THE BOOK OF THE CITY OF LADIES

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One day as I was sitting alone in my study surrounded by books on all kinds of subjects, devoting myself to literary studies, my usual habit, my mind dwelt at length on the weighty opinions of various authors whom I had studied for a long time. I looked up from my book, having decided to leave such subtle questions in peace and to relax by reading some light poetry. With this in mind, I searched for some small book. By chance a strange volume came into my hands, not one of my own, but one which had been given to me along with some others. When I held it open and saw from its title page that it was by Matheolus, I smiled, for though I had never seen it before, I had often heard that like other books it discussed respect for women. I thought I would browse through it to amuse myself. I had not been reading for very long when my good mother called me to refresh myself with some supper, for it was evening. Intending to look at it the next day, I put it down. The next morning, again seated in my study as was my habit, I remembered wanting to examine this book by Matheolus. I started to read it and went on for a little while. Because the subject seemed to me not very pleasant for people who do not enjoy lies, and of no use in developing virtue or manners, given its lack of integrity in diction and theme, and after browsing here and there and reading the end, I put it down in order to turn my attention to more elevated and useful study. But just the sight of this book, even though it was of no authority, made me wonder how it happened that so many different men—and learned men among them—have been and are so inclined to express both in speaking and in their treatises
and writings so many wicked insults about women and their behavior. Not only one or two and not even just this Mathiêlus (for this book had a bad name anyway and was intended as a satire) but, more generally, judging from the treatises of all philosophers and poets and from all the orators—it would take too long to mention their names—it seems that they all speak from one and the same mouth. They all concur in one conclusion: that the behavior of women is inclined to and full of every vice. Thinking deeply about these matters, I began to examine my character and conduct as a natural woman and, similarly, I considered other women whose company I frequently kept, princesses, great ladies, women of the middle and lower classes, who had graciously told me of their most private and intimate thoughts, hoping that I could judge impartially and in good conscience whether the testimony of so many notable men could be true. To the best of my knowledge, no matter how long I confronted or dissected the problem, I could not see or realize how their claims could be true when compared to the natural behavior and character of women. Yet I still argued vehemently against women, saying that it would be impossible that so many famous men—such solemn scholars, possessed of such deep and great understanding, so clear-sighted in all things, as it seemed—could have spoken falsely on so many occasions that I could hardly find a book on morals where, even before I had read it in its entirety, I did not find several chapters or certain sections attacking women, no matter who the author was. This reason alone, in short, made me conclude that, although my intellect did not perceive my own great faults and, likewise, those of other women because of its simplicity and ignorance, it was however truly fitting that such was the case. And so I relied more on the judgment of others than on what I myself felt and knew. I was so transfixed in this line of thinking for such a long time that it seemed as if I were in a stupor. Like a gushing fountain, a series of authorities, whom I recalled one after another, came to mind, along with their opinions on this topic. And I finally decided that God formed a vile creature when He made woman, and I wondered how such a worthy artisan could have designed to make such an abominable work which, from what they say, is the vessel as well as the refuge and abode of every evil and vice. As I was thinking this, a great unhappiness and sadness welled up in my heart, for I detested myself and the entire feminine sex, as though we were monstrosities in nature. And in my lament I spoke these words: "Oh, God, how can this be? For unless I stray from my faith, I must never doubt that Your infinite wisdom and most perfect goodness ever created anything which was not good. Did You yourself not create woman in a very special way and since that time did You not give her all those inclinations which it pleased You for her to have? And how could it be that You could go wrong in anything? Yet look at all these accusations which have been judged, decided, and concluded against women. I do not know how to understand this repugnance. If it is so, fair Lord God, that in fact so many abominations abound in the female sex, for You Yourself say that the testimony of two or three witnesses lends credence, why shall I not doubt that this is true? Alas, God, why did You not let me be born in the world as a man, so that all my inclinations would be to serve You better, and so that I would not stray in anything and would be as perfect as a man is said to be? But since Your kindness has not been extended to me, then forgive my negligence in Your service, most fair Lord God, and may it not displease You, for the servant who receives fewer gifts from his lord is less obliged in his service." I spoke these words to God in my lament and a great deal more for a very long time in sad reflection, and in my folly I considered myself most unfortunate because God had made me inhabit a female body in this world.
2. HERE CHRISTINE DESCRIBES HOW THREE LADIES APPEARED TO HER AND HOW THE ONE WHO WAS IN FRONT SPOKE FIRST AND COMFORTED HER IN HER PAIN.

