ABSTRACT

Mythographers and Myth-Makers: Classical Mythology in Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* and Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la Cité des Dames*

Samantha Elmendorf

Director: Hope Johnston, Ph.D.

Although the role and prominence of ancient literature varied throughout the Middle Ages, it was never wholly absent. Myth is shaped by each retelling; medieval expectations for reading, interpreting, and writing affects the retelling and understanding of ancient literature. This thesis analyzes the role of classical mythology in two late-medieval works: Giovanni Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* and Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la Cité des Dames*. Boccaccio writes a humanist compendium of ancient women, giving a moralizing assessment of each biography through his euhemerist understanding of his ancient sources. Christine, in turn, uses Boccaccio's work as one of her primary sources rather than the ancients themselves, and she corrects Boccaccio's work to recast the women's biographies in order to aid in the defense of woman-kind. Both authors must mediate their own cultural inheritance and assumptions in order to record and, at times, make mythology.

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS:


_____

Dr. Hope Johnston, Department of English


APPROVED BY THE HONORS PROGRAM:


_____

Dr. Elizabeth Corey, Director


DATE: _____

MYTHOGRAPHERS AND MYTH-MAKERS:

CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY IN BOCCACCIO'S *DE MULIERIBUS CLARIS* AND

CHRISTINE DE PIZAN'S *LIVRE DE LA CITÉ DES DAMES*


A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Baylor University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Honors Program


By

Samantha Elmendorf


Waco, Texas

May 2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Myth has a quality of plasticity that allows it to be shaped each time it is retold. Regardless whether an author intends to preserve the meaning of a tale as he or she finds it or to recast a myth into a new mold, each time a story is presented, transmitted, translated, or received, it is imbued with fresh interpretation. This is amply evident in the reception of Classical mythology in the Middle Ages.

This study will focus on two late-medieval authors, Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375), an Italian scholar writing during the emergence of humanism, and Christine de Pizan (1364-1430), a poet writing for the French court in the midst of its rise to cultural preeminence. Both of these authors address the problem of how women of antiquity are presented in contemporary literature. Boccaccio writes a humanist compendium, *De mulieribus claris*, with the stated purpose to write about the deeds and lives of ancient women, a subject theretofore neglected in serious academic inquiry. Christine writes *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* in response to misogynistic attitudes about women in literary and scholarly discourses throughout the Middle Ages. The present study analyzes how each author acts as both mythographers and mythmakers through the manner in which they interact with their source material.

Although the role and prominence of ancient literature varied throughout the Middle Ages, it was never wholly absent. Medieval expectations for reading and interpreting mythology affects the presentation and understanding of ancient literature. In turn, Boccaccio and Christine must mediate their own cultural inheritance and assumptions in order to record and, at times, make their own mythology. As Alicia

Ostriker has observed, anytime a writer employs the use of myth, "the potential is always present that the use will be revisionist: that is, the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends . . . ultimately making cultural change possible."[1]

Through selected biographies in both *De mulieribus claris* and *Cité des dames*, I examine in depth the authors' selection of myths and details from their source materials and determine how their appropriation of myth aids the completion of their agendas. This thesis is divided into three primary chapters which lay a foundational understanding of medieval modes of reading, then apply this understanding to the texts of Boccaccio and Christine de Pizan, respectively.

Chapter One deals with the reading and use of the ancients throughout the Middle Ages. I review the different modes of medieval reading, including Christianized, euhemerist, and allegorical interpretations applied particularly to mythology. Then I discuss how the ancient corpus gained educational and political importance, with the status of *auctoritas* conferred to many of the authors. The classical tales were useful in the instruction of Latin and imparted both ethical and practical wisdom. Furthermore, they came to represent a culturally and intellectually thriving society.

Chapter Two turns to Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*. Although he is considered a father of the humanist movement, he is still an inheritor of medieval scholarship. He combines medieval models and styles with classical knowledge in order to shape humanistic discourse. Acting as textual mediator for ancient authors like Ovid and Vigil, Boccaccio effectively shapes the discourse on women in scholarship and literature.

---

[1] Ostriker (1982) 72.

Chapter Three turns to Christine de Pizan and her work, *Cité des dames*. She uses Boccaccio as a primary source for her material on myths. However, Christine takes a defensive stance against misogynistic scholarly and literary attitudes, portraying women as active figures with a laudable capacity for skill, learning, and virtue. Christine engages with several voices of authority accepted in medieval scholarship and joins the compendia and exempla traditions to construct a city based on the lives of exemplary women.

Boccaccio ostensibly sets out to record the lives of ancient women, although his compendium proves to be full of ambiguous underlying attitudes. Christine's purpose, on the other hand, is to present the women not as isolated and historical lives, but as examples of women engaging in social, political, and intellectual capacities. Ultimately, however, both authors present new interpretations of the myths as a result of navigating different cultural circumstances.

CHAPTER ONE

Reading Classics in the Middle Ages

*Rightly Reading*

Two early church fathers, Jerome and Augustine, encountered problems of how one ought to approach pagan stories and the texts of the ancients well before the Middle Ages. Jerome, in his epistle to Eustochium, describes the daily conduct of a devout Christian and the secular pitfalls to be wary of. Despite his own love of reading and admiration for the ancients, especially for Cicero, he asks "What does Horace have to do with the Psalter, Virgil with the Gospels, and Cicero with Paul?"[1] Later in the letter he claims that in a dream he is declared a Ciceronian, not a Christian, after which he promptly puts aside the ancients and studies scripture with more zeal. Augustine experienced a similar repentance of his love of Latin literature in his boyhood studies. He questions, "What is more pitiable than a wretch not pitying himself and weeping over the death of Dido, which happened by loving Aeneas, but not weeping for his own death by not loving you, O God?"[2]

It would seem both Jerome and Augustine repented their time spent reading the great orations of Cicero and the renowned narratives of Virgil. These titans in Christian learning did not wholly condemn reading pagan authors, though. In fact, they recommend

---

[1] Jerome, *Epistle* 22.29. *Quid facit cum psalterio Horatius? cum evangeliis Maro? cum apostolo Cicero?* All translations in this chapter are my own unless otherwise noted.

[2] Augustine, *Confessions* 1.13. *Quid enim miserius misero non miserante se ipsum et flente Didonis mortem, quae fiebat amando Aenean, non flente autem mortem suam, quae fiebat non amando te, deus.*

in what instances the ancient authors can be useful in the study of scripture. Jerome likens pagan learning to a slave whose services ultimately benefit the master, that is, Christian truth, if she first is prepared and ordered as in Deuteronomy 21:11-12.[3] Augustine likewise uses a scriptural reference (Exodus 3:22, 12:35-36) to support his claim that "if those who are called philosophers, especially the Platonists, have perhaps said anything that is true and suitable to our faith, not only are those things not to be dreaded, but we ought to liberate those things for our own use from those possessing it unlawfully, as it were."[4]

Medieval readers and interpreters of texts had several different methods of recognizing pagan truth and relating it to its Christian master. Myth in particular posed a problem to a deeply Christian medieval audience because it was perceived as an integral part of Greco-Roman pagan religion. A justification for such material reconciled the pagan literature with Christian truths.

Indeed, medieval readers and writers recognized several different layers of meaning for understanding any text. The twelfth century Florentine poet Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) described his *Commedia* as "polysemantic," and he uses the several layers of meaning in scripture to illustrate the several layers of meaning in his own work. In a letter that he wrote to his patron, Cangrande della Scala, Dante provides a brief introduction for how to approach reading his work:

---

[3] Jerome, *Epistle* 21.13.

[4] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* 2.122. *Philosophi autem qui vocantur, si qua forte vera et fidei nostrae accommodata dixerunt, maxime Platonici, non solum formidanda non sunt, sed ab eis etiam tamquam ab iniustis possessoribus in usum nostrum vindicanda.*

> Therefore regarding the evidence of the things I am about to say, it ought to be known that the sense of such a work is not simple, on the contrary it is can be called polysemantic, that is, of many senses; the first sense is that which is conveyed through the letter, the second is that which is conveyed through the significance of the letter. And the first is called the literal, the second, however, is called allegorical or anagogical.[5]

He further explains what he gleans by literal and allegorical meanings through the example of Psalms 114:1-2, which describes the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. Dante differentiates two broad categories of understanding: the historical (or literal) and allegorical. Further, he lists the different allegorical senses, including moral, anagogical, and allegory itself.[6] In many ways Dante's letter reflects how a medieval audience read texts and how writers approached myth's relationship to truth in the Middle Ages. The different layers of understanding are present in medieval interpretations of the ancients and their mythology.

One method of interpretation was to read ancients as though they themselves were Christian.[7] Medieval audiences often approached Virgil in this way, especially interpreting his *Eclogue 4* as a Messianic poem foretelling the birth of Christ. The poem addresses a boy whose birth will bring about a new Golden Age for the world. It is easy to see how a medieval audience would readily interpret the boy as Christ, but Virgil in

---

[5] Dante, letter to Cangrande della Scala §7. *Ad evidentiam itaque dicendorum, sciendum est quod istius operis non est simplex sensus, immo dici potest* polysemos*, hoc est plurium sensuum; nam primus sensus est qui habetur per literam, alius est qui habetur per significata per literam. Et primus dicitur literalis, secundus vero allegoricus, sive mysticus.*

[6] For a discussion of the layers of meaning and understanding regarding the use of scripture and myth in Dante's *Commedia*, see Charles S. Singleton, "In Exitu Israel de Aegypto," *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, vol. 118, 2000, pp. 167- 187.

[7] Kallendorf (2007) 32.

fact made reference to the dawning reign of Augustus.[8] Whenever the poet himself could not be Christianized, his poetic form was. Theodulus' eclogue mimics Virgil's eclogues; he maintains the dialogue format but replaces the pastoral figures Tityrus and Meliboeus with the allegorical figures Pseustis (Liar) and Alithia (Truth), and Phronesis (Reason) moderates discussion. Pseustis recites stories from mythology, but Alithia responds with stories from the Old Testament, effectively winning the poetic contest. This tenth century poem modeled upon Virgil served as a Christian corrective for pedagogical purposes. As Ernst Curtius says, "it was eminently suited to teach, and at the same time to detoxicate, mythology."[9] This approach to define or remodel pagan authors as Christian is one of the most easily recognizable attempts to reconcile the classical tradition with a medieval readership. Other methods involved a non-literal interpretation that integrated pagan myths into a medieval understanding of the world.

The euhemerist interpretation attempted to impose a historical reading on myth. The historical theory claims that the myths of the classical period are stories about real men, women, and events that actually occurred. Over time, these stories grew in grandeur and exaggeration until they came to remember extraordinary people as more than mortal and describe explainable events in the terms of the supernatural.

The euhemerist method of interpretation took root in the Middle Ages through the encyclopedic tradition. Writers aimed to compile facts about a given subject, but there was little room for the fictions of literature. Isidore de Seville (560-636) is one such

---

[8] Virgil, *Eclogue 4.*

[9] Curtius (1953) 261.

compiler. In his *Etymologiae* he notes that the gods and their stories which he records are mortal men worshipped for their lives and merits:

> Tradition tells that those whom the pagans thought to be gods used to be men, and that among the pagans they came to be worshipped after their death on account of their lives and merits: thus Isis in Egypt, Zeus in Crete, Juba among the Moors, Faunus among the Latins, and Quirinus among the Romans. Likewise, Minerva in Athens, Juno in Samos, Venus in Paphos, Vulcan at Lemnos, Liber at Naxos, Apollo in Delos. Poets participated in praising them and by composing songs in their honor, they transported them to heaven.[10]

He thus humanizes the gods of several different mythologies with one sweeping application of historicism.[11] He attributes his statement to "tradition," yet his own treatment of pagan literature both in interpretation and organization in the *Etymologiae* set a precedent for how future scholars would read pagan myths, and the work even became a major source on ancient learning throughout much of the Middle Ages.

Moralizing the text through allegory was another interpretive lens to justify classics as useful for Christianity. Allegory cast the figures of myth as symbolic and stories taught a lesson for the reader cunning enough to discover the moral truth under the literal meaning. Such a moralizing interpretation of mythology became so extensive as the "universal vehicle of all pious expression" by the twelfth century that it was termed a *philosophia moralis,* which exposed not only moral illustrations but sacred truths as well.[12] A popular example of an allegorized figure is Orpheus. This poet and singer who descended into the underworld to rescue his beloved portrays (in popular allegorical

---

[10] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae 8.2*, from Brisson (2004) 129.

[11] Brisson (2004) 129-130.

[12] Seznec (1961) 90. The term *philosophia moralis* was coined by Hildebert of Lavardin, bishop of Tours, in his eleventh century work *Patrologia Latina*.

interpretation) as a typological figure for Christ. Such a moralization is closely related to the first method identified, that is, of Christianizing a text. Throughout the Middle Ages he is identified as a model lover, a savior, or a magician, and each of these personas reflect another aspect of Christ.[13] In his study of classical theories of allegory, Philip Rollinson makes it clear that allegory was not a medieval invention, but a method of interpretation practiced by the Hellenistic ancients as well. In any age the assumptions of allegory are the same: the author focuses on the means of expression to convey the intended meaning, but the interpreter wishes to see through the manner of expression to unveil the intended meaning;[14] therefore, the interpreter of allegory begins with the premise that there is a deeper meaning.

