CHAPTER 6

Christine de Pizan's Feminist Self-Fashioning and the Invention of Dido

Vous diray qui je suis, qui parle,
Qui de femelle devins masle
Par Fortune, qu'ainsy le voult;
Si me mua et corps et voult
En homme naturel parfaict;
Et jadis fus femme, de fait
Homme suis, je ne ment pas.
La Mutacion de Fortune (141–46)

I will tell you who I am, who speak, who from female became male by fortune, who willed it so; she changed me, both body and will into a perfect natural man; and I am made a man who once was a woman. I do not lie.

In this programmatic passage from the beginning of the *Mutacion de Fortune*, Christine de Pizan (1364–1430) represents her entry into literary activity as a change of gender, a formulation repeated later in her autobiographical text the *Avision*.[1] As Christine narrates her life story, the death of her husband, which made her a widow at the age of twenty-five, thrust upon her a set of responsibilities that ostensibly made a man out of her; most specifically, her widowhood made it necessary for her to support herself, and to that end, she turned to writing and the patronage it offered.[2] Christine sees authorship as a masculine performance, and in the *Mutacion* she fashions her authorial identity accordingly.

Throughout her writing, Christine explicitly connects her biography—specifically her widowhood—to her emerging authorial roles. The gender-specific aspects of her authorial self-fashioning are most striking by contrast to the self-fashioning impulses of sixteenth-century men so vividly characterized by Stephen Greenblatt; for men such as Thomas More, or Christopher Marlowe, "self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange or hostile. This threatening Other —heretic, savage, witch, adulteress, traitor, Antichrist—must be *discovered* or *invented* in order to be attacked or destroyed"[3] (emphasis added). Greenblatt's model for a cultural poetics is quite obviously gendered. The fact that he characterizes the threatening Other as adulteress or witch

enacts the standard gestures of Western culture in aligning the Other with the female, but Greenblatt's inclusion of these two gender-specific terms in his list of Others also implies analogous categories of marginality: the savage is to the civilized as the adulteress is to her husband, and so on. In such a model, the marginality of the Other becomes easily elided with the marginal otherness of the female within social structures and cultural paradigms. In Greenblatt's terms, self-fashioning is a male prerogative, often accomplished at the expense of the female, as both categories are defined in English Renaissance culture. For instance, Gavin Douglas's self-fashioning as a translator of Virgil—and thereby a learned administrator with a claim to royal favors—depends on his reading of Aeneas's exemplary rejection of Dido as "threatening Other."

By contrast to Gavin Douglas and the men in Greenblatt's model, the self-fashioning construction of a female author more than a century earlier suggests an entirely different paradigm:[4] Christine de Pizan does not achieve her authorial identity in relation to "the threatening Other." Instead, it is her identity as a woman—and her culture's identification of woman with the Other—that must be negotiated and renegotiated in each of her texts. The relationship between gender and authorship consequently takes different forms in the various texts Christine composed, which accounts for her shifting subject positions as reader and writer of texts and traditions.[5] As Kevin Brownlee has shown, her early writings on the *Roman de la Rose* allowed her to "establish and to authorize her new identity as a woman writer—poet and clerk—within precisely those traditional literary discourses that had seemed to exclude this possibility."[6] Although the passage from the *Mutacion* presents the self that speaks as a female who becomes male, in other texts—most notably, the *Livre de la Cité des dames*—she represents the self that reads as female. As poet and clerk, Christine repeatedly encountered medieval versions of the *Aeneid* story and the contradictory figure of Dido, whose presence in medieval texts—whether as queen and virago, as chaste victim of Iarbas, or victim of her own desire for Aeneas—challenges any fixed categories of gender. In her authorial performance as a reader of Dido, a performance that demonstrates her rhetorical skill with antiphrasis and *inventio*, Christine achieves a "feminist" identity in the process of her textual negotiations.

The Author as Female Reader: Feminism as Textual Strategy

To claim any sort of feminist identity for Christine de Pizan engages the modern scholar in a divisive set of debates within Christine scholarship. Although the literary career of Christine de Pizan challenges the standard assumptions of many modern readers that women did not gain access to the means of literary production until the dawn of the novel,[7] the literary

texts of this early woman writer have not held up under the scrutiny of modern feminists.[8] That she is far from radical needs no explanation, but many a modern feminist has expressed dismay at her straightforward acceptance and even endorsement of such patriarchal constructs as marriage or chastity.[9] Nonetheless, one frequently finds her labeled a feminist by modern readers.[10] From one point of view, such disagreement is easily explained: Christine's writing shows moments of resistance and revisionary critique, especially in relation to textual traditions, yet her overall rhetorical position seldom allows her adequate space to criticize the social institutions of her world and the resulting power relations in reference to gender or class.[11] Although a "feminism" also emerges from time to time in her responses to political or social institutions—particularly the practices of war—she does not sustain a feminist consciousness on political or social topics, and she remains a more contradictory figure when viewed in this light than when seen in the context of late medieval humanism. Her feminism is largely identifiable as—and limited to—a textual strategy, a result of her readerly engagement in narrative and historical texts and her performance as a woman reader.