1.2.1 So occupied with these painful thoughts, my head bowed in shame, my eyes filled with tears, leaning on the pommel of my chair's armrest, I suddenly saw a ray of light fall on my lap, as though it were the sun. I shuddered then, as if wakened from sleep, for I was sitting in a shadow where the sun could not have shone at that hour. And as I lifted my head to see where this light was coming from, I saw three crowned ladies standing before me, and the splendor of their bright faces shone on me and throughout the entire room. Now no one would ask whether I was surprised, for my doors were shut and they had still entered. Fearing that some phantom had come to tempt me and filled with great fright, I made the Sign of the Cross on my forehead.

1.2.2 Then she who was the first of the three smiled and began to speak, "Dear daughter, do not be afraid, for we have not come here to harm or trouble you but to console you, for we have taken pity on your distress, and we have come to bring you out of the ignorance which so blinds your own intellect that you shun what you know for a certainty and believe what you do not know or see or recognize except by virtue of many strange opinions. You resemble the fool in the prank who was dressed in women's clothes while he slept; because those who were making fun of him repeatedly told him he was a woman, he believed their false testimony more readily than the certainty of his own identity. Fair daughter, have you lost all sense? Have you forgotten that when fine gold is tested in the furnace, it does not change or vary in strength but becomes purer the more it is hammered and handled in different ways? Do you not know that the best things are the most debated and the most discussed? If you wish to consider the question of the highest form of reality, which consists in ideas or celestial substances, consider whether the greatest philosophers who have lived and whom you support against your own sex have ever resolved whether ideas are false and contrary to the truth. Notice how these same philosophers contradict and criticize one another, just as you have seen in the Metaphysics where Aristotle takes their opinions to task and speaks similarly of Plato and other philosophers. And note, moreover, how even Saint Augustine and the Doctors of the Church have criticized Aristotle in certain passages, although he is known as the prince of philosophers in whom both natural and moral philosophy attained their highest level. It also seems that you think that all the words of the philosophers are articles of faith, that they could never be wrong. As far as the poets of whom you speak are concerned, do you not know that they spoke on many subjects in a fictional way and that often they mean the contrary of what their words openly say? One can interpret them according to the grammatical figure of antiphasis, which means, as you know, that if you call something bad, in fact, it is good, and also vice versa. Thus I advise you to profit from their works and to interpret them in the manner in which they are intended in those passages where they attack women. Perhaps this man, who called himself Mathéolus in his own book, intended it in such a way, for there are many things which, if taken literally, would be pure heresy. As for the attack against the estate of marriage—which is a holy estate, worthy and ordained by God—made not only by Mathéolus but also by others and even by the Romance of the Rose where greater credibility is averred because of the authority of its author, it is evident and proven by experience that the contrary of the evil which they posit and claim to be found in this estate through the obligation and fault of women is true. For where has the husband ever been found who would allow his wife to have authority to abuse and insult him as a matter of course, as these authorities maintain? I believe that, regardless of what you might have read, you will never see such a husband with your own eyes, so badly colored
are these lies. Thus, in conclusion, I tell you, dear friend, that simplemindedness has prompted you to hold such an opinion. Come back to yourself, recover your senses, and do not trouble yourself anymore over such absurdities. For you know that any evil spoken of women so generally only hurts those who say it, not women themselves.

3. HERE CHRISTINE TELLS HOW THE LADY WHO HAD SAID THIS SHOWED HER WHO SHE WAS AND WHAT HER CHARACTER AND FUNCTION WERE AND TOLD HER HOW SHE WOULD CONSTRUCT A CITY WITH THE HELP OF THESE SAME THREE LADIES.

1.3.1 The famous lady spoke these words to me, in whose presence I do not know which one of my senses was more overwhelmed: my hearing from having listened to such worthy words or my sight from having seen her radiant beauty, her attire, her reverent comportment, and her most honored countenance. The same was true of the others, so that I did not know which one to look at, for the three ladies resembled each other so much that they could be told apart only with difficulty, except for the last one, for although she was of no less authority than the others, she had so fierce a visage that whoever, no matter how daring, looked in her eyes would be afraid to commit a crime, for it seemed that she threatened criminals unceasingly. Having stood up out of respect, I looked at them without saying a word, like someone too overwhelmed to utter a syllable. Reflecting on who these beings could be, I felt much admiration in my heart and, if I could have dared, I would have immediately asked their names and identities and what was the meaning of the different scepters which each one carried in her right hand, which were of fabulous richness, and why they had come here. But since I considered myself unworthy to address these questions to such high ladies as they appeared to me, I did not dare to, but continued to keep my gaze fixed on them, half-afraid and half-reassured by the words which I had heard, which had made me reject my first impression. But the most wise lady who had spoken to me and who knew in her mind what I was thinking, as one who has insight into everything, addressed my reflections, saying:

"Dear daughter, know that God's providence, which leaves nothing void or empty, has ordained that we, though celestial beings, remain and circulate among the people of the world here below, in order to bring order and maintain in balance those institutions we created according to the will of God in the fulfillment of various offices, that God whose daughters we three are all are and from whom we were born. Thus it is my duty to straighten out men and women when they go astray and to put them back on the right path. And when they stray, if they have enough understanding to see me, I come to them quietly in spirit and preach to them, showing them their error and how they have failed, I assign them the causes, and then I teach them what to do and what to avoid. Since I serve to demonstrate clearly and to show both in thought and deed to each man and woman his or her own special qualities and faults, you see me holding this shiny mirror which I carry in my right hand in place of a scepter. I would thus have you know truly that no one can look into this mirror, no matter what kind of creature, without achieving clear self-knowledge. My mirror has such great dignity that not without reason is it surrounded by rich and precious gems, so that you see, thanks to this mirror, the essences, qualities, proportions, and measures of all things are known, nor can anything be done well without it. And because, similarly, you wish to know what are the offices of my other sisters whom you see here, each will reply in her own person about her name and character, and this way our testimony will be all the more certain to you. But now I myself will declare the reason for our coming. I must assure you, as we do nothing without good cause, that our appearance here is not at all in vain. For, although we are not common to many places and our knowledge
does not come to all people, nevertheless you, for your
great love of investigating the truth through long and
continual study, for which you come here, solitary and
separated from the world, you have deserved and deserve,
our devoted friend, to be visited and consoled by us in
your agitation and sadness, so that you might also see
clearly, in the midst of the darkness of your thoughts,
those things which taint and trouble your heart.

There is another greater and even more special reason
for our coming which you will learn from our speeches:
in fact we have come to vanquish from the world the
same error into which you had fallen, so that from now
on, ladies and all valiant women may have a refuge and
defense against the various assailants, those ladies who
have been abandoned for so long, exposed like a field
without a surrounding hedge, without finding a champion
to afford them an adequate defense, notwithstanding
those noble men who are required by order of law to
protect them, who by negligence and apathy have allowed
them to be mistreated. It is no wonder then that their
jealous enemies, those outrageous villains who have
assailed them with various weapons, have been victorious
in a war in which women have had no defense. Where is
there a city so strong which could not be taken immedi-
atly if no resistance were forthcoming, or the law case,
no matter how unjust, which was not won through the
obstinace of someone pleading without opposition? And
the simple, noble ladies, following the example of suf-
ferring which God commands, have cheerfully suffered
the great attacks which, both in the spoken and the
written word, have been wrongfully and sinfully per-
petrated against women by men who all the while ap-
pealed to God for the right to do so. Now it is time for
their just cause to be taken from Pharaoh's hands, and
for this reason, we three ladies whom you see here,
moved by pity, have come to you to announce a particular
edifice built like a city wall, strongly constructed and
well founded, which has been predestined and established
by our aid and counsel for you to build, where no one
will reside except all ladies of fame and women worthy
of praise, for the walls of the city will be closed to those
women who lack virtue."

4. HERE THE LADY EXPLAINS TO CHRISTINE THE CITY
WHICH SHE HAS BEEN COMMISSIONED TO BUILD AND
HOW SHE WAS CHARGED TO HELP CHRISTINE BUILD
THE WALL AND ENCLOSURE, AND THEN GIVES HER
NAME.

"Thus, fair daughter, the prerogative among women
has been bestowed on you to establish and build the
City of Ladies. For the foundation and completion of this
City you will draw fresh waters from us as from clear
fountains, and we will bring you sufficient building stone,
stronger and more durable than any marble with cement
could be. Thus your City will be extremely beautiful,
without equal, and of perpetual duration in the world.

"Have you not read that King Tros founded the great
city of Troy with the aid of Apollo, Minerva, and Ne-
ptune, whom the people of that time considered gods, and
also how Cadmus founded the city of Thebes with the
admonition of the gods? And yet over time these cities
fell and have fallen into ruin. But I prophesy to you, as
a true sybil, that this City, which you will found with
our help, will never be destroyed, nor will it ever fall,
but will remain prosperous forever, regardless of all its
jealous enemies. Although it will be stormed by numerous
assaults, it will never be taken or conquered.

