in the *De Viris*. As a result, Christine was obliged to return to some of the organising principles used in Petrarch's catalogue as a corrective to the equivocation displayed in Boccaccio's ambivalent text. It is impossible to *prove* that Christine had direct knowledge of the *De Viris*, since there is no mention of any manuscripts of it in those Parisian libraries to which she is known to have had access when she was writing the *Cité*.[18] However, through both her father's Italian connections at the University of Bologna, where Petrarch had

[13] For an earlier version of this discussion, see Rosalind Brown-Grant, 'Des hommes et des femmes illustres: modalités narratives et transformations génériques chez Pétrarque, Boccace et Christine de Pizan', in Dulac and Ribémont, *Une femme*, 469–80.

[14] For English translations of these texts see Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Fates of Illustrious Men*, ed. and trans. Lewis Brewer Hall (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1965), hereafter referred to as *Illustrious Men*; and Boccaccio, *Concerning Famous Women*, trans. Guido A. Guarino (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964), hereafter referred to as *Famous Women*. All translations of passages from these works will refer to these editions, unless otherwise stated.

[15] For a parallel translation into modern Italian of extracts from the *De Viris*, see Francesco Petrarca, *Prose Latine*, ed. Guido Martellotti *et al.* (Milan/Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1955), 218–69.

[16] McLeod, *Virtue*, 116.

[17] *De Mulieribus*, 22. See also Vittore Branca, *Boccaccio: The Man and His Works*, trans. Richard Morges and Denise J. McAuliffe (New York University Press, 1976), 110; McLeod, *Virtue*, 62.

[18] See Elizabeth Pellegrin, 'Manuscrits de Pétrarque dans les bibliothèques de France', *Italia Medioevale e Umanistica* 4 (1961), 341–431; 6 (1963), 271–364; 7 (1964), 405–522; Gianni Mombello, 'I manoscritti delle opere di Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio nelle principali librerie francesi del secolo XV', in C. Pellegrini, ed., *Il Boccaccio nella cultura francese, Atti del Convegno di Studi 'L'opera del Boccaccio nella Cultura Francese'*, Certaldo, 2–6 settembre 1968, Pubblicazioni dell'Ente Nazionale Giovanni Boccaccio, 1 (Florence: Olschki, 1971), 81–209.

been a student,[19] and her own Parisian connections with the circles of early humanist intellectuals who were also familiar with Petrarch's work, Christine may have had access to a copy of the *De Viris*. As scholars have shown, she certainly knew of Petrarch's other texts, to which she was indebted both in the *Cité* (806), where she cites from his *De Remediis Utriusque Fortunae*, and in her lyric poems.[20]

As in other works in the catalogue genre, the plethora of examples provided in the *Cité* threatens to overwhelm modern readers and to make them lose sight of Christine's overall aims in the text. In order to show the unity of her defence of women across all three books of the *Cité*, this chapter will explore how Christine re-works both the formal conventions which she inherited from Petrarch and Boccaccio, such as the title and the prefatory sections of the catalogue genre, as well as the concept of history underpinning the choice of examples which each author offered for the reader's education. This comparative and thematic approach will allow us to see first, why the title of the *Cité* diverges radically from those found in Boccaccio and Petrarch's texts; secondly, how Christine constructs a different kind of relationship between author, reader and text in her prologue to the *Cité*, compared to those outlined by her male predecessors in their prefaces and dedications; and thirdly, how her view of history and set of *exempla* seek to empower her female reader by valorising key areas of women's experience, as opposed to the historical perspectives and examples adopted in the *De Viris*, *De Casibus* and *De Mulieribus*.

TELLING TITLES: CONCERNING FAMOUS OR INFAMOUS WOMEN?

Petrarch's *De Viris* represents what one critic has called a 'restoration' of the biographical catalogue genre, first developed in Antiquity.[21] The work underwent several different redactions between 1337 and 1374, since Petrarch hesitated as to whether he should use exclusively Roman *exempla* or include stories from the Old Testament as

[19] Willard, *Life*, 18–20.

[20] See Earl Jeffrey Richards, 'Christine de Pizan, the conventions of courtly diction, and Italian humanism', in his *Reinterpreting*, 250–71; Lori Walters, 'Chivalry and the (en)gendered poetic self: Petrarchan models in the *Cent Balades*', in Zimmermann and De Rentiis, *City*, 43–66.

[21] Pierre de Nolhac, *Pétrarque et l'humanisme*, 2 vols. (Paris: Champion, 1907), vol. 2, 2.

well.[22] The title of the text recalls works by Suetonius, Plutarch, Pliny, St Jerome and Giovanni Colonna, a contemporary of Petrarch's. Petrarch's aim in this work, like that of his predecessors, is clear from his use of the adjective 'illustris': to seek to write the history of those heroes whose fame is derived from their civic and military virtues.[23]

Though written in the same genre as Petrarch's text, Boccaccio's *De Casibus*, composed around 1358, undertook a complete transformation of both the genre's objectives and its narrative conventions.[24] This transformation is hinted at in the title itself: the noun 'casus', meaning 'downfall' in Latin, indicates that his work is exclusively concerned with moral lessons of behaviour to be avoided rather than with historical *exempla* of deeds to be emulated.[25] From the very start, the reader must expect to find stories dealing not with acts of heroism but with the downfall of heroic men and women which occurred in spite of their noble qualities.[26]

Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus*, begun around 1361 and revised in nine successive editorial phases up to 1375,[27] has often been regarded simply as a 'complement' to his earlier work, the *De Casibus*, but in fact the relationship between the two texts is rather more complex than this view would suggest.[28] Indeed, on first acquaintance the *De Mulieribus* seems totally different in aim and conception from Boccaccio's earlier work. The *De Casibus* is a virulent attack on the mores of both past and present generations, whereas the *De Mulieribus* seems to present itself as a celebration of the illustrious women of the past. But the title of Boccaccio's catalogue of women is somewhat misleading: although it appears to be closer to the title of

[22] See Benjamin G. Kohl, 'Petrarch's prefaces to the *De Viris Illustribus*', *History and Theory* 13,2 (1974), 132–44, for a summary of the different versions.

[23] See Pierre de Nolhac, 'Le *De Viris Illustribus* de Pétrarque: notice sur les manuscrits originaux, suivie de fragments inédits', *Notices et extraits des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale et d'autres bibliothèques* 34 (1891), 61–148; Carlo Calcaterra, *Nella Selva del Petrarca* (Bologna: Editore Licinio Cappelli, 1942), 415–33.

[24] Massimo Miglio, 'Boccaccio biografo', in Gilbert Tournoy, ed., *Boccaccio in Europe: Proceedings of the Boccaccio Conference, Louvain, Dec. 1975* (Leuven University Press, 1977), 149–63.

[25] *De Casibus*, xlviii.

[26] See Attilio Hortis, *Studi sulle opere latine del Boccaccio* (Trieste: Julius Dase Editrice, 1879), 117–51; Henri Hauvette, *Boccaccio: étude biographique et littéraire* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1914), 347–96; Annalisa Carraro, 'Tradizioni culturali e storiche nel *De Casibus*', *Studi sul Boccaccio* 12 (1980), 197–262.

[27] Branca, *Boccaccio*, 110.

[28] Peter Godman, 'Chaucer and Boccaccio's Latin works', in Piero Boitani, ed., *Chaucer and the Italian Trecento* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 269–95; McLeod, *Virtue*, 77, n. 29.

Petrarch's text than to that of the *De Casibus*, Boccaccio does not in fact use the adjective 'clarus' as a strict synonym for 'illustris', the term used by Petrarch and his classical predecessors, since 'clarus' has connotations not only of fame but also of infamy.[29] Furthermore, though there is no hint in the title of the *De Mulieribus* of the tragic overtones implied by the term 'casus', over half of the stories which it recounts do in fact feature women whose lives ended tragically.[30]

Unlike the *De Mulieribus*, the title of Christine's *Cité* makes no obvious reference to 'famous women' but simply tells us that the text concerns 'dames', without explaining why they have been chosen in the first instance. Christine thus avoids using terms to indicate fame which have any negative connotations. More importantly, she introduces an idea which is absent in all previous catalogues: that of the 'cité'. This extremely rich symbol functions in several interrelated ways in the text. First, it connects Christine's text to St Augustine's *City of God*, a work which the *Cité* explicitly invokes once its building process is complete, stating 'Gloriosa dicta sunt de te, civitas dei' (1031). The two texts are linked as universal histories of those virtuous figures of the past 'who deserved to reign eternally with God',[31] although Christine's work is universal in the sense that it includes both Christian and pagan women. Secondly, Christine, following Augustine, makes the city into the classic symbol of the ideal community held together by its common pursuit of virtue,[32] one constructed around a hierarchy of female warriors, good wives and saintly women. Thirdly, as we shall see, the idea of the city is also important for one of the central arguments of her work, namely that women have contributed to the development of civilisation as

[29] McLeod, *Virtue*, 64–5.

[30] Of the 104 stories recounted in the *De Mulieribus*, forty-seven concern women who either died an unhappy death through suicide or murder, or died in ignominious circumstances. Examples of suicides include Thisbe (66–71), Jocasta (108–9) and Lucretia (194–7). Examples of women killed include Cassandra (140–3), Cleopatra (344–57) and Agrippina, mother of Nero (366–75). Examples of women who died ingloriously include Soaemias (400–6) and Pope Joan (414–19). Another forty-three stories deal with women who both lived and died in glory and praise: such women include the Sibyls Erythraea (94–7) and Almathea (110–13), the virtuous wife Gaia (190–1), and the learned women Hortensia (332–5) and Cornificia (338–9). The remaining fourteen stories deal with women whose end Boccaccio does not in fact recount, including Helen of Troy (146–53) and the goddesses Ceres (42–7) and Minerva (48–53), who were considered to be immortal.

[31] Hindman, 'With ink', 471.

[32] See *City of God*, 890, for Augustine's definition of a community as 'an association of some kind or other between a multitude of rational beings united by a common agreement on the objects of its love'.

epitomised by the urban community, and have themselves played a prominent role as city-builders and as intellectuals.[33] Finally, as Reno has argued, Christine's city is a defensive fortress containing only virtuous women, many of them virgins.[34] It thus provides a counterpoint to Jean de Meung's stormed castle of female chastity, symbol of the Rose's implicit collusion in her own downfall. By its title alone, Christine's text signals its difference from that of its precursors in the biographical catalogue genre: unlike Petrarch and Boccaccio's works, the *Cité* calls the reader's attention to its status as polemical panegyric designed not only to *praise* but moreover to *defend* the female sex.

PREFATORY REMARKS: THREE AUTHORS IN SEARCH OF AUTHORITY

The opening passages of these catalogues by Petrarch, Boccaccio and Christine are crucial in outlining the roles of the author and the reader in their texts. However, Christine was to adopt a rather different set of strategies from those employed by her male predecessors, for establishing both her literary authority and her relationship with the reader.

Like its title, the long authorial preface which Petrarch added to the second version of the *De Viris* in 1351–3[35] attests to the roles which he envisaged both for himself as author and for his implied reader.[36] Petrarch's view of his contemporaries is unambiguous: to his mind, they persist in pursuing vice and totally neglect virtue.[37] His duty, therefore, is to call his compatriots back to reason, to show

[33] Bernard Ribémont, 'De l'architecture à l'écriture: Christine de Pizan et la *Cité des Dames*', in J.-M. Pastre, ed., *La Ville: du réel à l'imaginaire, Colloque du 8 au 10 novembre 1988* (Publications de l'Université de Rouen, 1991), 27–35.

[34] Christine M. Reno, 'Virginity as an ideal in Christine de Pizan's *Cité des Dames*', in Bornstein, *Ideals*, 69–90. See also Thomas M. Greene, *Besieging the Castle of Ladies*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, Occasional Papers, 4 (Binghampton, New York: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1995).

[35] See Kohl, 'Petrarch's prefaces'; L. R. Lind, 'Petrarch's Preface B to *De Viris Illustribus*: the approach to modern historiography', *Classical and Modern Quarterly* 7,1 (1986), 7–12. For the Latin text of this long preface, see *Prose Latine*, 218–27.

[36] Antonio Viscardi, 'Francesco Petrarca storiografo', *La Cultura* 2 (1923), 491–9; Calcaterra, *Nella selva*; Guido Martellotti, 'Storiografia del Petrarca', in Michele Feo and Silvia Rosso, eds., *Scritti petrarcheschi* (Padua: Antenore, 1983), 475–86.