Readership is central to authorship throughout the texts of Christine de Pizan, a fact that is visually emphasized by the variations on the "humanist" portrait of the author as reader that frequently accompany her works; such portraits literally depict her as a woman "avironnee de plusieurs volumes de diverses mateires," as she describes herself at the start of the *Cité des dames*.[12] The "humanist" portrait of Christine-as-reader points to the fact that she had access to books and libraries, and she possessed the education and learning that made it possible for her to make use of them. As Christine herself frequently notes, she was quite unusual in this respect.[13]

In the context of late medieval humanism as it develops in French court culture as a result of the extensive translation efforts and library building patronized by Charles V, vernacular textual culture was a vast and complex construct. In the rhetoric of reading dramatized by the *Cité des dames*, Christine the reader confronts the misogyny of these textual cultures and offers a revision of history in allegorical prose. the *Cité des dames* dramatizes the relationship between reading and writing in its introductory chapters, which describe Christine's perusal of a copy of Matheolus's *Lamentations*. Translated and amplified by Jean Le Fevre, this text exemplifies the medieval antifeminist polemic. Matheolus organized his diatribe around a series of general complaints about women—particularly as wives—and the institution of marriage. In fairly conventional rhetoric supported by the standard exempla, Matheolus insists that women are disobedient, quarrelsome, envious, cruel, proud, incapable of keeping secrets, and so forth. Christine's reading leads her to

formulate questions concerning the origins and purpose of the misogynist tradition, which she finds patently false, but nonetheless pervasive:

> Mais la veue d'icelluy dit livre, tout soit il de nulle auttorité, ot engendré en moy nouvelle penssee . . . que tant de divers hommes, clercs et autres, ont esté, et sont, sy enclins a dire de bouche et en leur traittiez et escrips tant de diableries et de vituperes de femmes et de leurs condicions. Et nom mie seulement un ou deux ne cestuy Matheolus . . . mais generaument aucques in tous traittiez philosophes, pouettes, tous orateurs . . . semble que tous parlent par une meismes bouche et tous accordent une semblable conclusion, determinant les meurs femenins enclins et plains de tous les vices. (1.1)
>
> But just the sight of this book, even though it was of no authority, made me wonder . . . that so many different men—and learned men among them—have been and are so inclined to express both in speaking and in their treatises and writings so many wicked insults about women and their behavior. Not only one or two and not even just this Mathéolus. . . . but, more generally, judging from the treatises of all philosophers and poets and from all the orators . . . it seems that they all speak from one and the same mouth. They all concur in one conclusion: that the behavior of women is inclined to and full of every vice. (pp. 4–5)

Christine's comment that Matheolus's book was "de nulle auttorité" illustrates the variable horizons a didactic text might occupy in late medieval culture. The authority of any one interpretive tradition or text would appear provisional in contrast to alternative traditions or in the face of the multiplication or embellishment of meanings brought about by translation and commentary.[14] Textual authority implicitly depends on context. Nonetheless, she cannot overlook the authoritative tradition in which Matheolus's book participates, a tradition that includes Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*. In following up the implications of these thoughts, Christine is filled with self-loathing and remarks upon her gendered identity: "Helas! Dieux, pourquoy ne me faiz tu naistre au monde en masculin sexe" (1.2) (Alas, God, why did You not let me be born in the world as a man? [p. 5]). Despite her earlier comments in the *Mutacion* about being turned into a man by fortune, her lament suggests that her experience as a reader of misogynist texts inescapably constructs her as female. She concludes: "par ma foulour me tenoye tres malcontente de ce qu'en corps femenin m'ot fait Dieux estre au monde" (1.2) (and in my folly I considered myself most unfortunate because God had made me

inhabit a female body in this world [p. 5]). By contrast to the performance of masculinity in her authorial role, Christine states that her experiences as a reader of misogynous texts activate a corporeal awareness as a person "en corps femenin." Like the self-conscious evocation of a masculine identity in the *Mutacion*, these assertions of femaleness programmatically foreground the interpretive issues faced by the reader who occupies a feminine subject position.[15] The author of the *Mutacion* may have been forced into masculine roles by fortune, but in the *Cité des dames* she will rhetorically read like a woman.

The literary experience narrated at the start of this text is, in many respects, a conventional introduction, since medieval dream visions often begin with a representation of reading.[16] But Christine's specific construction as a female reader—and her reaction to her reading as a woman—dramatizes the dangers of misogynistic texts for the woman reader, since it depicts the paralysis of self-hatred that results.[17] At this critical juncture, the three ladies appear, and Raison intervenes, chiding Christine for her uncritical acceptance of the terms of misogynistic discourse and then presenting her with an interpretive model of resistance. She appeals to the tradition of commentary and the revisionary gesture implied by that tradition, to the distrust of poetic fictionality, and finally to a principle of rhetoric as a means of destabilizing the perceived authority of misogynistic discourse:

> Regardes se les tres plus grans phillosophes qui ayent esté que tu argues contre ton meismes sexe, en ont point determiné faulx et au contraire du vray, et se ils respunent l'un l'autre et reprennent . . . Et il semble que tu cuydes que toutes les parolles des phillosophes soyent article de foy et qu'ilz ne puissent errer. Et des pouettes dont tu parles, ne sces tu pas bien que ilz ont parlé en plusieurs choses en maniere de fable et se veullent aucunes foiz entendre au contraire de ce que leurs diz demonstrent? Et les puet on prendre par la rigle de grammaire qui se nomme antifrasis qui s'entant, si comme tu sces, si comme on diroit tel est mauvais, c'est a dire que il est bon, et aussi a l'opposite. Si te conseille que tu faces ton prouffit de leurs diz et que tu l'entendes ainsi, quel que fust leur entente, es lieux ou ilz blasment les femmes. (1.4)
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> Consider whether the greatest philosophers who have lived and whom you support against your own sex have ever resolved whether ideas are false and contrary to the truth. Notice how these same philosophers contradict and criticize one another. . . . It also seems that you think that all the words of the philosophers are articles of faith, that they could never be wrong. As far as the poets of

> whom you speak are concerned, do you not know that they spoke on many subjects in a fictional way and that often they mean the contrary of what their words openly say? One can interpret them according to the grammatical figure of *antiphrasis*, which means, as you know, that if you call something bad, in fact, it is good, and also vice versa. Thus I advise you to profit from their works and to interpret them in the manner in which they are intended in those passages where they attack women. (pp. 6–7)

In this pithy summary of several interpretive issues concerning language, tradition, and authority in medieval culture, Raison provides the female reader with the means to enter the dialogic tradition of textual commentary and thereby problematize, if not subvert, the authority to which misogynistic discourse appeals. Such interventions are made possible by the early fifteenth-century textual cultures within which Christine worked: the texts that Christine read are highly mediated versions of textual dialogues, stretching back through complex traditions and textual transformations.[18] With the appropriation of the figure of antiphrasis, however, Raison authorizes the resisting reader. According to the preceptive grammarians, antiphrasis is a trope considered to be a subsection of allegory. Antiphrasis is included by name in the popular medieval treatises by Alexander of Villedieu and Evrard of Bethune; it can be traced to Donatus, who uses the term.[19] Donatus initially states that allegory is a trope by which another thing is meant than what is stated. As one of seven major categories of allegory, antiphrasis is a form of irony: irony is a trope that expresses a statement by its opposite, though its effectiveness depends on the seriousness of its proposition. Antiphrasis is "irony" of one word.[20] Raison's explanation, "that if you call something bad, in fact, it is good," specifically reproduces this rhetorical discussion of antiphrasis from the grammatical tradition; Christine no doubt based this passage on the discussion of antiphrasis in the section on grammar from the *Etymologia* of Isidore of Seville, a text Christine used in the process of composing the *Mutacion*.[21] By presenting the possibility of straightforwardly inverting the categories of antifeminist discourse, particularly when those categories are labeled by a single term, Raison makes it rhetorically legitimate to invert the terms of misogyny, to say that women are prudent rather than foolish, chaste rather than wanton, and so forth. To a large degree, the *Cité des dames* literally follows this principle in its interrogation of Matheolus's *Lamentations*.

Yet the rhetorical possibilities of antiphrasis are not limited to the revision of Matheolus's *Lamentations*, a text that Christine admits she cannot take seriously. The narrative of the *Cité des dames* engages just as pointedly in a commentary on the representation of women in historical

texts and in medieval conceptions of history. Nowhere is this revisionary approach so obvious as it is in the story of Dido. The multiple possibilities the reader might encounter in the case of a literary figure such as Dido would empower the reader-as-author to formulate a revisionist stance toward misogyny and the masculine bias of textual traditions, without explicitly challenging textual authority as a cultural given. Of the pagan women who are numbered among the residents of Christine's city, Dido best exemplifies Christine's antiphrastic approach to competing textual traditions and her consequent formation of an authorial position identifiable as feminist. To begin with, Christine's thematic interest in Dido might be seen as a feminist revision of Dante's authorial relationship with Virgil.

Earl Jeffrey Richards asserts that Christine essentially saw herself as a French—and female—Dante. According to Richards, "Christine envisaged her literary vocation in the vernacular in similar terms as Dante: that is, both viewed their poetic calling as emerging from a confrontation with Virgil, whose work they understood as the essential embodiment of poetry."[22] Richards points to a passage in the *Chemin de long estude* in which Christine specifically refers to the moment in *Inferno* 1 when Dante names Virgil as his *maestro* and *autore*. As several scholars have noted, Christine takes the Sibyl—Aeneas's guide to the underworld in *Aeneid* 6—as her own guide in the *Chemin de long stude*, thereby replacing the masculine model implied by the Dante-Virgil partnership with a model of feminine partnership.[23]

In constructing an authorial position centered on her experiences as a female reader in writing the *Cité des dames*, Christine substitutes Dido—a city builder known to her in a variety of contradictory texts—for the Virgil Dante invokes as an embodied guide. The *Cité des dames* implicitly evokes the same Virgilian subtext that stands behind the first two cantos of the *Inferno*, where the history of Italy, Rome, and Christendom is seen as the historical fulfillment of the mythic agenda of Aeneas. In these sections, Dante specifically names Lavinia and Camilla. Within such a "Virgilian" context in the *Cité des dames*, several women from the *Aeneid* are prominently featured: Camilla, Lavinia, and Dido are all represented in Christine's text, and Dido's story especially represents a culmination of the thematic issues at play throughout the *Cité des dames*. Christine's interest in these characters thematically locates the text of the *Cité des dames* in relation to the specific, literary traditions derived from Virgil's *Aeneid* and his depiction of Dido. Dante the poet expresses the complex set of textual relationships at work in the *Commedia* when Dante the pilgrim insists that he is neither Aeneas nor Paul. Within her allegorical program, Christine-as-reader, by contrast, appears to figure her authorial self in the act of reading Dido.

