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BUILDING THE IDEAL CITY: FEMALE MEMORIAL PRAXIS IN CHRISTINE DE PIZAN'S *CITÉ DES DAMES*

Although ethical memory is vital to Christine de Pizan's rhetorical agenda, the fact that it is deeply embedded within the text of *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* (*The Book of the City of Ladies*) has been little explored. Since medieval rhetoric viewed memory as the path to ethical knowledge and wisdom, the individual memory had to be trained in order to be fully functional in ethical pursuits. So Christine fashions an artificial memory system within the text that provides a means for women to develop an ethical memory practice, thereby disproving the anti-feminist tradition of women's vice and inconstancy. As she builds a pro-feminist history of "Woman" in the *Cité* by revising the anti-feminist tradition, Christine concomitantly instructs her female audience in the ways they can remember and practice this new history. Ultimately, this architectural system organizes a memorial space into a haven for the memories of her female readers, the new citizens of Christine's visionary citadel.

By 1405, when she wrote *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*, Christine de Pizan was already an active participant in the enduring literary and philosophical debate over the nature of "Woman."¹ Throughout its period of influence, this debate functioned as an intellectual literary game, a means by which individual writers could demonstrate their rhetorical skills and bolster their authority. The highly rhetorical nature of the debate's intellectual game was marked by its rigidly fixed, symbiotic structure of anti-feminist blame and pro-feminist praise in which each side brought into play the same rhetorical conventions and sources to make its particular case.² The debate's dialectical structure also required that pro-feminist authors counterargue anti-feminist polemic in addition to constructing a pro-feminist case. Christine maintained that the debate was detrimental to women not because their natures were inherently inconstant and unstable, as the anti-feminist side posited, but, rather, because women were uneducated in the rules of the game: without rhetorical training, women were unable to defend themselves against anti-feminist charges of inconstancy, imprudence, and vice, and still less able to construct a positive pro-feminist definition of, and for, themselves.

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In the *Cité des Dames*, Christine corrects this lack of rhetorical education by critiquing the anti-feminist tradition while also creating a rhetorical arena to house and preserve her pro-feminist case. The didactic agenda underlying her *Cité* requires not just rewriting and revising the anti-feminist case but also educating her female audience in this new vision, because, as she argues, “Dieu ... a donné a entedement de femme assez apprehensive de toutes choses entendibles concevoir, congnoistre et retenir” (762; “God ... has granted that the mind of an intelligent woman can conceive, know and retain all perceptible things”; 86–87).³ Her *Cité* demonstrates the scholarly refutation of the anti-feminist tradition by one such intelligent female reader as she creates a new, positive definition of “Woman,” replacing the anti-feminist definition in the minds of her female readers. As she replaces the accepted anti-feminist definition of “Woman” in both literary tradition and in women’s own lives and minds, Christine simultaneously provides a specific space to house this new memory practice. By presenting herself as a model female reader who counterargues the anti-feminist tradition through pro-feminist polemic and rhetorical mnemonics, Christine constructs a new reception practice in which she tutors her female readers.

Christine’s rendering of medieval female reception practice addresses contemporary critical concern as to how medieval women perceived the gender-based attacks emerging from the medieval debate.⁴ In her responses to the “querelle de la Rose”⁵ and in the *Cité des Dames*, Christine provides an example of gendered reception by a female medieval reader who had been trained in reading “as” a man.⁶ Despite such training, in the *Cité’s* prologue Christine depicts herself in the midst of an intellectual crisis prompted by her conflicted reception of Jehan Le Fèvre’s *Les Lamentations de Matheolus*. While by no means the first time she had met the full textual force of the anti-feminist tradition, this moment is represented by Christine as the first time that the tradition had brought her to such an emotional and intellectual impasse. Consequently, the narrator, presented as Christine herself, is reduced to an *etargie* (“stupor”) induced by *une fontaine resourdant* (619; “the gushing fountain”; 4) of anti-feminist authorities within her mind. Rather than reflect her own experiences back to her, this encounter proves instead to be a direct contradiction of her personal experience as a *femme naturelle* (618; “natural woman; 4), causing her to question her own perception of her self: “me sourdi une grant desplaisance et tristesse de couraige en desprisant moy meismes et tout le sexe feminin, si comme ce ce fust monstre en nature” (620; “A great unhappiness and sadness welled up in my heart, for I detested myself and

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the entire feminine sex, as though we were monstrosities in nature"; 5). What Christine laments in this opening scene is her inability to reconcile anti-feminist authority with her own experience as a woman. In order to resolve this hermeneutical conflict, Christine must change either her self or her reception practice.⁷ Thus, once Christine's narrator begins to question Le Fèvre's anti-feminist depiction of "Woman," she also begins to enact a hermeneutical reversal that demonstrates for her female readers how to read "as" women and not as immasculated readers of the anti-feminist tradition.

By representing herself as an idealized female reader within the text, Christine resists not only anti-feminist authority but also the medieval allegory of woman as misreader. Susan Noakes describes this negative image as the "generalized 'woman' who reads on the surface only or who distorts the author's intention" (*Timely Reading* 98).⁸ Not surprisingly, one of the central accusations leveled against Christine by her opponents in the "querelle de la Rose" was the charge that, because of her gender, she was misreading, and thus misinterpreting, Jean de Meun's true intentions in the *Roman de la Rose*. Christine's opponents saw her critiques—or misinterpretations, as they defined them—as examples of just such female misreading. However, while her male opponents perceived her gendered reception as an interpretive misprision, for Christine, reading as a woman rather than as a man was an equally valid perspective. Certainly, a main tenet of Christine's critique in the "querelle" was that not all readers interpret in the same manner because different readers will, depending on their subject positions, interpret the same text differently: "Christine did not concern herself with the question of how the *Roman* ought to be read, but how, in her opinion, the work *would* be read by different readers," which is why Christine concluded that "readers would interpret the *Roman* according to their own lights" with the virtuous finding virtue and the vicious finding vice (Schibanoff 93; italics hers).⁹ In this case, Christine demonstrates that female readers do not necessarily read and interpret in the same fashion as male readers. Noakes observes of such a situation: "When a woman writes in a field that has long cast women in the role of misreader ... she must seek ways to invert that role, to create another allegory to replace the allegory of woman as misreader. Clearly, its central positive figure must be a female reader" (*Timely Reading* 110). In the *Cité*, Christine enacts this principle, creating just such a central positive figure by re-allegorizing female reception practice and presenting her own reception as a model for her female audience.