[37] In the short preface added to the version of 1371–4, dedicated to the Paduan prince Francesco da Carrara, Petrarch understandably omits this invective against his contemporaries. For the Latin text of this preface see *De Viris*, vol. 1, 3–5; for an English translation see 'Petrarch's prefaces', 142–4.

them the path which leads to moral and civic glory by means of illustrious examples from the past. He expresses nothing but scorn for contemporary princes whose deeds, he claims, are more suitable for inclusion in a book of satire than in a record of the great and the good (*De Viris*, 218). When modern princes do manage to bring off some prodigious feat, it is more thanks to their good fortune than as a result of their intrinsic merit (ibid.). Petrarch insists that he is concerned only to recount the actions of those heroic individuals who had no need to appeal to Fortune: 'neque ego fortunatos sed illustres sum pollicitus viros' (*De Viris*, 222) (I have not promised [to describe] lucky men, but illustrious ones, 'Petrarch's prefaces', 140).

As to his own authorial status Petrarch is categorical: his aim is to insert himself into the tradition of laudatory historical writing, to write an *epitome*, a selected compendium of his sources, in line with Horatian principles (ibid.). Like his forerunners, he aims to obtain as accurate a narrative as possible, by using only the most reliable sources and by avoiding unnecessary digressions (ibid.). He seeks to emulate his favourite historiographer, Livy,[38] and to show the reader which examples he should try to follow and which to shun:

> fructuosus historici finis est, illa prosequi que vel sectanda legentibus vel fugienda sunt, ut in utranque partem copia suppetat illustrium exemplorum. (*De Viris*, 224)
>
> (this is the profitable goal for the historian: to point up to the reader those things that are to be followed and those to be avoided, with plenty of distinguished examples provided on either side.) ('Petrarch's prefaces', 141)

If, in accordance with the traditional didactic aims of the genre, Petrarch's chief concern is to exhort the reader to imitate the famous deeds of the Romans, Boccaccio in the *De Casibus* proposes a very different relationship between reader and text. To the dedicatee of his work, his friend Mainardo dei Cavalcanti, he explains his hesitations as to the choice of a patron. He would have wished to dedicate his text to a pope, prince or emperor worthy of the name, but not one of those who came to mind did he deem fit to receive this honour (*De Casibus*, 2–4).[39] In the preface, Boccaccio attacks the decadence into which his compatriots have fallen, employing a tone more direct and severe than that used by Petrarch:

[38] Myron P. Gilmore, 'The Renaissance conception of the lessons of history', in his *Humanists and Jurists: Six Studies in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1963), 1–31.

[39] *Illustrious Men* omits the text of the dedication. My translation is therefore provided for quotations.

maiori tamen conatu in mentem sese ingessere principum atque presidentium quorumcunque obscene libidines, violentie truces, perdita ocia, avaritie inexplebiles, cruenta odia, ultiones armate precipitesque et longe plura scelesta facinora. (*De Casibus*, 8)

(I particularly remembered the obscene lustfulness of princes and of those who command in general, their vicious deceits, shameful indolence, insatiable greed, bloodthirsty hatred, ferocious vendettas, and countless other wicked deeds.) (my translation).[40]

Rather than encouraging his contemporaries to pursue earthly glory, as Petrarch did, Boccaccio's explicit aim is to persuade them to look to the good of their souls and so avoid the fate of the characters in his text, many of whom fell because of their hubris. In the *De Casibus*, Boccaccio seeks to reveal the workings of Fortune and to help his contemporary readers break free from her endless cycle of rise and fall by inculcating in them a spirit of *contemptus mundi* (*De Casibus*, 10). As for his own authorship, Boccaccio, like Petrarch, acknowledges that he is following in the footsteps of illustrious antecedents (the most important of whom is again Livy), whilst expressing confidence in his own writerly talents. Indeed, using a humility topos, he lays claim to a didactic authority which is all the more effective for having a humble origin: 'cum meminerim non nunquam rudem voculam excivisse non nullos quos tonitrua movisse non poterant' (*De Casibus*, 8) (since I remembered that sometimes an unpolished little voice has succeeded with those whom even thunder could not rouse [my translation]).[41]

Likewise, in both the dedication and the preface of the *De Mulieribus*, Boccaccio sets out the relationship between this text and its implied reader. As Petrarch did, so Boccaccio here encourages his reader to imitate or even surpass the virtue of his pagan examples: 'Nec incassum, arbitror, agitabitur lectio si, facinorum preteritarum mulierum emula, egregium animum tuum concitabis in melius' (*De Mulieribus*, 20) (Your reading of this book will not be a waste of time, it seems to me, if you emulate the deeds of these women of the past, and turn your mind to even better things [my translation]).[42] However, this *imitatio* is made problematic by the fact that, for the

[40] The translation of this passage offered in *Illustrious Men*, 1, is somewhat inadequate: 'These rulers are so attracted to vice and debauchery, are so unrestrained.'

[41] The translation of this passage offered by *Illustrious Men*, 1, is imprecise: 'I believe it is my duty, though my skills are not equal to theirs, to try to penetrate their guard.'

[42] *Famous Women* omits the text of the dedication. My translation is therefore provided for quotations.

most part, Boccaccio identifies virtue ('virtus') with man ('vir'), an association which he continues in much of the text itself.[43] In this respect, he would seem to be following the medieval penchant for essentialising male and female nature on pseudo-etymological grounds, popularised by Isidore of Seville who first made this link between 'vir' and 'virtus', as well as claiming that the word for woman ('mulier') came from the word meaning softer or weaker ('mollier'), which was derived from the substantive meaning weakness ('mollitie').[44] Thus, in the dedication to his patroness Andrea Acciaiuoli, Boccaccio declares her to be the equal of the virtuous women of the past, although he qualifies this praise by deeming her an exception among her contemporaries, a point he explains by the fact of her masculine-sounding name: 'cum *andres* Greci quod latine dicimus *homines* nuncupent' (*De Mulieribus*, 20) (as *andres* in Greek means *men* in Latin [my translation]). This double-edged praise is matched by a similar comment in the preface, where Boccaccio reproduces Isidore's terminology to the effect that women should be praised for overcoming their innate weakness of mind and body:

> Et si extollendi sunt homines dum, concesso sibi robore, magna perfecerint, quanto amplius *mulieres*, quibus fere omnibus a natura rerum *mollities* insita et corpus debile ac tardum ingenium datum est, si in virilem evaserint animum et ingenio celebri atque virtute conspicua audeant atque perficiant etiam difficillima viris, extollende sunt? (*De Mulieribus*, 24, emphasis added)
>
> (If men should be praised whenever they perform great deeds (with strength which Nature has given them), how much more should women be extolled (almost all of whom are endowed with tenderness, frail bodies, and sluggish minds by Nature), if they have acquired a manly spirit and if with keen intelligence and remarkable fortitude they have dared to undertake and have accomplished even deeds which would be very difficult for men?) (*Famous Women*, xxxvii, translation slightly amended)

Moreover, throughout his dedication, Boccaccio praises his patroness by comparing her favourably to other contemporary women, of whom he undertakes a subtle but trenchant critique. For example, in exhorting Andrea to even greater virtue than she already

[43] See Constance Jordan, 'Boccaccio's in-famous women: gender and civic virtue in the *De Claris Mulieribus*', in Carole Levin and Jeanie Watson, eds., *Ambiguous Realities: Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 25–47. Examples of women praised by Boccaccio in the *De Mulieribus* for their virile qualities include the Minyan wives (128–35), Penthesilea (135–7), Arthemisia (228–37), Sophonisba (278–85), Hortensia (332–5), Cornificia (338–9), and Epicharus (374–81).

[44] See Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 43–5.

possesses, he encourages her to seek to embellish herself further, but not in the usual way which most women do, that is with cosmetics (*De Mulieribus*, 22). Whilst flattering his patroness, he still reaffirms the well-worn misogynist stereotype – familiar from Tertullian onwards – of women's vanity about their appearance.[45] It is true that both Petrarch and Boccaccio are critical of contemporary *men* in their catalogues – whose function is, after all, to reprove the lax morals of the present day and to lament the loss of the greater virtue of the past. However, in the *De Viris* and the *De Casibus* men are attacked as part of a complaint about a *general* decline in standards of conduct. Such criticisms are therefore very different from those which Boccaccio makes against women in the *De Mulieribus*, where he castigates the female sex for its failure to be more like the male sex.[46]

In the preface to the *De Mulieribus*, Boccaccio claims both authority and originality for his work. He inserts himself into the authoritative genealogy of historians writing in the genre of the biographical catalogue, thus allying himself both with the authors of Antiquity and with Petrarch (*De Mulieribus*, 22). He also declares himself to be the first to have written such a text about *women*, thereby rescuing them from historical oblivion (ibid., 24).[47] However, whilst appearing to celebrate women in the same manner as Petrarch feted men, Boccaccio introduces a slightly different set of criteria since not all the women in his text have been chosen for their glorious deeds. Rather, some have been included because of their extraordinary characters or the spectacular nature of their rise and fall at the hands of Fortune, this last criterion having been, as we have seen, specifically rejected by Petrarch: 'eisque addere ex multis quasdam, quas aut audacia seu vires ingenii et industria, aut nature munus, vel fortune gratia, seu iniuria, notabiles fecit' (ibid., 24) ([I have added] to them some of the many women whom daring, intellectual power, perseverance, natural endowments, or Fortune's favour or enmity have made noteworthy, *Famous Women*, xxxvii). Boccaccio also appears to follow Petrarch, at least in the later

[45] Ibid., 50–8.

[46] On a similar distinction in the sermons of medieval preachers between castigating men as an estate or as humans and women for being female, see Ruth Mazo Karras, 'Gendered sin and misogyny in John of Bromyard's "Summa Predicantium" ', *Traditio* 47 (1992), 233–57.

[47] On Plutarch's *Mulierum Virtutes*, an important classical catalogue devoted entirely to women, whose existence Boccaccio does not acknowledge, see McLeod, *Virtue*, 19–22.

versions of the *De Viris*, in refusing to mix pagan and Judaeo-Christian examples on the grounds that their motivations and aims were different, the former seeking earthly glory and the latter eternal salvation. A further reason for the omission of Judaeo-Christian women from the *De Mulieribus* is that it increases the author's originality, since their deeds had already been commemorated in biblical and hagiographical texts (ibid., 28).

For both Petrarch and Boccaccio, the purpose of their prefatory remarks is to establish their authority as writers within the catalogue tradition and to explain to their implied readers whether they should aim to follow or to shun the examples provided by the stories in their texts. Neither writer appears to express any 'anxiety of influence'[48] in seeking to construct for himself an authority as great as that of his illustrious antecedents within the catalogue genre. For Christine, however, things are not so straightforward. Unlike Petrarch and Boccaccio's texts, Christine's *Cité* has neither a dedication nor an authorial preface. Instead, it has a much more extensive prologue in which she reveals her 'anxiety of authorship' in taking up a pen in the first place, given that she has no previous examples of women writers on whose literary authority she can draw.[49] Moreover, in contrast to her two male predecessors who act purely as authorial and narratorial figures in their prefaces, Christine introduces into her prologue the narrative frame of a dream-vision. This framing device is superficially similar to that which Boccaccio employs in the body of the *De Casibus* where he is visited by Fortune and embarks on a journey to meet souls in torment, but it has a wholly different function in terms of establishing her authority and her relationship with her readers. In Christine's dream-vision, she herself features *in propria persona* as a protagonist in her own text when comforted by the three allegorical figures of Raison, Droiture and Justice following her distress at reading about the alleged wickedness of women in misogynist books such as Matheolus' *Lamentations*. Through the use of this fiction, Christine represents herself in the *Cité* as a receiver rather than as a dispenser of wisdom, thereby appearing to place herself on the same level as her implied readers. But why did Christine choose to open her text in this way? How does her choice

[48] See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford University Press, 1973).

[49] For the use of this term to describe women's difficulty in inserting themselves into a literary genealogy, see Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Imagination* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979).

of rhetorical strategies in the prologue affect her authority as an author, and the role of the reader, in the *Cité*?

In contrast to Petrarch and Boccaccio, Christine's bid for literary authority is based not simply on inserting her text into the pre-existing catalogue genre but also on attacking the anti-feminist tradition. Her prologue both undermines the authority of misogyny, expressed as a metaphor of clearing the ground of any 'ordes pierres broçonneuses et noires' in order to lay the foundations of the City of Ladies (643), and proposes an alternative to it, that provided by theology. This recourse to theology has two important implications for Christine: first, it offers her a new female model of authority for herself as author, that of the Virgin Mary in the Annunciation; secondly, it supplies her with a series of theological proofs by which to structure her defence of women throughout the *Cité*.