Of course, to Christine the "Virgilian" context was highly mediated. There is nothing in Christine's poetry or prose to suggest that she had direct experience with the Latin hexameters of the *Aeneid* itself.[24] Christine's awareness of the *Aeneid* story appears to be based on her experience with the texts of the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*. As we have seen, this vast narrative of universal history from the thirteenth century subsumes the plot of the *Aeneid* within the structures of medieval history. Consequently, the Virgilian Dido, as Christine might recognize her, did not belong to a fixed, authoritative Latin text, since the textual authority of the *Aeneid* takes a much more ephemeral form in the French prose summaries of the *Aeneid* story found in the various redactions of the *Histoire*.

In addition to such an explicitly "Virgilian" context, the *Cité des dames*—and Christine's reading of Dido—is mediated by several textual and historical traditions that are related, however indirectly, to Virgilian traditions. Central to these relationships is the complex textuality represented by Augustine's *De civitate Dei* in late medieval French humanism. Augustine's *De civitate Dei*—a literary and philosophical confrontation of Virgil's *Aeneid*—is generally recognized as a primary "pre-text" for the *Cité des dames*, particularly since Christine's title evokes Augustine's *Cité de dieu*, the title she would have known from the 1375 French translation by Raoul de Presles.[25] Charles V commissioned this French version of Augustine's *De civitate Dei* as part of his efforts at establishing a large body of traditional texts, both religious and secular, in French translations that would form the material basis of a *translatio studii*.[26] At least fifteen richly illustrated manuscripts of Raoul de Presles's *Cité de dieu*—which included commentary material in addition to Augustine's original text—were produced in Paris or northern France between 1375 and 1410; several appear to have been specifically produced for by Charles V or Jean, duc de Berry.[27]

This version of Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, supplemented as it is by the insertion of historical information and illustrated by miniatures representing historical and biblical incidents, exhibits a historical rather than a theological interest in the city of God, as Alexandre de Laborde noted in his massive study of the manuscript traditions of Raoul de Presles's text. The translator's Prologue dramatizes the historical immediacy of this reading of the city of God in Raoul de Presles's deferential emphasis on the lineage of Charles V in relation to a medieval construction of history and kingship.[28] The status of the *Cité de Dieu* in the decades immediately preceding the composition of the *Cité des dames*, we might see Augustine's text, in all its textuality, as an important mediating text for the production of the *Cité des dames*. Yet Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, though it essentially appropriates and re-presents the thematics of the city from

Virgil's *Aeneid*, notably omits any mention of Dido.[29] Christine's interest in Dido implicitly critiques Augustine's erasure of her. Christine's handling of traditional material in her Dido exempla demonstrates how Christine's the *Cité des dames* is positioned to interrogate the powerfully authoritative tradition dominated by Virgil and Augustine on the one hand, and Jean de Meun, Dante, and Boccaccio on the other.

Dido and History: The Self-Fashioning of the Author

Dido's story, as told within a historical paradigm in the *Mutacion* and then retold in the revisionary allegory of the *Cité des dames*, is emblematic of the relationship between these two texts, particularly since Dido's identity as city builder makes her central to the allegorical program of the textual city under construction in the first two books of the *Cité des dames*. Christine's interest in recontextualizing and retelling Dido's story in relation to the founding of Carthage foregrounds the thematic value of cities as a cultural construct central to French consciousness at the start of the fifteenth century.

By 1404, when she came to write the *Cité des dames*, Christine the writer/reader had had ample exposure to the textual traditions of Western culture, and in particular to medieval historical narratives, the reading of which formed the basis of a large segment of her long (23,636-line) poetical treatise, the *Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune* (1403). The seven parts of this poem are organized around a Boethian meditation on Fortune. The last three parts present a "universal history" that envelopes Christine's account of her own personal misfortunes in part 1 and concludes with a commentary on the contemporary historical events to which she is a witness. In this vast, conventionally narrated framework of ancient and biblical narrative drawn largely from the texts of the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*, two themes from the historical traditions converge: the genealogical narrative of lineage and the destruction of cities.[30] The recitation of lineage—whether a biblical sequence of *patriarches* drawn from the Old Testament or the history of kings—shapes the narrative of the *Mutacion* 4–7.