Perhaps the most famous medieval example of allegory is the *Ovide moralisé*. The huge undertaking (nearly 72,000 lines, far exceeding the length of Ovid's original epic) not only translates Ovid's *Metamorphoses* into vernacular French but also expands many tales by offering extra details, interpretations, and explanations that relate Ovid's myths to the Christian narrative and Christian piety. In several parts of the text, the author implies that the purpose of the work is to provide a reading of classics with a Christian purpose. The author suggests that ancient texts contain truths veiled in metaphor, and the medieval poet must uncover these truths.[15] To an extent, the project puts biblical exegesis and interpretation of classics on the same level. Such a reading lends the same dignity of

---

[13] Vicari (1982) 65.

[14] Rollinson (1981) 18.

[15] Blumenfeld-Kosinski (1997) 134.

scripture to classics, and classics can be equally useful for learning scriptural truths. In

Book Five, the poet uses the Last Judgement as a metaphor for how one should write:

> One must choose the good over the bad and read and reread one's book,
> and search all through it, and if there is a fault, correct it. . . . He should
> erase and add without delay, if he finds something to correct, and write
> diligently those things that he will read openly before the Master at the
> great disputation.[16]

Rightly reading classics is to do so with the intent of uncovering the truth. Medieval

interpretations are often through the lens of historicism and allegory in order to perceive

Christian truths. Likewise, correct writing attempts to convey only what is true. As we

will see, Boccaccio and Christine de Pizan use multiple methods of interpreting

mythology in order present the stories in a manner that conveys truth. Boccaccio

expresses his intent to moralize the stories from a euhemerist reading to serve as

examples, and Christine heavily relies on allegory for the same intent.

### *Classical Authors and* Auctoritas

The concept of *auctoritas* is tied to an author's ability to convey truth. An *auctor*

is someone regarded as a reliable and proficient in a subject, that is, the author is able to

speak truly about his subject. They are sources for technical information, worldly

wisdom, and even philosophy about the human experience.[17] An *auctor* is specifically the

authoritative person (or text), and their writings confer *auctoritas*.[18] In the very act of

expressing truth in the manifestation of a written text, the *auctor* simultaneously imitates

---

[16] *Ovide moralisé* 5.2400-2403, 2418-2423. Translation from Blumenfeld-Kosinski (1997) 132.

[17] Curtius (1953) 58.

[18] For a more complete discussion of the semantics and development in use of these terms, see Jan
M. Ziolkowski, "Cultures of Authority in the Long Twelfth Century," *The Journal of English and
Germanic Philology*, vol. 108, no. 4, 2009, pp. 421-448.

God's ability to create and provides a model for others[19]—the *auctor* becomes an authoritative example of how to imitate and in turn to be imitated.

Initially, the church did not place high value or emphasis on pagan texts. In the monastic libraries, spiritual and ecclesiastical texts were given precedence over the writings of ancients. These texts were useful insofar as they could be used for educational purposes; pagan authors were often reduced to teaching books and manuals.[20] Texts with *auctoritas* formed the backbone of the medieval education system structured through the *trivium* and *quadrivium*. In the beginning stages of this curriculum, students learned grammar through Latin texts, predominately classical texts. The standard curriculum used both Christian and classical authors throughout, but the latter remained in large part for their ethical value.[21] The commentary and gloss tradition played an important role in receiving these pagan authors for the purpose of education. A gloss mediated pagan authors to filter decidedly non-Christian themes towards a reading that ultimately reflected truths held by the Church.

The three Vatican Mythographers serve as an example of reframing texts with *auctoritas* for educational purposes. Each wrote a handbook to facilitate reading and appropriating the mythical figures, themes, and places in terms that agreed with Christian teachings. The First Mythographer does little to explain why his work is necessary, but the Second Mythographer says myths are in fact fables meant to expound on the morals of human beings. The Third Mythographer states his purpose to "refute in turn some

[19] Szpiech (2013) 63.

[20] Reynolds and Wilson (1991) 82.

[21] Curtius (1953) 49.

unexplained errors of antiquity" by explaining the symbolism within myth in a Christian context. The handbooks of the Vatican Mythographers intended to facilitate what they deemed an appropriate reading of the classical poets, yet they had the additional effect of solidifying the poets as *auctors*.[22]

A commentary, gloss, or a teacher's explanation and control of access to a text acted as a filter for pagan *actors*, and the interpreter was something of an authority on the text.[23] Often the teacher or the gloss filtered texts through interpretation and maintained a fine balance between what the author literally says for the student to translate and what the author likely meant, for the edification of the student's understanding.

*The Educational and Political Importance of Classics*

We have now seen how classics were read in such a way that justified their survival among a medieval Christian culture; the following section will discuss the conditions of this survival. In the early Middle Ages, the preservation of cultural and intellectual life shifted into the hands of the church, and writings both secular and ecclesiastical relied largely on the monastic literary tradition. Over the centuries, classical texts secured their place in the cultural sphere of education, often through policies motivated by political agendas.

The eighth and ninth centuries saw the first major revival of classical texts, the Carolingian Renaissance, through the implementation of educational programs intended to improve literacy and better equip the clergy to deal with sacred scripture. King

---

[22] Pepin (2008) 4, 101, 102.

[23] Reynolds (2000) 8, 12.

Charlemagne of France determined that the clergy needed not only a better grasp of the Latin language, but also a broader range of learning to increase their wisdom. The Carolingian Renaissance sparked an intellectual revival that started in the courts of Charlemagne with efforts directed at the clergy that reached even the laity as they gained increased access to education.[24] The *Admonitio generalis* issued in 789 set forth legislation for this educational and ecclesiastical reform. It aimed to regulate liturgical practices, to ensure uniform application of the Benedictine rule, and to provide training in the mastery of Latin as the liturgical language. Nearly seven thousand manuscripts survive from this period, many from an influx of late antique texts brought from Italy and copied in France.[25] The intellectual atmosphere encouraged by the policies of Charlemagne's court allowed ancient authors a place in medieval learning, and they benefited from the burst in scribal activity in copying and circulating texts. The eighth and ninth centuries greatly favored Virgil, indicated by the sheer number of manuscripts copied, followed by Lucan, Terence, Solinus, and Juvenal. Horace gained popularity in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and Ovid did not reach his peak in popularity until the twelfth century.[26]

The Twelfth Century Renaissance represented a second major revival of classical texts. They were still integral to the education system, now with a new interest for ancient wisdom. Several factors contributed to the cultural renaissance of this century: the ancients were discovered to be a wealth of information for technical writings, such as

---

[24] Contreni (2008) 709, 711.

[25] Hunt, Smith, and Stok (forthcoming).

[26] Ibid.

law, medicine, rhetoric, and logic; literacy grew in the lay population rather than just the clergy; increased wealth and secular tends in the arts and letters directed many people to previously disregarded pagan writings.[27] This period of renaissance was not born simply from admiration of the classical past but for a love of the Latin language and its ability to strengthen Christian learning. The development of universities during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries shifted the cultural and intellectual centers away from the monastery, expanding the medieval audience of these works. The texts retained their sense of Christian morality, however.

In the fourteenth century, Charles V of France (1338-1380) implemented a program to translate authoritative classical and medieval texts into the vernacular French so that they would be more widely known among the people of France who were not trained in reading Latin. He commissioned over thirty translations and housed his library in the Louvre. In Christine de Pizan's biography of Charles V, she highlights the moral and political implications of the enterprise.[28] As in previous periods, a political purpose directed towards education aided the renewal of classical texts. The education intended in this case, however, was one of moral examples and the wisdom of great ancient and medieval writers—the texts were not merely tools for learning Latin grammar for ecclesiastical purposes. Perhaps a greater motivation for displaying classical learning was for Charles to legitimize his rule with cultural and political power. The prologue of *Grandes chroniques de France,* a vernacular chronicle of the history of France, associates the cultural center of learning with God's favor, and it claims that during this time Paris

---

[27] Reynolds and Wilson (1991) 110.

[28] Sherman (1995) 6.

was the *fountain of clergie* which supported the church.[29] Charles V commissioned a copy of this chronicle to be updated for his own courts, thus associating his own court with both the center of learning and God's favor. In this way, Charles' emphasis on commissioning translations validated his reign as one that encouraged cultural growth under God's favor.

Each of these three periods of classical renewal exhibit the ideology of *translatio studii et imperii*. *Translatio* is not wholly understood by the narrow term "translation." A more apt modern day English word with a similarly broad range of meanings is "transfer." *Translatio studii et imperii* refers to the transfer of cultural power through learning and political power from one country to another.[30] Chrétien de Troyes writes in the opening of *Cligés*, "Our books have taught us that Greece had the first fame of chivalry and learning. Then came chivalry to Rome, and the sum of learning, which is come to France."[31] By the fourteenth century in Charles V's reign, the classics represented the *translatio* of cultural dominion from one universal empire to another.[32]

This concept of *translatio* greatly affects the writings of Christine de Pizan as she attempts to reconcile the examples of classical myths with her own portrayal of the medieval woman. In Boccaccio, the history of using pagan texts for educational and moralizing purposes is continued in his own writings, as he not only compiles myths but seeks to present them in a manner that informs a particular lifestyle of Christian piety.

---

[29] Walters (2003) 27.

[30] Ibid., 26.

[31] Chretéin de Troyes, *Cligés 30-35*. Translation from Curtius (1953) 385.

[32] Curtius (1953) 29.

*The Effects of Humanism*

From the fourteenth century to the middle of the sixteenth century, Europe saw a resurgence in the prominence of classical learning that began with the Italian Renaissance and spread to much of Western Europe. This Renaissance gained momentum from the humanist movement, a term coined by students at the time to describe the subject of their teachers' profession, "*umanista*," that is, the study of humans.[33] Although humanist ideals pervaded several areas of life, it maintained a central focus on classical literature and its teaching, study, and promotion.

Humanism boasts several distinct figures who made way for the Renaissance to spread with unprecedented force. The earliest humanists, Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374) being prominent among these, collected, edited, and annotated a vast array of classics. Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406) was influential in introducing a steady interest in Greek studies in Western Europe, and Poggio Bracciolini's (1380-1459) time nearly a century later is termed the Age of Discovery for the sheer quantity of classical texts he recovered. Although this is simply a brief catalogue of some of the leading figures in early humanism, it provides a sense of the several different methods of restoring classical learning, but all with the same intent to recover a great age of learning and literature.

Humanism is largely responsible for not only the recovery of additional classical works but also for transforming the critical tradition for classical texts. Dante revolutionized medieval exegesis and mythography through popularizing the vernacular, the authorial persona as a character, and explication of human experience (not necessarily focused on spiritual or scriptural experience) through allegory, consequently popularizing

---

[33] Reynolds and Wilson (1991) 122.

the use of myth.34 Petrarch transformed medieval respect for authority into a conversation with authority. He not only regarded *auctors* as venerable sources of knowledge, but in his work *Res familiarum*, he writes letters to the literary and intellectual giants of antiquity, establishing a discourse of familiarity.

One of Boccaccio's influences in this period was to realign the relationship between poetry, theology, and philosophy. In his *Genealogia deorum gentilium*, a compendium containing genealogies related to the pagan gods, he identifies physical theology, that is, the practice of illustrating a theological truth with metaphor grounded in the physical world, with mythology. He turns to the wisdom of Aristotle, who claims that "he who wonders and is perplexed feels that he is ignorant, thus the myth-lover is in a sense a philosopher, since myths are composed of wonders."35 Boccaccio redeems myth as a way to explore how the human experience relates to the world, both physical and spiritual.36

By the end of the Renaissance, most of the classical literature extant today had been recovered.37 Humanists began to search out classics hidden away so they could copy manuscripts for their personal libraries. Both Greek and Latin texts were translated into the vernacular, thereby extending their audience. Once in the hands of individuals, there was more opportunity for varying interpretations of classical texts.

---

34 Chance (2014) 37.

35 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 982b. ὁ δ᾽ ἀπορῶν καὶ θαυμάζων οἴεται ἀγνοεῖν, διὸ καὶ ὁ φιλόμυθος φιλόσοφός πώς ἐστιν· ὁ γὰρ μῦθος σύγκειται ἐκ θαυμασίων.

36 Minnis (1988) 387-394.

37 Reynolds and Wilson (1991) 122.

The humanistic tradition did not wholly abandon medieval methods of reading. Despite the efforts of Petrarch to align the literature of the age with classical ideals, a medieval understanding of texts influences the humanistic tradition. Jane Chance notes that "the prime subjects of mythographic exegesis [are viewed as] classical heroes and famous men and women, rather than the gods who preceded them," and for this reason historical interpretation is often combined with allegorical interpretation in mythographic commentary. Boccaccio and Christine are both apart of this tradition that provides humanist commentary to the tradition of classical myths, but they cannot separate their own writings from either the cultural or literary traditions that preceded them.