Misogyny is presented in the *Cité* as an all-pervasive doctrine, since Christine the protagonist complains of being unable to open any book without immediately coming across some derogatory remark about the female sex: 'generaument aucques en tous traittiez philosophes, pouettes, tous orateurs desquelz les noms seroit longue chose, semble que tous parlent par une meismes bouche et tous accordent une semblable conclusion, determinant les meurs femenins enclins et plains de tous les vices' (618). In fact, Christine's complaint is somewhat hyperbolic, as defences of women such as the *Livre de Leesse* written by Jehan le Fèvre, Matheolus' own translator into French,[50] or the French versions of the story of Melibeus and Prudence taken from Albertano of Brescia's *Book of Consolation and Advice*, would have been available to her.[51] However, by choosing not to mention these texts and by emphasising instead her difficulties in

[50] See Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 278. However, for studies of Jehan le Fèvre's text which suggests that his defence of women might in fact be ironic, see Karen Pratt, 'Analogy or logic; authority or experience? Rhetorical strategies for and against women', in Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox, eds., *Literary Aspects of Courtly Culture. Selected Proceedings from the Seventh Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 27 July-1 August 1992* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), 57–66; Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 'Jean Le Fèvre's *Livre de Leesce*: praise or blame of women?', *Speculum* 69 (1994), 707–27; Helen Solterer, *The Master and Minerva: Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 131–50.

[51] See Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 237–42. As Curnow, *Cité*, vol. 1, 408, points out, a copy of the French version of Albertano's text, entitled the *Livre de Mellibee et de dame Prudence sa femme*, is bound in one of the manuscripts which contains the *Cité*: Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale 9235. Indeed, it was once thought that Christine herself had translated this text: see Charity Cannon Willard, 'The manuscript tradition of the *Livre des Trois Vertus* and Christine de Pizan's audience', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27,3 (1966), 433–44.

opposing such an overwhelming mass of negative opinions, Christine thereby stresses the novelty of her approach. The basis of misogynist teaching, as she has gleaned from her reading of Matheolus, is that woman is a 'monstre en nature' (620), a defective creature who is somehow less than human.[52] This view, though presented as being propounded by philosophers and poets, nevertheless has important *theological* repercussions for Christine since she is forced to contemplate the almost unthinkable idea that in creating woman, God deliberately created something vile:

> Ha! Dieux, comment puet cecy estre? Car *se je ne erre en la foye*, je ne doy mye doubter que ton inffinnie sapience et tres parfaitte bonté ait riens fait que tout ne soit bon? Ne fourmas tu toy meismes tres singulierement femme, et des lors luy donnas toutes telles inclinacions qu'il te plaisoit qu'elle eust? Et comment pourroit ce estre que tu y eusses en riens failly? (620, emphasis added)

As Christine herself indicates, this conclusion constitutes theological error and so places her soul in a perilous position since it explicitly contradicts Genesis 1:31: 'And God saw every thing he had made, and behold, it was very good.' By implication, those misogynist writers who seek to convince her of this argument are guilty of the same error.

In order to correct Christine's misconceptions, Raison sets out to destroy the credibility of the teachings of misogyny and the authority of its exponents. She shows how anti-feminism is not an unassailable doctrine but one which can be refuted by further argument, using the image of gold being refined in a furnace to describe the need to continue the debate on women's worth (623). This image of the furnace functions in two different ways: on the one hand, it ironically subverts Matheolus' description in the *Lamentations* of marriage as a purgatorial fire,[53] whilst on the other, it prefigures Christine's later

[52] This Aristotelian view is discussed and ultimately refuted by Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae*, xiii: see Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 92–3.

[53]
> Afin que par la forte luite
> Qu'en mariage est introduite
> L'omme se puist justifier
> Et par preuve saintifier,
> Aussi com l'or dedens la forge,
> Qui est recuit quant on le forge,
>
> (*Lamentations*, vol. 1, Book III, lines 1943–8).

See also *Cité*, 1039, for the note to this reference in para. 4.

stories of the sufferings of female saints in Book III by creating a forceful parallel between the situation of women under attack from misogynists and the virgin martyrs at the mercy of their pagan torturers.[54] Raison thus casts doubt on the validity of anti-feminist thinking by equating it with the heresy of unbelievers, a point which she reiterates more explicitly later in the prologue: 'Et les simples debonnaires dames, a l'example de pacience que Dieu commande, ont souffert amyablement les grans injures qui, tant par bouche de plusieurs comme par mains escrips, leur ont esté faites *a tort et a pechié*, eulx rapportant a Dieu de leur bon droit' (629, emphasis added).

Raison argues that far from being all-pervasive, as Christine had intially believed, misogyny is in fact a marginal discourse with regard to Christian doctrine, although it is no less dangerous for that since, at its extreme limits, it borders on error and even heresy.[55] She sets up a hierarchy of discourses in order to point out that philosophical authorities are not necessarily immune from error, since Plato was corrected by Aristotle, who was himself in turn corrected by St Augustine (623). By substituting theological authority for that of pagan philosophers, Raison proposes to correct the teachings of misogyny from which Christine has derived her erroneous conclusions about the female sex. At first sight, this is a somewhat surprising argument given the important place of both scriptural and patristic sayings in the canon of anti-feminist writings alongside those of Aristotle or Ovid. However, as Graham Gould has argued, patristic thought on the question of women was by no means homogeneous: though to the modern reader the Church Fathers might often appear misogynist when they criticise women, such criticisms are often placed next to pro-female statements.[56] Whilst this juxtaposition may seem contradictory, in fact both sets of

[54] See McLeod, *Virtue*, 134; and Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, '"Femme de corps et femme par sens"': Christine de Pizan's saintly women', *Romanic Review* 87,2 (1996), 157–75. Actual examples of virgins tortured in furnaces in the *Cité* include St Martina (989), St Eufemia (995–6), St Christine (1007), and St Afra (1026).

[55] On Christine's marginalisation of misogyny, see Earl Jeffrey Richards, 'Christine de Pizan and the question of feminist rhetoric', *Teaching Language through Literature* 22 (1983), 15–24; McLeod, *Virtue*, 116; McLeod and Katharina M. Wilson, 'A clerk in name alone – a clerk in all but name: the misogamous tradition and *La Cité des Dames*', in Zimmermann and De Rentiis, *City*, 67–76.

[56] Graham Gould, 'Women in the writings of the Fathers: language, belief and reality', in W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood, eds., *Women in the Church*, Studies in Church History, 27 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 1–14.

views could happily co-exist in the same author, depending on whether his moral aim was to praise virgins and chaste wives or to castigate profligate and garrulous termagants.[57] As we shall see, for Christine the Fathers are clearly enrolled on the side of the defence of women against the pagan philosophers.

Raison makes a similar appeal to theological arguments in her attacks on medieval poets such as Matheolus and Jean de Meung, whose authority, she claims, is based on much weaker foundations than that of the philosophers. Indeed, in the case of Matheolus, his ideas, when read literally, could be seen to be heretical, particularly against 'l'ordre de mariage qui est saint estat digne et de Dieu ordoné' (624).[58] By encouraging men to avoid marriage because of the vileness of women, such poets were harnessing misogyny to the teaching of misogamy.[59] In fact, Raison's condemnation of such arguments as heretical is itself polemical, given that misogamy as a doctrine was also founded in large part on the authority of the Church Fathers, in particular St Jerome.[60]

Advising Christine of the need to pit theological authority against philosophical and poetic pseudo-authority, Raison appropriates for Christine's defence of women the literary tools which misogynist writers had traditionally used against them.[61] Although in the 'querelle' Christine had decried Pierre Col for quoting selectively

[57] See Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 12–13.

[58] Matheolus also makes at least two other highly contentious points about women which go against orthodox Christianity. First, he claims that Christ announced his resurrection to women because of their inability to stop babbling and, by extension, to keep a secret: 'Les femmes visita premieres; / Car de jangler sont coustumieres' (*Lamentations*, vol. 1, Book II, lines 2321–2). Secondly, and more importantly, he explicitly contradicts Augustinian doctrine in stating that woman will not be saved at the Last Judgment, and will therefore have to give man back his missing rib:

> Mais, sa coste restituée,
> Femme sera destituée.
> Ainsi saulvée ne sera
> Ne ja ne ressuscitera.
>
> (ibid., vol. 1, Book III, lines 1449–52)

This last argument is so obviously extreme that it is probably meant to be read ironically as a symptom of the bigamous narrator's ravings. Whether this means that the whole of the text should be read in this way is another matter: see Pratt, 'Analogy or logic'.

[59] See Katharina M. Wilson, and Elizabeth M. Makowski, *Wykked Wyves and the Woes of Marriage: Misogamous Literature from Juvenal to Chaucer* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

[60] Ibid. In fact, Jerome's text *Against Jovinian* (c.393), which, because of its extensive quotation from Theophrastus' *Book on Marriage* became the misogamous text *par excellence* for medieval writers, was deemed excessive in its own time. See Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 64.

[61] Bloch, 'Medieval misogyny'; and Quilligan, *Allegory*, 61.

from the *Rose* in order to reinforce his defence of Jean de Meung's morality, as a woman reader of misogynist texts in the *Cité* she cites the pro-female arguments from her patristic sources and ignores the anti-female ones which misogynists had traditionally exploited.[62] Moreover, as Raison encourages her to do, Christine reads more mixed arguments against the grain, in accordance with the rhetorical device of *antiphrasis*,[63] extracting from them only what is useful for her thesis: 'Si te conseille que tu faces ton prouffit de leurs diz et que tu l'entendes ainsi, quel que fust leur entente, es lieux ou ilz blasment les femmes' (624).

Raison's final argument against the authority of misogyny equates women's assailants with the image of obdurate, unbelieving torturers. She claims that even though such attacks on the female sex are pernicious and painful for women to read, they in fact harm the slanderer more than the slandered. If misogyny is heresy, its practitioners are running the risk of damning themselves: 'car saiches que tout mal dit si generaument des femmes empire les diseurs et non pas elles meismes' (625). The danger which misogyny represents is ultimately directed against its own exponents, as Christine had also demonstrated in the 'querelle' by arguing that the *Rose*'s defenders had been 'infected' by its poisonous teachings.

The prologue to the *Cité* not only establishes Christian doctrine as the criterion by which Christine can undermine the credibility of misogynist writers, it also uses theology in order to provide her with a model for her own authority in the text. Critics have frequently commented on Christine's appropriation of the authority of both Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*[64] and Dante's *Divina Commedia*[65] for the structure of the *Cité*: here Raison, Droiture and Justice perform a similar function to that of Philosophy in Boethius' text, whereas Christine's role as their disciple echoes that of Dante under Virgil's

[62] Blamires, *The Case for Women*.

[63] Schibanoff, 'Taking the gold', 90; and Quilligan, *Allegory*, 65.

[64] See Glynnis M. Cropp, 'Boèce et Christine de Pizan', *Le Moyen Age* 87 (1981), 387–417; Blanchard, 'Artéfact littéraire', 7–47.

[65] See Y. Batard, 'Dante et Christine de Pisan (1364–1430)', in *Missions et démarches de la critique: mélanges offerts au Professeur J. A. Vier*, Publications de l'Université de Haute Bretagne (Paris: Klincksieck, 1973), 345–51; Earl Jeffrey Richards, 'Christine de Pizan and Dante: a re-examination', *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 222 (1985), 100–11; Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 'Christine de Pizan and the misogynistic tradition', *Romanic Review* 81,3 (1991), 279–92; Quilligan, *Allegory*, 18–31; McLeod, *Virtue*, 117; and Slerca, 'Dante'.

instruction in the *Divina Commedia*.[66] However, in the absence of an anti-misogynist tradition with which to combat male slander of women, Christine's catalogue also invokes the New Testament account of a key female figure whose authority in fact buttresses that of the *Cité* at several different levels: the Virgin Mary. The parallels between Christine's visitation by the three Virtues and the Annunciation of the Virgin are striking and more persistently sustained throughout the prologue of the *Cité* than any allusion to either the *Consolation of Philosophy* or the *Divina Commedia*.[67]

First, both Mary in St Luke's account of the Annunciation and Christine in the *Cité* are presented as intimidated by the sudden appearance of the bearers of the prophecies which will concern them. Mary's initial reaction at the angel's appearance is one of fear: 'And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be' (Luke 1:29). Christine is similarly frightened by the supernatural vision of her noble visitors, for she mistakes them for devils: 'Doubtant que ce fust aucune fantosme pour me tempter, fis en mon front le signe de la croix' (622). Secondly, both are then reassured by being told that they are privileged to be entrusted with the task that awaits them. Gabriel twice emphasises to Mary the fact that she is the honoured recipient of God's prophecy: 'Hail thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women' (Luke 1:28); 'Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favour with God' (Luke 1:30). Likewise, Raison twice informs Christine that she alone among women has proved herself worthy of receiving their prophetic utterances: 'tu as desservy, et dessers, estre de nous, comme chiere amie, visitee et conssolee' (628); 'Ainsi, belle fille, t'est [donné] la prerogative entre les femmes de faire et bastir la Cité des Dames' (630). Thirdly, both Mary and Christine are informed that the product of their missions will be immortal. The child which Mary will conceive is destined to rule forever: 'And he shall rule over the

[66] On Christine's identification with Boethius in the *Avision* see Semple, 'Consolation', 39–48; and with Dante in the *Chemin de long estude*, see Dina De Rentiis, '"Sequere me": "Imitatio" dans la *Divine Comédie* et dans le *Livre du Chemin de long estude*', in Zimmermann and De Rentiis, *City*, 31–42.

