This manuscript was put together by Christine for the French queen Isabeau of Bavaria. John, Duke of Bedford, who was then the regent of France, acquired it toward the end of the Hundred Years' War (between 1425 and 1430), and thus it began its lengthy journey to Edward Harley in England, whose wife brought it into his famous collection in 1713. The opening miniature of The Book of the City of Ladies shows us Christine welcoming the three allegorical ladies, Reason, Rectitude, and Justice, in her study on the left. Each holds her attribute: Reason a mirror; Rectitude a rule; and Justice a golden measuring vessel. On the right, Christine begins the construction of the city with the help of Lady Reason. London, British Library, Harley 4431, folio 200.

FROM THE BOOK OF THE CITY OF LADIES

The Book of the City of Ladies responds to Christine's complaint in the God of Love's Letter that women had not written books about themselves and were, therefore, represented unfairly over many centuries. As Christine peruses books in her own library, she becomes painfully aware of the bad treatment women had experienced at the hands of the authors and even begins to believe them. At this point three allegorical ladies, Reason, Rectitude, and Justice, appear to her and make her realize her error; she will now be charged with establishing a new written tradition of women by building the City of Ladies, where the debris that needs to be cleared from the building site stands for the writings of the antifeminists, where every stone is a celebrated woman of learned or military achievement, and where the inhabitants are women of impeccable virtue.

Within the polemical framework of refuting the misogynistic tradition,

1. It is remarkable how the opening scene of reading misogynistic authors recalls Virginia Woolf's essay into the British Library in search of writings about women—which are all by men. See A Room of One's Own, especially chaps. 1 and 2.

Christine works as a compiler of exemplary stories whose function it is to give counterexamples to all the reproaches leveled against women by male authors. One model may have been Jean Le Fevre de Sorbon's Livre de joie (Book of Joy), written in the 1370s, designed to celebrate women and
defend them against the misogynist attacks of Mathesius, the very author who upset Christine at the beginning of the City of Ladies. Most of the stories come from Boccaccio’s Concerning Famous Women, translated into French in 1401. Christine also translated a number of stories from the Decameron. For Boccaccio, famous women were women of some achievement but not necessarily virtuous, and he certainly dwells on the crimes of Medea and the notoriousness of Cleopatra. He also states that saintly women have no place in his text, since they should not be in the company of pagan women and since there are special texts devoted to them. But Christine, like Jean Le Fèvre, includes female saints and devotes her whole book 3 to them. Her source was the Speculum historiale (Historical mirror) by Vincent of Beauvais in the French translation made by Jean de Vigny in the late 1320s.

Women’s achievements as depicted in books 1 and 2 cover all areas of learning: science, poetry, painting, agriculture, and military arts; some are even prophets. Their deeds illustrate the virtues of filial piety, devoted motherhood, marital love, chastity, constancy, and honesty. The saints of book 3 are almost all martyrs and thus are exemplars of these same virtues in a religious context.

Christine’s mission has been accomplished at the end of the City of Ladies: women now have a strong and durable refuge against slander. They will be recognized for their true worth, and their history will finally take its place alongside that of men.

In Christine’s own time, the City of Ladies was not her most successful work, since it was often considered to be a mere translation of Boccaccio. And while a Flemish translation was made in 1475 and the first English version was printed in 1521, it was not really rediscovered until the 1980s. Today, the City of Ladies is Christine’s most frequently read text because it speaks to our modern concerns of recognizing and celebrating women’s contributions throughout history.


I could judge in my conscience, without prejudice, whether these things, to which so many notable men bear witness, could be true. But according to everything I could know about this problem, however I looked at it and peeled away its various layers, it was clear to me that these judgments did not square with the natural behavior and ways of women. Nevertheless, I argued strongly against women, saying that it would be unlikely that so many famous men, such solemn scholars of such vast understanding, so clear-sighted in all things as these men seemed to be, could have lied in so many places that I could hardly find a book on morals, no matter who was its author, in which, even before finishing it, I would not find some chapters or certain sections speaking ill of women. This reason alone, in short, made me conclude that, although my intellect in its simplicity and ignorance did not recognize the great defects in myself and in other women, it must nonetheless be so. And thus I relied more on the judgment of others than on what I myself felt and knew.