*Conclusion*

Boccaccio and Christine de Pizan were inheritors of an evolving tradition. Classical texts experienced periods of revival that highlighted not only their educational value, but political and cultural importance as well: the Carolingian Renaissance saw the implementation of educational programs for classics, the development of the university during the Twelfth Century Renaissance provided a wider audience and interest in ancient wisdom, Charles V's literary programs established the classical tradition as indispensable for cultural and political *translatio*, and the Italian Renaissance nearly contemporary to the two writers at the focus of this study is ever present in the influences of humanism. Boccaccio and Christian de Pizan were writing at times when attitudes towards the classics were notably shifting.

The following chapters will show how Boccaccio and Christine de Pizan each compose a collection of classical myths to make a statement about the life of the virtuous Christian woman within the context of medieval practices of reading. They carefully

18

couch their writings in dialogue with *auctors* so that their own work can be received in the literary tradition of mythography, and each read, interpret, and write myth through the lens of what it means to read rightly.

CHAPTER TWO

Boccaccio: Re-Telling Myth

*Two Traditions*

Boccaccio stands between two traditions that are both evident in his works. His teacher Francesco Petrarch identified himself as "situated as if at the boundary of two peoples, looking at one and at the same time both forward and back,"[1] referring to the classical age that he longed for and an age that had yet to unfold before him. Boccaccio was similarly positioned between two intellectual, cultural, and literary worlds, yet he would have perhaps defined for himself different boundaries. Whereas Petrarch saw himself as in a direct line of conversation with the ancients, Boccaccio recognized the weight of the medieval tradition.

Boccaccio was a younger contemporary of Petrarch, and, although not as fastidious a scholar as Petrarch in copying texts, he showed great interest in creating his own compilations in dialogue with different genres and modes of interpretation, drawing from his extensive knowledge of classical sources.[2] He claims to model himself not after Theocritus, who wrote only literally without allegory, nor after Petrarch, who saw allegory in every aspect of a story; rather, he aligns himself with the great poet of Rome, Virgil, because he takes a middle path between allegory and literal meaning.[3] His

---

[1] Petrarch, *Rerum memorandarum* 1.2, quoted from Kallendorf (2010) 34. All translations in this chapter are provided by translated editions.

[2] See further Arduini (2015) 31-33, Boccaccio's writings reveal an interest in intertextuality and compendia in their composite nature of texts both erudite and literary spanning different genres.

[3] Gittes (2015) 160-161.

identification with Virgil has the further implication of declaring classicism itself, sans any mediatory author or interpretation, as his model and source. However, he was still the heir of the medieval ideology of what it means to read, interpret, and write properly—seen in his own tendency to historicize and moralize myths in his presentation of stories.

The presence of both the medieval and classical traditions results in the seemingly contradictory attitudes in *De mulieribus claris*. Boccaccio carefully situates his work in the scholarly tradition—one that, although in the process of being reshaped by humanist interests like his own, is still rooted in medieval precedents. The reader need only study a few of the biographies of women to encounter tensions in many facets of the text; the dedication and preface show this, too. The work is written about women, but women's accessibility to the text is questionable; the deeds recorded are exemplary of both virtue and vice, yet women are not expected to be able to emulate them. There are clear distinctions stated between pagan and Christian women, yet the lives of pagans are assessed with a Christian world view, thus Boccaccio blurs the lines between historiography and his own moralizing commentary.

As we've seen in the previous chapter, medieval textual mediators dealing with classical texts, especially mythology, have a tendency to obscure the text in an effort to preserve the morality. Boccaccio acts as a cultural mediator as much as a textual mediator. Glenda McLeod highlights Boccaccio's ties to medieval writing practices, noting in particular his zeal in amassing and categorizing information through compendia; the ordered dedication and preface stating intent, purpose, and method; the attitude towards *auctoritas* (although Boccaccio rarely names his sources); and the

authoritative manner of commenting with a moral purpose derived from the exempla.[4]

Although he does not intentionally break from the medieval expectations in style and

composition, he adjusts the interpretive filters he applies to accommodate classicism. He

does not conform to antiquity, but he holds up the literature, history, and individuals of

antiquity to be viewed more directly, evidenced by his intermixed presentation of history

and commentary in each biography.

Determining Boccaccio's attitudes and intentions are often tentative at best.

Pamela Benson asserts a profeminist reading of *De mulieribus claris*, but Alcuin

Blamires purports that Boccaccio has a much more ambivalent attitude towards women,

suggesting that Boccaccio supports the stereotype of women as the weaker sex, yet extols

women's ability to transcend the stereotype.[5] McLeod claims that Boccaccio takes a

conservative approach, saying that he does not offer a new perception of women, but that

he makes others possible.[6] Stephen Kolsky interprets Boccaccio's work as focused on

"active" women who are worthy of humanistic thought, whereas Margaret Franklin

proposes that the female exempla are actually guides for male behavior.[7]

Despite the far range of readings from interpreting Boccaccio as feminist to

misogynistic, he unquestionably played an essential role in shaping humanism and

humanistic discourse. Even with conflicting readings of Boccaccio's stance on women as

literary and social-political figures—particularly as seen through myth—he sets a

---

[4] McLeod (1991) 79.

[5] Benson (1992) 9; Blamires (1997) 70.

[6] McLeod (1991) 79.

[7] Kolskey (2003) 3; Franklin (2006) 7.

precedent for writing about women and acknowledging their deeds. This is made possible by his use of myth; Boccaccio is responsible for both the presentation of myth as a mythographer and the shaping of myth as a myth-maker. Boccaccio maintains a relationship with the past (with both classical and medieval thought) and establishes a new discourse that future readers can participate in, thus shaping his own role as both mythographer and myth-maker.

*Boccaccio's Works*

Most of Boccaccio's early works were written in the vernacular as he tried on different styles and models found in both classical and medieval sources. His early vernacular works were well-received. He arguably wrote the first Italian romance, *Filocolo,* rooted in the medieval penchant for romanticizing, Christianizing, and allegorizing classical characters.[8] Other works from his *Elegia* to the *Decameron* show a progression of styles incorporating classical sources into forms more or less rooted in medieval style.[9] Boccaccio brings new life to antiquity in his works, but he does not divorce himself from medieval traditions or authors. Boccaccio notably recognizes Dante as one of the great poets, setting him among classical authors like Ovid, Virgil, Lucan, and Statius.[10] Although he claims that one can only follow after such authors in the use of

---

[8] A. E. Quagilo says "the framework [of the *Filocolo*] recalls either the structure of the thirteenth and fourteenth century epics of European extraction of the encyclopedias and anthologies of scholastic culture in which anecdotes, legends and provers of the Middle Ages are closely packed with classical sources." Quoted in Branca (1976) 46.

[9] Branca (1976) 41-54.

[10] Boccaccio, *Filocolo* v, 97, 5-6.

classical themes and style, he sets the medieval poet Dante among them, and perhaps envisions that he, too, will join their ranks.

Boccaccio composed many of his later works in Latin, which amassed information about the classical world in several volumes of compendia. The *Geneologia deorum gentilium* is the great mythological treatise of his time; *De montibus* is a catalogue of cultural geography, covering both classical and contemporary landmarks; and two works devoted to the moralized biographies of notable men and women, *De casibus virorum illustrium* and *De mulieribus claris*, respectively.[11] The classical influence is readily apparent, the works were devoted to a literary investigation of different aspects of the classical world. The medieval influence permeates the structure and narrative style of the works. The encyclopedic nature of the works recalls Isidore de Seville's own *Etymologiae* and subsequent medieval encyclopedias that intended to catalogue all known information about a subject. The narrative style in the *De casibus* and *De mulieribus* also seems to stem from the medieval methods of reading by applying euhemerist, allegorical, and moralized perspectives to the biographies. This seamless blend in traditions is distinctively humanistic. It would prompt later prominent scholars to identify Boccaccio as a founder of humanism, and the nineteenth-century cultural historian Jacob Burckhardt to declare that Boccaccio "had ushered in a new age, animated by a new spirit, and defined by a new relationship to the world of antiquity."[12]

---

[11] Branca (1976) 111-112.

[12] Burckhardt (2002) 141.

*De mulieribus claris*

     *De mulieribus claris* is notable as perhaps the earliest example of a compilation about women. Boccaccio began the work in 1361, and he continued its revision up until 1375. It is useful to distinguish this work, among Boccaccio's other later works of compendia, as scholarly in nature, unlike his earlier poetic pursuits, shifting deliberately from the vernacular to Latin as part of this transition. However, Boccaccio's use of Latin in writing *De mulieribus claris* is one of several problematic features of the work's structure and composition. Further, *De mulieribus* is the only work for which Boccaccio does not provide a framing narrative cornice.[13] He does not attempt to link the biographies with anything external to each individual life.  Although a few women had the benefit of education, they were not the majority and by no means expected to engage with an erudite compendia without mediation. On one hand, the use of Latin centers the work in a predominately male discourse.[14] On the other hand, the work recognizes women and their capacity for intellect and action in history and introduces the subject to male scholarship and thought.[15]

     Boccaccio reasons that the volume should be dedicated to a distinguished lady "since women are the subject of the book."[16] Although addressed to women and dedicated to Andrea, he also says the work was initially written "more for my friends'

---

[13] Kolsky (2003) 9.

[14] Kolsky (2003) 46. For more on female learning in the age of humanism, see Part Three: *Courts and Courtiers in Renaissance Northern Italy* in Kolsky (2009).

[15] Shemek (2015) 104.

[16] Boccaccio, *De mulieribus claris* Dedication. Translations for Boccaccio are from Virginia Brown's 2001 edition.

pleasure than for the advantage of the broader public."[17] Benson understands the text as including men in a text about women, and the text is intended to be accessible by women despite the distance caused by the use of Latin. The humanist movement, it should be noted, provided educational opportunities for upper-class women, allowing them to participate in the literature, if not the scholarship. Women can read the deeds but not translate the deeds into ethical principle, thus the necessity of the exemplum format to better present and well as instruct.[18]

Boccaccio progresses through the biographies in chronological order, beginning with the first woman, Eve. Consistent among each chapter, though, is the internal structure of the lives. Boccaccio first introduces each woman with a sentence or two telling who she is and where she comes from, and then he continues with an account of the deeds that made her famous or historically notable. This account is followed with narrator commentary, often moralizing the account, suggesting a historical explanation, sometimes offering a vague explanation of sources, and almost always exhorting either women to use the example or men in how to regard or raise women. The individual lives resemble the genre of medieval exempla used in sermons for moral-didactic purposes. Under humanistic influences, the exemplum became "a mirror of life" accessible in compendia independently from sermons.[19] *De mulieribus claris* takes on a historical-didactic tone, and includes women in the readership, thus beginning the humanist trend of

---

[17] Ibid.

[18] Benson (1992) 16.

[19] Tubach (1962) 412.

inviting women into literary and educated spheres of readership.[20]  Boccaccio likely did

not choose Latin as a means of excluding women from the text, but as a means of

situating women as a subject worthy of scholarly discourse.

*Boccaccio's Sources*

Despite the relationship to medieval compendia and exempla traditions as well as

the humanist agendas for both readership and presentation, Boccaccio's inspiration and

material are deeply rooted in classicism. Early humanists—including Petrarch and

Boccaccio—believed that the knowledge of classical antiquity "represented an almost

inexhaustible source of wisdom that Christian thought could and should assimilate."[21]

Boccaccio expands the humanist reach of study within the context and expected readings

of traditional medieval literature, and he opens a viable discourse for considering the

value of ancient literature and history.

Boccaccio was greatly influenced by the ancient poets, and his works are littered

with themes, allusions, and even direct retellings of many of their tales. Virgil and Ovid

figure most prominently among Boccaccio's sources, and he takes especial interest in

their mythologies. Boccaccio relies heavily on Ovid's *Fasti*, *Metamorphoses*, and

*Heroides*; throughout his works, Ovid came in second to Virgil alone as a mythological

source.[22] In *De mulieribus claris*, however, Ovid is a source for over a fifth of the

---

[20] See Bergin (1981) 249f, for historical-didacticsm; Cf. Patricia Phillippy, who considers the female audience as secondary to a male audience. She suggests that "the work appears not as a book of exempla for women, but as part of the scholarly discourse of humanism," and she notes lack of examples suitable for imitation, Phillippy (2002) 169.

[21] Barsella (2006) 16.

[22] Black (2011) 130.

biographies of 106 women, most of these mythological figures are treated in the first half

of the text. Virgil falls behind Ovid, but not for lack of influence. His *Aeneid* and

*Georgics* are often referenced, and Boccaccio shows a high regard for his poetics in

*Genealogia*:

> [From the poetry of Virgil] the sap of philosophy runs pure. Then is any
> reader so muddled as not to see clearly that Virgil was a philosopher; or
> mad enough to think that he, with all his deep learning, would, merely for
> the sake of displaying his eloquence, in which his powers were indeed
> extraordinary, have led the shepherd Aristeus into his mother Climene's
> presence in the depths of the earth, or brought Aeneas to see his father in
> Hades?[23]

For Boccaccio, poetry combines eloquence and wisdom in order to convey moral truths,

and he lauds Virgil as a prime model.[24] However, Boccaccio does not propose an

uncritical view in reading even the most distinguished of ancient poets: although he often

refers to Virgil for inspiration and material, he attempts in *De mulieribus claris* to draw

out the moral truths from the poetic narrative in his presentation and commentary on the

lives.