"Long ago the Amazon kingdom was begun through
the arrangement and enterprise of several ladies of great
courage who despised servitude, just as history books
have testified. For a long time afterward they maintained
it under the rule of several queens, very noble ladies
whom they elected themselves, who governed them well
and maintained their dominion with great strength. Yet,
although they were strong and powerful and had con-
quered a large part of the entire Orient in the course of
their rule and terrified all the neighboring lands (even the Greeks, who were then the flower of all countries in the world, feared them), nevertheless, after a time, the power of this kingdom declined, so that as with all earthly kingdoms, nothing but its name has survived to the present. But the edifice erected by you in this City which you must construct will be far stronger, and for its founding I was commissioned, in the course of our common deliberation, to supply you with durable and pure mortar to lay the sturdy foundations and to raise the lofty walls around, high and thick, with mighty towers and strong bastions, surrounded by moats with firm blockhouses, just as is fitting for a city with a strong and lasting defense. Following our plan, you will set the foundations deep to last all the longer, and then you will raise the walls so high that they will not fear anyone. Daughter, now that I have told you the reason for our coming and so that you will more certainly believe my words, I want you to learn my name, by whose sound alone you will be able to learn and know that, if you wish to follow my commands, you have in me an administrator so that you may do your work flawlessly. I am called Lady Reason; you see that you are in good hands. For the time being then, I will say no more.”

5. HERE CHRISTINE TELLS HOW THE SECOND LADY TOLD HER NAME AND WHAT SHE SERVED AS AND HOW SHE WOULD AID HER IN BUILDING THE CITY OF LADIES.

1.5.1 When the lady above finished her speech, before I could resume, the second lady began as follows: “I am called Rectitude and reside more in Heaven than on Earth, but as the radiance and splendor of God and messenger of His goodness, I often visit the just and exhort them to do what is right, to give to each person what is his according to his capacity, to say and uphold the truth, to defend the rights of the poor and the innocent, not to hurt anyone through usurpation, to uphold the reputation of those unjustly accused. I am the shield and defense of the servants of God. I resist the power and might of evil-doers. I give rest to workers and reward those who act well. Through me, God reveals to His friends His secrets; I am their advocate in Heaven. This shining ruler which you see me carry in my right hand instead of a scepter is the straight ruler which separates right from wrong and shows the difference between good and evil: who follows it does not go astray. It is the rod of peace which reconciles the good and where they find support and which beats and strikes down evil. What should I tell you about this? All things are measured by this ruler, for its powers are infinite. It will serve you to measure the edifice of the City which you have been commissioned to build, and you will need it for constructing the façade, for erecting the high temples, for measuring the palaces, houses, and all public buildings, the streets and squares, and all things proper to help populate the City. I have come as your assistant, and this will be my duty. Do not be uneasy about the breadth and long circuit of the walls, for with God’s help and our assistance you will build fair and sturdy mansions and mansions without leaving anything vague, and you will please the City with no trouble.”

6. HERE CHRISTINE TELLS HOW THE THIRD LADY TOLD HER WHO SHE WAS AND HER FUNCTION AND HOW SHE WOULD HELP BUILD THE HIGH ROOFS OF THE TOWERS AND PALACES AND WOULD BRING TO HER THE QUEEN, ACCOMPANIED BY NOBLE LADIES.