Dido's presence in the *Mutacion* is subject to the thematic priorities of history as it was conventionally written in the Middle Ages. The removal of Dido from Trojan lineage and Roman history is reflected in the genealogical structure that framed the medieval historical consciousness in the tradition of texts such as the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*. As we have seen, since Dido plays no role in the transference of power and civilization from Troy to Rome to France, she is omitted from the genealogical framework of medieval history, and frequently eliminated from historical narrative as well. Lavinia's name, by contrast, often

occurs in narratives of lineage since she contributes to the genealogy of Roman emperors, and then by extension, to the lineage of European emperors and kings, including those of France. In the *Livre du Chemin de long estude* (3110–36), Christine presents a linear model for the history of European civilization and adapts the Virgilian story to the narrative of universal history, which results in the complete omission of Dido's name and story, while Lavinia's role and story become visible. Of Aeneas's arrival in Italy, Christine comments: "Le roy Latin a moult grant joie / Le receut, et pour son lignage / Il lui donna par mariage / Sa fille" (3552–55) (The Latin king received him with great joy, and for his lineage, he gave his daughter in marriage to him). Likewise, the *Mutacion* includes Lavinia's name in the description of Roman lineage, since she gives birth to Silvius, who becomes the ruler after Ascanius (18342–47). In this respect, Lavinia's significance—which results from her male descendants—stands in direct opposition to Dido's place in history. Not only does Dido fail to leave an heir—a male descendant—but her city is eventually destroyed as well.

The contrast between Dido and Lavinia is explored in the *Mutacion*, which juxtaposes the stories of the two women, the Dido story preceding the Lavinia story in the text. Following the bare outline of the Virgilian version, available in the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*,[31] Christine narrates the destruction of the queen:

Ceste dame a Eneas donne
Tous ses avoirs et habandonne,
Et cuer et corps en ses mains met,
Car cellui lui jure et promet
Qu'il l'espousera, sanz jamais
Avoir autre en sa vie, mais,
Il lui menti, et s'en parti,
Sanz congié, dont en tel parti
Fu Dido que piteusement
S'occist de dueil; et ensement
Mourut Dido, au cler visage,
Qui tant ot esté preux et sage
Qu'aultre dame ne la passoit!
Mais sage et folz Amours deçoit!
Eneas, qui la refusa,
D'ainsi la laissier s'excusa,
En disant que les dieux l'avoient
Amonnesté que ilz vouloient
Qu'en Ytalie s'en alast,
Et en ce lieu femme espousast;

Sebile l'ot prophetisié,
Qui parmi Enfer l'atisié
Le convoya et adestra,
Et l'ame Anchisés lui monstra.
Si lui dist que de lui vendroient
Lignees, qui el monde tendroyent. (18283–308)

This lady had given Eneas all of her possessions and herself; and put her heart and body in his hands, because he swore to her and promised that he would marry her, never to have another in his life. But he lied to her, and he departed without taking leave. Dido had such grief over this departure that she piteously killed herself. And in this manner Dido died, Dido of bright visage, who had been so valiant and wise that no other lady could surpass her! But love deludes both wise and foolish. Eneas, who rejected her, then excused himself for abandoning her thus, by saying that the gods had announced that they desired that he go to Italy, and in that place marry a wife. The Sibyl had prophesied it to him, the excited one who had accompanied and guided him through Hell, and shown to him the soul of Anchises. This one said to him that from him would come a lineage that would extend throughout the world.

This passage illustrates some of the paradoxes of gender and history that Christine confronted in the composition of the *Mutacion*. This "Virgilian" segment of the Troy story names Dido and elegiacally comments on her nobility and value ("Qui tant ot esté preux et sage / Qu'aultre dame ne la passoit"). Nonetheless, the historical framework of the *Mutacion* implicitly privileges Lavinia's place in history as the divinely promised bride whose role as wife ensures the lineage of the Roman empire. That Lavinia is not named in this particular passage illustrates the fact that even women—such as Lavinia—who belong to history might remain nameless in such historical paradigms; the focus on Dido illustrates as well the extent to which Dido's story defies standard categories of gender in terms of history and lineage.

Throughout the *Mutacion*, Dido is thematically connected to Carthage, a city whose complete destruction by the Romans in the third century B.C.E. received thorough coverage, via Livy, in medieval texts of universal history. In the seventh part of the *Mutacion de Fortune*, "qui parle de l'istoire des Rommains abrigee," Christine inserts an elegiac comment about the fall of Dido into her narration of the destruction of Carthage. Her comment laments Dido and her city and simultaneously acknowledges that Dido is omitted from the lineage of Rome:

.IX[e] ans avoit que fondee
L'ot celle, qui dure souldee
Hot, par Eneas trop amer,
Ce fu Dido, lorsque, par mer,
De Troye s'en aloit, a nage.
Celle dame ot fondé Cartage,
Bien estoit drois que fust destruicte
Par la ligne Eneas et suite. (20599–606)

It had been 900 years since she had founded it (Carthage), who had suffered retribution because she loved Aeneas too much—this was Dido—when he sailed by sea on his way from Troy. This lady had founded Carthage. It was only fitting that it was afterward destroyed by the lineage of Eneas.

In the corresponding passage in the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*, Dido is noted briefly as the founder of Carthage.[32] Christine has amplified that comment to connect the Aeneas-Dido story to the fall of Carthage, a connection that emphasizes the survival and power of the lineage of Aeneas, and elegiacally notes the destruction of the city of Carthage:

Mais grant pitié fu de destruire
Tel cité, qu'on veoit reluire
En toute beaulté et richece,
En force, en valour, en noblece. (20609–12)

But it was a great pity to destroy such a city, which could be seen to shine in complete beauty and wealth, in power, in courage, and in nobility.