The *Aeneid* was not approached by any serious medieval scholar without also

referring to Servius, a late-fourth, early-fifth century grammarian. His commentary on

Virgil, *In Vergilii Aeneidem commentarii*, often applies allegorical readings to Virgil

throughout his *Commentarii*, which shaped the way Virgil was read in the Middle Ages

and likely appealed to Boccaccio's predilection to draw out the philosophical intentions

---

[23] Boccaccio, *Genealogia* 14.10.20-26.

[24] Kallendorf (1983) 40-42.

of the classical poet.[25] Servius' commentary is thorough, and often serves as a source for women's biographies that Virgil himself does not address.

Roman historians are a key source for many of the latter biographies, where Boccaccio refers extensively to historiographers such as Tacitus, Suetonius, and Valerius Maximus. Livy's influence on Boccaccio extended beyond citations of source material. Boccaccio was intimately familiar with Livy's works and even completed translation of the third and fourth decades of *Ab urbe condita*.[26] Boccaccio's didactic use of historical material is clearly influenced by what Livy defines as the purpose of writing histories:

> What chiefly makes the study of history wholesome and profitable is this, that you behold the lessons of every kind of experience set forth as on a conspicuous monument; from these you may choose for yourself and for your own state what to imitate, from these mark for avoidance what is shameful in the conception and shameful in the result.[27]

Livy uses history to make a moral assessment on the past in order to inform how to appropriately live in the present and determine a moral trajectory for the future. A stylistic technique that Boccaccio borrows from Livy is the juxtaposition of events and people. Livy often frames elements of his history in its opposites—a virtuous man may appear between the characterizations of two wicked men, or a detestable event may be presented as the natural result of a series of events leading to that inevitable point. Livy does not often state his opinion outright, but frames the history of Rome in such a way that the reader makes a judgement of what is beneficial or ill for the city. This model

---

[25] Jones (1961) 217, Baswell (1985) 183.

[26] Branca (1976) 77.

[27] Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 1.1.10-12.

influenced Boccaccio's own presentation of individuals;[28] he rarely concludes with a definitive judgement on whether an action or behavior was virtuous or deplorable, but he lets the biography serve as a starting point of a commentary that looks towards the morality of posterity.

When Boccaccio was confronted with conflicting sources, he would most often turn to Eusebius, a third century Greek historian, and author of the *Chronicon*. His chronicle of the history of the world likely would not have had much influence in the Middle Ages if Jerome had not rendered it into a Latin translation in 382 AD. The work quickly became the authoritative historical encyclopedia in the West.[29] Eusebius contextualized his chronicle in a Christian framework, so Boccaccio often used the work as a final authority of historical difference among the sources.

Boccaccio's sources influenced *De mulieribus claris* on levels that extend beyond source material. Ancient poets, Ovid and Virgil in particular, are found throughout his works, but Boccaccio's attitudes towards the use and writing of poetry deeply affect how he approaches their mythology in his compendium. He reads the myths critically and narrates them in order to reveal philosophical truths. Ancient historians prove no less an influence in how Boccaccio chooses to approach myth from a historiographic perspective. Even mythic figures have a place in select Roman histories for what they can reveal about the nature of the state's foundation, progress, and values. Finally, the sources preeminent as tomes of information throughout the Middle Ages were not neglected by Boccaccio. From Eusebius to Isidore de Seville, the use of these works links

---

[28] Gittes (2008) 225-227.

[29] Mosshammer (1979) 38.

Boccaccio to medieval knowledge and its reading of the classical era. Boccaccio does not wish to depart from this trove of knowledge and wisdom, even as he chooses to revisit myths with a humanistic assessment.

*The Biographies*

In the following pages, I will examine the biographies of three goddesses: Ceres, Minerva, and Venus. Although there are several biographies that show evidence of Boccaccio's ancient influences, I selected three in order to examine in further depth the relationship between the text and the sources.[30] The women's identity as goddesses establishes them as mythic, whereas several of the mortal women have a tenuous relationship between history and fable. Furthermore, the three goddesses appear early in the chronology and early in the text, affording them unique positions as shapers of humanity and civilization.

*Ceres*

One of the most cohesive accounts of Ceres is laid out in Ovid's *Fasti*, which describes the festival days of Rome and the reasons for celebration or worship of particular individuals. The first attribute Ovid names of Ceres is her role in the harvest, saying that "there is no need to declare the reason; the bounty and the services of the goddess are manifest."[31] Before Ceres introduced the means and methods to cultivate the land, humanity lived off of herbs, grass, and leaves: anything the earth yielded of its own

---

[30] For a brief listing of the citations to ancient sources in each biography, see the Notes of Virginia Brown's edited edition (2001).

[31] Ovid, *Fasti* 4.393-4.

accord. The options were so slim that the discovery of the acorn vastly improved their diets. Virgil also identifies the acorn as the primary substance of their diet; before Ceres' gift, the "earth changed Chaonia's acorn for the rich [grain]."[32] Boccaccio is keen to pick up on the repeated detail of the acorns in his own account of Ceres.[33] The landscape of the earth and the lifestyle of humanity vastly alters when Ceres invents the means and methods of farming: "Ceres was the first to turn the globe with the hooked plowshare; she first gave [grain] and kindly sustenance to the world."[34] In *Fasti*, Ovid attributes to Ceres the results of harvest, and in *Metamorphoses* he is more specific, noting that her invention of farming equipment brought about this advancement. Boccaccio takes these elements and describes in greater detail each step in the lengthy processes involved in providing food for humanity heretofore mentioned in the sources. After all, according to Ovid, "all things are the gift of Ceres."[35]

Thus far, Boccaccio has presented Ceres in a fairly typical manner, and the inclusion of details like the acorns humanity depended on hints towards his sources. However, the Augustan poets claim that Ceres is responsible for even more than just the harvest. Cultivation of the land leads to cultivation of a civilization. Immediately after Ovid names the equipment she introduced in the *Metamorphoses*, he says that "she first gave laws."[36] In *Fasti* after "the upturned soil beheld the sun for the first time," he

---

[32] Virgil, *Georgics* 1.7-8. Here and elsewhere I have adjusted the translation of *arista* from "corn" to read "grain."

[33] Boccaccio, *De mulieribus claris* 5.1.

[34] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 5.341-3.

[35] Ibid., 5.343.

[36] Ibid., 5.343.

exclaims, "Copper was now held in esteem; iron ore still lay concealed; ah, would that it had been hidden forever!"[37] As food becomes abundant, it becomes a source of wealth and resource. Humanity then learns to value their harvest and place monetary value and greed upon it. After Virgil praises Ceres for the introduction of agriculture, he "must tell, too, of the hardy farmers' weapons, without which the crops could be neither sown nor raised."[38] Virgil does not directly lament the advancements of Ceres, perceiving that that humanity would likely starve without them, but the consequence of amassing personal stores and wealth is the need to protect it against violence.

Boccaccio picks up on these subtle mentions of the consequences of agriculture. His series of questions as to whether Ceres did more harm or good is nearly twice as long as the actual account her inventions and deeds. He cites cities, sustenance, appreciation of beautiful things, rational thought, directed human energy, empires, and customs as the results of cultivation—all good things truly seem to be rooted in the gifts of Ceres. Yet even these are countered by the resulting vices, including boundaries, 'yours' and 'mine', poverty, slavery, envy, war, and bloodshed. Ovid describes the Iron Age in very similar terms in *Metamorphoses* 1.125-150, and Virgil depicts a typical contrast between the Golden and Iron Age in *Eclogue* 4. Boccaccio is drawn to the poets' lament for the loss of the Golden Age, and he echoes them in his own assessment of Ceres. He concludes the biography:

---

[37] Ovid, *Fasti* 4.404-6.

[38] Virgil, *Georgics* 1.160-1.

> After considering these and many other issues, I am tempted to believe—indeed I do believe—that those golden centuries, even if they were rude and uncivilized, are greatly to be preferred to our own Iron Age, refined though it is.[39]

In this final agreement with Virgil and Ovid, Boccaccio sounds himself much like the classical poets.  He uses the same term 'Iron Age' to describe his age as the poets did, although his use of 'our' refers to himself and his contemporary readers. He thus creates a likeness between the advancements of his own age and those of the classical world—or much more accurately, he suggests a link between the cultivation of learning in his own age and the classical world. The humanistic movement successfully recovers past culture while forging its own, but Boccaccio is mindful that there is still value in the attitudes and ways of ages past.

Ceres is the first woman presented who definitively changed the lifestyle of humanity after the Fall. She is an example of women's intellectual achievement, but it is nonetheless "likely to cause upheaval in the natural order"—if Eve was the first woman to bring about humanity's departure from paradise, Ceres is the second because she brought humanity out of the paradisiac Golden Age.[40] It is clear from Boccaccio's account of Ceres that he feels an affinity for antiquity, and he likely found the Golden Age which was so celebrated in bucolic poetry to be very unlike his own world. However, the poets he looks to so fondly also benefit from the loss of that time, for an age that produces literature and intellection must be one that benefits from the cultivation of a civilization.

---

[39] Boccaccio, *De mulieribus claris* 5.13.

[40] Franklin (2006) 46.

*Minerva*

Boccaccio learns from several Roman writers, including Ovid, Lucan, and Livy, that Minerva first appeared on earth at Lake Tritonis in northern Africa during the reign of King Ogyges. Boccaccio claims that her fame was known to "not only the barbarous Africans, but also to the Greeks," likely because the location of her first recognition was in northern Africa and her reputation spread north according to the sources, "for Libya, as the heat alone proves, is nearest the sky … and she called herself Tritonis after the lake she loved."[41] Augustine and Eusebius confirm the account linking Minerva to the lake and place her dating as far back as the rule of Ogyges. Boccaccio reiterates Augustine's claim the woman was "more readily believed to be a goddess because her origin was so little known."[42] . It is not surprising that Boccaccio nods to the myth of Minerva's origin, that she sprung fully armored from Zeus' head as a major aspect of his sources, but passes it over fairly quickly, because it is not supported by natural human processes.

The goddess was especially revered for her virginity, and this is the first trait Boccaccio addresses after the typical introduction of the woman's birth. Boccaccio places heavy emphasis on purity throughout the biographies, stating that the pagan women's glory is in "their virginity, purity, holiness, and invincible firmness in overcoming carnal desire."[43] Naturally, Boccaccio would also see this as the most important trait of Minerva. Boccaccio learns from his sources and includes in the biography that Vulcan supposedly

[41] Boccaccio, *De mulieribus claris* 6.1; Lucan, *Pharsalia* 3.351-54.

[42] Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei* 18.8; Euseibus, 30.

[43] Boccaccio, *De mulieribus claris* Preface.

struggled for a long time to lay with Minerva, but he was defeated.44 It is odd, though, that Boccaccio does not offer a fuller account of this struggle or include a word of praise. He prefaces the event with the reasoning that ancients believed the myth "to render it more credible" that Minerva was a perpetual virgin.45 Much of the remainder of the chapter proceeds in a similar tone: Boccaccio seems ambivalent about the actions and inventions of Minerva, offering little to no moralization until he reaches the description of her statue. Nevertheless, the defeat of Vulcan is a victory for female chastity.

The subsequent paragraphs are a catalogue of the several arts Minerva taught humanity. Some contributions, such as the invention of weaving, the development of battle strategy, and the creation of the olive tree, are so incorporated into the identity of Minerva that Boccaccio hardly needs a source for the information. Other contributions are more obscure, like the invention of numbers or the bagpipes, which are consistent with the character of her many inventions, but the former can be confidently linked to Livy and the latter to Hyginus as likely source material due to similarities in the specificity of detail.46

Boccaccio makes it clear throughout *De mulieribus claris* that he takes a historical approach to assessing the divinity of goddesses. Referring to what he only names "some serious sources," Boccaccio agrees with the assessment that the inventions are of not one,

---

44 Ibid., 6.2. The medieval allegorical understanding of the figure of Vulcan was as a figure of carnal lust, Brumble (1998) 349-52. For more on the struggle between Vulcan and Minerva, see Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 1.17.12-13 and Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei* 18.12.

45 Boccaccio, *De mulieribus claris* 6.2.

46 Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 7.3.7; Hyginus *Fabulae* 165.

but several women, "in order to increase the number of famous women."[47] Cicero

identifies up to four different Minervas, and this is likely the authoritative source that

Boccaccio alludes to.[48] Boccaccio notes that the ancients "attributed divinity to that

woman of wisdom on account of so many discoveries," yet when he calls antiquity "the

lavish dispenser of divinity," he nearly diminishes the value of the inventions that

Minerva brought forth to deserve such a title.[49]

The final concrete description of Minerva is through her statue. As Boccaccio

describes the motifs found in the monument, Minerva appears rather masculine. She is

girded in battle armor symbolic, according to Boccaccio, of a person who is wise,

prudent, and skilled in battle. Each aspect of her armor signifies another aspect of her

wisdom. Whereas most of the material in the earlier part of Minerva's biography can be

found in sources Boccaccio used quite often, there is little evidence of specific meanings

attached to the pieces of armor in the classical sources.[50] It is likely that Boccaccio, after

ascertaining the various elements of the statue, invented his own explanation for what

they signify. For example, "she was guarded with a cuirass since the wise man is always

armed against every blow of Fortune," and Boccaccio turns the traditional aegis into a

symbol of serpentine wisdom.[51] Boccaccio seems to follow the medieval tradition of

---

[47] Ibid., 6.9.