I was so deeply and for such a long time transfixed by this thought that it seemed to be in a trance, and a large number of authors on this subject passed through my mind, one after the other, just like a gushing fountain. And eventually I concluded that God made a vile thing when He formed women, wondering how such a worthy artisan could have stooped to making such an abominable piece of work which is the vessel, as they say, as well as the hiding-place and shelter of every evil and vice. As I was thinking this, a great unhappiness and sadness rose up in my heart, and I despised myself and the entire feminine sex, just as if it were a monstrosity in nature. And in my grief I spoke the following words:

"Oh, God, how can this be? For lest I be mistaken in my faith, I am not allowed to doubt that Your infinite wisdom and perfect goodness created anything that is not good. Did not You Yourself form woman in a very singular way, and did You not give her all those inclinations which it pleased You she should have? And how could it be that You should have erred in anything? And nevertheless, here are all the great accusations against them, all judged, determined, and concluded. I cannot understand this hostility. And if this is so, dear Lord God, that it is true that all these abominations abound in the feminine sex — as so many testify — and if You Yourself say that the testimony of more than one witness should be believed, why should I doubt that this is true? Alas, God, why did You not let me be born into this world as a man, so that I would be inclined to serve you better and so that I would not err in anything and be of such perfection as man is said to be? But since Your kindness does not extend to me, forgive my negligence in Your service, good Lord God, and let it not displease You; for the servant who receives fewer gifts from his lord is less obliged to be of service to him."

In my grief I spoke these words and many more to God for a very long time, and in my folly I behaved as if I should be most unhappy because God had made me exist in this world as a female body.

Here Christine Tells How Three Ladies Appeared to Her, and How the One Who Was in Front Addressed Her First and Comforted Her in Her Unhappiness.

Lost in these painful thoughts, my head bowed in shame, my eyes full of tears, my hand supporting my cheek and my elbow on the armrest of my chair's armrest, I suddenly saw a ray of light descending onto my lap, as if it were the sun. And as I was sitting in a dark place where the sun could not shine at this hour, I was startled as if awakened from sleep. And as I lifted my head to see where this light was coming from, I saw standing before me three crowned ladies of great nobility. The light coming from their bright faces illuminated me and the whole room. Now, no one would ask whether I was surprised, given that my doors were closed, and nevertheless they had come here. Wondering whether some phantom had come to tempt me, in my fright I made the sign of the cross on my forehead.

Then the first of the three began to address me as follows: "Dear daughter, do not be afraid, for we have not come to bother or to trouble you but rather to comfort you, having taken pity on your distress, and to move you out of the ignorance that blinds your own intelligence so that you reject what you know for certain and believe what you do not know, see, and recognize except through a variety of strange opinions. You resemble the fool in that funny story who was dressed in a woman's dress while he slept in a mill. When he woke up those who made fun of him told him that he was a woman and he believed their lies more readily than the certainty of his own being."

"Fair daughter, what has happened to your good sense? Have you forgotten that when fine gold is tested in the furnace, it does not change or vary in strength, but rather gets purer the more it is hammered and handled in various ways? Do you not know that the best things are those that are most debated and argued about? If you just look at the highest things, which are ideas and celestial things, try to see whether the greatest philosophers, those whom you use to argue against your own sex, have ever determined what is false and contrary to the truth and whether they have not contradicted and blamed each other. You have seen this


3. This story and variant on it are well known in the folktale tradition.
yourself in the *Metaphysics*, where Aristotle argues against some opinions and speaks of Plato and others in this way. And note, moreover, how Saint Augustine and other doctors of the Church have criticized certain places in Aristotle even though he is called the prince of philosophers and was a supreme master of both natural and moral philosophy.