[67] See Quilligan, *Allegory*, 54–5, 238–9; V. A. Kolve, 'The Annunciation to Christine: authorial empowerment in the *Book of the City of Ladies*', in Brendan Cassidy, ed., *Iconography at the Crossroads: Papers from the Colloquium Sponsored by the Index of Christian Art, Princeton University, 23–24 March 1990* (Princeton University Press, 1993), 171–96; Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, 'Fondements et fondations de l'écriture chez Christine de Pizan: scènes de lectures et scènes d'incarnation', in Zimmermann and De Rentiis, *City*, 79–96.

house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end' (Luke 1:33). The fruit of Christine's labours, the city, will never be destroyed as it is superior to all earthly cities: 'Si sera ta cité tres belle sans pareille et de perpetuelle duree au monde' (630). Finally, both women submit themselves in humility to God's wishes, Christine's words being an almost verbatim quotation of those of the Virgin. Mary states: ' "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" ' (Luke 1:38), whilst Christine echoes: 'Et voycy vostre chamberiere preste d'obeir. Or commandez, je obeyray, et soit fait de moy selonc voz parolles' (639).

These textual parallels are further underscored in the iconographical detail of the miniatures in the *Cité*.[68] In the manuscripts of the text produced under Christine's supervision,[69] her gown is always blue, a colour signifying truth, as is the Virgin's in most late medieval representations of the Annunciation and, indeed, in the miniature which opens the third part of the *Cité* in which Mary is elected Queen of the City.[70] Furthermore, Mary is frequently depicted alone in a room of her house, an open book containing Isaiah's prophecy of the virgin birth in front of her (Isaiah 7:14), just as Christine is represented reading books in her study in the opening miniature of the *Cité*.[71] She thus boldly appropriates for herself the authority of the Virgin as the humble yet elected receiver of a prophecy sent by God's messengers.

Christine's recourse to theology provides her not only with a

[68] The manuscripts bearing the three miniatures which precede each of the three parts of the text are Paris, BN f. fr. 607, London, BL Harley 4431, Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale 9393, and Paris, BN f. fr. 1178. One manuscript, Paris, BN f. fr. 1179, only has the first miniature. For a discussion of the manuscript tradition of the text, see *Cité*, vol. 1, 346–589.

[69] Kolve, 'The Annunciation', mentions neither of these iconographical parallels in his analysis of the *Cité* miniatures. As he bases his discussion on BN f. fr. 1177, a manuscript which was produced under circumstances over which Christine had no direct control, the iconographical elements which he identifies as alluding to the Annunciation are the representation of the three Virtues as a Trinity, and the miraculous ray of light falling onto Christine's lap; this latter element is lacking in the manuscripts for which she *was* directly responsible.

[70] See D. M. Robb, 'The iconography of the Annunciation in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries', *Art Bulletin* 18 (1936), 480–526; Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art* (London: Lund Humphries, 1971), 33–52; George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (Oxford University Press, 1979), 151.

[71] This representation of the Virgin reading became the standard in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: see Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), second edition, 191. See also Diana M. Webb, 'Woman and home: the domestic setting of late medieval spirituality', in Sheils and Wood, *Women in the Church*, 159–74.

model for her own authority in the prologue of the *Cité*, but also with a set of arguments with which to combat misogyny, arguments which she uses to structure the whole of the *Cité*, whether discussing pagan or Christian women.[72] Despite the highly conventional nature of this theological defence,[73] the originality of Christine's text resides in its attempt to employ such arguments in the generic context of a catalogue of virtuous *exempla*. As Raison stresses to Christine, misogynist slanderers have transgressed God's laws in choosing to attack women, since they have acted both against reason and nature:

> Contre raison en tant que il est tres ingrat et mal congnoissant des grans biens que femme luy a faiz, si grans que il ne pourroit rendre, et par tant de foiz, et continuellement a neccessité que elle luy face. Contre nature en ce que il n'est beste mue quelconques ne oysel qui naturellement n'aime chierement son per: c'est la femelle. Sy est bien chose desnaturee quant homme raisonnable fait au contraire. (646)

Far from women being less than human, Raison insists that it is misogynists who deviate from nature when they persist in acting against God's will and fail to acknowledge or to be grateful for women's contribution to society.[74] The *Cité* here transposes into the domain of gender the theme of *gratitudo*, which by the fourteenth century had become an important concept with which medieval social theorists expressed the need to show loyalty towards one's benefactors in return for their gifts, thus assuring maximum social cohesion through ties of loyalty and inter-dependence.[75] By invoking

[72] On Christine's and Abelard's use of theological proofs to argue for the dignity of women, see Leslie C. Brook, 'Christine de Pisan, Heloise, and Abelard's holy women', *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie* 109,5/6 (1993), 556–63.

[73] See Paul Meyer, 'Mélanges de poésie française, IV: Plaidoyer en faveur des femmes', *Romania* 6 (1877), 499–503; and Meyer, 'Les manuscrits français de Cambridge, II: Bibliothèque de l'Université', *Romania* 15 (1886), 236–357; *Cité*, 1050; and Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge University Press, 1980), 6–27.

[74] *Le Bien des fames*, lines 44–7, similarly stresses the potentially heretical nature of misogyny:

> Je ne sai clerc, ne lai, ne prestre
> Que de fame puist consirrer,
> Se il ne veut trop meserrer
> Envers Dieu en mainte maniere.

[75] See Andrew Galloway, 'The making of a social ethic in late-medieval England: from *gratitudo* to "kyndenesse" ', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 55,3 (1994), 365–83. See also Alain Chartier, *Le Quadrilogue invectif*, ed. E. Droz (Paris: Champion, 1950), 2, who castigates his compatriots for their failure to maintain the state in good health: 'l'ingratitude des dons de Dieu est punie sur les hommes par sustraction de sa grace que aprés bon amendement et loiale correction a renvoyé et redrecié les seigneuries et les peuples en parfaitte paix et restitucion de leur disposicion premiere'.

the concept of gratitude, Raison argues that misogynists are both going against God's own Providence and undermining good relations between men and women by acting ungratefully towards a sex whose actions have contributed positively to the general development of civilisation.

Her two principal arguments in defence of the female sex, both of which are reinforced by theological proofs, are first, that woman has brought great benefits to humanity, and secondly, that woman is man's 'per', his natural and worthy companion who shares his human essence, as Christine herself had insisted in the 'querelle'. The greatest benefit of all to humanity, Raison argues, has been that of the Virgin's conception of Jesus (652). This act not only compensates for the Fall brought about by Eve, but far exceeds it in terms of its significance for the human race: 'trop plus hault degré a acquis par Marie qu'il ne perdi par Eve, quant humanité est conjointe a deité' (653).[76] The Virgin's pre-eminence is proven by the *ex exaltatione* topos which declares her to be 'par dessus tous les anges' (652).[77] Whilst the Virgin is the apex of this proof, the *Cité* also draws on numerous other examples to illustrate the benefits that women have brought to humankind.[78] Raison cites a Latin proverb, 'fallere, flere, nere, statuit deus in muliere' ('God made woman to lie, cry, and spin') often used to disparage women,[79] but turns it round to stress the good that has come to humanity from women's ability to 'plourer, parler, filler' (657). Firstly, reading antiphrastically in order to counter the misogynist view that women use tears to deceive men,[80] she shows the value of women's tears as a sign of faith by which unbelievers are converted, of which those of the Magdalene

[76] See Maclean, *Renaissance Notion*, 23.

[77] A similar argument is employed in *Le Bien des fames*, lines 11–17.

[78] Maclean, *Renaissance Notion*, 23, notes that the Virgin, though the embodiment of traditional female virtues such as humility and obedience, is in fact a problematic example for women because of her unique status as virgin mother. However, as Eamon Duffy argues in 'Holy maydens, holy wyfes: the cult of women saints in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England', in Sheils and Wood, *Women and the Church*, 175–96, 189–90, such examples of virginity as Mary provided 'not so much a model to imitate . . . but rather a source of power to be tapped . . . as uniquely powerful intercessors'.

[79] For the use of this adage in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, line 402, see Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 210, and 294, n. 46.

[80] For this negative account of women's tears in Juvenal, see ibid., 28:

> She fakes the outraged sigh, and hates the boys whom her husband
> Has, or she says he has, or sheds tears over a mistress
> Purely fictitious, of course. Her tears come down like raindrops,
> With plenty more where they came from, ready to flow at her bidding.
>
> (*Satire Six*, lines 272–5)

(658) and St Augustine's mother (659) are the most famous examples. This reference to conversion anticipates the deeds of the virgin martyrs set out by Christine in Book III. Secondly, in a crucial argument which will be discussed in greater detail below, Raison also valorises female speech, in order to refute a crucial element of misogynist doctrine.[81] She highlights the usefulness of women's language and the many virtuous purposes to which it has been put: 'Dieux a demonstré que voirement a yl mis langagige [sic] en femme pour en estre servy' (663). Raison also combats the standard misogynist arguments against women's sophistry and garrulity, by citing the *ex apparitione* topos according to which Christ chose women to spread word of his resurrection by appearing first to the Magdalene (660).[82] Finally, by praising women for spinning, Raison anticipates the discussion of the inventions and discoveries of the pagan women in Book I of the *Cité*. She stresses the universally useful nature of this art: 'sans lequel ouvraige les offices du monde seroyent maintenus en grant ordure' (663).[83]

Raison similarly uses conventional theological proofs when she argues that as man's 'per', woman enjoys a full humanity and is not, as misogynists would have Christine believe, a less-than-human 'other'. She refutes the Aristotelian view of women's defective bodies propounded by texts like the *Du secret des femmes* (a work wrongly attributed in the later Middle Ages to Albertus Magnus),[84] citing two well-known theological topoi: first, the *e loco* topos which argues that Eve was born in a nobler place than Adam, since she was formed in paradise and he outside; and second, the *e materia* topos which stresses the nobility of the matter from which she was born, a rib,

[81] Women's speech is castigated in misogynist thought because of its association with temptation and seduction in the Fall: see Maclean, *Renaissance Notion*, 15; and Edith Joyce Benkov, 'Language and women: from silence to speech', in Julian N. Wasserman and Lois Roney, eds., *Sign, Sentence, Discourse: Language in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Syracuse University Press, 1989), 245–65. See Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 51, for this view expressed by Tertullian: 'You are the gateway of the devil; you are the one who unseals the curse of that tree, and you are the first one to turn your back on the divine law; *you are the one who persuaded him whom the devil was not capable of corrupting*' (*The Appearance of Women*, 1.1, emphasis added).

[82] For other examples of this argument in women's defence cited by Abelard, *Letter 6*, 'On the origin of nuns', and Albertano of Brescia, *The Book of Consolation and Advice*, ch. 4, see Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 233–4 and 239 respectively.

[83] For other examples of praise for women's spinning, cited by Marbod of Rennes, *The Book of the Good Woman*, from *The Book with Ten Chapters*, ch. 4, see Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 230; and *Le Bien des fames*, lines 83–9.

[84] *Cité*, 1048, note to para. 27.

rather than from earth (646–51).[85] Furthermore, Raison shows how the 'rib-topos' serves to symbolise woman's role in marriage as man's companion and not his slave, since Eve was created from Adam's side and not at his feet (651), a commonly used argument which prefigures the praise of wives conducted in Book II.[86] On the question of the soul Raison is equally adamant, stating unequivocally that woman as well as man was formed in God's image, in terms of His 'esperit intellectuel': 'Laquelle ame Dieu crea et mist aussi bonne, aussi noble et toute pareille en corps femenin comme ou masculin' (652).[87] This proof underscores not only the discussion of the intellectual qualities of women in Book I, but also the examples of the martyrs in Book III, who are shown to be of equal faith to men.

However, once she has stressed the common humanity of male and female, Raison also asserts their mutual complementarity in terms of a sexual division of labour, a point which has posed problems for many modern commentators of the *Cité*.[88] In answer to Christine's question about women's exclusion from courts of justice, Raison explains that male and female have complementary functions for which God has fitted them, an explanation which may be derived from Aristotle's *Economics* where he stresses the need for men and women to play different roles in order to assure the smooth running of human society:[89] 'Dieux a establi homme et femme pour le servir en divers offices et pour aussi aidier et conforter l'un et l'autre, chascun en ce qui luy est establi a faire, et a chascun sexe a donné tel

[85] See Meyer, 'Mélanges', and Meyer, 'Les manuscrits français'; *Cité*, 1050, note to para. 27a; and Maclean, *Renaissance Notion*, 91.