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To this end, Christine creates a mnemonic city that allows her to rewrite women's history while simultaneously providing a new memorial space to house this revision. As Mary Carruthers has demonstrated, the medieval conception of memory differs significantly from the contemporary view of memory and memory training.¹⁰ In the medieval rhetorical tradition, built upon classical principles, a trained memory was required not only for didactic purposes but also for ethical practice. Since knowledge was memory based, education was designed to train the memories of students to develop a personal "library" in their minds. Carruthers provides the best description of the kind of rhetorically trained memory system demonstrated in the *Cité*:

I must ask my readers ... to conceive of memory not only as "rote," the ability to reproduce something (whether a text, a formula, a list of items, an incident) but as the matrix of a reminiscing cogitation, shuffling and collating "things" sorted in a random-access memory scheme, or set of schemes, a memory *architecture* and library built up during one's lifetime with the express intention that it be used inventively. (*Craft of Thought* 4; her italics)

This matrix of designed memory was referred to for textual information, certainly, but the primary goal for such training was intellectual and ethical guidance. While an individual's mental architecture was used to store and create literary texts, its highest use was the invention of a personal ethos by providing the mind with ethical examples and instruction upon which the individual could draw for ethical counsel as needed.

To the medieval audience, this interrelationship between reading, memory, and ethics was a fundamental premise. Initially, the act of reading was experiential because a reader experienced what he or she was reading as if it were directly happening to him or her.¹¹ Therefore, because the text was in some sense "lived," reading also merged into one's experiential memory—if that memory were properly trained. Finally, the experience of reading, recalled through systematic memory training, would shape individual character by providing the reader with an internal memorial structure to serve as an ethical guide. Consequently, individual ethics were derived through the act of reading: "More importantly than growth in knowledge, reading produces growth in character, through provisioning—in *memoria*—the virtue of prudence" (Carruthers, *Book of Memory* 191). As one of the four cardinal virtues of the Middle Ages, prudence was traditionally composed of three parts: memory, intelligence, and foresight. The

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ethical use of prudence involved using one's memory to recall ideas and concepts; then using one's intelligence to understand those ideas; and, finally, using one's foresight to apply those ideas wisely to a given situation. Thus, the prudent practice, or praxis, of memory produced ethical behavior; by using the memory as an ethical repository and guide, an individual would be equipped to act prudently and ethically.

Because the memorial architecture employed by an individual directly affected his or her ethical formation, the individual memory had to be properly trained in prudent memory praxis. Therefore, Christine creates a textual city to serve as an artificial memory system that will train the ethical memory of her female reader. First, she designs the *Cité* as an authoritative guide to revising the anti-feminist tradition that was already a component of her, and her reader's, memory. As she wants her female reader first to remember and then to reject the anti-feminist tradition, she purposefully invokes anti-feminist authorities, particularly the *Roman de la Rose* and Giovanni Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus*, in order to rewrite them in her reader's memory.¹² But in addition to rewriting anti-feminist into pro-feminist rhetoric, she purposefully designs an architectural memory space for the creation and practice of this new memory. She builds the text as an architectural mnemonic by using one of the debate's rhetorical conventions, the catalogue of exempla; these exempla serve as the allegorical building blocks of the system she constructs to create her new definition of "Woman."

While Jody Enders and Glenda McLeod have also suggested that the *Cité* resembles the kind of mnemonic system that Frances Yates calls the "art of memory," there has been no detailed examination of its practice in the *Cité*.¹³ Enders further contends that Christine's mnemonic system fails as a "virtual social performance" since it should "impel" Christine and her female readers not only to "authoritative speech" but to "authoritative action" (235). However, in Christine's perception, textual and ethical performance are social performance; that is, social action is informed and prompted by individual ethics. This text creates a special mnemonic space for women that provides a system not for large-scale action in the world but for individual contemplation of personal action and personal salvation. As a result, Christine's memory city is intended for the articulation of a personal ethical memory, with its mnemonic system providing her female readers with a virtual space for their ethical praxis: "it was in trained memory that one built character, judgment, citizenship and piety" (Carruthers, *Book of Memory* 9). Therefore, this memory system is designed to affect the personal ethics of the female readers, which will, in

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turn, affect their social actions. As Christine instructs her readers, “vous soit cause ceste cité d'avoir bonnes meurs et estre vertueuses et humbles” (1032; “may this city be an occasion for you to conduct yourselves honestly and with integrity and to be all the more virtuous and humble”; 255). Christine molds the City's individual citizens by training their ethical memories, which in turn builds their character, judgment, and piety.

Artificial memory as a fundamental rhetorical tool originates in classical rhetorical theory. Such mnemotechnical systems (*ars memorativa*) were used either to remember concepts and ideas (*memoria rerum*) or, less often and arguably less usefully, for word-by-word memorization of texts (*memoria verbum*). The usefulness of such a system was traditionally demonstrated by the story of Simonides of Ceos, considered the inventor of artificial memory, who was able to identify the participants of a dinner party after the roof collapsed and crushed them; Simonides could remember each participant by re-creating the image of the party in his mind and “seeing” where each individual had been seated.¹⁴ In his *Confessions*, Augustine alludes to the “treasure house” of memory (*ubi sunt thesauri innumerabilium imaginum*; 10.8)¹⁵ that his mind can access. Literary metaphors for this kind of mnemonic device are commonplace in medieval texts and include images of a storehouse (*thesaurus*), a book of memory that can be read page by page in the mind, buildings, libraries, storerooms or cellars, birds, bees, meadows, pearls, a money pouch (*sacculus*), a cave or inner room, and a chest (*arca*).¹⁶ Medieval pedagogy ensured that students were trained in these mnemonic systems to aid them in developing similar storehouses.