Afterward, the third lady spoke and said, "My friend Christine, I am Justice, the most singular daughter of God, and my nature proceeds purely from His person. My residence is found in Heaven, on Earth, or in Hell: in Heaven, for the glory of the saints and blessed souls; on Earth, for the apportionment to each man of the good or evil which he has deserved; in Hell, for the punishment of the evil. I do not bend anywhere, for I have not friend nor enemy nor changeable will; pity cannot persuade me
not cruelty move me. My duty is only to judge, to decide, and
to dispense according to each man's just deserts. I
sustain all things in their condition, nothing could be
stable without me. I am in God and God is in me, and we
are as one and the same. Who follows me cannot fail, and
my way is sure. I teach men and women of sound mind
who want to believe in me to choose, know, and correct
themselves, and to do to others what they wish to have
done to themselves, to distribute wealth without favor,
to speak the truth, to flee and hate lies, to reject all
viciousness. This vessel of fine gold which you see me
hold in my right hand, made like a generous measure,
God, my Father, gave me, and it serves to measure out to
each his rightful portion. It carries the sign of the fleur-
de-lis of the Trinity, and in all portions it measures true,
nor can any man complain about my measure. Yet the
men of the Earth have other measures which they claim
depend upon and derive from mine, but they are mis-
taken. Often they measure in my shadow, and their
measure is not always true but sometimes too much for
some and too little for others. I could give a rather long
account of the duties of my office, but, put briefly, I
have a special place among the Virtues, for they are all
based on me. And of the three noble ladies whom you
see here, we are as one and the same, we could not
exist without one another; and what the first dispenses,
the second orders and initiates, and then I, the third, finish
and terminate it. Thus I have been appointed by the will
of my three ladies to perfect and complete your City, and
my job will be to construct the high roofs of the towers
and of the lofty mansions and inns which will all be made
of fine shining gold. Then I will populate the City for
you with worthy ladies and the mighty Queen whom I
will bring to you. Here will be the honor and prerogative
among all other women, as well as among the most
excellent women. And in this condition I will turn the
City over to you, completed with your help, fortified
and closed off with strong gates which I will search for
in Heaven, and then I will place the keys in your hands."

7. Here Christine tells how she spoke to the
three ladies.

When the speeches of all three ladies were over— to
which I had listened intently and which had completely
taken away the unhappiness which I had felt before their
coming—I threw myself at their feet, not just on my
knees but completely prostrate because of their great
excellence. Kissing the earth around their feet, adoring
them as goddesses of glory, I began my prayer to them:
"Oh ladies of supreme dignity, radiance of the heavens
and light of the earth, fountains of Paradise and joy of the
blessed, where did such humility come from to Your
Highnesses that you have deigned to come down from
your pontifical seats and shining thrones to visit the
troubled and dark tabernacle of this simple and ignorant
student? Who could give fitting thanks for such a boon?
With the rain and dew of your sweet words, you have
penetrated and moistened the dryness of my mind, so
that it now feels ready to germinate and send forth new
branches capable of bearing fruits of profitable virtue
and sweet savors. How will such grace be bestowed on
me that I will receive the boon, as you have said, to build
and construct in the world from now on a new city? I am
not Saint Thomas the Apostle, who through divine grace
built a rich palace in Heaven for the king of India, and my
feeble sense does not know the craft, or the measures,
or the study, or the science, or the practice of construc-
tion. And if, thanks to learning, these things were within
my ken, where would I find enough physical strength in
my weak feminine body to realize such an enormous
task? But nevertheless, my most respected ladies, although
the awesomeness of this news seems strange to me, I
know well that nothing is impossible for God. Nor do I
doubt that anything undertaken with your counsel and
help will not be completed well. Thus, with all my
strength, I praise God and you, my ladies, who have so
honored me by assigning me such a noble commission,
which I most happily accept. Behold your handmaiden

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ready to serve. Command and I will obey, and may it be unto me according to your words."

8. HERE CHRISTINE TELLS HOW, UNDER REASON'S COMMAND AND ASSISTANCE, SHE BEGAN TO EXCAVATE THE EARTH AND LAY THE FOUNDATION.

1.8.1 Then Lady Reason responded and said, "Get up, daughter! Without waiting any longer, let us go to the Field of Letters. There the City of Ladies will be founded on a flat and fertile plain, where all fruits and freshwater rivers are found and where the earth abounds in all good things. Take the pick of your understanding and dig and clear out a great ditch wherever you see the marks of my ruler, and I will help you carry away the earth on my own shoulders."

1.8.2 I immediately stood up to obey her commands and, thanks to these three ladies, I felt stronger and lighter than before. She went ahead, and I followed behind, and after we had arrived at this field I began to excavate and dig, following her marks with the pick of cross-examination. And this was my first work:

1.8.3 "Lady, I remember well what you told me before, dealing with the subject of how so many men have attacked and continue to attack the behavior of women, that gold becomes more refined the longer it stays in the furnace, which means the more women have been wrongfully attacked, the greater waxes the merit of their glory. But please tell me why and for what reason different authors have spoken against women in their books, since I already know from you that this is wrong; tell me if Nature makes man so inclined or whether they do it out of hatred and where does this behavior come from?"