Even as she acknowledges the conventional view[33] that sees Rome's conquest of Carthage as the historical consequence of the Aeneas-Dido story, Christine nonetheless laments the fall of this city.

Although essentially left out of history, Dido is not completely erased in the *Mutacion*. As Christine's reading of history clearly demonstrates, the story of Dido and her connection to Carthage may not be represented in the Eurocentric, masculine construct of history, but like the Amazons (who are well represented in Christine's city), Dido and Carthage represent a persistent countermemory that cannot be completely suppressed or erased from historical consciousness. In the *Mutacion*, Christine is ambivalent toward Dido, an ambivalence that hints at her discomfort with the patriarchal construct of history that she received from texts and transmitted in the task of writing the *Mutacion*; it points as well to her problems with the rhetoric of war that such historical constructs were

often used to serve.[34] Moreover, Christine frequently refers to Carthage (without mention of Dido) in several texts, particularly in discussions of warfare, as in her later treatise *Epistre de la prison de vie humaine* (1415). The destruction of Carthage casts a long shadow over the textual history she formulated in response to her sources; to Christine, the destruction of Carthage must have figured Dido's fate, writ large.

The thematic emphasis on the destruction of cities such as Carthage in the *Mutacion* illustrates the commonplaces of medieval historiography: the city as a unit functions as a protagonist in medieval historical narratives. Christine's narrative of the destruction of cities in the *Mutacion*—soon followed by her allegorical construction of a city in the *Cité des dames*—reflects the textual traditions that give such prominence to the city as a cultural entity. In addition to the obvious cultural context suggested by literary and historical traditions, the *Mutacion* and the *Cité des dames* reflect the political and social understanding of the city as a unit of defense, as it was for the French during the Hundred Years War. To French writers and readers of the early fifteenth century, the construction and destruction of textual cities would have had an immediate and resonant meaning beyond the traditional allegorical or historical connotations.

Although the last quarter of the fourteenth century was marked by a series of truces between the kings of France and England that brought relative peace and stability to the French, the first four decades of the conflict had left significant traces on the French landscape and consciousness.[35] The military practices of the English focused attention on cities, resulting in a war marked less by decisive battles between armies than by sieges of cities and walled towns—the sort of warfare in which the noncombatants who reside in contested territory are heavily implicated and suffer accordingly. The French responded to the initial campaigns of the English by investing enormous resources in fortifying cities, especially by building city walls and strengthening existing strongholds.[36] Throughout the fourteenth century, but especially during the reign of Charles V, the French landscape was transformed by these defensive measures aimed at turning urban settlements into walled fortresses.

Christine arrived in France in 1368, soon after the inception of such efforts toward the fortification of cities, and she grew into adulthood in a culture poised and prepared for invasion. Although the *Mutacion* and the *Cité des dames* were composed before the English invasions began again in the fifteenth century, these two texts reflect the cultural awareness of warfare and the anxieties of the French at the start of the reign of Henry IV.[37] The ostensible source of conflict was the English claim to the throne of France—a claim based on the construction of the royal genealogy in such a way that the English king, Edward III, would be placed more

directly in the line of succession to the French crown than Philip VI, the successful claimant. Edward's claim depended on the fact that his mother, Isabella, the spouse of Edward III, was the daughter of Philip IV, who held the French throne from 1285 to 1314. Although Edward's genealogy made him the grandson of one French monarch (Philip IV) and the nephew of three succeeding French kings (Louis X, Philip V, and Charles IV), his claim depended on tracing descent through the female line. Christopher Allmand summarizes the issue as it was understood at the time:

> Edward appeared to have a good claim, indeed perhaps the best claim, to succeed him [Charles IV]. His right, however, had been transmitted to him through his mother, and it was this transmission through the female, later explained as the inability of a woman to pass on a claim which, as a woman, she could not herself exercise, which worked against Edward's ambition. When the French nobility, in whose hands the resolution of such a crisis lay, made its choice, that choice was to make one of their number, Philip, Count of Valois, king. The grounds were essentially those of suitability: Philip was French; he was eighteen years older than his English rival (then aged only fifteen); and he had always lived in France. Although not, as Edward III was, a direct descendant of Philip IV, he was at least his nephew through his father, Charles of Valois. In the circumstances, the degree of kinship was sufficiently close to secure him the support he required.[38]

Although Edward's claim was a rhetorical gesture intended to give an ideological justification to an essentially feudal conflict, his claim resulted in a proliferation of statements concerning the place of the female in the construction of royal lineage; most notably, by the time of Charles V, the French had appealed to the "Salic law" as justification for excluding Edward's claim on the grounds that it depended wholly on descent through the female line.[39] While the battles and sieges of the fourteenth century resulted from multiple economic and social causes, this debate around lineage and gender remained the stuff of war propaganda for the entire period of conflict.[40]

The composition of the *Mutacion* took place within such an ideological context: given the historical moment that produced these traditions and this text, this thematic emphasis in the *Mutacion* on lineage and the destruction of cities is especially significant. The textual construction of history around a masculine genealogy that essentially excluded women from the structures of history mirrors rather closely the appeal to the Salic law as an ideological defense for the French claim. Although Christine does not completely omit women from her narrative—many of the

women in the *Cité des dames* appear in the *Mutacion*—in composing the *Mutacion*, she was participating in the construction of history around narratives of male lineage punctuated by the fall of cities. In this regard, the *Mutacion* is an important pre-text to the *Cité des dames*.