One such storehouse, the architectural mnemonic, follows three basic rules.¹⁷ The first step is to visualize a building, either real or imaginary, that will provide an orderly and clearly defined series of rooms or spaces—loci—where the images to be memorized will be placed.¹⁸ The loci must also be well-lighted so that they and the images placed within them may be visualized clearly, free of clutter and distraction.¹⁹ The second step is creating the agent images (*imagines agentes*) of the idea to be memorized. These agent images should be active rather than passive, as unusual and emotionally striking as possible, and, ideally, violent and/or bizarre because the mind retains the unusual and strange more easily than it remembers the mundane. The classic example of such an agent image, repeated with slight variations throughout the rhetorical manuals, is one a lawyer would use to remember the facts in a murder trial: a sick man lies in bed, and the accused is seated beside him holding a cup in one hand and holding on the fourth finger of the other hand a ram's testicles (*testic-*

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ulos). The sick man is used to remember the victim, the cup to remember the means of death (i.e., poison), and the testicles to remember that a will and the testimony of witnesses (*testes*) are involved. The last step is moving sequentially through the loci to remember the agent images placed there. Once the system is established, the individual can mentally walk through the series of rooms and visualize the images, seeing in the mind what has already been placed there and drawing on what is useful in any given situation. Although typically one would start at the beginning of the building or structure and work step by step through the loci, the system should be so ordered that any locus can serve as the starting point—i.e., the system may be entered from the middle or the end and then worked through either backward or forward without losing one's place in the series. Carruthers's analogy of a random-access matrix is useful here; the system is organized so that access is possible from any entry point without changing the order or placement of the information stored within. Although constructed along rigid lines, such architectural structures are designed to be as flexible and adaptable as possible in practice so that the individual may easily access and retrieve stored information as necessary for reference or guidance.

The imagery of just such an architectural mnemonic is invoked from the beginning of the *Cité*.²⁰ After describing the stupor induced by the gushing fountain of anti-feminist authorities within her mind, Christine-as-narrator, wonders, "Helas! Dieux, pourquoy ne me faiz tu naistre au monde en masculin sexe" (621; "Alas, God, why did You not let me be born in the world as a man?"; 5). She then describes herself as bowing her head in shame, her eyes full of tears and her head resting on the arm of her chair.²¹ At this decisive juncture, the narrator is visited by three divine female figures, *Raison* (Reason), *Droiture* (Rectitude) and *Justice* (Justice), who advise her "Or te reviens a toy meismes, reprens ton scens et plus ne troubles pour telz fanffelues" (625; "Come back to yourself, recover your senses, and do not trouble yourself anymore over such absurdities"; 8). They explain that they have been sent by God to defend women against their foes and to construct a refuge for *femmes dignes de loz* (630; "women worthy of praise"; 11). Then *Raison* informs Christine that the trio has come to help her build and establish this city to serve as a "certain ediffice fait en maniere de la closture d'une cité fort maçonnee et bien ediffice" (630; "a particular edifice built like a city wall, strongly constructed and well founded"; 10). From this point forward, Christine will invoke detailed images of the city and its buildings, constructing a visual city for the female reader to picture and remember. *Droiture* then assures Christine

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that she will use her ruler to measure the walls of the edifice and its buildings as well as people the city, *sans riens vague* (634; “without leaving anything vague”; 13), just as the manuals instruct that the loci and their images must be clearly defined. Finally, *Justice* explains that, once she has gilded the roofs of the city, she will place the keys to the city in Christine's hands; once the system has been memorized, the manuals promise that it will remain in the mind forever. This city will indeed be perpetual because Christine and, more particularly, her female reader will hold the keys to the system within their minds.

Once the trio has explained their purpose, they are ready to begin the construction of this memory city. However, underlying the establishment of such a mnemonic system is the assumption that careful mental preparation and reflection are necessary in order to provide a solid foundation upon which to build. Geoffrey of Vinsauf invokes a similar architectural metaphor for beginning the process of literary invention, advising a writer that

If a man has a house to build, his impetuous hand does not rush into action. The measuring line of his mind first lays out the work and he mentally outlines the successive steps in a definite order. The mind's hand shapes the entire house before the body's hand builds it.... As a prudent workman, construct the whole fabric within the mind's citadel; let it exist in the mind before it is on the lips. (16–17)

In the same fashion, an architectural mnemonic emphasizes thoughtful preparation and order prior to creating a system within the “mind's citadel.” Furthermore, such methodical preparation is necessary in constructing a memory system because what to forget is just as important as what to remember. So, in Christine's system, any existing anti-feminist misinterpretations must be removed and forgotten in order for the new pro-feminist case she is building to be positioned in the reader's memory. The narrator explains to the trio of allegorical figures that her mind is a *tabernacle troublé et obscur* (638; “troubled and dark tabernacle”; 15) in which she has been dwelling as a *simple et ignoient estudiante* (638; “simple and ignorant student”; 15). Consequently, before the establishment of the city of new memories, the divine ladies must remove any incorrect or inappropriate memories from the narrator's mind.

The ensuing refutation of the anti-feminist tradition metaphorically clears the ground preparatory to laying the foundation for the new city.

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Raison leads Christine to the Field of Letters and advises her to use her *pioche d'inquisition* (640; "pick of cross examination"; 16). Christine is to use this pick to remove the misshapen stones of the anti-feminist tradition from the ground—her own mind as well as her reader's—preparatory to laying out the guidelines of the new city. *Raison* clearly delineates the inappropriate and incorrect memories that must be removed in order to create new ones: as a result, the *ordes pierres broçonneuses et noires* (643; "black, dirty and uneven stones"; 18) that form Christine's troubled and dark tabernacle stand in direct contrast to the *belles reluysans pierres* (787; "clean and shining bricks"; 99), the new pro-feminist images, that will be used to build the new City of Ladies.²² The first basket of dirt that *Raison* removes symbolizes her answer to Christine's question as to why male authorities attack women for vice and inconstancy. As Christine continues to "dig" the black and dirty stones out of the ground, *Raison* refutes multiple anti-feminist accusations and authorities, including Aristotle, Virgil, Ovid, and Cicero. *Raison* accuses these authorities of misinterpretation, claiming that they, in fact, are the ones who have read and interpreted improperly (*mesprendre*; 646; "mis-take"; 20). She contrasts such male misinterpretation with the properly virtuous assessment of women by St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, and, most especially, Christ. Once the refutation of anti-feminist authorities is complete, *Raison* reveals the *grant et large fosse* (676; "large and wide ditch"; 38) cleared by the removal of this dirt. This section of the *Cité* symbolizes the preparation of the groundwork for the city, with *Raison*'s counterarguments removing the anti-feminist "dirt" from the narrator's mind in order to clear a space to build the new city and new memory.