Then she replied, "Daughter, to give you a way of entering into the question more deeply, I will carry away this first basketful of dirt. This behavior most certainly does not come from Nature, but rather is contrary to Nature, for no connection in the world is as great or as strong as the great love which, through the will of God, Nature places between a man and a woman. The causes which have moved and which still move men to attack women, even those authors in those books, are diverse and varied, just as you have discovered. For some have attacked women with good intentions, that is, in order to draw men who have gone astray away from the company of vicious and dissolve women, with whom they might be infatuated, or in order to keep these men from going mad on account of such women, and also so that every man might avoid an obscene and lustful life. They have attacked all women in general because they believe that women are made up of every abomination."

"My lady," I said then, "excuse me for interrupting you here, but have such authors acted well, since they were prompted by a laudable intention? For intention, the saying goes, judges the man."

"That is a misleading position, my good daughter," she said, "for such sweeping ignorance never provides an excuse. If someone killed you with good intention but out of foolishness, would this then be justified? Rather, those who did this, whoever they might be, would have invoked the wrong law; causing any damage or harm to one party in order to help another party is not justice, and likewise attacking all feminine conduct is contrary to the truth, just as I will show you with a hypothetical case. Let us suppose they did this intending to draw fools away from foolishness. It would be as if I attacked fire—a very good and necessary element nevertheless—because some people burnt themselves, or water because someone drowned. The same can be said of all good things which can be used well or used badly. But one must not attack them if fools abuse them, and you have yourself touched on this point quite well elsewhere in your writings. But those who have spoken like this so abundantly—whatever their intentions might be—have formulated their arguments rather loosely only to make their point. Just like someone who has a long and wide robe cut from a very large piece of cloth when the
material costs him nothing and when no one opposes him, they exploit the rights of others. But just as you have said elsewhere, if these writers had only looked for the ways in which men can be led away from foolishness and could have been kept from tiring themselves in attacking the life and behavior of immoral and dissolute women—for to tell the straight truth, there is nothing which should be avoided more than an evil, dissolute, and perverted woman, who is like a monster in nature, a counterfeit estranged from her natural condition, which must be simple, tranquil, and upright—then I would grant you that they would have built a supremely excellent work. But I can assure you that these attacks on all women—when in fact there are so many excellent women—have never originated with me, Reason, and that all who subscribe to them have failed totally and will continue to fail. So now throw aside these black, dirty, and uneven stones from your work, for they will never be fitted into the fair edifice of your City.

1.8.4 Other men have attacked women for other reasons: such reproach has occurred to some men because of their own vices and others have been moved by the defects of their own bodies, others through pure jealousy, still others by the pleasure they derive in their own personalities from slander. Others, in order to show they have read many authors, base their own writings on what they have found in books and repeat what other writers have said and cite different authors.

1.8.5 Those who attack women because of their own vices are men who spent their youths in dissoluteness and enjoyed the love of many different women, used deception in many of their encounters, and have grown old in their sins without repenting, and now regret their past follies and the dissolute life they led. But Nature, which allows the will of the heart to put into effect what the powerful appetite desires, has grown cold in them. Therefore they are pained when they see that their 'good times' have now passed them by, and it seems to them that the young, who are now what they once were, are on top of the world. They do not know how to overcome their sadness except by attacking women, hoping to make women less attractive to other men. Everywhere one sees such old men speak obscenely and dishonestly, just as you can fully see with Matheolus, who himself confesses that he was an impotent old man filled with desire. You can thereby convincingly prove, with this one example, how what I tell you is true, and you can assuredly believe that it is the same with many others.

1.8.6 “But these corrupt old men, like an incurable leprosy, are not the upstanding men of old whom I made perfect in virtue and wisdom—for not all men share in such corrupt desire, and it would be a real shame if it were so. The mouths of these good men, following their hearts, are all filled with exemplary, honest, and discreet words. These same men detest misdeeds and slander, and neither attack nor defame men and women, and they counsel the avoidance of evil and the pursuit of virtue and the straight path.

1.8.7 Those men who are moved by the defect of their own bodies have impotent and deformed limbs but sharp and malicious minds. They have found no other way to avenge the pain of their impotence except by attacking women who bring joy to many. Thus they have thought to divert others away from the pleasure which they cannot personally enjoy.

1.8.8 Those men who have attacked women out of jealousy are those wicked ones who have seen and realized that many women have greater understanding and are more noble in conduct than they themselves, and thus they are pained and disdainful. Because of this, their overweening jealousy has prompted them to attack all women, intending to demean and diminish the glory and praise of such women, just like the man—I cannot remember which one—who tries to prove in his work, De philosophia, that it is not fitting that some men have revered women and says that those men who have made so much
of women pervert the title of his book: they transform ‘philosophy,’ the love of wisdom, into ‘philofolly,’ the love of folly. But I promise and swear to you that he himself, all throughout the lie-filled deductions of his argument, transformed the content of his book into a true philofolly.