[48] Cicero, *De natura deorum* 23.59.

[49] Boccaccio, *De mulieribus claris* 6.7.

[50] There are descriptions of the stature that Boccaccio may have had access to, the most detailed description provided by Plutarch and Pausanias. There were also several copies of the statue made in antiquity that survived, although the original did not.

[51] Boccaccio, *De mulieribus claris* 7.7.

allegorizing classical imagery, but he stops short of Christianizing it as could be expected.

This particular biography hints at the breadth of Boccaccio's reading, from the Latin poets and historiographers to the patristic fathers, with much knowledge borrowed from traditional medieval interpretations of what certain events or figures signify.

Minerva is praised in this chapter for inventions that are not vastly different from the agricultural inventions for which Ceres was blamed. Franklin suggests that Boccaccio favors Minerva because she maintained perpetual virginity or because she has clearly masculine qualities.[52] Although these arguments are both convincing, there is also a third possibility: Boccaccio takes on judgments that are similar to his sources. Many of the sources that Boccaccio clearly used in his biography of Ceres were poetic in nature that dealt with undertones of (or were directly addressing) the Golden Age. The theme of the Golden Age is one of lament for a time past and irretrievable; Boccaccio himself would have likely identified with this view as he looked back to the Classical Age. Minerva, however, traditionally represents not the advent of civilization, like Ceres, but the refinement of culture through art and skill. Minerva is the friend of the poet, because the skill of weaving words to lay out a narrative is likened to the skill of weaving on the loom to depict a story.[53] Although Boccaccio does not display a particular affinity to the arts of the goddess, he relates her arts with a tone similar to his ancient sources. The gifts of Minerva are to be treasured and valued because, although we cannot return to a Golden Age, learning and refinement are owed to art and skill.

---

[52] Franklin (2006) 48.

[53] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 6.1-144.

*Venus*

In the biography of Venus, as with the other goddesses, Boccaccio establishes her mortality by offering several explanations of her parentage.[54] He does not, however, acknowledge the most famed tale of Venus' birth as he does in the biography of Minerva, where her myth becomes an allegorized signifier for the mortal woman's most famed attributes. The mythological birth of Venus could certainly lend itself to such allegory: the goddess of love purportedly rose from the sea foam generated from the fallen blood after the Titan Saturn castrated his father Uranus. Boccaccio could have easily translated the violence done to the sexual anatomy of Uranus into an explanation for Venus' hyper-sexualized nature and the threat it poses to individual men and to society. Instead, Boccaccio omits this account and attributes Venus' ancient status as a goddess wholly to "the effect of [her] powers [being] such that men were unable to resist her lewd acts."[55]

Boccaccio grounds the fame of Venus in pagan evidence that links her to the practice of prostitution. According to Lactantius, Venus first instituted the practice of prostitution, and Boccaccio claims that the practice spread to other peoples, even to Rome, from this first instance.[56] The account ends with a passage that is almost verbatim to Justinus' account of a Cypriotian ritual:

> It was a custom among the Cyprians to send their daughters, on stated days before their marriage, to the sea-shore, to prostitute themselves, and thus procure money for their marriage portions, and to pay, at the same

---

[54] Boccaccio may be referring to Cicero, *De natura deorum* 3.23.50. Unlike in the Minerva biography, however, in which the parentage suggestions were nearly the exact same that Cicero offers, the parentage suggestions for Venus' chapter have a looser correlation.

[55] Bocaccio, *De mulieribus claris* 7.5.

[56] Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 1.17.9-10.

time, offerings to Venus for the preservation of their chastity in time to come.[57]

Boccaccio takes advantage of such ancient accounts to defame Venus and thus make her divinity seem all the more unlikely.

In the medieval tradition, there is a rich history of representing two different Venuses. Each Venus signifies a different kind of love: the first represents a generous and oftentimes spiritual love, the second is a selfish and carnal love.[58] In Boccaccio's historical interpretation of the pagan Venus, he gives her only the carnal attributes, placing her wholly on the side of vice. Furthermore, he aligns her vice as a perversion of her beauty, thus all virtue she may have had is corrupted as she turns to carnal desires and acts. Boccaccio does not completely eliminate the notion of two Venuses; he cites two husbands and marks a distinct turning point in her lascivious activity after the death of the first. Boccaccio claims that "Venus so abandoned herself after Adonis' death to her wanton urges that in the eyes of those who had not been bewitched she seemed to tarnish all the splendor of her beauty with her incessant acts of fornication."[59] It would appear that Boccaccio implies, or at least allows, that Venus retained her virtue in her first marriage, and that she did not debase her beauty until after his death. This is emphasized by the nature of her second husband, Vulcan, a symbol of carnal desire in the Middle Ages.[60]

Among the three goddess examined in this chapter, Venus is the only one with seemingly no redeeming characteristic. She is certainly beautiful, and Boccaccio counts her

---

[57] Justinus, *Epitoma Historiarum philippicarum Pompei Trogi* 18.3.4.

[58] Schreiber (1975) 522.

[59] Boccaccio, *De mulieribus claris* 7.8.

[60] Notice that the advances Minerva rejected, Venus accepted.

among the famous "for her outstanding beauty rather than because of some shameless fabrication," that is, the myth of her immortality as a goddess.[61] In the dedication of the book, Boccaccio warns Andrea that a woman "should not embellish [her] beauty with cosmetics," but rather she should "increase its distinction through integrity, holiness and the finest actions." It is in this manner that a woman is able to "please Him who granted you beauty."[62] Such advice suggests that beauty is woman's most desirable, and even most virtuous, trait. This suggestion is affirmed in the first biography of the book relating the account of the first woman, Eve: "women count beauty among their foremost endowments and have achieved . . . much glory on that account."[63] In the cases of Eve and of Boccaccio's advice to Andrea, beauty is a passive virtue which brings them honor. Venus is an example of a woman who possessed the most desirable and potentially most virtuous trait of beauty, yet she perverts it into sexual misdeeds. The fact that she acted so forwardly is as much a vice as the lewd nature of the action.

*Conclusion*

Thus far I have not taken a definitive stance on the much debated issue of Boccaccio's attitude towards women. Rather than declaring him profeminist or misogynistic, I find the most compelling reading of *De mulieribus claris* as humanistic curiosity in the knowledge that the ancients have to offer. Many of his earlier works exhibit great learning, but they are generally vernacular, poetic, and of his own invention. *De*

---

[61] Boccaccio, *De mulieribus claris* 7.8.

[62] Ibid., Dedication 9.

[63] Ibid., 1.4.

*mulieribus claris* belongs to the later part of his career. He shifts to a more formal and scholarly Latin composition, written in prose. Though he proclaims his purpose to be humanistic, to restore classical knowledge, he does not insist on distancing himself from medieval modes of reading as Petrarch does. The result is oftentimes a medieval reading and portrayal of the ancients: Boccaccio endeavors to restore to classical learning a dignity for its own merits, beyond a medieval understanding of them. His desire to preserve the knowledge of the ancients inspires him to describe the physical world through its topography in *De montibus*, the metaphysical in *Geneologia*, and the men who interact with that world in *De casibus virorum illustrium*. The completion of his learned project required a book for women, *De mulieribus claris*. Rather than having a strong attitude towards woman-kind, Boccaccio's work is motivated by his endeavor to produce a fuller understanding of the ancient world through his compendia.

CHAPTER THREE

Christine de Pizan: Re-Making Myth


*Creating a Space for Women*

Boccaccio's concluding remarks to *De mulieribus claris* invites the emendation of

his text should there be faulty information discovered:

> If [my readers] are charitably inclined, let them correct and emend the
> inappropriate passages by addition or deletion: in this way, the work will
> live for someone's benefit rather than perish, mangled by the teeth of envy,
> of service to no one.[1]

Christine de Pizan obliges, and she does not hold back in her critique of the male-crafted

mythology of women. Boccaccio relays the biographies of women in such a manner that

an individual life can be perceived as a mythological archetype with generalizing

comments about womankind. Christine takes a new approach in her compendium by

writing about vernacular and historical examples in such a way that each life is individual

and concrete. The virtues of Christine's collection of lives, however, are not as

unattainable as they seem in Boccaccio's work; rather, they are representative of the

virtue of women, for which they are admitted into the City of Ladies.


*Reading in Translation*

Although Christine addresses several literary contexts in her work, the clearest

source of her material is from Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*. Approximately three-

---

[1] Boccaccio, *De mulieribus claris* Conclusion. All translations in this chapter are provided by translated editions. Translations for Boccaccio are from Virginia Brown's 2001 edition, translations for Christine de Pizan are from Earl Jeffrey Richards' 1998 edition.

fourths of the biographies in Christine's work appear in Boccaccio as well. It is possible—in fact, very likely—that Christine did not read Boccaccio in his own Latin, but through the Middle French translation *Des cleres et nobles femmes*. The translation was produced anonymously in 1401, at the height of a debate about the depiction of women in the "Debate of the *Rose*," in which Christine played an active role.[2] The rendering of Boccaccio's *De mulieribus* favored a verbatim translation. However, as Jane Taylor demonstrates, the translator was not so proficient that he was able to prevent his own distinct interpretation of the text from seeping in, and he offers a distinctly negative reading of the women's biographies.[3] Although Boccaccio is often ambiguous in his judgements and has confounded scholars in taking a definitive stance on his view of the female sex, Taylor reads the translation of *Des cleres et nobles femmes* as "rather a demonstration of female iniquity."[4]

If it is true that Christine read Boccaccio's work through the filter of this translation, then she would have certainly had a negative response to his assessment of women, and there would be much to defend. In the previous chapter, I have commented on the ambiguity of Boccaccio's position towards women within his Latin work that has puzzled many scholars and produced several contradictory readings. I do not aim to make a pronouncement of Boccaccio's own attitudes in this chapter but wish to recognize that

---

[2] See Willard (1984) 73-89 for a detailed account of the Debate of the Rose, and page 82 for a concise account of Christine's impact in the debate. See Desmond (2003) "The *Querelle de la Rose* and the Ethics of reading" for how Christine participated in the debate and her focus on the moral *utilitas* of a work.

[3] Although the identity of the translator is unknown, critics assume that a man produced the translation.

[4] Taylor (2000) 506.

Christine combatted definitively misogynistic literature within a late medieval Middle French context.

*Voices of Authority*

In order for Christine to create a place for herself as a writer, and for women more broadly as rational and valuable constituents of society, Christine is careful to establish how she relates and contributes to *auctoritas*. One recourse for authority that Christine turns to is the use of exempla. In several of her writings, she relies on historical material to redefine the role of women, achieved through what Fiona Tolhurst describes as an "awareness of two key realities: one, that historical writing has always been about advancing a particular moral or political agenda, and two, that it had heretofore been an inherently male literary project."[5] By introducing female experience and historical examples into the canon of male-literacy, Christine undermines misogynistic assumptions.[6] This is an essential aspect of her *Livre de la Cité des dames*: by participating in the compendia tradition, using Boccaccio as her direct link to the male-dominated use of exempla, Christine is able not only to make a place for herself as a woman to continue the tradition, but she is even able to redefine how the exempla are approached, that is, as concrete rather that archetypal figures.

Christine affirms experience as a source of truth and a viable form of *auctoritas*. Writers have the responsibility to convey only the truth and the reader has the responsibility to strive to read correctly, as the narrative persona is able to with the aid of

---

[5] Tolhurst (2004) 26.

[6] See Brown-Grant (2003) "Christine de Pizan as a Defender of Women" for how Christine combats philosophical and theological arguments against women.

Reason, Rectitude, and Justice in *Cité des Dames*.[7] Kevin Brownlee describes her authority as "derive[d] from the truth of history itself, guaranteed, underwritten, by God."[8] Although she promotes experience and even divinely underwritten history as valid sources of *auctoritas*, Christine bolsters her case with more traditional foundations.

Christine often claims divine authority as a foundation within her own writings. Whereas Petrarch and Boccaccio participate in traditionally male sources of *auctoritas*, and thus achieve authoritative standing for themselves, "Christine appropriates for herself the authority of a God-sent prophesy, thereby placing her catalogue under the sign of theology."[9] In *Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc*, Christine's last known work, the figure of Joan functions as a Christian sibyl, and Christine aligns her narrative voice with the voice of Joan's character so that she herself is figured into a sort of prophetess of God.