"And it seems that you think that all the words of the philosophers are articles of faith and that they cannot be wrong. And as for the poets of whom you speak, don't you know that they have spoken of many things in fables, and that many times they mean the opposite of what their texts seem to say? And one can approach them through the grammatical figure of antithesis, which means, as you know, that if someone says this is bad, it actually means it is good and vice versa. I therefore advise you to profit from their texts and that you interpret the passages where they speak ill of women that way, no matter what their intention was. And perhaps this man who called himself Matheolus understood things in his own book in this way: for there are many things in it which, if taken literally, would be pure heresy. And as for the accusations against the holy estate of marriage ordained by God, put forth not only by him and others but even by the *Romance of the Rose* to which people give greater credence because of its author’s great authority, it is clearly proved by experience that the contrary of the evil that they say exists in this estate through the fault of women is true. For where has there ever been a husband who would permit his wife to dominate him in such a way that she could have the right to abuse and insult him, as those who speak of women claim? I believe that, no matter what you have seen written, you will never with your own eyes see such a husband; these lies are painted too badly. I tell you in conclusion, dear friend, that simplicity has brought you to your current opinion. Come back to yourself, recover your good sense and do not bother yourself anymore with these absurdities. For you should know that all evil things that are said about women in such a general way only hurt those who say them, and not women themselves."

4. Suzanne Solenc has shown that Christine was familiar with St. Thomas’s thirteenth-century commentary on the *Metaphysics*. See her edition of the biography of Charles V, *La Livre des fols et bernes mesne du seigneur Charles V. 2 vols.* (Paris: Champion, 1935–41). However, Christine mentions St. Thomas in part 3, chapter 58 of the biography and in Christine’s *Vision*.

5. As in the Letter from Others and at the beginning of *The Tale of the Shepherdess*, Christine emphasizes that certain stories, or fables, can have a hidden meaning.

6. Christine’s opinion on the *Romance of the Rose* became clear in *The Debate on the Romance of the Rose* (see p. 41).
"There is another greater and more special reason for our coming which you will learn from what we tell you: you should know that we have come to remove from the world the same error into which you have fallen, so that from now on ladies and all valiant women may have a refuge and a defensive enclosure against so many different assailants. These ladies have been abandoned for so long, expired like a field without a hedge, without finding a champion who would appear for their defense, notwithstanding the noble men who by order and right should defend them, but who through negligence and lack of interest have let them be mocked. It is therefore no wonder that their envious enemies and the outrageous villains, who have attacked them with various weapons, have won the war against the defenseless ladies.

"Where is there a city, be it ever so strong, that could not be taken if no one showed resistance, or a cause, be it ever so unjust, that cannot be won by someone who pleads without opposition? And the simple good ladies, following the example of suffering that God commands, have gladly suffered the great offenses that, by speaking and by writing, have wrongfully and sinfully been done to them by those who claim to have the right to do so from God. But now it is time that their just cause be taken from Pharaoh’s hands, and this is why we three ladies, that you see here, moved by pity, have come to you to announce a certain edifice built like the wall of a city, with strong walls and well constructed, which you are predestined and made to build with our help and counsel, and where no one will live except all ladies of renown and worthy of praise, for to those who are without virtue the walls of our city will be closed."

Here [Christine] Tells More about the Lady and How She Speaks to Christine about the City She Has Been Commissioned to Build and How She Will Help Her Build the Wall and the Enclosure That Goes around, and Then the Lady Tells Her Name

"Thus, fair daughter, you have been given the prerogative among women to construct the City of Ladies, for whose foundation and completion you will take and draw from the three of us fresh water as from clear fountains, and we will give you plenty of material, stronger and more durable than marble, even if it were cemented. Thus your city will be incomparably beautiful and will last forever in the world.