Once the ground of the mind is cleared and prepared, the series of loci can be established. Significantly, Christine here switches construction implements, exchanging her *pioche d'inquisition* for the *truelle de ta plume* (676; "trowel of her pen"; 38) to create the foundation of the city's walls. She signals to her reader that Semiramis will serve as the first locus, or brick, of the city's foundation when she has *Raison* declare: "Car voycy une grande et large pierre que je vueil qui soit la premiere assisse ou fondement de ta cité" (676; "for you can see here a great and large stone which I want to place as the first in the first row of stones in the foundation of your City"; 38). As a city-builder herself, Semiramis seems a logical choice on which to found a mnemonic city. A woman of great physical strength, Semiramis repeatedly battles to defend her people and expand her kingdom, much as Christine herself is doing in writing the *Cité*. *Raison* also stresses her measures to rebuild, strengthen, and defend the city of

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Babylon: "mais encores plus l'enforca ceste dame de plusieurs deffenses et fist faire autour larges et parfons fosses" (679; "This lady strengthened the city even more with many defenses and had wide and deep moats dug around it"; 39).²³ Christine further emphasizes Semiramis's bravery, courage, vigor, and strength since she is using this exemplum to refute the anti-feminist depiction of women as weak and unstable.

In revising the anti-feminist version of Semiramis, Christine fixes this exemplum as the first locus in her architectural mnemonic. Christine must adapt the traditional rules of an architectural mnemonic for her untrained female audience, so she provides memorable images at key points to establish the loci. Christine adds an agent image to the exemplum in order to help the female reader remember this first locus. It is the emotional intensity of the unusual imagery coupled with its action that leaves an impression in the memory; consequently, *Raison* provides a detailed description of the statue of Semiramis, imprinting its image in the reader's mind, to further fix this first locus of the architectural mnemonic. This statue memorializes the moment when Semiramis, in the midst of having her hair braided, is informed that one of her kingdoms has revolted. She then vows not to have the other half of her hair braided until she has resolved the conflict. *Raison* describes the statue itself in detail: "une grand statue d'une ymaige faite d'arain, doré richement, eslevé sus un hault piller en Babiloine qui representoit une princepce tenant une espee, et ot l'un des costez de son chief trecié et l'autre non" (679; "a large and richly gilt cast-bronze statue on a high pillar in Babylon which portrayed a princess holding a sword with one side of her hair braided, the other not"; 40). *Raison* further explains to Christine that this statue "duquel fait tant noble et couraigeux par longtemps donna tesmoingnaige" (679; "bore witness to this noble and courageous deed for a long time"; 40), as it also will in this memory system. *Raison* concludes the story of Semiramis by telling Christine: "Mais or est assise la premiere pierre ou fondement de nostre cité. Sy nous convient d'ores en avant asseoir ensuivant pierres a quantité pour avancier nostre ediffice" (681; "And now the first stone is set in the foundation of our City. Now we must lay many more stones to advance our edifice"; 40). Now that *Raison* has fixed this first locus in the foundation of the mnemonic city by imprinting the image of the statue of Semiramis the empire-builder in the reader's mind, she will proceed to construct the rest of the loci.

This first locus is characteristic of those that follow: each "stone" is one of a series of similarly constructed exempla that serve both as components of Christine's pro-feminist revision and as the building blocks of the archi-

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tectural mnemonic. Since the loci of Book I form the foundation of the City of Ladies, they logically correspond to the building blocks of civilization, beginning with illustrations of women's physical strength and determination as rulers and warriors. Many of these exempla are also filled with vivid and bizarre images in order to solidify their places in the series of loci in the reader's mind. The exemplum of Semiramis is immediately followed by the exemplum of the women of Scythia, who establish a new nation composed entirely of women. They become known as the Amazons, whom *Raison* defines as *desmamelles* (682; "breastless ones"; 41) because each woman removes one of her breasts to better use a bow and arrow and thus enhance her skills as a warrior. Most of the images used throughout this section are bloody and violent, depicting battles and warfare; for example, Thamiris is a Queen of the Amazons who throws the severed head of her enemy, Cyrus of Persia, into a bucket filled with his men's blood. Another visual trait that marks this series of loci is the statue motif; in fact, just as *Raison* begins building the city's foundation with the statue of Semiramis, she concludes the construction of the foundation with the exemplum of Cloelia and its accompanying statue. One of a group of Roman virgins held hostage, Cloelia cleverly deceives her guards and escapes, bringing along the other hostages. Although she has never ridden, when Cloelia sees a horse, she immediately captures it, using the horse to ferry the other hostages across a river, one by one. A statue depicting Cloelia on her horse is built "a celle fin que de ce fait fust memoire a toujours mais" (720; "in permanent memory of this deed"; 62). In the story, the statue serves as a marker along the road for the Romans, but here the statue serves as a marker for this last brick in the city's foundation: "mais de or sont achevés les fondemens de nostre cité" (720; "Now the foundations of our City are complete"; 62). Just as Semiramis's statue marked the beginning of the series of loci that forms the city's foundation, Cloelia's statue marks the final locus of the foundation's completion.

With the foundation complete, the high wall that will surround the city becomes the next stage of construction. Accordingly, the subject for this series of loci shifts, moving from women's physical strength and daring to their intellectual strengths, including their invention in sciences and arts. While the previous stories emphasized women's physical accomplishments, these exempla demonstrate their intellectual accomplishments, alluding especially to the connection between memory and learning. Thus, Proba, a Roman wife and a Christian, reads the works of the classical poets, especially Virgil, until she knows them *en memoire* (725; "by memory"; 65) and understands them fully: "lesquelz livres et lesquelz dittiez,

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comme un foiz elle les leust par grant entente de son engin et de sa pensee, et si comme elle se prenoit garde de la signiffiance d'iceulx" (725; "after she had read these books and poems with profound insight and intelligence and had taken pains in her mind to understand them"; 65). Proba then composes her own literary text by joining pieces of Virgil's poems together to reveal the history of the Old and New Testaments—a process of composition similar to the one in which Christine herself is engaged. The story of Sempronia further emphasizes the role of memory in learning: in her case, her beauty is surpassed only by her impressive intellect, which could recall anything at will. Where statues were the dominant motif used to build the city's foundation, temples become the visual motif used to construct the city's wall. These temples, which *Raison* explains were created in commemoration of the exemplary women who inspired them, serve as the visual markers to fix these loci into their places in the city's mnemonic system.