The English atrocities in France, well remembered in 1403 from the campaigns of Edward III and the Black Prince several decades earlier, undercut any possible chivalric concepts of war or idealization of military practices from the point of view of the noncombatant.[41] Christine must have been aware of the difficult position of the noncombatant: the military practices of the war brought incredible suffering to French women as well as to men. Townswomen and peasants often starved while a city was under siege, only to be raped and then butchered when the city fell.[42] Men in arms could potentially be taken prisoner (rather than killed) and held for ransom—a chivalric "courtesy" grounded purely in economic terms that offered the noncombatant very little protection in siege warfare;[43] Christine frequently mentions the vulnerability of women to rape during warfare.[44] In the *Mutacion*, Christine confronted a vast textual tradition that constructed history around lineage—traced through biblical, ancient, and medieval times—that either omitted women or subsumed them around a male genealogy punctuated by the fall of cities. As the collective French experience of the fourteenth century demonstrated, although women were omitted from lineage, they were not protected from the suffering of war that such lineages were used to justify. It is this disjunction between ideology and practice that best contextualizes the visible shift in emphasis from the *Mutacion* to the *Cité des dames*.

The thematic emphasis on the destruction of cities, so relentlessly rehearsed in the *Mutacion*, is replaced in the *Cité des dames* by the allegorical structure of city building: the narrator metaphorically constructs a city that will house the literary, historical, and religious women who are otherwise suppressed, overlooked, or misrepresented in history. In the *Cité des dames*, the detailed emphasis on architectural details and metaphors counteracts the cyclical destruction of cities that emerged from the *Mutacion*. The siege mentality of the *Mutacion* gives way to a serene framework of assembly rather than a narrative of genealogy. Although the *Mutacion* acknowledges an architectural and visual arrangement of texts, especially in the castle of Fortune and the hall of Fame where historical texts are depicted, it does not develop a coherent spatial order. By contrast to the model of linear history, which forms the narrative paradigm in the *Mutacion*, the exempla and anecdotes of the *Cité des dames* organize a spatial rather than temporal allegory.

The manuscript context of the *Cité des dames* visually reinforces the textual city as an allegory articulated in spatial terms. Like most of

Christine's works—most notably the *Epistre d'Othea* with its one hundred-plus illuminations—the early editions of the *Cité des dames* were all richly illuminated and produced under Christine's direction as luxury editions. As Sandra Hindman has shown, Christine herself generally took responsibility for the selection and execution of the miniatures in her texts, and careful attention to such miniatures and their "pictorial antecedents" demonstrates "the intervention of an author whose sensibility was highly attuned to visual imagery."[45] In contemporary manuscripts, each of the three books of the *Cité des dames* is introduced by one lavishly executed miniature, which, in Hindman's terms, provides "an intelligible visual summation of the book that it prefaces."[46] Such summation not only illustrates the spatial arrangement of the allegory, but it also shows the complex issues of specularity and textuality that are negotiated in Christine's invention of Dido, as we shall see.

The initial miniature that introduces book 1 of the *Cité des dames* in Harley 4431 (see figure 22) has a bipartite structure: the left half represents Christine at her desk; before her stand Dames Raison, Droiture, and Justice. Christine as author reads from an open book; on the desk lie three other books depicted as large luxury editions. This half of the miniature evokes the tradition of the "humanist portrait" of Christine the author as reader/writer that we have already noted.[47] Although the number of books depicted in such authorial presentations might vary, they are a common feature of pictorial representations of Christine the author—a constant visual reminder of her confrontation with texts, specifically with illuminated texts produced as bulky commodities. The right half of the miniature depicts the allegorical focus of the *Cité des dames* through the city-building activities of Christine and Raison, who are employed in fashioning a city wall. As Hindman notes, "The two scenes also give visual form to the metaphor that underlies the *Cité des dames* by reinforcing the association between the enterprises of authoring and building."[48] In addition, the scene insists that the activities of authoring and building depend on reading, and that the allegory of city building results from the author's status as a reader who must rely on texts and textual traditions in the "invention" of her city.

That the architectural metaphors so prominent throughout the prose of the *Cité des dames* are visually emphasized in each of the three miniatures that introduce the three books is obvious; however, it is significant that Christine's visual plan for the *Cité des dames* is limited to these three illuminations. This limited program of illustration marks a departure from the extensive visual text of the *Epistre d'Othea*, and it stands in sharp contrast to one of the most important "source" texts for the *Cité des dames*, the French versions of Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus*, *Des cleres femmes*, which, as we have seen, contain an illustration for each