"Have you not read how King Troe founded the great city of Troy with the help of Apollo, Minerva, and Neptune, whom the people of that time believed to be gods, and also how Cadmus founded the city of Thebes by order of the gods?" And yet in the course of time these cities have fallen and have turned into ruins. But I prophesy to you, as a true sibyl, that this city which you will found with our help, will never be destroyed, nor will it fall, it will forever prosper in spite of all its jealous enemies. Although it will be attacked in many assaults, it will never be taken or vanquished.

"A long time ago the Amazon kingdom was founded by the order and enterprise of several courageous women who desired servitude, as you have learned from the testimony of history books. And for a long time afterwards they maintained it under the rule of several queens, most noble ladies whom they themselves elected, who governed them very well and who kept up the rule with great strength. Nonetheless, although they were strong and powerful and during their reign conquered a large part of the Orient and terrified all the neighboring lands, and although the Greeks feared them, who were then the flower of the world’s countries, nonetheless, after a time the power of this kingdom failed, so that, as it happens with all earthly reigns, nothing but the name has survived to the present time.

"But you will build a much stronger edifice in this city that you must fashion. In order to begin its construction I have been commissioned, through the deliberations of three, to deliver to you durable mortar, without any blenish, to lay the strong foundation and to raise the wide walls around, high and thick, with huge towers and strong bastions with moats around, fortified by block houses, as is fitting for a city with a strong and lasting defense. And, following our design, you will lay them deep, so that they will last longer, and then you will raise the walls above them so high they will fear no one.

"Daughter, now I have told you the reason for our coming, and so that you will lend more credence to my words, I want to tell you my name, by whose sound alone you will be able to understand and know that, if you want to follow my orders, you have in me someone who will administer your work in such a way that you will be unable to make a mistake. I am called Lady Reason; now you see that you have good guidance. For now, I will say nothing more.”

7. As in the Letter from Orpheus and The Book of Fortune’s Transformation Christine draws on the thirteenth-century compilation of ancient history known as the Historia antique jusqu’à César (Ancient history up to Julius Caesar) for information on these ancient kingdoms, including the Amazons and others she treats in these opening chapters.
city and bring in its population of worthy ladies and the queen. She will then hand over the keys of the city to Christine.

Here Christine Tells How She Spoke to the Three Ladies

When the three ladies had finished their speeches, to which I had listened intently and which had taken away from me all the unhappiness I had felt before their arrival, I immediately threw myself at their feet, not just on my knees but completely stretched out because of their great excellence. Kissing the earth around their feet, adoring them like goddesses of glory, I began to pray to them: 'Oh ladies of the highest dignity, lights of the heavens and illumination of the earth, from where did your highnesses receive such humility that you deign to descend from your pontifical seats and shining thrones to come to the troubled and dark tabernacle of this simple and ignorant student? Who could be sufficiently grateful for such a privilege? You have already penetrated and moistened the dryness of my mind with the rain and dew from your sweet words that have descended on me; it now feels ready to germinate and bring forth new plants prepared to bear fruits of profitable virtue and delectable savor. How will such grace be given to me that I should have the privilege, according to your words, to build and fashion a new city that will exist from now on in this world?

'I am not St. Thomas the apostle, who through divine grace built a rich palace in heaven for the king of India, but nor does my feeble sense know the crafts, nor the measures, nor has it studied the theory and practice of stonework. And even if through the possibility of study these things were to become comprehensible to me, from where would my feeble feminine body take sufficient strength to undertake such a huge project? But nevertheless, my most respected ladies, although I am stunned by this news, I know well that nothing is impossible for God, and I cannot doubt that whatever is undertaken with your counsel and help should not come to a good end. Thus I praise God with all my strength and also you, my ladies, who have so honored me that now I am set up in this noble commission, which I accept with great joy. Here I am as your handmaiden, ready to obey. Command and I will obey, and may it be done to me according to your words.'