The final subject for this series of loci constructing the city's wall is women's ability to utilize ethical memory. Logically, the topic of ethical memory would be part of the city's architecture since the structure of the whole text is designed to enforce the praxis of such memory. Accordingly, Christine asks *Raison* whether a woman's mind is clever enough to engage in the ethical practice of prudence: "C'est assavoir que elles ayent avis sur ce qui est le meilleur a faire et ad ce qui doit estre laissié, souvenance des choses passees, par quoy soyent plus expertes par l'exemple que ont veu, sages ou gouvernement des choses presentes, qu'elles ayent pourveance sus celles a advenir" (762; "whether women can reflect on what is best to do and what is better to be avoided, and whether they remember past events and become learned from the examples they have seen, and, as a result, are wise in managing current affairs and whether they have foresight in the future"; 87). Notably, this question invokes the three parts of prudence: the use of memory, intelligence, and foresight to act wisely and virtuously. In reply to this question, *Raison* outlines the two forms of prudence: that which is naturally bestowed and that which is acquired through long study. *Raison* concludes that the latter is the better because *la science tousjours dure* (764; "learning endures forever"; 88)—just as this city, designed for long study, will endure.

However, the suggestion that educated, trained prudence is more valuable than natural prudence seems a problematic stance for Christine to assume: although a trained memory will last forever, the vast majority of her female readers would not have had access to such formal memory training. Because most women would have had to rely solely on their nat-

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ural prudence, to negate it would be to negate much of Christine's conception of female virtue: that women naturally possess proper prudence and wisdom. However, *Raison* also warns that, just as an educated memory, which holds biased and false information, is detrimental, so too is a natural prudence without moral, ethical, and spiritual guidance. Therefore, Christine argues here for a balanced methodology: part of her didactic message in the *Cité* is the ideal that both experience (natural prudence) and authority (trained prudence) are necessary for a virtuous and ethical character. Consequently, the exempla in this section illustrate the kind of balanced prudence encouraged by *Raison* and Christine: the definitive ideal is the prudent woman depicted in Proverbs 31. But *Raison* also relates the stories of other properly prudent women, including Dido, Ops, and Lavinia, all of whom are also dynastic leaders and city-builders.²⁴ Once she has underlined the true nature of female ethical prudence, *Raison* has finished her dual task: first, to prove that God looks favorably on women and, second, to build the city's foundation and walls. These exempla have memorialized women's powerful deeds as well as their intellectual accomplishments and capabilities; thus, *Raison* declares that the walls of the city are *tous achevez et enduiz* (778; "finished and plastered"; 97).

With the first phase of building complete, *Droiture* steps in to continue the construction of the mnemonic city's loci by creating its buildings. *Droiture* informs Christine that she has already assembled a quantity of "belles reluysans pierres plus precieuses que autres nulles" (787; "beautiful and shining stones more precious than any others"; 99) for Christine to arrange along a specific line laid down by *Droiture's* ruler and instructions. She provides Christine with yet another allegorical building tool, the *mortier ou cornat* (786; "mortar of her ink bottle"; 99) to be used in conjunction with the *truelle de ta plume* ("trowel of her pen"). The considerable emphasis on prudence continues in this next section, whose exempla counterargue two predominant anti-feminist stereotypes: first, that women are imprudent and untrustworthy and, second, that daughters are less worthy than sons. As a result, the subject for the loci that form the city's buildings shifts from women's accomplishments and deeds to their prudent devotion and fidelity. *Droiture* explains that her first stones are the sibyls and female prophets; as exemplars of prudent wisdom and foresight, they demonstrate that God has entrusted his secrets to faithful and devoted women. The remaining exempla in this section demonstrate women's superior capacity for filial piety. Again, vivid imagery is used to help fix these loci within the system: for example, *Droiture* describes Dryptina, a loyal daughter to her father, as *moult diffourme* (809; "a mon-

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strosity"; 809) because she had an extra row of teeth. But perhaps the most vivid image in this series of loci is the last in the construction of the city's buildings, the Roman woman who breastfeeds her imprisoned mother. Significantly, Christine has changed the gender of the parent from the original story here so that the woman suckles her imprisoned mother rather than her father, further enhancing this story's pro-feminist interpretation. With this highly visceral image, *Droiture* concludes the construction of the buildings and of the series of loci, which began with *Raison's* statue of Semiramis.

With the completion of the city's foundation, wall, and buildings, the series of loci is established; in the second half of the *Cité*, these loci must be stocked with the agent images of the architectural mnemonic. Accordingly, *Droiture* explains that she will people this city so that its buildings do not become *vague ne vuide* (814; "vacant and empty"; 116), since the fundamental purpose of any architectural mnemonic is to create a specifically ordered space to hold ideas in memory. *Droiture* further explains that this city has a certain purpose, having "la propriété de cest ouvrage que les possessarresses n'en pourront estre deboutees" (815; "a special property that its owners cannot be expelled"; 117); if properly memorized, these agent images and their system will remain perpetually in the minds of the readers, the owners of this city. Because these exempla form the active impressions of the architectural mnemonic, their subject shifts from women's capabilities to women's active conduct and behavior. *Droiture* relates exempla that counter anti-feminist depictions of female vice by demonstrating female chastity and constancy. The agent images in these exempla reinforce wise and virtuous action by providing prudent and ethical examples for the female reader's memory system. As *Droiture* explains, the citizens of this city will be *bonnes preudesfemes* (816; "women of good character"; 117) because the ethical memory trained and reinforced by this system will guide their ethical behavior. Therefore, this metaphorical citadel will serve as the site for the *nouvel royaume de Femenie* (815; "New Kingdom of Femininity"; 117) where "assez souffira pour tousjours mais de cellas que ores y mettrons" (815; "those whom we now place here will suffice quite adequately forever"; 17).