In the *City of Ladies*, the construction of the city is directed by allegorical figures of Christian virtues: Reason, Rectitude, and Justice. Such allegorical guides representing God's divine authority are not easily dismissed. Furthermore, Christine participates in an already ongoing Christian discourse. The title of Christine's work, 'City of Ladies,' is a reference to Augustine's 'City of God.' Lori Walters describes the community within the city of God that Augustine depicts as "continually being generated from the dialectic between the ideal and the real . . . Christine tries to change conditions in present-day France and the influence the evolution of future societies by placing her City of Ladies

---

[7] McRae (1991) 418-419.

[8] Brownlee (1989) 134.

[9] Brown-Grant (1999) 154.

within the context of Augustine's model of the ever-evolving City of God."[10] By referencing a work that was respected and read for its divine insight since it was first penned, Christine situates herself within a similar divine authority. Instead of writing about a divine city against the falsity of the pagans, Christine founds a city against the misconceptions of male writers and readers.

In the opening chapter of *Cité des dames* Christine defines the literary precedents she takes issue with. While reading a book by Matheolus, her persona concludes that it is full of lies and not beneficial for "elevated and useful study." She looks in other books and is astounded:

> Just the sight of this book, even though it was of no authority, made me wonder how it happened that so many different men—and learned men among them—have been and are so inclined to express both in speaking and in their treatises and writings so many devilish and wicked thoughts about women and their behavior.[11]

The book she refers to in the opening chapter, Matheolus' *Lamentations*, is a particularly scathing example of clerical misogyny, as the author hopes to dissuade men from marriage. Kevin Brownlee highlights the *Roman de la rose* as the privileged courtly model text and the clerkly discourse that was aligned with a learned and male disposition as two dominant literary discourses in late-fourteenth century France, and they both participated and contributed to misogyny in literature and scholarship.[12] To establish herself in such an environment, Christine must establish her authority on a foundation

---

[10] Walters (2002) 878.

[11] Pizan, *Cité des dames* 1.1.1.

[12] Brownlee (2002) 199-200, more on the several layers of misogyny and Christine's role in the Debate of the *Rose* in Kevin Brownlee's article.

other than an exclusively male-favored system of *auctoritas*. Christine makes it her explicit purpose to redress the errors done towards women in literature.

The ability to produce literature in the Middle Ages required education, access to materials, a degree of financial independence or patronage, and liberty of time; many women writers in the Middle Ages, therefore, were of a religious order or an unusual position of independence.[13] With these considerations in mind, it is not too difficult to see why academia was not naturally inclusive towards many women. As the humanist movement gradually transformed scholarship in the Middle Ages, education became, as Susan Bell remarks, "the key to the good life with which every humanist thinker from Boccaccio to Erasmus concerned himself. Virtue increased in direct proportion to learning and the acquisition of knowledge."[14] It is in this context that we find Christine. Her father ensured that his daughter was educated, and she became well-versed in both classical knowledge and contemporary writings.[15] It was not until her husband's death, however, that Christine began to forge her identity as a writer.

Christine had access to a wide variety of literature through the library of King Charles V who, as previously noted, commissioned a literary program to translate Latin texts into French. Christine, as the king's personal biographer, benefitted from the *translatio imperii et studii* agenda that aimed to make France a locus of humanist,

---

[13] Wilson (1984) ix. Also see Bell (1976) "Humanism and the Problem of a Studious Woman" for more information about the education of women during this period.

[14] Bell (1976) 173.

[15] See Willard (1984) 33-34 and Wilson's "Introduction" to *Medieval Women Writers* (1984), for information about Christine's early education and how she began to write after her husband's death.

cultural, literary, and intellectual preeminence.[16]Marilyn Desmond notes that access to an extensive and growing library with a "proliferation of vernacular versions of classical texts made it possible for a woman like Christine who lacked a formal education to participate fully in the literary cultures of the day." Some of the works Christine would have been familiar with includes Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Rhetoric* in Nicole Oresme's translations; Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in the anonymous *Ovide moralisé*; and Virgil's *Aeneid* in the prose compilation of universal history, the *Histoire ancienne jusqùa` César.*"[17]

Because Christine operates within a male-dominated literary project, the majority of her sources, both classical and contemporary, are by men. In fact, much of the defense she builds in *Cité des dames* is meant to combat the misogyny that she encounters in literature. Christine acknowledges her peculiar position between her identity as a learned and skilled poet and writing in a period dominated by male scholarship. Like Boccaccio, she stood with each footed planted in very different worlds, but whereas Boccaccio's task was to forge a new relationship between medieval modes of reading and classical literature, Christine fashions a place for herself as a woman writer within a male discourse.

---

[16] Walters (2003) 26-29, for a description of Christine's relationship to Charles V and the impacts his *translatio et studii* program had on her writing. Walters even suggests that in the final part of *Cité des dames*, Christine presents herself as "a sacred tongue authorized to complement or substitute for the king's tongue." Such an argument enhances her political *auctoritas*, as in page 34.

[17] Desmond (2008) 134.

*Cité des dames* has a three-part structure, and the construction within each book is presided over by one of the three virtues:

> We three ladies whom you see here, moved by pity, have come to you to announce a particular edifice built like a city wall, strongly constructed and well founded, which has been predestined and established by our aid and counsel for you to build, where no one will reside except all ladies of fame and women worthy of praise, for the walls of the city will be closed to those women who lack virtue.[18]

Reason presides over the first book, and the foundation and walls of the city constructed therein. This portion of the work is populated by women of political and military accomplishment and those of learning and skill. The second lady, Rectitude, directs Christine in building all manner of edifices necessary to populate the city. This book turns to examples of women who exhibit various kinds of virtue. The final book is guided by Justice, who helps perfect and complete the city with lofty roofs and towers. The women in this section are the saints and martyrs.

Christine in this way implements a moral hierarchy as she progresses through the biographies of women. Boccaccio uses linear chronology to suggest a decline through the ages, for by the time he reaches his own age there are few virtuous women of whom to make mention:

> As can be clearly seen, I have reached the women of our time, in which the number of illustrious ones is so small that I think it more suitable to come to an end here rather than proceed farther with the women of today.[19]

---

[18] Pizan, *Cité des dames* 1.3.3.

[19] Boccaccio, *De mulieribus claris* Conclusion.

Yet in Christine's work, the progression through the biographies suggests not a decline, but an improvement in human advancement and female virtues. The moral hierarchy corresponds to the construction of her allegorical city, "whereby the pagan warriors and inventors are the foundations of the defense of women and the saints and martyrs represent its culmination," as Rosalind Brown-Grant remarks.[20] Thus, by the time Christine reaches the final chapters, Christian saints and martyrs inhabit the highest towers.

To combat generalizing categorizations of women and slanders from misogyny, Christine focuses on particulars in the foundations of the citadel for virtuous women.[21] Alcuin Blamires describes Christine's agenda to "promote the ordinary powers of women in everyday life."[22] Accordingly, the biographies that Christine uses are carefully collated and grouped to demonstrate not only the virtue of each individual, but to show that such virtues are accessible to women as a whole.

Reason points out the fallibility of philosophical authorities by showing that Aristotle corrected Plato and, in turn, Augustine corrected Aristotle.[23] If such ancient philosophical authors are victim to error in representing the female sex, then neither are ancient literary works of *auctoritas* exempt from fallibility. This correction also points to an evolution of better thinking towards the advancement of civilization. Contemporary authors could likewise fall into error, for the most ancient and revered authorities are not

---

[20] Brown-Grant (1999) 157, 163.

[21] Blamires (2011) 225.

[22] Ibid., 222.

[23] Brown-Grant (1999) 143.

the only writers who can be corrected. Furthermore, Reason reminds Christine that women, too, are made in the image of God, and women are shown to be equals to men in intellect and faith in Books One and Three, respectively.[24]

The analogy of the city is not simply to provide a foundation and walls to defend the women within from false representation; the most important aspect of the city is the community within. The women in the city are not isolated, but contribute socially, politically, and spiritually, so that the contributions of each cultivates a thriving polis. Barry Collett notes that the "*La Cité des dames* was in the mirror-for-princes genre," a genre which instructs rulers on how to rule well, yet "Christine presented it not as moral exhortation, nor even as supplementary practical advice, but as a series of descriptions of good management and working efficiently in self-contained communities."[25] The defense for women does more than propose what women can contribute to society, or theorizing about their political and moral virtues; rather, the defense lies in the evidence Christine provides that women actively display virtues and are already integrated into a community of women. Not only do the women thrive in active participation, but as Eleni Stecopoulos notes they also "to some extent 'preside over,' the city, that is, over the communal entity, a forum, thanks to their skill, their *clergie*, and yes, their *chevalerie*,"[26] All that remains is for men to recognize that women can integrate into a secular community as well.

---

[24] Pizan, *Cité des dames* 1.9.2; Brown-Grant (1999) 151.

[25] Collett (2005) 11.

[26] Stecopoulos (1992) 56.

*Women of the City*

The women that reside in the City are presented as both historical and representative. That is, they are individuals with unique merits and contributions, without being outliers in the range of womankind's capabilities. Boccaccio often paints the women of *De mulieribus claris* as archetypes of a particular virtue or vice; mythic figures were especially susceptible to this interpretation. Christine, however, writes about vernacular and historical examples in such a way that each life is individual and concrete.

She does not limit her discussion of women to just classical figures, but expands the scope of her work to include contemporary and ancient, Christian and pagan, historical and mythic. Book Three, concerning the saints and martyrs, is almost exclusively Christian women, albeit both ancient through contemporary. Books One and Two, however, offer a fairly even mix of women of historical and mythical origins. By interspersing myths with 'true' historical narratives, Christine presents narratives as true exempla that women can imitate. By integrating pagan examples with Christian women, the virtuous women of the past are still relevant. Finally, by relaying the deeds of the women through conversations between a narrative persona and the allegorical figures, rather than in discrete biographies as Boccaccio does, each women takes part in an integrated community rather than remaining an isolated and irrelevant biography.

*Ceres*

Both Ceres and Minerva are presented among other women of skill and art who make up the foundations and walls of the city in Book One. The account of Ceres is nearly half the length of the biography presented in Boccaccio's work, and much of this

is on account of the rhetoric the authors use. Christine makes assertive and straightforward statements on matters where Boccaccio displays doubtful questioning. Furthermore, Christine pays no notice to Ceres' lineage; instead, she describes how the woman paves a path for the development of society. It is also notable that Christine saves mention of the Ceres' status as a goddess for the end of the chapter. Divinity is not her defining trait, but a nod to the impact of her contributions to human life.

The introduction to Ceres and her inventions is nearly copied from Boccaccio, with only slight alterations in the occasional phrasing. Boccaccio says of Ceres that "her intelligence was such" that she was able to make substantial contributions to society.27 Christine replaces this phrase, saying that Ceres "enjoys the privilege of being the first" to discover such cultivation and inventions.28 This subtle alteration changes the significance of Ceres' fame. Whereas Boccaccio portrays her as a woman of unusual intelligence who accomplished something that no other could, Christine presents her honor as a privilege, implying that others are capable of such an achievement of which she is only "the first." Christine's phrasing does not belittle Ceres' accomplishments, for the contribution is still honored, but she invites other women into the honor for advancements of which they are likewise capable.

The first part of the biography is fairly similar in Boccaccio and Christine's description of Ceres' discovery and inventions, save for some key phrasing differences. Christine's rhetoric in the second half of the section is a great deal different than, and even responds to, Boccaccio's text. Whereas Boccaccio poses a series of questions that

---

27 Boccaccio, *De mulieribus claris* 5.1.

28 Pizan, *Cité des dames* 1.35.1.

infer Ceres' discovery of cultivation was a double-edged sword that harmed the human lifestyle as much as it improved it, Christine offers succinct, straightforward responses.[29] Along with cultivating the land, Ceres formed the first communities. Ceres teaches the people to build permanent cities where the people can live together. By extension, Ceres paved the way for Christine to do her own work in building a city, a cultivated and sustained community of women that is built through from the contributions of historical women and will remain permanent. "Thanks to this woman," Christine praises, "the world was led away from bestial living conditions to a rational, human life."[30] Boccaccio expresses through questions his doubts that humanity is better off, which Christine addresses with confident answers. Boccaccio lauds the simplicity and innocence of the Golden Age, but Christine asserts that humanity is separated from the beasts not only by reason, but by community as well.[31] Whereas Boccaccio wishes for a return to a past Golden Age, Christine wishes to use the knowledge and achievements of both past and contemporary women to enhance the present conditions of humanity.

Christine's account of Ceres ends with an affirmation of the "authority of her knowledge," highlighting the importance of experience and merit.[32] She also restates that Ceres "brought about a great good for the world," establishing her position as a figure fit

---

[29] Brown-Grant (1988) provides analysis in "Décadence ou progrès?" Also see Kellogg (1989), "Christine de Pizan and Boccaccio" for more on the impacts of Ceres and Minerva's inventions.

[30] Pizan, *Cité des dames* 1.35.1.

[31] The comma suggests an important semantic implication that without community, life is not truly human. See Johnston's edited edition of Christine de Pizan's middle French text, "a vie humaine et raisonnable", and Brain Anslay's sixteenth century translation, "into the reasonable lyfe of man" (2014) 142-143.