Here Christine Tells How, by Reason's Commandment and Help, She Began to Dig into the Earth in Order to Lay the Foundation

Then Lady Reason answered and said: "Up and about now, daughter! Let us go without delay to the field of letters: there the City of Ladies will be founded on flat and fertile land, where all fruits and fresh rivers are found and the earth abounds in all good things. Take the pick of your understanding and dig deep and make a great ditch wherever you see my outlines, and I will help you carry away the soil on my own shoulders."

To obey her commands I gingerly got up, feeling, thanks to them, stronger and lighter than before. She went ahead and I behind, and once we had arrived at this field, I began to dig along her marks with the pick of inquiry. My first piece of work went like this:

"Lady, I remember well that you told me earlier, on the subject of why so many men have blamed and continue to blame the behavior of women, that the long and golden in the furnace the purer it gets: which means that the more wrongly they are blamed, the greater is the merit of their glory. But I beg you to tell me why and for what reason so many different authors have spoken against women in their books, since I already know from you that they are wrong—is it that Nature makes them do it or do they do it out of hatred, and where does all this come from?"

Then she replied: "Daughter, to give you a way of entering more deeply, I will remove this first basketful of soil. You should know that all this does not come from Nature but is in opposition to her: for in this world there is no greater and stronger bond than that of the great love that Nature, by the will of God, forged between man and woman. But the causes that have moved and still more men to blame women are diverse and varied, and the same goes for the authors in their books, as you have found. For some have done this with good intentions; that is, to get men that were led astray away from frequenting vicious and dissolute women, with whom they may be besotted or to keep them from getting besotted in the first place, and so that men avoid a lewd and lascivious life. They have blamed all women in general because they believe that they should all be abominated."

"Lady," I said then, "forgive me if I interrupt your words: have they done well, then, because they were motivated by good intentions? For the intention, people say, judges the man." "This is badly put, dear daughter," she said, "for one should never excuse gross ignorance. If someone killed you with good intentions moved by crazy thoughts, would this then be well done? Rather, those that act like this, whoever they may be, misinterpreted the Law, for to harm and wrong one party is an act of injustice, and not to blame all feminine behaviors in opposition to the truth, as I will demonstrate by this hypothesis: Let us suppose that they did it in order to get fools away from foolish behavior. It would be as if I blamed fire, which is, after all, very good

9. This story appears in the Acts of Thomas, one of the Apostolical books of the New Testament and also in book 9, chapter 55 of Vincent de Beauvais’s Speculum historiale (Historical Mirror), Christine’s source for most of book 3 of the City.
1. Cf. Luke 1:38, after the Annunciation by the angel that she would be the mother of Christ, "Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word."
2. These lines seem to echo Fortuna’s Transformation, lines 1348-17 and 1531, where Christine describes her physical transformation into a man. Note that here she shows the same strength in a female body "Them", i.e. the ladies.
3. I.e., blame women.
and necessary, just because some people burned themselves, or water because people drown in it. And the same could be said of all good things that can be used well or badly. Nonetheless, one should not blame them just because fools abuse them; you yourself have touched upon this point quite well elsewhere in your texts. But those who have spoken abundantly on the subject, whatever their intentions might be, have cast their net rather widely just to achieve their goal. Just like someone who has a long and wide robe cut from a large piece of cloth that costs him nothing and that no one refuses him: he takes and usurps the rights of others.

"But, as you have said earlier, if these writers had looked for ways and means to get men away from folly and to keep them away by uniringly blaming those women who show themselves to be vicious and dissolute—which is exactly, to tell the straight truth, what an evil, dissolute, and perverse woman does, a woman who is like a monster in nature, a counterfeit far removed from her true natural condition, which must be simple, quiet and honest—if they had done this, then I would agree that they would have built a good and beautiful piece of work. But to blame all of them, when there are so many excellent women, I can assure you that this did not come from me and that whoever does this and whoever follows this approach is making a great mistake. So now throw away these dirty, black, and knobbled stones, for they will never be part of the beautiful edifice of your city.