Serving as agent images, these exempla provide active, emotional imagery to impress their places in the system and in the reader's mind. The first of these exempla is Hypiscrata, who is so loyal to her husband that she follows him into battle disguised as a man. Detailed descriptions of her physical transformation from a beautiful and sensual queen to a woman disguised as a warrior provide vivid imagery for the reader: "Et en tel

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maniere se gouvernoit, celle noble dame par force de grant et loyal amour que le tendreté de son biau corps, jeune et delie et souef nourry, estoit converti si comme en un tres fort et vigueroux chevalier armé” (822; “Thanks to the force of her strong and loyal love, this noble lady conducted herself so valiantly that her fair and soft body, so young, delicate, and tenderly nourished, was transformed, as it were, into a powerful and vigorous armed knight”; 121).

Multiple exempla follow, providing highly visual demonstrations of the loyalty and faithfulness of wives toward their husbands. Among them are Artemisia, who, distraught over her husband’s death, drinks his ashes in order to embody his sepulcher, and Argia, who elaborately embraces and kisses the decomposing, infested corpse of her husband. Perhaps the most striking image—as Christine herself points out—is the death of Portia. After a failed attempt to warn her husband Brutus not to go to his meeting with Caesar, she commits suicide by eating fiery coals, thus burning herself to death from the inside out. Next, to demonstrate the chastity of women and negate anti-feminist claims that women enjoy and encourage rape, *Droiture* provides multiple exempla of women who fend off or destroy their attackers. She concludes this series of exempla with the women of Lombardy, who place raw chicken meat on their breasts in order to avoid being raped by their enemies; the meat quickly rots in the heat and, when the would-be attackers smell it, they leave, declaring *Dieux, que ces Lombardes puent* (890; “God, how these Lombards stink”; 164). All of the exempla in this section are marked by similarly visceral imagery, reinforcing their import and places in the system.

In contrast to such positive exempla, *Droiture* also provides agent images that demonstrate the consequences of acting without prudence. She relates a number of exempla on the topic of female constancy. However, these range from stories of women who demonstrate proper constancy—such as Leaena, who bites off her tongue rather than break silence under tortures—to those of women who are victims of foolish, if constant, love. Typically in the debate tradition, the pro-feminist side depicts the latter as women who are morally good despite, or because of, their lovers’ betrayal and their own victimization. However, Christine differs from such previous depictions in presenting an ethical argument against such unthinking adherence to constancy; instead, she uses her exempla to illustrate that even a seeming virtue such as constancy can be as damaging as its opposing vice if taken too far. For instance, *Droiture* tells the story of Lisabetta, who hides her murdered lover’s head in a basil pot and waters it with her tears, and Ghismonda, who, given her lover’s

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heart in a goblet, adds poison and commits suicide by drinking the concoction. *Droiture* concludes “qu trop on amé de grant amour sans varier” (951; “that they loved too much, too deeply and too constantly”; 202). Here, constancy in and of itself is not virtuous; rather, the prudent governance of constancy is the ideal. Finally, *Droiture* proclaims that such imprudent constancy always leads to an imprudent conclusion—“car toujours 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” (952; “for its end is always detrimental and harmful to their bodies, their property, their honor and—most important of all—to their souls”; 202).

After establishing the difference between prudent and imprudent constancy, *Droiture* returns to peopling the city's buildings with further positive exempla, providing agent images that reinforce women's prudent and virtuous conduct. For instance, she tells the story of the Roman woman, Claudia Quinta, who despite her venal reputation is actually virtuous; because of her purity and chastity, she is able to rescue a boat stuck in the Tiber, pulling it to shore using only her belt. Finally, *Droiture* states that she has completed her portion of the task at hand: she has built “de biaux palais et de maintes belles heberges et menssions” (970; “beautiful palaces and many fair inns and mansions”; 215) and also populated the city with many virtuous women. At this point, Christine enters the narrative in the persona of the author to address her readers. She declares that she has created this text to provide “heberge honnourable pour demeure perpetuelle tant que le monde durera, vous soit par moy en la closture cité établie” (971; “honorable lodging within city walls as a perpetual residence for as long as the world endures”; 214–15). With the mnemonic city nearing its completion, the female reader will be able to keep the ideas it contains in her mind perpetually.

However, although its buildings are constructed and peopled, the city itself is still not complete. Instead, *Justice* explains to Christine that the city's final purpose is to house its Queen, the Virgin Mary, who is the *chief du sexe femenin* (977; “head of the feminine sex”; 219). Now, with its *palais et les haultes menssions prestes et parees* (974; “palaces and tall mansions ready and furnished”; 217), this city is hers to *dominee et seigneurie* (974; “rule and govern”; 217). *Justice* further explains that the city's citizens are to drink from the *fontaine de vertus* (976; “fountain of virtues”; 218), which flows from the Virgin. This image of a fountain of virtues serves to counteract the image of the gushing fountain of anti-feminist authorities that overwhelmed the narrator in the beginning of the *Cité*; the authority of the Virgin, placed within the confines of the pro-feminist mnemonic

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city, counterargues and counteracts the anti-feminists' vicious, incorrect attacks. The Virgin arrives accompanied by her attendants, the female saints and martyrs, "desquelles les vies sont belles a ouyr, de bon exemple a toute femme sur toute autre sagesce" (978; "whose fair lives serve as excellent examples for every woman above all other wisdom"; 219); because of the constancy and strength they demonstrate in their suffering, their stories provide the concluding exempla and agent images of the mnemonic city.