1.8.9 “As for those men who are naturally given to slander, it is not surprising that they slander women since they attack everyone anyway. Nevertheless, I assure you that any man who freely slanders does so out of a great wickedness of heart, for he is acting contrary to reason and contrary to Nature: contrary to reason insofar as he is most ungrateful and fails to recognize the good deeds which women have done for him, so great that he could never make up for them, no matter how much he try, and which he continuously needs women to perform for him; and contrary to Nature in that there is no naked beast anywhere, nor bird, which does not naturally love its female counterpart. It is thus quite unnatural when a reasonable man does the contrary.

1.8.10 “And just as there has never been any work so worthy, so skilled is the craftsman who made it, that there were not people who wanted, and want, to counterfeit it, there are many who wish to get involved in writing poetry. They believe they cannot go wrong, since others have written in books what they take the situation to be, or rather, mis-take the situation—as I well know! Some of them undertake to express themselves by writing poems of water without salt, such as these, or ballads without feeling, discussing the behavior of women or of princes or of other people, while they themselves do not know how to recognize or to correct their own servile conduct and inclinations. But simple people, as ignorant as they are, declare that such writing is the best in the world.”

9. HERE CHRISTINE TELLS HOW SHE DUG IN THE GROUND, BY WHICH SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD THE QUESTIONS

WHICH SHE PUT TO REASON, AND HOW REASON REPLIED TO HER.

“Now I have prepared for you and commanded from you a great work. Consider how you can continue to excavate the ground following my marks.” And so, in order to obey her command, I struck with all my force in the following way:

“‘My lady, how does it happen that Ovid, who is thought to be one of the best poets—although many believe, and I would agree with them, thanks to your correcting me, that Vergil is much more praiseworthy—that Ovid attacks women so much and so frequently, as in the book he calls Ars amatoria, as well as in the Remedia amoris and other of his volumes?”

She replied, “Ovid was a man skilled in the learned craft of poetry, and he possessed great wit and understanding in his work. However, he dissipated his body in every vanity and pleasure of the flesh, not just in one romance, but he abandoned himself to all the women he could, nor did he show restraint or loyalty, and so he stayed with no single woman. In his youth he led this kind of life as much as he could, for which in the end he received the fitting reward—dishonor and loss of possessions and limbs—for so much did he advise others through his own acts and words to lead a life like the one he led that he was finally exiled for his excessive promiscuity. Similarly, when afterward, thanks to the influence of several young, powerful Romans who were his supporters, he was called back from exile and failed to refrain from the misdeeds for which his guilt had already punished him, he was castrated and disfigured because of his faults. This is precisely the point I was telling you about before, for when he saw that he could no longer lead the life in which he was used to taking his pleasure, he began to attack women with his subtle reasonings, and through this effort he tried to make women unattractive to others.”

The Book of the City of Ladies  20

21 Christine de Pizan
"My lady, you are right, and I know a book by another Italian author, from the Tuscan marches, I think, called Cecco d'Ascoli, who wrote in one chapter such astounding abominations that a reasonable person ought not to repeat them."

She replied, "If Cecco d'Ascoli spoke badly about all women, my daughter, do not be amazed, for he detested all women and held them in hatred and disfavor; and similarly, on account of his horrible wickedness, he wanted all men to hate and detest women. He received the just reward for it: in his shame he was burned to death at the stake."

"I know another small book in Latin, my lady, called the Secreta mulierum, The Secrets of Women, which discusses the constitution of their natural bodies and especially their great defects."

She replied, "You can see for yourself without further proof, this book was written carelessly and colored by hypocrisy, for if you have looked at it, you know that it is obviously a treatise composed of lies. Although some say that it was written by Aristotle, it is not believable that such a philosopher could be charged with such contrived lies. For since women can clearly know with proof that certain things which he treats are not at all true, but pure fabrications, they can also conclude that the other details which he handles are outright lies. But don't you remember that he says in the beginning that some pope—I don't know which one—excommunicated every man who read the work to a woman or gave it to a woman to read?"

"My lady, I remember it well."

"Do you know the malicious reason why this lie was presented as credible to bestial and ignorant men at the beginning of the book?"

"No, my lady, not unless you tell me."

"It was done so that women would not know about the book and its contents, because the man who wrote it knew that if women read it or heard it read aloud, they would know it was lies, would contradict it, and make fun of it. With this pretense the author wanted to trick and deceive the men who read it."