[86] See D. L. d'Avray and M. Tausche, 'Marriage sermons in *ad status* collections of the central Middle Ages', *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age* 47 (1980), 71–119. For an example of this topos cited in defence of women, see *Dives and Pauper*, Commandment 1, ch. 4, quoted in Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 261.

[87] See Maclean, *Renaissance Notion*, 13; Kari Elisabeth Børresen, *Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Role of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981); Lyndon Reynolds, 'Bonaventure on gender and godlikeness', *Downside Review* 106 (1988), 171–94; and Børresen, ed., *Image of God and Gender Models* (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1991).

[88] See, for example, Quilligan, *Allegory*, 66–7; and Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 295, n. 50.

[89] See Aristotle, *Oeconomica*, trans. E. S. Forster, in *The Works of Aristotle Translated into English*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), revised edition, Book I, 3: 'Thus the nature both of the man and of the woman has been preordained by the will of heaven to live a common life. For they are distinguished in that the powers which they possess are not applicable to purposes in all cases identical, but in some respects their functions are opposed to one another though they all tend to the same end. For nature has made the one sex stronger, the other weaker.'

nature et inclinacion comme a faire son office luy appartient et compete' (665). It is men who uphold the law because they have the physical strength to do so, not because women are lacking in any mental capacity or in courage (664–6).[90] This concept of a sex-specific division of labour is fundamental to the type of defence of women offered throughout the *Cité*, one in which Christine seeks to convince misogynists of women's intellectual and moral potential for exercising virtue rather than to propose the reform of society so as to grant women equal access to all social roles. It therefore allows her to encourage women to pursue personal virtue within their existing social conditions, a lesson which she will propound more directly in the *Trois Vertus*.

If the prologue of the *Cité* establishes the theological basis of both Christine's authority and of the pro-women arguments which she puts forward as an alternative to those asserted by misogynists, her self-representation here as protagonist also determines the role she expects her reader to play in her text. Unlike Petrarch and Boccaccio, whose aim is largely to act as figures who recount *exempla* for their readers' edification in a detached authorial voice, Christine functions as a model for her female readers in order to encourage them to pursue virtue and to refute misogynist slander by their own worthy actions.

The lessons which the *Cité* offers its readers are designed to address two distinct needs on their part, both of which are also felt by Christine the protagonist herself.[91] On the one hand, she reveals to her readers the type of process which they must undergo in reading the *Cité* by first going through this process herself. Whereas in the 'querelle', Christine had argued that misogynist texts such as the *Rose* can have a dangerous effect on their male readers by encouraging them to adopt immoral attitudes towards both women and marriage, the prologue of the *Cité* shows the effects which misogyny can produce even on a female reader, in this case Christine herself. Schibanoff has described these effects as the result of 'immasculation', whereby Christine, through adopting the anti-feminist point of view, succumbs to feelings of 'self-hatred and self-doubt' as a woman, feelings which, as we have seen above, are presented in the prologue as being tantamount to theological

[90] McLeod, *Virtue*, 124.

[91] See Laura Kathryn McRae, 'Interpretation and the acts of reading and writing in Christine de Pisan's *Livre de la Cité des Dames*', *Romanic Review* 82,4 (1991), 412–33.

error.[92] In order for Christine to free herself from the deleterious effects of reading such texts, she must first learn to reject misogynist opinions. The three Virtues therefore have to teach Christine, and by extension her female readers, using *anamnesis* or recollection, a Platonic doctrine which Philosophy employs with her disciple Boethius to help him recall the knowledge he once had but has forgotten.[93] In Book II of the *Cité*, for example, Droiture refers to the need to correct misogynists' faulty memories: 'Et qui veulst oublier les grans biens que font les meres a leurs fiz et femmes a tous hommes? A tout le moins, je leur pry que les biens qui touchent dons espirituelz ilz ne vueillent pas oublier' (856). Through many other persistent reminders, the *Cité* serves to reactivate the memory of those readers who, like Christine, have internalised misogynist teachings by revealing how they have unjustly forgotten women's contribution to society.[94] This emphasis on faulty memory suggests that misogynists have acted unethically, since, as Mary Carruthers has argued: 'The choice to train one's memory or not, for the ancients and medievals, was not a choice dictated by convenience: it was a matter of ethics. A person without a memory, if such a thing could be, would be a person without moral character and, in a basic sense, without humanity.'[95]

On the other hand, Christine acts as a model for her female reader by showing her how to emulate the virtue of the women whose stories are recounted in her text, in line with the Petrarchan ideal of an *imitatio*. Unlike Boccaccio in the *De Mulieribus*, whose recommendation that his female reader should follow his examples is made highly problematic by his equation of virtue with manliness, Christine here shows her female reader the way to honour by herself performing an important virtuous action: the construction of the

[92] Schibanoff, 'Taking the gold', 85–6, borrows the term 'immasculation', defined as the process by which a woman is forced to read as a man, from Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

[93] See Margaret Brabant and Michael Brint, 'Identity and difference in Christine de Pizan's *Cité des Dames*' in Brabant, *Politics*, 207–22. The doctrine of *anamnesis* is discussed in *Phaedo* 72e–77d and *Meno* 81d–e in *Plato*, 12 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, 1928), and Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. V. E. Watts (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 22 and 109, n. 14.

[94] See also Jody Enders, 'The feminist mnemonics of Christine de Pizan', *Modern Language Quarterly* 55,3 (1994), 231–49.

[95] Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 13.

'city'.[96] In Book II, Droiture explicitly stresses the praiseworthiness of this action by comparing Christine's writing of the text with the good deeds of women who employed their virtue in other ways: 'ceste oeuvre a bastir estoit a toy reservé et nom mie a elles, car par leurs oeuvres estoyent assez les femmes louees aux gens de bon entendement' (924). Whilst Christine writes the work which contains innumerable examples of women's noble actions, her female readers can choose to copy her lead and so 'write' themselves, metaphorically, into the *Cité*.

Christine's prologue thus sets out the foundations of the argument to be developed in the three books of the *Cité*: woman's common humanity with man in mental, moral and spiritual terms, a humanity which equips her for her role as man's helpmeet and the necessary complement to his role in society. Like its title, the prologue of the *Cité* clearly contrasts Christine's text with the works of Petrarch and Boccaccio. Whereas they speak as already established authorities within the catalogue genre, Christine appropriates for herself the authority of a God-sent prophecy, thereby placing her catalogue under the sign of theology. Moreover, unlike Petrarch and Boccaccio, whose relationship with previous historiographical authorities was unambiguous, consisting largely of paying homage to and selecting from their predecessors' writings, Christine explicitly hierarchises her sources, pitting theology against philosophy and poetry in order to construct the basis of her defence of women. Finally, Christine speaks not as an external authorial voice by which to admonish her contemporaries as Petrarch and Boccaccio do, but rather as a model working from within her text for her female reader who must be brought back from the brink of theological error.

PERSPECTIVES ON HISTORY: PROGRESS VERSUS DECLINE

Having shown how the title and prefatory parts of these works by Petrarch, Boccaccio and Christine establish both their authors' status and the role of their implied readers, we need now to examine the conception of history contained in each text. This issue is a crucial one as it determines how each of our three authors chose the

[96] The prologue of the *Cité* can be seen to correspond to the Ciceronian *exordium*, whose function is to convince the reader of the protagonist's virtue: see McLeod, *Virtue*, 122.

biographical examples that they offered for their readers' emulation or disapprobation. As we shall see, the most striking divergence between Christine and her predecessors is that whereas Petrarch and Boccaccio share a pessimistic view of history, which they regard either as a process of decline or as a continuum of vice down the ages,[97] she argues that history has been marked by progress and that women have played a key role in the development of civilisation.

In the preface to the *De Viris*, as in his other historical works, Petrarch presents a clear picture of the decadence and decline of his compatriots.[98] As Franco Simone has argued, Petrarch saw his own era as constituting the lowest point of the rotation of Fortune's Wheel, whose apogee had been reached in Roman times.[99] However, Petrarch's belief in a fundamentally unchanging human nature led him to adhere to a cyclical conception of history in which a return to a heroic past *would* be possible.[100] He maintained that by informing his readers of the glorious deeds of the Romans, he could inculcate in them a desire to imitate the Ancients and to turn back the Wheel of Fortune towards apogee and a new Roman Age.[101] This conception of history explains why Petrarch ultimately decided only to include Roman heroes in his text rather than also adding the great men of the Old Testament, such as Adam and Nimrod. Although the aspirations which motivated these latter characters would have been more familiar to the medieval reader (for they could be read as prefigurations of the New Testament),[102] their moral aims were nevertheless fundamentally irreconcilable with the civic and political aims of the Roman heroes. Through the use of virtuous examples, Petrarch sought to transmit to his reader the

[97] The view of decline is a medieval commonplace: see J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Growth and Origins* (New York: Dover Publications, 1932), 20–2; Theodor E. Mommsen, 'St. Augustine and the Christian idea of progress: the background of the *City of God*', in his *Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Eugene F. Rice Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1959), 265–89.

[98] Mommsen, 'Petrarch's conception of the "Dark Ages"', in his *Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 106–29.

[99] Franco Simone, 'Il Petrarca e la sua concezione ciclica della storia', *Arte e storia: studi in onore di Leonello Vincenti* (Turin: Giappichelli Editore, 1965), 382–428.

[100] Mommsen, 'Petrarch's conception', 127.

[101] Simone, 'Il Petrarca'.

[102] See Marcello Aurigemma, 'Petrarca e la storia: osservazioni sulle biografie del *De Viris Illustribus* da Adamo ad Ercole', *Scrittura e società: studi in onore di Gaetano Mariani* (Rome: Herder, 1985), 53–74; Eckhard Kessler, 'Petrarch's contribution to Renaissance historiography', *Res Publica Litterarum: Studies in the Classical Tradition* 1 (1978), 129–49.

respect and affection which he himself felt for the great heroes of the pagan past.[103]

Boccaccio in the *De Casibus* is even more pessimistic than Petrarch about the moral state of his contemporaries and about the course of history as a whole. Adopting a linear, rather than cyclical, view of history, he argues that the vices of his own time are evidence not so much of a decline in morals but of a continuation of the immorality prevalent in Antiquity. To his mind, the downfall of the illustrious is ineluctable, in all periods of human history:

> Et, ne in tempus aut sexum cadat obiectio, a mundi primordio in nostrum usque evum, consternatos duces illustresque alios, tam viros quam mulieres, passim disiectos, in medium succincte deducere mens est. (*De Casibus*, 10)
>
> (And, so that there can be no accusation against any specific time or sex, my idea has been to present succinctly . . . those rulers and other famous persons, women as well as men, who have been cast down from the beginning of the world until now.) (*Illustrious Men*, 1–2, translation slightly amended)[104]

Whilst Petrarch, in his attempt to encourage a return to the glories of Rome, advocates the need for the reader to imitate the Ancients, Boccaccio presents the reader with a catalogue of those unfortunate souls who have brought ruin upon themselves. The overall pattern of Boccaccio's narratives becomes explicit in the section where he recounts the fable of the fight between Poverty and Fortune, first told to him by his mentor, Andalò del Negro. According to this fable, Fortune, having been beaten by Poverty in hand-to-hand combat, was made to tie up her henchman Misfortune to a post so that only those who deliberately chose to untie him would suffer setbacks and tribulations (*De Casibus*, 192–200). Boccaccio's argument is that his readers' fate lies in their own hands: it is up to them to decide whether or not they should seek to emulate those souls whose overweening desire for glory led them into ruin. To emphasise this point, Boccaccio provides a lengthy series of *exempla* from Adam and Eve right up to the present, in order to stress the short time that is left to the reader until the fateful Day of Judgment.[105] Thus, rather

[103] Aldo S. Bernardo, *Petrarch, Scipio and the Africa* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), 11–20.

[104] Godman, 'Chaucer'.

[105] Paul Budra, '*The Mirror for Magistrates* and the shape of *De Casibus* tragedy', *English Studies* 69,4 (1988), 303–12.

than providing his reader with virtuous models to follow, as Petrarch does, Boccaccio offers his reader examples of behaviour which should be shunned.