[32] See Stecopoulos (1992) 52-53, for an analysis of Ceres as a contributor to human culture and cultivation.

for the foundation not only for the City, but also for the society of humankind.[33] By serving as a foundation because of her impact on civilization, she elevates the City of Ladies as a model for the ideal civilization. Boccaccio stops just short of likening the Ceres to Eve and the fallen nature of humanity. Christine, however, refashions the figure as a representative of what defines the conditions of human living: a rational life within a community.

*Minerva*

The account of Minerva as told by Christine does not follow Boccaccio's text quite as closely as the Ceres account of did, but it is clear that Christine used Boccaccio as a primary source for the information of this biography. The introductory information concerning her alleged background and recognition during her life uses similar phrases as Boccaccio, but the information is condensed. There is no mention of her geographic placement, time period, or what peoples initially knew of her. On one hand, this selectivity of information removes concrete aspects of Minerva's background that could define her as a woman who really existed, such as placing her first appearance during the reign of King Ogyges. On the other hand, Christine removes elements that could lead to mysterious and mythic speculation about the lack of information about her parentage.[34]

It is clear that Christine emphasizes learning in Minerva's biography. Minerva "has a subtle mind, of profound understanding, not only in one subject but also generally,

---

[33] Pizan, *Cité des dames* 1.35.1.

[34] Boccaccio, *De mulieribus claris* 6.1, points out that many foolish mortals believed the tales that Minerva sprung from the head of Zeus.

in every subject," thus the vast array of inventions attributed to her person.35 The first invention Christine names is a shorthand Greek script that facilitates writing long narratives. Boccaccio makes no mention of this in Minerva's biography; rather, he attributes this invention to Cadmus, the founder and king of Thebes.36 Not only does Christine ascribe this important advancement to a woman, but she places it in the first position of Minerva's laudable deeds.37 Recall that the first quality Boccaccio names is Minerva's perpetual virginity. Rather than defining Minerva by her chastity, as though this were a highly unusual trait; it remains worthy of mention, but it is the last quality that Christine includes, and even then it was due to the woman's "considerable force of mind [that she] remained a virgin her entire life."38 This deliberate alteration by Christine serves to emphasize Minerva's intellect as her primary trait. Such an emphasis highlights the value of classical knowledge that is accessible to contemporary readers, affirms Christine's own position as a learned female, and invites womankind to participate in learned discourse and the contributions it can have for human culture.

Christine does not ignore Minerva's reputed divinity. Minerva was worshipped as the goddess of arms, chivalry, and knowledge, Boccaccio paints Minerva as achieving her status by having a manly intelligence and wisdom; Christine firmly maintains her femininity. Minerva did not accomplish what she did in spite of being a woman, but she expands the boundaries of what women are thought to be capable of.

---

35 Pizan, *Cité des dames* 1.34.1. Kellogg (1989) 126, goes into more depth about bringing "social order out of social chaos"; Phillippy (1986) 182 makes similar comments.

36 Boccaccio, *De mulieribus claris* 27.6.

37 See Benkov (1994) 37-38 for more on the femininity of Minerva.

38 Pizan, *Cité des dames* 1.34.4.

So far we have seen Christine retell the narratives of mythic figures recorded by Boccaccio to build a defense and provide exempla for fellow women. In the description of the statue erected at Athens in Minerva's honor, Christine goes even further to include courtly values.39 In doing so, she makes room for societal values not provided by women alone, but accommodates French chivalry in knighthood. Christine names each element of the statue as it appears in Boccaccio's description, including the allegorized interpretations that he provides. She explicitly adds, however, her own interpretation of each piece of armor and what it represents for the courtly knight. She emphasizes justice, deeds of arms, defense of one's country and people, and the fitting behavior of a knight, to name a few.40 Christine clearly appropriates this element of Boccaccio's text to highlight societal values in her own society. What's more, the values she inserts into the tale are not for women alone, but for the knights, as if to educate the court as well as the women in her audience. For Christine, this myth is a tool for teaching, and she recasts the narrative to demonstrate values appropriate to her audience.

*The Virtue of Chastity*

Venus makes no appearance in the City. On one hand, this is odd because Venus was known to represent two sides of love: the carnal and the spiritual, and the latter would seem appropriate in Book Two's description of women's virtues.41 On the other hand, Boccaccio does not make mention of the spiritual love associated with Venus, and

---

39 For further discussion on the junction of *clergie* and *chevalerie* represented in the statue, see Stecopoulos (1992) 55-56.

40 Pizan, *Cité des dames* 1.34.5.

41 Brumble (1998) 338-342.

he thoroughly condemns her for wantonness. Christine makes use of Boccaccio as a primary source, but she often deliberately omits information to build the authority of the City on the terms of the women, not on the terms of another male authority. The presence of Venus could have signaled a duality to a woman's virtue. Love, for instance, can be both spiritual and carnal, it can be the root of both virtue and vice. Christine makes no attempt to claim that every woman is just and virtuous. Reason even bars some from entrance because in the city, "no one will reside except all ladies of fame and women worthy of praise, for the walls of the city will be closed to those women who lack virtue." Since Boccaccio insists on portraying Venus as the founder of prostitution practices, a woman praised only for sex and beauty, then Christine will respond by denying her "love" altogether.

By excluding Venus from the City, Christine eliminates any room for the dubious aspects of her legend. Instead, Rectitude instructs Christine in the number of chaste women over the course of several chapters after Christine laments that "many men claim it is considerably difficult to find a beautiful and chaste woman."[42] Rectitude responds with the life of Mariannes, a beautiful Hebrew woman unhappily married to Herod. Much like Venus, she "exceeded and surpassed all the women of her own time in beauty" to the extent that they thought "she was a celestial and divine apparition rather than a mortal woman."[43] In many ways Mariannes is a foil to Venus. Both possess beauty so great that they are thought divine. But whereas Venus, according to Boccaccio, gives into her lust, Mariannes endures great unhappiness for the sake of her chastity. She does not engage in

---

[42] Pizan, *Cité des dames* 2.41.1

[43] Ibid., 2.42.2

a carnal love with her many wooers, but remains faithful to her marriage even though it is unprofitable. In similar biographies, Christine acknowledges the beauty of a woman, but holds it almost as accidental—a very different attitude from Boccaccio, who often praised a woman's beauty as her greatest virtue. Without chastity, Christine notes, "all their other virtues would be nothing, since chastity is the supreme virtue in women."[44] Christine thus replaces love and beauty with chastity, the proper ordering of earthly love.

## *Conclusion*

Christine presents classical and contemporary, pagan and Christian, and mythological and historical women alike. She follows Boccaccio's lead in historicizing figures from myth—even the goddesses become mortals. However, oftentimes Boccaccio explains the attributed divinity of a goddess to the stupidity of the people, a muddled biography, or an amalgam of several women with similar traits. As a result, the virtues and merits of mythological figures are strained through a filter unenlightened ignorance. In the care of Christine, though, the lives of these women are vibrant and exemplary. She also historicizes their lives, but she does not attempt to explain away the improbable as Boccaccio does with Minerva, nor mitigate their virtues with potential drawbacks as Boccaccio does with Ceres.

Despite having knowledge and access to other sources containing or explicating the mythic figures of antiquity, Christine instead relies on her authority of experience, mediated by Reason, Rectitude, and Justice, to emend the attitudes found within texts like *De mulieribus claris*. With an aim to create a place for women in literary and scholarly

---

[44] Ibid., 2.37.1.

discourse, Christine transforms myths from archetypes into evidence, and she uses

exempla to undergird her own, and womankind's, *auctoritas*.

CONCLUSION

This work has aimed to show how Boccaccio and Christine de Pizan appropriated and shaped myth in *De mulieribus claris* and *Le Livre de la Cité des dames*. Boccaccio and Christine de Pizan each appropriates a collection of classical myths to make a statement about the life of the virtuous Christian woman within the context of contemporary reading practices. They each carefully formulate their writings in dialogue with *auctors* and establish their own stances as informed writers so that their work can be received in the literary tradition of mythography.

Chapter One reviewed the standard modes of reading in the Middle Ages and the conditions in which classical myths survived to reach Boccaccio and Christine. Chapters Two and Three examined the particular uses of the source material and the alterations to myth as applied to Boccaccio and Christine, respectively. While Boccaccio's stated purpose is to record the lives of ancient women, albeit with a certain degree of ambivalence remarked upon by modern critics, Christine's overt purpose is to present the women as imitable and representative exempla engaging in social, political, and intellectual capacities. Ultimately, however, both authors present new interpretations of the myths as a result of navigating their cultural and literary circumstances.

Boccaccio revived the compendia tradition as a means to examine classical knowledge without rejecting medieval scholarship; he continues the history of using pagan texts for educational and moralizing purposes, as did Jerome, Augustine, and Isidore de Seville. He not only compiles myths but seeks to present them in a manner that informs a particular lifestyle of Christian piety for his contemporaries, including both

men and women. Christine primarily wrote for the court of Charles V, whose political and literary program of *translatio* greatly influenced her concept of *auctoritas* as she attempted to reconcile the examples of classical myths with her own portrayal of womankind.

Boccaccio realigned the relationship between poetry, theology, and philosophy, redeeming myth as a way to explore how the human experience relates to the world, rather than how it relates solely to scriptural or practical truths. His works, both in the vernacular but more so in Latin exhibit a familiar knowledge of classical sources; the investigation into some of the biographies of *De mulieribus claris* reveals that he was adept in selecting and presenting information available to him.

Part of the difficulty for scholars in determining his attitudes towards women is the multifaceted nature of his project. In the opening paragraph of the Dedication, he claims the work began as a project for the enjoyment of his friends—likely a male scholarly circle—yet he dedicates the book to Andrea Acciaioli, Countess of Altavilla, with encouragement that it should inform her own Christian virtues as a woman. The issues regarding the audience, the dedication, and even the language of composition present interpretive difficulties. Thus a close analysis of his use of the ancient sources that we can ascertain he knew quite well reveals what information, values, and virtues he deemed appropriate to convey to a late medieval audience.

Christine creates an allegorical City of Ladies built upon the narratives of famous women to demonstrate the virtues accessible to women in general. Christine's participation in the mythography of ancient women supports her own *auctoritas* as a largely self-educated woman. Nearly all of the voices and sources in her work are

grounded in an authority other than herself. The literal content of her narratives is virtuous examples of classical and Christian women in history. She uses male authors and their compilations as sources to determine what narratives she includes. She affirms the authority of experience, but it is not isolated to the individual; rather, each exemplum is interconnected with the other women of the city, and those reading the book can likewise emulate and take part in the city. Furthermore, the directing voices within the text are the allegorized figures of Reason, Rectitude, and Justice. These layers of authority—history, respected sources, experience, and the voice of virtue itself—allow Christine to establish her own authority both as a writer and as a woman taking part in her own allegorical city.

Christine de Pizan's authorial purpose, although no easier to accomplish, is much more straightforwardly expressed. Christine aims to construct an allegorical city to serve as a defense against the slanders of misogyny and provide a framework for women to engage with a literary and social polis. She uses Boccaccio's compendium as a primary source, but she incorporates the biographies with a very different intent. Christine, too, uses moralizing and historicizing interpretations of classical stories, but with the purpose of justifying the examples they set forth in the tradition of women's history.

I have focused on the goddesses who held unique roles as shapers of humanity and civilization to more fully examine the authors' interaction with their sources. . Ceres is responsible introducing agriculture and harvest to humanity, along with the associated equipment and methods. Minerva is renowned for her learning and many inventions necessary for art, skill, and war. Finally, Venus represents both spiritual and carnal love in the Middle Ages; Boccaccio includes only her wanton side and the sexual corruption she brings, while Christine does not allow her into the city at all, opting to transform the

virtue of chaste love through the biographies of women such as Mariannes. The goddess shape various aspects of cultivation and civilization, as well as its pitfalls. Boccaccio's remarks on their deeds as individuals translates into implications for society and humanity as well. For example, Venus is a hyper-sexualized figure who first introduces the practice of prostitution that spreads even the heart of the Roman Empire. Minerva receives less attention for her mythic genesis from the mind of Jupiter than for her archetypal intelligence and virginity. His position towards Ceres is telling about how he views the progression of civilization. He describes the advent of the harvest, and thus of law and civilization, in a manner that recalls the actions of Eve—in essence, Ceres brought about the second fall of man. It is clear through the use of his sources that Boccaccio joins the poets in lamenting a past Golden Age, but by lauding the classical values of the ancients that shaped the way he experiences culture in his present day, he inadvertently draws direct line between present and past, for better or worse.

Christine's treatment of Ceres and Minerva emphasize that women actively contribute to society. Within Minerva's account, female learning is highlighted. Ceres is praised for bringing humanity out of bestial living conditions into a proper civilization. The advancements that these women brought about for humanity are also reflected upon the City of Ladies and its role as a book. Minerva as a representative of female learning affirms the author's female identity and encourages women not only to read the work, but also take part in subsequent discussion. Ceres as a founder of ordered society shows that women can not only constructively cooperate within the city Christine constructs, but that they can also actively contribute to the society of humanity.