"My lady, I recall that among other things, after he has discussed the impotence and weakness which cause the formation of a feminine body in the womb of the mother, he says that Nature is completely ashamed when she sees that she has formed such a body, as though it were something imperfect."

"But, sweet friend, don't you see the overweening madness, the irrational blindness which prompt such observations? Is Nature, the chambermaid of God, a greater mistress than her master, almighty God from whom comes such authority, who, when He willed, took the form of man and woman from His thought when it came to His holy will to form Adam from the mud of the ground in the field of Damascus and, once created, brought him into the Terrestrial Paradise which was and is the most worthy place in this world here below? There Adam slept, and God formed the body of woman from one of his ribs, signifying that she should stand at his side as a companion and never lie at his feet like a slave, and also that he should love her as his own flesh. If the Supreme Craftsman was not ashamed to create and form the feminine body, would Nature then have been ashamed? It is the height of folly to say this! Indeed, how was she formed? I don't know if you have already noted this: she was created in the image of God. How can any mouth dare to slander the vessel which bears such a noble imprint? But some men are foolish enough to think, when they hear that God made man in His image, that this refers to the material body. This was not the case, for God had not yet taken a human body. The soul is meant, the intellectual spirit which lasts eternally just like the Deity. God created the soul and placed wholly similar souls, equally good and noble in the feminine and in the masculine bodies. Now, to turn to the question of the creation of the body, woman was made by the Supreme
Craftsman. In what place was she created? In the Terrestrial Paradise. From what substance? Was it vile matter? No, it was the noblest substance which had ever been created: it was from the body of man from which God made woman.”

1.9.3 “My lady, according to what I understand from you, woman is a most noble creature. But even so, Cicero says that a man should never serve any woman and that he who does so debases himself, for no man should ever serve anyone lower than him.”

She replied, “The man or the woman in whom resides greater virtue is the higher; neither the loftiness nor the lowliness of a person lies in the body according to the sex, but in the perfection of conduct and virtues. And surely he is happy who serves the Virgin, who is above all the angels.”

“My lady, one of the Catos—who was such a great orator—said, nevertheless, that if this world were without women, we would converse with the gods.”

She replied, “You can now see the foolishness of the man who is considered wise, because, thanks to a woman, man reigns with God. And if anyone would say that man was banished because of Lady Eve, I tell you that he gained more through Mary than he lost through Eve when humanity was conjoined to the Godhead, which would never have taken place if Eve’s misdeed had not occurred. Thus man and woman should be glad for this sin, through which such an honor has come about. For as low as human nature fell through this creature woman, was human nature lifted higher by this same creature. And as for conversing with the gods, as this Cato has said, if there had been no woman, he spoke true; for he was a pagan, and among those of this belief, gods were thought to reside in Hell as well as in Heaven, that is, the devils whom they called the gods of Hell—so that it is no lie that these gods would have conversed with men, if Mary had not lived.”

10. MORE ARGUMENTS AND ANSWERS ON THIS SAME SUBJECT.

“This same Cato Uticensis also said that women who are pleasing to men naturally resemble the rose, which is pleasant to look at but whose thorn always lurks beneath to prick.”

She answered, “Again this Cato spoke truer than he knew, for every good and honest woman of virtuous life ought to be, and is, one of the most pleasant things to look at which exist. And, nevertheless, there remains the thorn of fear of sinning and of contrition in the heart of such a woman, who cannot separate herself from what makes her remain tranquil, composed, and respectful, and it is this which saves her.”

“My lady, is it true that some authors have testified that women are naturally lecherous and gluttonous?”

“My daughter, you have many times heard the proverb repeated which says ‘What Nature gives, no one can take away.’ Thus it would be surprising if women were so much inclined that way and yet were rarely or never found in those places ordained to this purpose. They are, however, scarce there, and if anyone would respond that shame keeps women away, I say that this is not at all true, that nothing keeps them away except their nature, which is not inclined this way at all. But let us suppose that they were so inclined and that shame made them resist their natural inclination, then this virtue and constancy should redound to their credit. Furthermore, recall that not long ago, during a holiday, as you were standing in the doorway of your residence conversing with the honorable young lady who is your neighbor, you spied a man coming out of a tavern who was telling another man, ‘I spent so much in the tavern, my wife will not drink any wine today,’ and then you asked why she would not drink any wine that day, and he answered, ‘Because, my lady, every time I come back from the tavern, my wife always asks me how much I spent, and if it is more