In the *De Mulieribus*, as in the *De Casibus*, Boccaccio adopts a linear chronology which runs from Eve, as first mother (though he largely omits Judaeo-Christian women), to Queen Joanna of Sicily, Boccaccio's contemporary to whom he had once considered dedicating the text (*De Mulieribus*, 18). This chronology reveals a general pattern of decline which explains the paucity of virtuous examples found in Boccaccio's own time, as he himself states in his Conclusion:

> In nostras usque feminas, ut satis apparet, devenimus, quas inter adeo perrarus rutilantium numerus est, ut dare ceptis finem honestius credam quam, his ducentibus hodiernis, ad ulteriora progredi. (ibid., 448)
>
> (As can be clearly seen, I have reached the women of our time, in which the number of illustrious ones is so small that I think it more suitable to come to an end here rather than proceed farther with the women of today.) (*Famous Women*, 251)

Yet in addition to suggesting that his female contemporaries are, in general, the inferiors of pagan women in terms of virtue, Boccaccio also argues that several of the pagan women he discusses were themselves actually *responsible* for the historical decline of the human condition. For example, in his discussion of the deeds of Queen Ceres, the inventor of agriculture, Boccaccio laments the loss of the Golden Age (*De Mulieribus*, 42–7), a point on which, as we shall see below, Christine explicitly disagrees with him. In this important passage of the text, Boccaccio strives to weigh up the good and the bad consequences of Ceres' inventions but finally, with reluctance, declares that he regrets the passing of these earlier, more innocent times:

> Quibus inspectis, una cum innumeris aliis, vix scio, imo scio, quia longe aurea illa, licet rudia et agrestia fuerint, his nostris ferreis comptisque seculis preponenda sint. (ibid., 46)
>
> (Having considered these things and others without number, I hardly know whether, or rather I do know that, those golden centuries, although primitive and uncivilized, were greatly to be preferred to our sophisticated age of iron.) (*Famous Women*, 13, translation slightly amended)

Far from praising Ceres for bringing new discoveries into the world, Boccaccio actually ends by blaming her for causing misery to the

human race.[106] Similarly, he condemns Veturia the Roman for her part in the process of historical decline (*De Mulieribus*, 218–27). He describes how, in thanks to Veturia for intervening with her son to save Rome, certain privileges, such as dressing in elaborate finery and inheriting wealth, were established for women, privileges which, to his mind, they have subsequently abused right up to the present day. Boccaccio castigates women, both of the past and the present, for their persistent profligacy and arrogance, and upbraids men for allowing themselves to be duped in this way:

> Veturie igitur applaudant, eius colant nomen et meritum quotiens caris lapillis purpura et aureis ornantur fibulis et incedentibus a viris assurgitur ociosisque morientium substancie numerantur. (ibid., 226)
>
> (Let them applaud Veturia, then, and honor her name whenever they adorn themselves with precious jewels, royal vestments, and gold brooches, and whenever men stand up as they go by, and let them squander in idleness the wealth of the dead.) (*Famous Women*, 121)

By stressing both the inferiority of contemporary women and the dire consequences of women's actions in the past, Boccaccio's text therefore leaves the implied female reader in some doubt as to how to draw inspiration from any of the women described in his work.[107]

Christine's view of history in the *Cité* contrasts markedly with that of both Petrarch and Boccaccio, and even differs substantially from the one set out in many of her other historical and political writings. In the *Policie* and the *Paix*, for instance, where Christine is witness to the increasingly perilous situation of civil war in France, she echoes the commonplace late medieval view of contemporary society's decadence and decline.[108] In the *Mutacion*, she employs the Augustinian typology of the six ages of man, ending with a description of the

[106] See Rosalind Brown-Grant, 'Décadence ou progrès? Christine de Pizan, Boccace et la question de l'"âge d'or"', *Revue des Langues Romanes* 92,2 (1988), 295–306; Judith L. Kellogg, 'Christine de Pizan and Boccaccio: rewriting classical mythic tradition', in Cornelia N. Moore and Raymond A. Moody, eds., *Comparative Literature East and West: Tradition and Trends*, vol. 1 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, College of Languages, Linguistics and Literature, and the East-West Center, 1989), 124–31; McLeod, *Virtue*, 71–3.

[107] McLeod, *Virtue*, 78. See also Laura Torretta, 'Il *Liber de Claris Mulieribus* di Giovanni Boccaccio', *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana* 39 (1902), 254–92. However, for a different view, see Anna Cerbo, 'Il *De Claris Mulieribus* di Giovanni Boccaccio', *Atti e Memorie dell'Arcadia* s.3, 6,3 (1974), 51–75.

[108] See Rosalind Brown-Grant, 'Les exilées du pouvoir: Christine de Pizan et la femme devant la crise du Moyen Age finissant', in Claude Thomasset and Michel Zink, eds., *Apogée et déclin: Actes du Colloque de l'URA 411, Provins, 1991* (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1993), 211–24.

present time as an age of decrepitude.[109] Even in the *Cité*, when discussing her male contemporaries she laments both the decline of men's attitudes towards women, as evidenced by an ever-increasing readiness to slander them (884), and the decadence of State and Church as institutions controlled by men: 'Et se tu me veulz dire que ces choses fussent jadis et que a present soyent bons, tu puez veoir aujourd'uy en tous estaz se le monde va en amendant et se grant fermeté et grant constance a es faiz et es consaulx, tant des princes temporelz comme des espirituelz' (898).

By contrast, when discussing women's role in the history of civilisation in the *Cité*, Christine adopts a perspective of progress rather than one of decline. This discrepancy can be explained by the fact that her rhetorical aims differ according to whether she is writing about men or about women. In her historical and political works, where Christine's explicit aim is to take a negative stance and bewail the decline of morality in the knights and rulers of her own day compared with the virtue of those in the past, she necessarily takes a short-term view of history. In the *Cité*, where her whole purpose is to be positive and to defend women, she analyses history from the long term in order to valorise the contribution made by the female sex to human progress. She expresses this view of history and of women's historical role most clearly in her only explicit disagreement with Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus* in the whole of the *Cité*, where she marks her 'ideological independence'[110] from her source by her rejection of the myth of the Golden Age.[111] On this question, Christine was not only opposing Boccaccio but also going against one of the most prevalent attitudes in both classical and medieval culture.

The form in which the late Middle Ages knew the myth of the Golden Age was determined largely by the works of Ovid and Boethius. In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid paints an idealised picture of the Age of Saturn in which neither technology nor war had yet been invented, an age which came to an end when Jupiter usurped Saturn's throne and humankind discovered precious metals and the

[109] *Mutacion*, vol. 2, lines 8256–399. See Paul Archambault, 'The ages of man and the ages of the world: a study of two traditions', *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* 12 (1966), 193–228; and Elizabeth Sears, *The Ages of Man: Medieval Interpretations of the Life Cycle* (Princeton University Press, 1986).

[110] Phillippy, 'Establishing authority', 168.

[111] Brown-Grant, 'Décadence'.

power that such discoveries could bring them.[112] Boethius follows Ovid's account closely in the *Consolation of Philosophy* but adds his own moral and Christian interpretation to the legend.[113] For Boethius, the end of the Golden Age recalls the Fall of Adam and Eve, although he asserts that it is better that humans should exercise free will and be conscious that sin has come into the world, rather than remain in a state of primitive ignorance, lived purely according to their instincts. The Golden Age had also been evoked at length by Jean de Meung in the *Rose*, through the discourses of four different characters: Raison, Ami, La Vieille and Genius, all of whom subscribe to the Ovidian version of the legend.[114] For the most part, these characters express nostalgia for the fact that the end of the Golden Age also entailed the end of innocence in love. In their view, this loss of innocence brought about constraints on human liberty and thus a need for fraud and deceit in amorous relations between men and women.

All of these authorities, including Boccaccio, favour the primitivist myth of the Golden Age, that is, that humans were once wild and yet content, innocent of the unhappiness that progress would bring into the world. Christine would therefore seem to be one of the first late medieval writers to support an anti-primitivist thesis and to argue for the positive effects of civilisation and of human inventions.[115] As evidence of women's intellectual capacities, Raison claims that discoveries such as the letters of the alphabet, arms and agriculture

[112] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Mary M. Innes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), Book I, lines 65–176. See also A. O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (New York: Octagon Books, 1965), 43–65.

[113] *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Book II, metre v. See also George Boas, *Essays on Primitivism and Related Ideas in the Middle Ages* (New York: Octagon Books, 1978), 64–7.

[114] See the *Rose*, lines 5505–58 on Raison, 8325–424 and 9463–648 on Ami, 13817–4156 on La Vieille, and 19994–20190 on Genius. See also Paul B. Milan, 'The Golden Age and the political theory of Jean de Meung: a myth in *Rose* scholarship', *Symposium* 23 (1969), 137–49; F. W. A. George, 'Jean de Meung and the myth of the Golden Age', in H. T. Barnwell, ed., *The Classical Tradition in French Literature: Essays Presented to R. C. Knight* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1977), 31–9.

[115] In Antiquity, only the Epicureans seem to have subscribed to a view of progress in human history, of which Lucretius (in *The Nature of the Universe*, trans. Ronald E. Latham Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1952, Book V, lines 800–1457), would seem to have been the chief exponent: see Bury, *Idea of Progress*, 15–18; and Lovejoy and Boas, *Primitivism*, 222–42. However, Christine is unlikely to have encountered Lucretius' text as only fragments of it were known in the Middle Ages: see R. R. Bolgar, *The Classical Heritage* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), 262. Her views on progress nonetheless correspond closely to those of her contemporary, the preacher Jacques Legrand: see Evencio Beltran, 'Christine de Pizan, Jacques Legrand et le *Communiloquium* de Jean de Galles', *Romania* 104 (1983), 208–28.

were all brought into the world by pagan women (Nicostrata [735–9], Minerva [739–43], Ceres [743–4] and Isis [745–6] respectively). These stories are followed by an account of the usefulness of their inventions, in the course of which a fifth example is cited, Arachne (753–4), who discovered the art of weaving. In this discussion, Raison argues that the historical significance of these women's deeds is that they brought civilisation to otherwise barbarous and lawless people. Citing the example of Ceres, she states that 'par ceste dame fu ramené le siecle de bestialleté a vie humaine et raisonnable' (744), a declaration which is repeated in the case of each of these pagan women.

Raison goes on to summarise all the steps towards progress which women have helped humankind to make, stating unequivocally that they have facilitated the founding of cities, the improvement of agriculture, and the development of learning (749–50). Christine, in response to Raison, reiterates her charge that misogynists are lacking in gratitude in failing to acknowledge women's intellectual capacities and their contribution to the development of civilised life:

> Ha! dame, or apperçoy par ce que vous dittes, plus qu'oncques mais, la tres grant ingratitude et descongnoissance d'iceulx hommes qui tant mesdient des femmes: car nonobstant que il me semblast que assez cause souffisant y avoit de nom les blasmer parce que femme est a tout homme mere et les autres biens que on voit magnifestement que generaument femmes font a hommes, vrayement voycy comble de benefices et a souveraine largesce que ilz ont receu, et reçoivent, d'elles. (751)

As in the *Dieu d'Amours*, where, using Cupid as a mouthpiece, Christine castigated both clerks and knights for slandering women, so here she exposes their bad faith for refusing to appreciate that those objects on which they depend for their livelihood, the Latin alphabet and arms respectively, are things which women have brought into the world (ibid.).

As part of the process of *anamnesis* used to correct the memories of misogynists and to reproach them for their ingratitude, the *Cité* contrasts their response to women's inventions with that of the people who were the original beneficiaries of them. For example, Raison explains how Nicostrata's discovery of the Latin alphabet was greatly appreciated by her contemporaries: 'de ce benefice *n'ont pas esté ingras* les Ytaliens, et a bon droit' (737, emphasis added). Indeed, they expressed their gratitude and celebrated this achievement for posterity by constructing a monument to their benefactress:

'ilz luy ediffierent un temple que ilz dedierent en son nom' (ibid.), an action which is repeated by the compatriots of other pagan women such as Minerva (741) and Isis (746).

The final step in Raison's argument is an appeal to divine authority, since she claims that the ultimate proof of the usefulness of women's inventions lies in the use that Jesus made of them: 'car il usa de pain, de vin, de char de poisson, de robe de couleur, de linge et de tous si faiz necessaires, laquel chose n'eust point fait se mieulx fust user de glans et de cenelles' (755). Christine denies categorically that there ever was a primitive Golden Age, since true human happiness resides in those things which help people to live more civilised lives (754). Unlike Jean de Meung, who distinguishes in the *Rose* between the natural order which prevailed during the Golden Age and the conventional order set up afterwards to combat and contain moral corruption,[116] Christine presents social organisation as, in itself, better than the laws of nature. In this respect, she follows Aquinas' positive view of the state as part of divine order rather than as simply functioning to repress evil in the post-lapsarian world.[117] The *Cité* thus links the notions of civilisation and improvement of the human condition with that of salvation itself. Whilst Raison argues that it is pagan women who have taken these important temporal steps in human history, Droiture explains how it is the Virgin who has taken the vital spiritual step, one for which all men should be grateful: 'O! comment est jamais homme si ingrat que il oublie que par femme la porte de paradis luy est ouverte? C'est par la Vierge Marie – quel plus grant bien puet demander? et que Dieux est fait homme? – si que devant t'a esté dit' (856).