Mythological characters provide a means to explore the plasticity of myth in the varying contexts of authorship, source material, and conditions of composition. However, further study could extend to additional mythic characters and figures recorded by historiographers. The role of classical mythology in Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* and Christine de Pizan's *Cité des dames* did not stop with the composition of the texts. Both authors employed the narratives with an aim to shape how the subject was viewed in their literary and scholarly contexts. Boccaccio greatly influenced humanistic thought and discourse, and this particular work introduced women as a serious subject of humanist study. Christine effectively created a space for women as active members of a polis within her text and established this position in dialogue with misogynist literature. Not only does culture shape a period's understanding of mythology, but the myths likewise have the power to affect cultural change.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alighieri, Dante. *Opere minori di Dante Alighieri: Il convito di Dante Alighieri e le Epistole*. Edited by Pietro Fraticelli, Barbèra-Bianchi, 1857.

Arduini, Beatrice. "Boccaccio and his Desk." *The Cambridge Companion to Boccaccio*, edited by Guyda Armstrong, Rhiannon Daniels, and Stephen J. Milner, Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. Edited by W. Jaeger, Oxford Classical Texts-Oxford University Press, 1957.

Augustine. *Confessions*. Edited by W. Watts, Loeb-Harvard University Press, 1912.

-----. *The City of God against the Pagans*. Translated and edited by R. W. Dyson, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

-----. *De Doctrina Christiana*. Edited by R.P.H. Green, Oxford University Press, 1995.

Barsella, Susanna. "Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Peter Damian: Two Models of the Humanist Intellectual." *MLN*, vol. 121, no. 1, 2006, pp. 16-48.

Baswell, Christopher. "The Medieval Allegorization of the *Aeneid*: MS Cambridge, Peterhouse 158." *Traditio*, vol. 41, 1985, pp. 181-237.

Bell, Susan Groag. "Christine De Pizan (1364-1430): Humanism and the Problem of a Studious Woman." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 3, no. 3/4, 1976, pp. 173-184.

Benkov, Edith Joyce. "Coming to Writing: *Auctoritas* and Authority in Christine de Pizan." *Le moyen francais*, vol. 35-36, 1994, pp. 33-48.

Benson, Pamela Joseph. *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman*. Pennsylvania University Press, 1992.

Bergin, Thomas G. *Boccaccio*. The Viking Press, 1981.

Black, Robert. "Ovid in Medieval Italy." *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, edited by James G. Clark, Frank T. Coulson, Kathryn L. McKinley, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 123-142.

Blamires, Alcuin. *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture*. Clarendon Press, 1997.

Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Renate. *Reading Myth: Classical mythology and its interpretations in Medieval French literature*. Stanford University Press, 1997.

Boccaccio, Giovanni. *Famous Women*. Translated and edited by Virginia Brown, Harvard University Press, 2001.

-----. *On Poetry: Being the Preface and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Books of Boccaccio's* Genealogia Deorum Gentilium. Translated by Charles G. Osgood, Princeton University Press, 1930.

Branca, Vittore. *Boccaccio: The Man and His Works*. Translated by Richard Monges, New York University Press, 1976.

Brisson, Luc. *How Philosophers Saved Myths*. Translated by Catherine Tihanyi, University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Brownlee, Kevin. "Discourses of the Self: Christine de Pizan and the *Rose*." *Romanic Review*, vol. 79, no. 1, 1988, pp. 199-221.

-----. "Structures of Authority in Christine de Pizan's *Ditié de Jehanne d' Arc*." *Discourses of Authority in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, edited by Kevin Brownlee and Walter Stephens, University Press of New England, 1989.

Brown-Grant, Rosalind. *Christine De Pizan and the Moral Defense of Women: Reading beyond Gender.* Cambridge University Press, 1999.

-----. "Christine de Pizan as a Defender of Women." *Christine de Pizan: A Casebook*, edited by Barbra K. Altmann and Deborah L. McGrady, Routledge, 2003, pp. 81-100.

-----. "Décadence ou progress? Christine de Pizan, Boccace et la question de 'l'âde d'or'." *Revue des Langues Romanes*, vol. 92, 1988, pp. 297-306.

Brumble, H D. *Classical Myths and Legends in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: A Dictionary of Allegorical Meanings*. Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998.

Burckhardt, Jacob. *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. Translated by S. G. C. Middlemore, Modern Library, 2002.

Collett, Barry. "The Three Mirrors of Christine de Pizan." *Healing the Body Politic: The Political Thought of Christine De Pizan,* Karen Green and C. J. Mews, vol. 7, Brepols, 2005, pp. 2-18.

Contreni, John J. "The Carolingian Renaissance: education and literary culture." *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, edited by Rosamond McKitterick. Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 709–757.

Chance, Jane. *Medieval Mythography, Volume 3: The Emergence of Italian Humanism, 1321-1475*. University Press of Florida, 2014.

Cheney, Liana De G. "Christine de Pizan's Collection of Art and Knowledge." *Contexts and Continuities: Proceedings of the IVth International Colloquium on Christine de Pizan*, edited by Angus J. Kennedy et al., vol. 1, University of Glasgow Press, 2002, pp. 257-270.

Curtius, Ernst Robert. *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953.

Desmond, Marilynn. "Christine De Pizan." *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*, edited by Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 123-136.

----- and Pamela Sheingorn. *Myth, Montage, and Visuality in Late Medieval Manuscript Culture: Christine de Pizan's* Epistre Othea*. University of Michigan Press, 2003.

-----. "The *Querelle de la Rose* and the Ethics of Reading." *Christine de Pizan: A Casebook*, edited by Barbra K. Altmann and Deborah L. McGrady, Routledge, 2003, pp. 197-180.

Franklin, Margaret Ann. Boccaccio's heroines: power and virtue in Renaissance society. Ashgate Publishing, 2006.

Gittes, Tobias Foster. Boccaccio's Naked Muse: Eros, Culture, and the Mythopoeic Imagination. University of Toronto Press, 2008.

-----. 'Boccaccio and humanism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Boccaccio*, edited by Armstrong, G., Daniels, R., and Milner, S.J.*,* Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 139-154.

Hunt, Smith, and Stok. *Classics from Papyrus to the Internet.* University of Texas Press, Forthcoming.

Jerome. *Select Letters of Jerome*. Edited by F. A. Wright, Loeb-Harvard University Press, 1933.

Jones, J. W. "Allegorical Interpretation in Servius." *The Classical Journal*, vol. 56, no. 5, 1961, pp. 217-226.

Kallendorf, Craig. "The Rhetorical Criticism of Literature in Early Italian Humanism from Boccaccio to Landino." *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1983, pp. 33–59.

-----. "Renaissance." *A Companion to the Classical Tradition*, edited by Craig W. Kallendorf, Blackwell Publishing, 2007, pp. 30-43.

Kellogg, Judith L. "Christine de Pizan and Boccaccio: Rewriting Classical Mythic Tradition." *Comparative Literature East and West: Traditions and Trends*, edited by Cornelia N. Moore and Raymond A. Moody, University of Hawaii and the East-West Center, 1989, pp. 124-131.

-----. "*Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*: Feminist Myth and Community." *Essays in Arts and Sciences*, vol. 18, 1989, pp. 1-15.

-----. "Transforming Ovid: The Metamorphosis of Female Authority." *Christine de Pizan and the Categories of Difference*, edited by Marilynn Desmond, University of Minnesota Press, 1998, pp. 181-194.

Kolsky, Stephen. *Courts and Courtiers in Renaissance Northern Italy*. Ashgate-Variorum, 2003.

-----. *The Genealogy of Women: Studies in Boccaccio's* De Mulieribus Claris, *vol. 62*. Peter Lang Publishing, 2003.

Lactantius. *Divine Institutes*. Translated by Anthony Bowen and Peter Garnsey, Liverpool University Press, 2003.

Livy. *History of Rome*. Translated by B. O. Foster, Loeb-Harvard University Press, 1919.

Lucan. *Civil War*. Translated by J. D. Duff, Loeb-Harvard University Press, 1981.

Marsh, David. "Italy." *A Companion to the Classical Tradition*, edited by Craig W. Kallendorf, Blackwell Publishing, 2007, pp. 208-221.

McLeod, Glenda. *Virtue and Venom: Catalogs of Women from Antiquity to the Renaissance*. University of Michigan Press, 1991.

McRae, Laura Kathryn. "Interpretation and the Acts of Reading and Writing in Christine de Pisan's *Livre de la Cité des Dames*." *Romanic Review*, vol. 82, no. 4, 1991, pp. 412-433.

Minnis, Alastair. *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, second edition. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

-----, A. B. Scott, David Wallace. *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*. Clarendon Press, 1988.

Mosshammer, Alden A. *The Chronicle of Eusebius and Greek Chronographic Tradition.* Bucknell University Press, 1979.

Ostriker, Alicia. "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking." *Signs*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1982, pp. 68–90.

Ovid. *Fasti*. Translated by James G. Frazer, Loeb-Harvard University Press, 1931.

-----. *Metamorphoses*. Translated by Frank J. Miller, Loeb-Harvard University Press, 1977.

Pepin, Ronald E. *The Vatican Mythographers*. Fordham University Press, 2008.

Phillippy, Patricia A. "Establishing Authority: Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus* and Christine De Pizan's *Le Livre De La Cité Des Dames*." *Romanic Review*, vol. 77, no. 3, 1986, pp. 167-194.

Pizan, Christine de. *The Book of the City of Ladies*. Translated by Earl Jeffrey Richards, Persa, 1998.

Plato. *Platonis Opera*. Edited by John Burnet, Oxford Classical Texts-Oxford university Press, 1901.

Reynolds, L. D., and N. G. Wilson. *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*, third edition. Clarendon, 1991.

Reynolds, Suzanne. "Inventing Authority: Glossing, Literacy and the Classical Text." *Prestige, Authority and power in Late Midieval Manuscripts and Texts*, edited by Felicity Riddy, Boydell & Brewer, 2000, pp. 7-16.

Rollinson, Philip. *Classical Theories of Allegory and Christian Culture*. Duquesne University Press, 1981.

Schreiber, Earl G. "Venus in the Medieval Mythographic Tradition." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 74, no. 4, 1975, pp. 519-535.

Seznec, Jean. *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art*. Harper Torchbook, 1961.

Shemek, Deanna. "Doing and Undoing: Boccaccio's Feminism." *Boccaccio: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, edited by Victoria Kirkham, Michael Sherberg and Janet Levarie Smarr, University of Chicago Press, 2014, pp. 195-204.

Sherman, Claire Richter. *Imaging Aristotle: Verbal and Visual Representation in Fourteenth-Century France*. University of California Press, 1995.

Singleton, Charles S. "In Exitu Israel de Aegypto," *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, vol. 118, 2000, pp. 167- 187.

Stecopoulos, Eleni with Karl D. Uitti. "Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la Cité des Dames*: The Reconstruction of Myth." *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan*, edited by Jeffrey Richards, et al., University of Georgia Press, 1992, pp. 48-62.

Szpiech, Ryan. "Alterity and Auctoritas: Reason and the Twelfth-Century Expansion of Authority." *Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic*, edited by Ryan Szpiech, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013, pp. 59-91.

Taylor, Jane H. M. "Translation as Reception: Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* and *Des Cleres et Nobles Femmes*." *Por Le Soie Amisté: Essays in Honor of Norris J. Lacy,* edited by Keith Busby and Catherine M. Jones, Rodopi, 2000, pp. 491-507.

Tolhurst, Fiona. "The Great Divide?: History and Literary History as Partners in Medieval Mythography." *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2004, pp. 7–27.

Tubach, Frederic C. "Exempla in the Decline." *Traditio*, vol. 18, 1962, pp. 407-417.

Vicari, Patricia. "*Sparagmos*: Orpheus among the Christians." *Orpheus: The Metamorphoses of a myth*, edited by John Warden, University of Toronto Press, 1982, pp. 63-83.

Virgil. *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I-VI*. Translated by H. R. Fairclough, Loeb-Harvard University Press, 1960.

Walters, Lori J. "Christine de Pizan as Translator and Voice of the Body Politic." *Christine de Pizan: A Casebook*, edited by Barbra K. Altmann and Deborah L. McGrady, Routledge, 2003, pp. 25-42.

-----. "The 'Humanist-Saint': Christine, Augustine, Petrarch, and Louis IX." *Contexts and Continuities: Proceedings of the IVth International Colloquium on Christine de Pizan*, edited by Angus J. Kennedy et al., vol. 3, University of Glasgow Press, 2002, pp. 873-888.

-----. "Christine de Pizan as Translator and Voice of the Body Politic." *Christine de Pizan: A Casebook*, edited by Barbra K. Altmann and Deborah L. McGrady, Routledge, 2003, pp. 25-42.

Wilson, Katharina M. "Introduction." *Medieval Women Writers*, edited by Katharina M. Wilson, Manchester University Press, 1984, pp. vii-xxix.

Ziolkowski, Jan M. "Cultures of Authority in the Long Twelfth Century," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 108, no. 4, 2009, pp. 421-448.