The exempla in this final section are agent images based on saints' and martyrs' hagiographies. Certainly, the ethical import of a saint's life—that throughout, and despite, her ordeals she remains steadfast and constant in her faith to God—is vital to Christine's ethical argument, but, further, in this context hagiographies seem ideal for an architectural mnemonic because they customarily employ bizarre and violent imagery. For instance, the longest exemplum in this section is that of St. Christine, the author's patron saint. For her virtuous faith, St. Christine is punished by her father, who has her dragged and beaten through the streets of Tyre until the beating wears out ten men; she is then tortured on a wheel accompanied by fire and boiling oil, imprisoned, then tied to a stone and thrown into the river where the angels save her from drowning. After this, although her father is destroyed by the Devil, another judge and torturer is appointed. This second judge boils her in oil, has her hung upside down and tortured with hooks, then has her hung by her long blond hair until he, too, is finally destroyed by the Devil. A third judge steps forward and burns Christine at the stake for three days; next, he has her attacked by snakes; then he rips off her breasts, which spout milk instead of blood; finally, he has her tongue cut out—twice. Christine spits the last portion of her tongue in his face and, at last, dies. While hagiographies typically depict a similar series of tortures and punishments, this extensive listing provides a visually and emotionally arresting picture as the agent image. Because the purpose of Christine's system is to fix prudent and ethical behavior in the minds of her female readers, hagiographies provide familiar and intensely vivid imagery to reinforce the final agent images of this architectural mnemonic. With these exempla, the construction of the city is completed. *Justice* turns the city over to Christine, *parfaiite et bien fermee* (1031; "finished perfectly and well enclosed"; 254).

The true culmination of Christine's vision emerges in the closing address to her female readers, wherein she outlines her final instructions for the use and praxis of her memorial city. For, in training her readers' ethical memories, Christine is forming the citizens of the City of Ladies. She envi-

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sions the city as a specialized site for her reader's newly revised ethical memory, serving as both a *refuge* (1032; "refuge"; 254) and a "deffense et garde contre voz annemis et assaillans" (1032; "defense and guard against your enemies and assailants"; 254). The city is fashioned from virtue itself; as Christine explains, the city is "si relyuysant que toutes vous y povez mirer" (1032; "so resplendent that you may see yourselves mirrored in it"; 254). This image is also reminiscent of the initial narratorial crisis that prompted the city's construction; only now, Christine's inability to find her own experience mirrored in her reading has been resolved. And Christine presumes that the construction of this city has solved the same problem for her readers. However, she warns her readers not to misuse this new inheritance; rather, they should follow the example of the Virgin and, by inference, all the other ethical exempla; otherwise, the city will be closed to them forever. Her readers should *souviengne* (1035; "remember"; 256) the tricks of men and withstand them by remembering "par les vertus attraire et fouyr les vices" (1035; "to cultivate virtue, to flee vice"; 257). Ultimately, Christine advocates that, through the correct use of her memory city, women can expose the falsehoods and misinterpretations of anti-feminist authorities through their prudent and ethical feminine action: "Faittes les tous menteurs par monstrier vostre vertu et prouvés mençongeurs ceulx qui vous blasment par bien faire" (1034–35; "Make liars of them all by showing forth your virtue, and prove their attacks false by acting well"; 256).

Since the proper use of ethical memory for prudence and virtue is essential for citizenship in the City of Ladies, the structure of Christine's entire vision teaches this practice by providing the materials, as well as the space, for remembering. Throughout the *Cité*, Christine demonstrates that women are capable of such prudent and ethical memory and, furthermore, of prudent and ethical behavior derived from that memory. Accordingly, this City of Ladies constitutes a mnemonic space that provides her female readers with a formalized rhetorical system for the contemplation of personal ethics. By designing her textual city to serve as both moral defense and ethical guide, Christine draws on the mnemonic tools of medieval memory practice to effectively, and affectively, train the ethical memories of her female audience.

The culmination of Christine's didactic agenda synthesizes real and imagined structures in the construction of her City of Ladies, creating a memorial space that trains her female readers to develop their own intellectual realms. Fusing the real and the ideal, Christine draws upon imagery based on the physical structures that would have surrounded her

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female readers in their daily lives and on the familiar narrative models that would have been available to them. She revises these conventional locales and stories, refashioning the anti-feminist view of "Woman" residing within her readers' cultural memory. In the process of crafting her new pro-feminist paradigm of "Woman," Christine creates a cerebral citadel peopled by the exemplary heroines who will guide her female readers in the prudent exercise of their natural gifts, uninhibited by the restrictive anti-feminist assumptions suffusing the debate tradition. Constructed to remain forever in the minds of its readers, this newfound capital of feminine consciousness serves as a textual and temporal guide for its citizens, instructing them in the ways of becoming the reflective and ethical selves, the good women Christine knows them to be.

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NOTES

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¹ This literary and philosophical debate over the definition of the nature of "Woman," particularly her moral status, was a commonplace rhetorical matter throughout the classical, patristic, and medieval periods, and continued well into the Renaissance. The debate also served a didactic function, with the question "What is a Woman?" used as a generic topos in the Latin colloquies of both classical and medieval education. As Christine herself observed of the debate's longevity: "They [clerks] give these [i.e. anti-feminist] texts out to their youngest lads, / To schoolboys who are young and new in class, / Examples given to indoctrinate / So they'll retain such doctrine when they're grown" ("L'Epistre au Dieu d'Amours" 147).

² While contemporary criticism has tended to focus on the anti-feminist stance, the classical and medieval debate consistently presented itself as a binary dialogue, encompassing both anti-feminist and pro-feminist positions: either blaming Woman for her inherent evil, usually defined as inconstancy and fickleness, or praising her essential goodness, defined as her constancy and stability. The debate as a two-sided dialectic of both blame and praise is a subject only recently addressed in the critical literature: see Glenda McLeod, *Virtue and Venom*; Alcuin Blamires, Karen Pratt, and C. W. Marx; Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "Jean de Fèvre's *Livre de Leesce*: Praise or Blame of Women?"; and Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture*. See also the series of articles examining the debate tradition throughout the medieval period in the recent anthology *Gender in Debate from the Early Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, edited by Thelma S. Fenster and Clare A. Lees.

³ Quotations from *La Livre de la Cité des Dames* are cited by page number from the edition by Maureen Cheney Curnow. English translations are cited by page number from the translation by Earl Jeffrey Richards.

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⁴ As Roberta Krueger asks: "Did women accept without questioning either misogynistic attacks or idealization?" (30).

⁵ The "querelle de la Rose" was a late fourteenth-century French literary debate over the reception of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's *Le Roman de la Rose*. See Eric Hicks; see also Joseph L. Baird and John R. Kane.