"Other men have blamed women for other reasons: some have invented blame because of their own vices and others have been motivated by the defects in their own bodies, others through pure envy, and some others by the sheer pleasure they experience from slander. Others, in order to show that they have read many texts, base themselves on what they have found in books and repeat others and cite authorities.

"Those who have invented blame because of their own vices are men who wasted their youth in dissipation and had a great many love affairs with different women, used deception in many instances, have grown old in their sins without repentance, and now regret their past follies and the absolute life they led in their time. But nature, which does not allow the fulfillment of the heart's desire without sufficient power of the appetite, has grown cold in them. They are mournful when they see that the life that they used to call good times is over for them, and it seems to them that the young, who are now what they used to be, are enjoying the good times. They do not know how to make their sadness go away except by blaming women, believing that in this way they will make them displeasing to others. And one sees commonly such old men speaking obscenely and dishonestly, just as you can see with Matheolus, who admits himself that he was an old man with plenty of will but no
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potency. Through him you can prove that what I tell you is true, and you can firmly believe that the same holds true for many others.

"But these corrupt old men who are like incorruptible leprous, not the good, valiant men of ancient times whom I made perfect in virtue and wisdom—for not all old men have such corrupt desires, it would be too bad if such were the case—and in whose mouths are, according to their hearts, good, exemplary, honest, and discreet words. And these men hate misdeeds and slander and neither blame nor defame men or women, they hate vices and blame them in general without indicting or charging anyone in particular, they counsel the avoidance of evil and the pursuit of virtue and the straight path.

"Those men who are motivated by the defect of their own bodies are impatient and have deformed limbs but sharp and malicious minds, and they cannot avenge the pain of their impotence except by blaming those women who bring joy to many: and thus they hope to spoil for others the pleasure that they themselves cannot enjoy.

"Those who blame women out of jealousy are those wicked men who have seen and perceived many women of greater intelligence and nobler conduct than they themselves possess, and thus they are full of sorrow and disdain: and for these reasons their great jealousy has made them blame all women, hoping to suppress and diminish their glory and praise, just like I do not know which man who in his text entitled On Philosophy makes a great effort to prove that women should not be honored by men, and he says that those men who make so much of women pervert the name of his book: that is to say that out of 'philosophy' they make 'philology.' But I assure and swear to you that he himself, through the deduction—filled with lies—of the case he makes there, transforms the content of his book into a true philology.

"As for those who are slanderers by nature, it is no wonder that they blame women since they blame everyone. Nevertheless, I assure you that any man who willingly slanders women, does so because of a vile heart, for he acts against reason and nature. Against reason, in so far that he is most ungrateful and ignorant of the great good that woman has brought him, so often and continuously catering to his needs; it is so great a good that he could never pay her back. And it is against nature, in so far as there is no more beast anywhere, nor is there a bird which does not by nature dearly love its companion and that is the female! And thus it is quite unnatural when a reasonable man does the opposite.

"And just as there has never been a work so worthy and made by such a good master that some people did not, and still do not want, to counterfeit it, there are many who want to try their hand at writing poetry."

5. Sophia means "wisdom", philosophy is the "love of wisdom". Christine invents the counterpoint "love of folly."

6. The word in French is dicer. Estache Deschamps (see Estache Moral), to whom Christine wrote a letter in 1404 (see p. 199), had written an Art de dicter (Art of poetry) in 1393.
And it seems to them that they cannot go wrong, since others have stated in their books what they want to say—or rather misstated, as I well know. Some want to embark on expressing themselves by making poems of water without salt, such as they are, or ballads without feeling, speaking of the behavior of women or princes or other people, while they themselves cannot recognize or correct their own miserable behavior and inclinations. But the simple people, who are as ignorant as they are, say that these poems are the best in the world.