In contrast to the view shared by Petrarch in the *De Viris* and Boccaccio in the *De Mulieribus* of history as a process of decline, which explains the lack of contemporary examples in their texts, Christine sees history in terms of progress, so that her catalogue of women *does* include examples from her own time. Moreover, this progressivist theory of history allows her to emphasise the continuity between women of the past and those of the present in terms of their virtue, as opposed to Boccaccio's view, expressed in the *De Casibus*, of human history as merely a continuum of vice. So, contrary to

[116] Milan, 'The Golden Age', 148.

[117] See Walter Ullmann, *A History of Political Thought in the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 183.

McLeod's argument that the pattern of history which emerges in the course of the *Cité* is universal, secular and cyclical,[118] Christine's concept of continuity means that she in fact *precludes* the notion of a cyclical return to the past. In stressing progress over decline, Christine not only argues that in the past women have played a key role in both temporal progress towards civilisation and spiritual progress towards salvation, but also shows how, within the spheres of the community, the family and the individual, there has been a continuous line of female virtue up to the present. In Books I and II, pagan and Christian *exempla* of martial courage, intellect, filial love and constancy sit side by side. In Book III, on women's spiritual equality with men, which of necessity includes only Christian *exempla*, Christine places both stories of holy women associated with the earliest Apostles, such as Ephigenia and Maximilla, and later accounts of martyrs within the established Church, such as St Catherine of Alexandria. Finally, in the address to her audience at the end of Book III of the *Cité*, Christine stresses that this continuity will even extend into the future, with every new virtuous reader taking her place among the ranks of women already assembled inside: 'Mes tres redoubtees dames, Dieux soit louez, or est du tout achevee et parfaitte nostre cité, en laquelle a grant honneur vous toutes celles qui amez vertus, gloire et loz povez estre hebergees, *tant les passees dames, comme les presentes et celles a avenir*, car pour toute dame honnourable est faitte et fondee' (1031, emphasis added).[119]

Unlike Boccaccio in the *De Mulieribus*, whose choice of *exempla* obeys no logic of presentation other than that of chronology, Christine sets out her models within the framework of a moral hierarchy. This hierarchy is reflected in the allegory of the city itself, whereby the pagan warriors and inventors are the foundations of the defence of women and the saints and martyrs represent its culmination. These distinctions correspond roughly to Aristotle's definitions of practical philosophy: politics (the individual in relation to the state); economics (the individual in relation to the family); and ethics (the individual as individual), although Christine transposes ethics into theology, which concerns the spiritual good of individuals rather than just their moral good.[120] However, unlike Aristotle, and indeed

[118] McLeod, *Virtue*, 133. [119] See also *Cité*, 970.
[120] Maclean, *Renaissance Notion*, 48–9.

most medieval political theorists,[121] Christine places the sphere of economics above that of politics in her hierarchy, ranking the deeds of wives and mothers above those of warriors and teachers, as Raison indicates at the end of Book I of the *Cité* where she uses the metaphor of the foundations to show that the rest of the text is both figuratively and literally superior to it: 'bien me semble que desormais doit souffire en ce que je t'ay basti es murs de la closture de la Cité des Dames; or sont tous achevez et enduiz. Viengnent avant mes autres suers, et par leur aide et devis soit par toy parfaicte *le seurplus* de l'ediffice' (778, emphasis added). This preference places woman's domestic role as *mulier economica*, an office which is acknowledged by both philosophers and theologians alike as the 'natural' one for women,[122] above her political role in offices which are more usually designated as male preserves. Therefore, whilst Christine adopts a highly conventional medieval view of womanhood, she also valorises the role which most of her female readers would actually have been expected to fulfil. Whereas Boccaccio finds virtue in those women who, as viragoes, managed to transcend their sex, Christine devotes over half of her text to women who virtuously performed the roles which are specific to their gender. How, then, were Christine's readers encouraged to interpret and emulate the virtuous examples put forward in the *Cité*? How could they be expected to draw for inspiration on the lives of women like the pagan warriors and the virgin martyrs whose circumstances were so different from their own?

The *exempla* in Books I and III of the *Cité* deal, for the most part, with exceptional women who were acting under extraordinary conditions. In Book I, many of the heroines demonstrating martial courage and leadership are initially obliged to do so out of practical necessity. The Amazons, for instance, first take up arms on being widowed and are forced to defend their country against invaders (681). Similarly, Cornificia has to take the unusual step of adopting a masculine disguise in order to receive an education (724). The exceptional quality of the women who discovered new arts and

[121] See Aristotle, *Politica*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, in *The Works of Aristotle*, Book I, ch. 2: 'the state is by nature prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part'. See also Ullmann, *Political Thought*, 168.

[122] See Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny, 'Comment les théologiens et les philosophes voient la femme', *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 20 (1977), 105–29; Maclean, *Renaissance Notion*, 58–9.

sciences is indicated by the fact that their contemporaries imputed a divine origin to them, as in the examples of Minerva, Ceres and Isis. Others were deemed to have been given divine assistance, such as Nicostrata, of whom it was thought that 'elle estoit amee du dieu Mercurius' (735). Like the women in Book I, those in Book III are also presented as the equals of men, but here they are praised for the strength of their faith and their willingness to suffer in defence of it (978). However, Justice indicates that the virgin martyrs and saints are also extraordinary figures, since theirs is the most elevated vocation to which a woman can aspire: 'desquelles les vies sont belles a ouyr, de bon exemple a toute femme sur toute autre sagesce. Et pour ce ycestes seront les plus supperlatives de nostre cité' (ibid.).

Given the very exceptional nature of the heroines whose lives are recounted in Books I and III, the more direct relevance of Book II to Christine's implied female readership is signalled by the fact that she places most of her examples of contemporary virtuous women, such as the princesses and noble ladies of France, in this section.[123] These ladies, though of high social status, are nonetheless largely referred to as good wives and mothers, since it is in these capacities that their virtuous conduct will make itself manifest. A typical example is that of Valentina Visconti, wife of Louis d'Orléans: 'De laquelle plus prudente dame se pourroit dire? Forte et constante dame en couraige, de grant amour a son seigneur, de bonne dottrine a ses enffans, avisee en gouvernement, juste envers tous, de maintien saige et en toutes choses tres vertueuse' (968). This description, along with many of the other examples of domestic virtue given in the *Cité*, could have served as a model for the precepts of chastity, fidelity and discretion delivered to princesses in its sequel, the *Trois Vertus*, which addresses women's pragmatic concerns directly. Moreover, at the very end of the *Cité*, in line with the *exempla* presented in Book II, Christine addresses her audience in terms of their marital status as maidens, wives and widows, irrespective of their socio-economic estate, and recommends virtuous conduct to them purely in the domestic sphere, in recognition of the fact that their actions will largely be confined to this sphere (1031–6).

What, then, is the significance of the stories of illustrious women in Books I and III of the *Cité*, if Book II is the only one which

[123] See Glynnis M. Cropp, 'Les personnages féminins tirés de l'histoire de la France dans le *Livre de la Cité des Dames*', in Dulac and Ribémont, *Une femme*, 195–208.

contains examples that Christine's readership could feasibly be expected to follow? On the one hand, Christine would seem to be arguing that women are capable of great exploits in domains outside their role as wives and mothers, but without necessarily *advocating* that her contemporaries should actually perform such. This is not to say that she marks a complete separation between the domestic and the public spheres.[124] As McLeod has rightly pointed out, Book II 'attempts to place women within the context of the community'.[125] However, it is debatable whether this lack of separation between the spheres is due to Christine's 'humanist sentiments', as McLeod suggests.[126] Rather, it is a medieval commonplace that private virtue has public effects, an ethical view which Christine applies to women in the *Cité* and the *Trois Vertus* as much as she does to men in the *Othéa* and the *Avision*.[127]

On the other hand, the fact that the Amazons and the virgin martyrs are presented as 'exemplary', rather than as literally 'imitable',[128] does not necessarily prevent them from acting as role models for Christine's readers. Her contemporary, the Augustinian preacher Jacques Legrand, shows himself to be equally concerned with this matter in his *Livre des bonnes meurs*, a series of *sermones ad status* in which he cites examples of wives who were so devoted to their husbands that they killed themselves on hearing of their spouses' deaths. Far from suggesting that his female readership should do likewise, Legrand signals the difference between understanding the moral point of an *exemplum* and slavishly imitating the behaviour of its protagonists: 'Et ja soit de ce que *ainsi faire ne soit couvenable ne necessaire*, toutesvoies appert il par les dittes hystoires

[124] The domestic sphere for a noblewoman would in fact have meant a large household and lands which it was her task to manage and administer: see S. H. Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Class, Status and Gender* (London: Macmillan, 1995), 268.

[125] McLeod, *Virtue*, 132.

[126] Ibid., 131.

[127] On the importance of this idea, derived from the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Secretum Secretorum* and Giles of Rome's *De Regimine Principum*, which also influenced the *Othéa* and the *Avision*, see Elizabeth Porter, 'Gower's ethical microcosm and political macrocosm', in Alastair J. Minnis, ed., *Gower's Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983), 135–62, 139: 'Ethical self-governance, therefore, enables men to contribute to their communities, both the small community of the family and the large community of the body politic.'

[128] This distinction is taken from Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Glyn S. Burgess, trans., *Virgin Lives and Holy Deaths: Two Exemplary Biographies for Anglo-Norman Women* (London: Dent, 1996), xiii.

comment en mariage l'en doit avoir grant amour.'[129] Similarly, in order to empower her female contemporaries by encouraging them to pursue virtue within their existing social conditions, Christine indicates how her readers can emulate the *qualities* shown by the exceptional women of Books I and III of the *Cité*, even if they cannot literally imitate their *deeds*, by translating these qualities into her readers' own realm of experience. For example, at the end of Book I of the text she draws a parallel between the actions of women warriors and intellectuals and those of wives and mothers by referring to their shared quality of prudence. The relevance of this quality to the women of Book II, and by implication to Christine's female readers, is shown by the fact that the epitome of prudence (as a key aspect of women's rationality) which the text discusses is the conventional description from Proverbs 31:10–31 of the good wife: '"Qui trouvera femme forte, c'est a dire prudente, son mary n'ara pas faulte de tous biens"' (765). Unlike martial prowess and academic learning which are presented as culturally specific, and to which women's access – as far as Christine's contemporaries are concerned – is now limited, prudence is presented as innate in both sexes and therefore as a quality which may be increased by learning but is not created by it (763).[130] Even if Christine's readers could not aspire to being warriors or teachers, they could still cultivate the quality of prudence, the exercise of which she specifically associates with women in their married lives.

The *Cité* therefore valorises women's role as wives and mothers in Book II by translating the qualities of the exceptional women in Books I and III into domestic terms. In this sense, as Judith Kellogg has argued, the three-part structure of the *Cité* echoes the three parts 'texte', 'glose' and 'allegorie', which comprise the stories recounted in the mythographical *Othéa*, with Book I corresponding to the 'texte', in which women's *literal* deeds are celebrated, Book II to the 'glose', read for women's *moral* deeds, and Book III to the 'allegorie', read for their *spiritual* deeds.[131] This method of reading the *Cité* allows us to analyse how Christine rehabilitates two key areas of

[129] *Livre des bonnes meurs*, 369, emphasis added.

[130] See McLeod, *Virtue*, 127, n. 35: Christine here claims for women a moral virtue which both Plato and Aristotle saw as more prevalent in men than women. See also Maclean, *Renaissance Notion*, 49–50.

[131] Kellogg, 'Christine de Pizan and Boccaccio', 124–31, 129.

women's experience which had traditionally been reviled by misogynists: female language, which they had characterised exclusively in terms of speech and associated with garrulity and riot; and the body, which they had depicted as an erotic site of carnality and sin. Christine relates the virtue exhibited by women in each of these areas of experience across the three spheres of influence which are explored in the different parts of the text: the community, the family and the individual.