⁶ Judith Fetterly explains that, "as readers and teachers and scholars, women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny," which results in women who are "immasculated" readers (xx). Although analyzing American texts, Fetterly's conception of the immasculated reader—and that of the reader who "resists" such immascultation by reading the female back into the text—can be usefully applied to many literary periods. In a more medieval context, Susan Schibanoff suggests that the misogynist text is a "fixed" structure, already systematically arranged "in 'Christine's' mentality and memory and in the written traditions of Western literature and philosophy" (85–86).

⁷ Wolfgang Iser has described this kind of receptive division as one that is not "between the subject and object, but between subject and himself" (155). Note also that, for Iser, the reader is always male.

⁸ This allegory of the superficial female reader was often combined with another metaphor of gendered reading as an "attack on the body of the text's truth," which gave the "image of destructive reader as female its special appeal, especially for authors who are male" (Noakes, *Timely Reading* 109). See also Noakes's discussion of how women are depicted as misreaders throughout the Western tradition in "On the Superficiality of Women."

⁹ Notably, the "querelle" itself demonstrates that principle in action: "Inadvertently, Jean's defenders proved Christine's point. Although they continued to justify the morality of the *Roman* on the basis of an ideal reading—their reading—increasing frustration with Christine's attack led them to admit that other readers were, in fact, understanding the work differently, or, in their terms, misreading it" (Schibanoff 94; italics hers).

¹⁰ See Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture and The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric and the Making of Images 400–1200*. See also Judson Boyce Allen for the connection between memory and ethics.

¹¹ Note that Christine's hermeneutical crisis is prompted by what she experiences while reading.

¹² For more detailed studies on how Christine refutes specific anti-feminist texts, see the following: Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski's "Christine de Pizan and the Misogynistic Tradition"; Maureen Quilligan; Glenda McLeod, "Poetics and Antimisogynist Polemics in Christine de Pizan's *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*" as well as her *Virtue and Venom*; Kevin Brownlee, "Literary Genealogy and the Problem of the Father"; Glenda McLeod and Katharina Wilson, "A Clerk in Name Only—A Clerk in All But Name: The Misogamous Tradition and 'La Cité des Dames'"; and Patricia Phillipy, "Establishing Authority: Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus* and Christine de Pizan's *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*."

¹³ Enders focuses on the rhetorical implications of the architectural mnemonic, particularly its ability to engender speech, in "The Feminist Mnemonics of Christine de Pizan," while McLeod briefly suggests the possibility of the *Cité* as an architectural mnemonic in "Poetics and Antimisogynist Polemics in Christine de Pizan's *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*." On the other hand, David Cowling argues in *Building the Text: Architecture as Metaphor in Late Medieval and Early Modern France* that the *Cité* employs an architectural metaphor, but not an architectural mnemonic. For detailed accounts of the history and practice of architectural mnemonics, see Francis A. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, especially chapters 1–4; Mary Carruthers, "Italy, Ars Memorativa, and Fame's House," *The Book of Memory*, especially

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chapters 3 and 5, "The Poet as Master Builder: Composition and Locational Memory in the Middle Ages," and *The Craft of Thought*, especially chapter 1; see also Janet Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories: Studies in the Reconstruction of the Past*.

¹⁴ The principles of the architectural mnemonic were outlined in the classical period in Cicero's *De oratore*, in the rhetorical manual *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, and in Quintilian's *Institutio*. The twelfth century brought a revival of the architectural mnemonic by Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas and others; cf. Carruthers *Book of Memory*, chapter 4, and "Italy."

¹⁵ The phrase "treasure house" is from Pine-Coffin's translation of Augustine, while the Latin quotation is from the Watts edition.

¹⁶ As Carruthers suggests, these metaphors "center upon the notion of a *designed* memory as the inventory of all experiential knowledge" (*Book of Memory* 34; italics hers). See chapter 1 for a detailed discussion of these metaphors.

¹⁷ I am using Mary Carruthers's term *architectural mnemonic* rather than Francis Yates's *art of memory*, or the more common term, *mnemotechnics*, because the term *architectural mnemonic* helps to keep foregrounded the very specific visual image of the city that Christine is at such pains to create; see Carruthers, "Italy" 181.

¹⁸ In practice, an individual could choose a real or imaginary building, a series of buildings, even a street; what is central to both the classical and medieval traditions is that the architectural choice must provide an orderly and easily remembered scheme.

¹⁹ Obstacles to such a system include darkness, vagueness, overcrowding, wandering without purpose, and lack of direction. See Carruthers on *curiositas* as a memorial vice in *Craft of Thought* 82–84. See also Glenda McLeod for the connection between Cicero's description of loci as *illustris* and Boccaccio's use of *clarus* in relation to the *Cité* (*Virtue and Venom* 64–66).

²⁰ Despite the fact that the rhetorical authorities usually argue against setting up such a memory system for someone else (in fact, some have argued that this is why much of the literature is so vague in giving detailed specifics regarding loci and *imagines agentes*), Christine's contemporary female readers would not have had the kind of formal rhetorical education in which memory training was a commonplace, so she must adapt traditional principles for her untrained readers. Faced with such a novice audience, Christine first must refute what may already lie in their memories while at the same time creating the memorial images she wishes them to retain. In that sense, Christine constructs an implied female audience within the text that seems familiar with the texts and exempla she invokes although not formally schooled in them. Her historical audience is harder to define: unfortunately, as Krueger observed in 1993, "A comprehensive study of women's literacy and education in France from 1160–1500 remains to be written" (277, n.79).

²¹ Carruthers suggests that such meditative reveries are quite similar to the mental state necessary for rhetorical invention. The narrator of a dream vision can be found not just in bed asleep, but also sitting or standing in a chamber or study; he or she can be reading a book, staring into space, or even sitting with eyes closed and head in hands, but all are indicative of mental and literary invention. See *Craft of Thought* chapter 4.

²² Note how these images invoke the terminology of useful versus problematic memory systems.

²³ These images of establishing and shoring up the city's defenses mirror the narrator's own building endeavors at this point in the allegory.

²⁴ The long tradition of Dido as a chaste, wise ruler is outlined in Mary Louise Lord's "Dido as an Example of Chastity: The Influence of Example Literature."

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