Here Christine Tells How She Dug into the Earth: Which Means the Questions She Asked Reason and How Reason Answered

"Now I have prepared and ordered from you a great work; give some thought to continuing to dig in the ground along the lines I marked." Then, in order to obey her command, I struck with all my force in this way:

"Lady, how is it possible that Ovid, who is reputed to be the foremost poet—although some people believe that Virgil should be praised more, and, since you set me straight on this, I now agree with them—blames women so much in many of his works, for example in the book he called On the Art of Love and also in the one he entitled Remedies for Love—and in other volumes? Answer:” Ovid was a man skilled in the art of poetry, and he had a very sharp wit and great understanding in what he was doing. However, he let his body slip into vanity and fleshly delights, not just into one love affair, but he abandoned himself to all possible women, he showed no moderation or loyalty, and valued none of the women. And in his youth he led this kind of life as much as he could, for which in the end he got his just deserts: that is, loss of reputation, of his possessions, and of his limbs, for he was exiled for his great lewdness, not only because he himself lived like this but also because of the advice he gave others to lead a similar life.

"Similarly, when he was later called back from exile with the help of some powerful young Romans, his followers, he did not keep from committing again the misdeeds for which he had been punished, and he was chastised and disgraced for his faults. This point confirms what I said to you earlier, for when he saw that he could no longer lead the life he used to delight in so much, he began to blame women with his subtle reasoning and tried to make them displeasing to others."

"Lady, this is well said, but I saw a book by another Italian author, from the region or the marches of Tuscany, I believe, who is called

7. In the first text Ovid gave advice on how to seduce women, while in the second he gave remedies for falling out of love. The second text is more nuanced than the first.
8. The present text preserves the structure of question and answer (which evokes both legal proceedings and a scholastic debate) and does not translate response by “she answered.”
9. Christine states that Ovid is “chastised,” which means “blamed.” Although he did not write it either.

Cecco d'Ascoli, and who wrote in one chapter abominations one can only marvel at, and they are such that any reasonable person should not repeat them.” Answer: "If Cecco d'Ascoli speaks badly of all women, daughter, do not be amazed, for he detested and hated all of them and was annoyed by them. And similarly, because of his horrible wickedness he wanted all men to find them displeasing and hate them. He got what he deserved for this: a reward for his criminal vices he was shamefully burned to death."

"I saw another small book in Latin, Lady, which is called On the Secrets of Women, which speaks of the disposition of women's natural bodies which have great defects." Answer: "You can realize by yourself, without any other proof, that this book was written tendentiously and hypothetically: for if you read it, it should be obvious to you that it is full of lies. And although some people say that it was written by Aristotle, one cannot believe that such a philosopher would have taken it upon himself to fabricate such nonsense. For since women can clearly know by experience that some things they treat are not true but pure nonsense, they can conclude that other specific points he speaks of are straight lies. But don't you remember that he says in the beginning of his book that some Pope, I do not know which one, excommunicated every man who would read it to a woman or who would give it to her to read?" "Lady, I remember it well." "Do you know the malicious reason, given at the beginning of this book, why bestial and stupid men were supposed to believe this nonsense?" "No, Lady, not unless you tell me." "It was done so that women would not know about this book and what it contains: for the man who wrote it knew well that if women read it or heard it read, they would know well that it was nonsense and would contradict it and make fun of it. In this way, the author who wrote it wanted to fool and deceive the men who read it. "Lady, I remember that among other things—after he has spoken at length about the impotence and weakness that are responsible for the formation of the female body in the womb of the mother—he says that Nature seems all ashamed when she sees that she has formed such a body which appears to be something imperfect."

"Ha, sweet friend! Just consider the great folly, the blindness beyond all reason that made him say this. Is Nature, then, who is the handmaiden of God, a greater mistress than her master, from whom she receives her authority, almighty God, who by the power of his thought had created the form of man and woman?"