In the prologue of the *Cité*, as we have seen, Raison argues that despite the claims of misogynists, women have in fact used language for positive ends, an argument which the rest of the text proceeds to illustrate in literal, moral and spiritual terms. Moreover, in Book I the *Cité* extends women's virtuous use of language to *written* texts, in contrast to anti-feminists who focus solely on women's speech and its negative effects. Raison celebrates pagan women's gift of the Latin alphabet and of written laws to their communities in terms of their literal significance for the development of civilised society. The alphabet invented by Nicostrata facilitates communication between people and so advances learning, whilst laws such as those devised by Isis explicitly replace barbarism with order: 'Elle donna et ordena certaines lois bonnes et droitturieres; aprist aux gens d'Egypte, qui vivoyent rudement et sans loy de justice n'ordenance, a vivre par ordre de droitture' (745). Raison also applauds as a literal achievement the actions of Christian women like Proba, who perfected exegetical readings of Vergil and Homer and extracted the word of God out of pagan texts (725–6).

If women's relationship to language in Book I is rehabilitated by showing how certain exceptional individuals developed literacy, with its civilising influence for humanity as a whole, Book II presents women's use of language in moral and domestic terms, valorising the spoken eloquence of those characters who saved husband and family from danger and dismay through good advice, peacemaking, conversion and consolation. These roles are consonant with those outlined for women's speech in the *Trois Vertus* and, indeed, in many medieval marriage sermons.[132] In reply to the misogynist claim that husbands should not listen to their wives' counsel, Droiture enumerates the examples of women, both pagan and Christian, whose advice proved

[132] See d'Alverny, 'Comment'; and Liliane Dulac, 'The representation and functions of feminine speech in Christine de Pizan's *Livre des Trois Vertus*', in Richards, *Reinterpreting*, 13–22.

beneficial to their husbands: Antonia, who persuaded her husband Belisarius to obey his king's commands (853–5), and the unnamed wife of Alexander the Great, who persuaded her husband to suffer illness with dignity rather than committing suicide (855). Droiture also relates women's speech to their role as peacemakers: the Sabine women beg their husbands and fathers to call off their battle with each other (867); Veturia the Roman woman implores her son to spare the city (869). Furthermore, Droiture records how a Christian woman converted her husband to the faith, an example which explicitly links speech to the idea of charity: Clotilda, wife of King Clovis, 'ne finoit de timonner et prier son seigneur que il voulsist recepvoir la sainte foy et estre baptisiez' (870).[133] Finally, as an example of women's role as comforters to their spouses, Droiture tells the story of Queen Hypsicratea, who consoled her husband in his exile 'par la doulceur de ses parolles' (823).

Droiture shows not only how women's speech has positively helped their loved ones, but also how women can control their speech and maintain secrecy, thus refuting the assertion (repeated in the *Rose*) that 'femmes ne scevent riens celler' (843). Citing the example of an unnamed Roman woman, Droiture shows how, in contrast to the male conspirators who met at her house and were loose in their talk ('pas assez sagement ne se garderent de parler', 848), this woman refused to divulge their secret plan to assassinate the tyrants who were ruling the city at that time (ibid.).

Whilst in Book I women's role has been to provide language and laws by which to save a people from bestiality, and in Book II to save husbands and family from despondency, in Book III women's language has the spiritual function of rescuing the souls of individual unbelievers from damnation. The martyrs' tormentors who refuse to convert are described as being in a state even lower than that of beasts, thus emphasising their perversity in choosing to ignore the perilous position of their souls. In the longest biography of Book III, one devoted significantly to the author's namesake, St Christine castigates the judge who is torturing her as a ' "Cruel felon, plus que beste sauvaige" ' (1005). In several of the stories, this point is further underscored by the fact that the wild animal set upon the martyr to

[133] Sharon Farmer, 'Persuasive voices: clerical images of medieval wives', *Speculum* 61,3 (1986), 517–43, 533, discusses how thirteenth-century theologians, such as Thomas of Chobham, used this example of a wife's conversion of her spouse to argue that all women should act as 'preachers to their husbands'.

kill her recognises her sanctity and spares her, whereas the tormentor does not. St Theodosina is unharmed by leopards (997), St Martina tames a wild lion (989), whilst St Christine, tormented by snakes, thanks God that ' "les serpens horribles congnoissent en moy ta dignité" ', even when her tormentor fails to do so (1007).

The martyr's whole function is to be kept alive by God in order to convert as many people as possible through her 'predicacion'.[134] The example of St Martina states this clearly: 'Et Dieux la gardoit que elle si tost ne mourust, adfin que les tourmenteurs et le puepple eussent cause de eulx convertir' (987). The importance of the martyr's speech is even emphasised by the fact that she continues to speak even after having had her tongue cut out.[135] St Christine blinds her tormentor by spitting out the stub of her tongue and mocks him for thinking that he could silence her by this method: ' "Tirant, que te vault avoir couppee ma langue adfin que elle ne beneysse Dieu, quant mon esperit a tousjours le beneystra et le tien demourera perpetuel en maleysson?" ' (1009).

Whilst the women who founded laws, invented the alphabet and converted pagans to Christianity were certainly exceptional in their use of language, the advice and comfort which wives give to their husbands is presented by Christine as both laudable in moral terms and accessible to all women. In line with her general view of progress in history, the *Cité* shows how women's use of language has had, and can continue to have, a civilising influence on society as a whole and a comforting effect on individual men.

In addition to rehabilitating women's language, the *Cité* is equally concerned with reclaiming the female body, literally, morally and spiritually, as a site of virtue rather than of vice, as misogynist writers would have their readers believe.[136] In many of the stories in Book I, the female body is physically de-eroticised in order to stress that a woman can exhibit the same martial qualities as a man. The example of the Amazons, many of whom (like Synoppe and Penthesilea)

[134] See Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'Saints' lives and the female reader', *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 27,4 (1991), 314–32, 315.

[135] See Kevin Brownlee, 'Martyrdom and the female voice: Saint Christine in the *Cité des Dames*', in Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell, eds., *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 115–35; Quilligan, *Allegory*, 212–41; Quilligan, 'Translating dismemberment'.

[136] See Karras, 'Gendered sin', 237, who observes: 'the equation of woman with flesh, though not new to the Middle Ages, continued as a powerful force behind monastic misogyny and its social repercussions'.

maintain a perpetual virginity, shows how the female body can be put to service in defence of the state. Raison's etymological explanation of the Amazons' name as meaning 'desmamellees' indicates the extent to which the women warriors literally divest themselves of an erotic attribute like the breast, the better to take up arms against their enemies (682–3).[137] She also recounts the stories of women who de-eroticise their bodies for the good of the state through less drastic means than the Amazons. Zenobia, for example, follows her husband into battle to protect his kingdom by suppressing her corporeal femininity: 'adonc Cenobie, qui pas ne fist grant force de garder la frescheur de sa biauté, se disposa de souffrir le travail d'armes avec son mary, vestir le harnois et estre participant avec luy en tous labours en l'excercite de chevallerie' (702).

In Book II, these extraordinary exploits are translated into domestic terms: the wives in this section are shown to have transformed the meaning of their bodies not physically but morally, by preserving their chastity for their own and their husbands' sakes. Droiture cites the standard *exempla* of both biblical and pagan figures, including Susanna (876), Sarah (878), Lucretia (885–7, 959) and Penelope (880–1), in order to attest to this virtuous quality in women. To the example of Antonia, the beautiful but chaste wife of Drusus Tiberius, she adds an important gloss which compares a woman resisting pressure from suitors to a body remaining unharmed in a burning furnace, 'estre entre les flames sans soy ardoir' (883). This gloss thus draws a parallel between the preservation of a woman's chastity in the face of temptation and the martyrdom of the virgins in furnaces in Book III, and so has the effect of valorising, by association, the virtuous actions of wives.

In order to underscore the importance of challenging the misogynist characterisation of the female body as essentially lustful, the *Cité* privileges the moral virtue of bodily chastity over emotional fidelity. It is significant that the only examples of female behaviour which are not fully condoned and applauded in Christine's text are those which concern women who were faithful in love but not chaste, since their love was outside marriage and thus constituted an 'inclinacion charnelle' (927). Whilst the stories of women such as Dido, Medea, Hero and Ghismonda are adduced by Droiture as

[137] See John A. Nichols, 'Female nudity and sexuality in medieval art', in DuBruck, *New Images*, 165–206.

examples of women's fidelity, they are also cited as cautionary tales against unchastity since all of them met a tragic end:

> Mais ses piteux exemples et assez d'autres que dire te pourroye ne doivent mie estre cause d'esmouvoir les couraiges des femmes de eulx fichier en celle mer tres perilleuse et dampnable de folle amour, car tousjours en est la fin mauvaise a leur grant prejudice et grief en corps, en bien et en honneur et a l'ame, qui plus est. (951–2)[138]

The virgin martyrs of Book III represent the supreme model of the rehabilitated female body in the *Cité*, since their tortured limbs symbolise the triumph of the soul over the flesh and dissolve the misogynist equation of woman with the erotic body.[139] In Tertullian's phrase, 'the spirit is crowned in the flesh and the flesh does not draw the eyes and sighs of young men'.[140] The martyr demonstrates the extent to which the tormentor is misguided in seeking first to desire her physical beauty, and secondly to torture her body in anger at her refusal either to marry him or to worship pagan gods, when, in both instances, it is her piety which he should seek to emulate through his own conversion. As St Martina explains to the emperor who desires her: ' "Je suis christienne offerte a Dieu le vif, qui se delitte en corps chaste et en cuer net, et a celluy je sacrefie et m'y recommande" ' (986). Just as the virgin martyr's chastity cannot be taken from her without her consent, so her physical body constantly returns to a miraculous state of health until the moment of her death, as the example of St Macra illustrates: 'Et entre ses tourmens ot les mamelles errachiers. Et aprés, si comme elle estoit en la chartre, Dieu luy envoya son ange qui luy restabli sa santé' (994).

Whilst, obviously, Christine could not expect her audience to de-eroticise themselves in physical terms as did the Amazons, nor to transcend the body in spiritual terms through martyrdom, she could nevertheless encourage them to translate these qualities into moral terms and to strive to be chaste wives and to guard against the transient pleasures of unchastity by heeding the *exempla in malo* of women such as Dido and Medea who loved 'par amor'.

Christine's theory of history in the *Cité*, one based on a pattern of

[138] McLeod, *Virtue*, 131–2.

[139] See Benjamin Semple, 'The male psyche and the female sacred body in Marie de France and Christine de Pizan', in Françoise Jaouën and Benjamin Semple, eds., *Corps Mystique, Corps Sacré: Textual Transfigurations of the Body from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*, *Yale French Studies* 86 (1994), 164–86; and Michelle Donovan, 'Rewriting hagiography: the *Livre de la Cité des Dames*', *Women in French Studies* 4 (1996), 14–26.

[140] Tertullian, *The Appearance of Women*, II.3, quoted in Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 52.

progress, is coupled with her choice of examples to reveal the thematic continuity of female virtue across the different spheres of society. Her views differ significantly from those of both Boccaccio, for whom human history in the *De Casibus* is a linear continuum of vice, and in the *De Mulieribus* an ambiguous legacy of pagan values, and of Petrarch, for whom only a cyclical return to the past could allow his contemporaries to find glory equivalent to that of the Romans. Moreover, rather than writing against her female contemporaries or urging them to be more like men, as did Boccaccio, Christine shows how the qualities exhibited by extraordinary women in the past could also be demonstrated by women of the present acting in more ordinary roles.

CONCLUSION

In the *Othéa* and the *Avision*, Christine had addressed male readers and encouraged them to see women on the same footing with men as bearers of moral truths. In the *Cité*, Christine turned directly to a female readership in order to provide them with a more positive view of womankind than that propounded by writers in the misogynist tradition. Given this audience and aim, she was obliged to recast the conventions of the catalogue genre, such as the title and the preface, which she had inherited from her predecessors, Petrarch and Boccaccio. But it was not just the formal devices typically used in the genre which she re-worked. In addressing the female reader and using models of women with which to inspire rather than to reprove her contemporaries, Christine needed to adopt a view of history which was radically different from that of Petrarch or Boccaccio, one which accounted for the continuation of female virtue from pagan and biblical times to her own present day. Thus, whilst Christine's critique of misogyny in the *Cité* is firmly rooted in medieval culture, in terms both of its literary techniques such as the use of an allegorical framework and of the kind of defence of women which she offered, one based on theological beliefs about women's rational and moral potential, she was also able to put these aspects of orthodox thought to new ends. The significance of the *Cité* lies not in its anticipation of twentieth-century feminism but in the way in which Christine offers her female readership models of behaviour which, unlike those in Boccaccio's catalogue, *are* meant to be accessible to all medieval women. If, in the *Cité*, Christine argued

that the two sexes are equal, at least in terms of their propensity for virtue, and encouraged her readers to emulate the qualities exhibited by her historical heroines, it is in the *Trois Vertus* that she was to provide a more detailed blueprint for her female contemporaries in all strata of society to follow.

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Reading beyond gender

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