1. As Curnow notes, Francesco Stabili, an astrologer at the University of Bologna, was known as Cecco d'Ascoli, see Curnow's edition, 1948. He was the author of the Ascoli and was born for herey in 1327.
2. In fact, this work was most often attributed to the thirteenth-century theologian Albert the Great, although he did not write it either.
When it occurred to His holy will to form Adam from the clay of the earth in the field of Damascus, he led him, after he had created him, to the terrestrial paradise which was and is the most worthy place down here on earth. There he made Adam fall asleep and formed the body of a woman from one of his ribs, which signifies that she should be at his side as a companion and not at his feet like a slave, and also that she should love him as his own flesh. If the supreme craftsman was not ashamed to create and form a female body, Nature should be ashamed. Ha, it is the height of folly to say this. Indeed, how was she formed? I don't know if you noticed this, but she was formed in the image of God. Oh, how can any mouth slander something that bears such a noble imprint? But some men are so crazy that they believe, when they hear it said that God created man in His image, that this means the material body. But this is not so, for at that time God had not taken on a human body. Rather, it refers to the soul which is an intellectual spirit and lasts forever, just like the Deity. God created this soul and put completely equal souls, one as good and noble as the other, into the female and male bodies. But to return to the question of the creation of the body: woman, then, was made by the supreme craftsman. And in which place was she made? In the earthly paradise. And of what? Of vile matter? No, but from the noblest matter that had ever been created. It was from the body of man that God made her.

"Lady, according to what I hear from you, woman is a most noble thing, yet Cicero says that no man should serve a woman and that whoever does so devalues himself; for no one should serve anyone lower than him." Answer: "That person, male or female, who possesses more virtue is the higher; neither the eminence nor the lowliness of people lies in their bodies according to their sex, but in the perfection of morals and virtues. And happy is he who serves the Virgin who is above all angels."

"Lady, one of the Catechists", who was such a great orator, says further that if there were no women in this world we would converse with the gods. Answer: "Now you can see the folly of someone whom people consider wise: for it is through woman that man reigns with God. And if anyone claims that he was exiled because of Lady Eve, I reply that he has gained a higher good through Mary than he lost through Eve, when humanity was joined to the Deity, which would have never happened if Eve's misdeed had not occurred. Thus man and woman should be happy about this fault which has brought them such honor. For as low as human nature fell through the created beings, the higher is raised up by the Creator. And as for conversing with the gods if woman did not exist, as this Cato said, he spoke truer than he thought for he was a pagan, and those of this religion believed that gods lived in hell as well as in heaven; that is, the devils whom they called gods of hell so it makes sense that men would have conversed with these gods had it not been for Mary." [Christine asks more questions about misogynist prejudices, for example that women are only interested in dressing, that they are glutinous and childish. For each reproach Reason offers counterexamples that demonstrate the essential goodness of women. In response to the proverb stating that women are only made for talking, crying, and spinning, Reason proves that women's tears are not signs of helplessness but of piety, which has brought about many miracles. Reason now turns to woman's speech.]

"Similarly, God gave women speech, and praised He for this, for if He had not given them speech they would be mute. But to refute what is said in this proverb, which someone, I don't know, made up only in order to level reproach at women, if women's language had been so worth of reproof and of so little authority, as some men maintain, our Lord Jesus Christ would have never designed to wish that such a holy mystery as that of His glorious Resurrection should first be announced by a woman, for He Himself ordered the blessed Magdalene, to whom He first appeared on Easter, to tell and announce it to the Apostles and to Peter. Oh, blessed God, may you be praised, you who together with other infinite gifts and favors that You have given to the female sex, wished that a woman should be the bearer of such high and worthy news."

"All those envious people should be silent now, lady, if they could see the truth," I said. "But I smile at the foolishness that some men utter and I even remember that I heard some foolish preachers say that God first appeared to a woman because He knew well that she could not keep quiet, so that the news of His Resurrection would become known faster." Answer: "Daughter, you have spoken well when you called those people fools who say this: for it is not enough for them to blame women, they even ascribe to Jesus such blasphemy by saying that He wanted to reveal His great perfection and dignity through a vice. And I don't know how a man dares to say this, and though they may say it in jest, God should not be mixed up in such mockery."