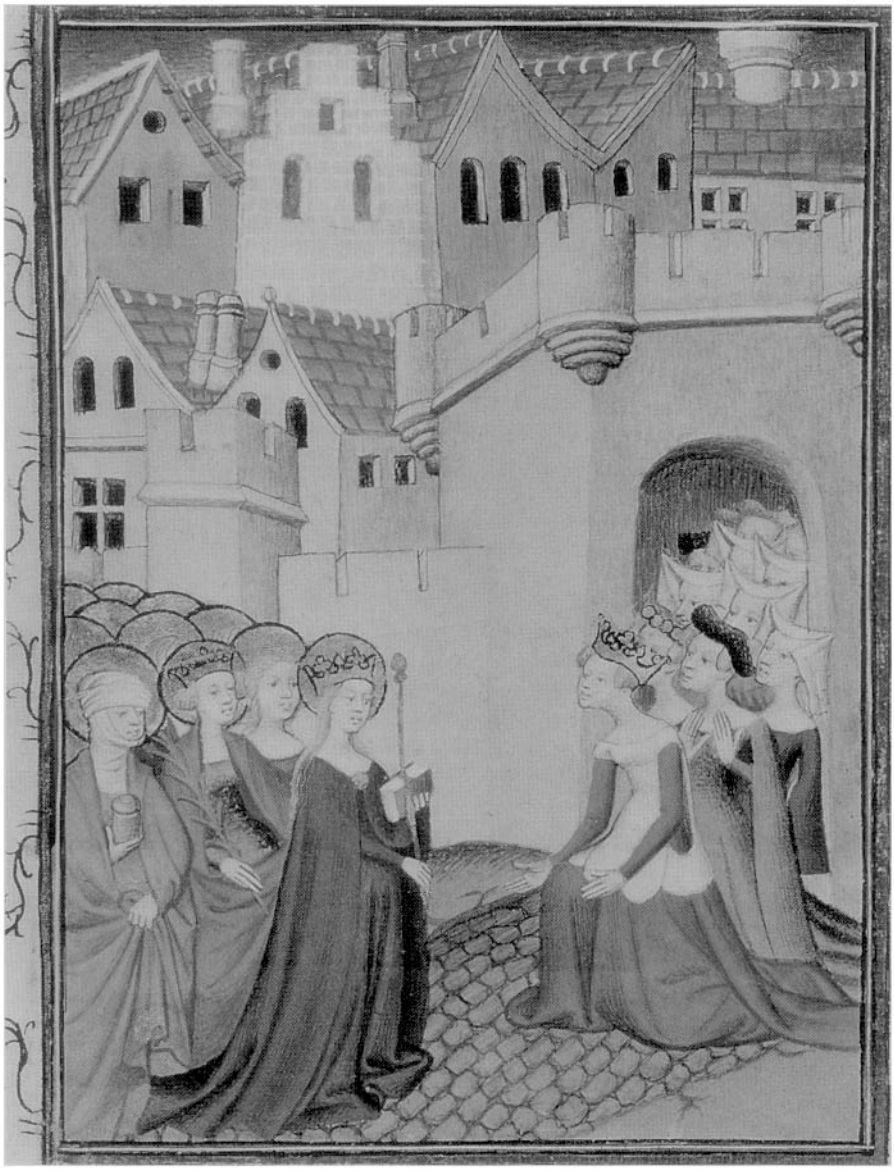
22. Christine at her desk; Christine builds her city. The *Cité des dames*. London, British Library, Harley 4431, fol. 288r. Fifteenth century. By permission of the British Library.

exemplum. As if to refuse the specular economy of the texts of *Des cleres femmes*, the textual exempla in the *Cité des dames* are not illustrated with individual images for each woman and each exemplum. Rather, taken together, the women in the *Cité des dames* are incorporated into the thematics of city building, since the exempla represent "lesquelles dites dames ont par si longtemps esté delaissies, descloses comme champ sans haye, sans trouver champion aucun qui pour leur deffence comparust souffisantment" (1.7) (those ladies who have been abandoned for so long, exposed like a field without a surrounding hedge, without finding a champion to afford them an adequate defense [p. 10]). Consequently, the focus of book 3 on a city that can provide a safe haven for women is visually reinforced in the third miniature, which depicts the entrance of the queen of heaven and a group of female saints into the city of ladies (see figure 23). This image visually enacts the textual revision that shapes Christine's allegorical city.

The density and architectural mass of the city walls that fill most of the illumination form a visual citation of the illustrations of the celestial city (see figure 24) found in the manuscripts of Raoul de Presles's *Cité de dieu*, two of which were illuminated in the same workshop as the *Cité des dames*.[49] Such visual intertextuality replaces the images of the church fathers with a female assembly of saints led by the queen of heaven.[50] The substitution of female saints for the male figures of church authority suggests that the masculine models for cities, history, and civilization, particularly as found in textual traditions, have failed to provide adequate champions or defense for women. Instead of the distributed authority suggested by the placement of the four church fathers in the four corners of the illumination—each figure is engaged in the authoritative act of writing—the *Cité des dames* illumination is less hierarchical. The queen of heaven is clearly distinguishable from the saints, but there is no rank visible in the dense group of women who form a procession behind her. By contrast to the church fathers, the female saints do not each singly represent authority. As a group, however, these saints are about to claim the protection offered by Christine's *Cité des dames*. The visual images in the *Cité des dames* do not merely cite the pictorial program of the *Cité de dieu*, they revise the masculine images of traditions and hierarchy that are part of the Augustinian tradition. Like the pictorial revision of Augustine's celestial city, the revision of the Dido story in the *Cité des dames* challenges the masculine bias of textual authority.

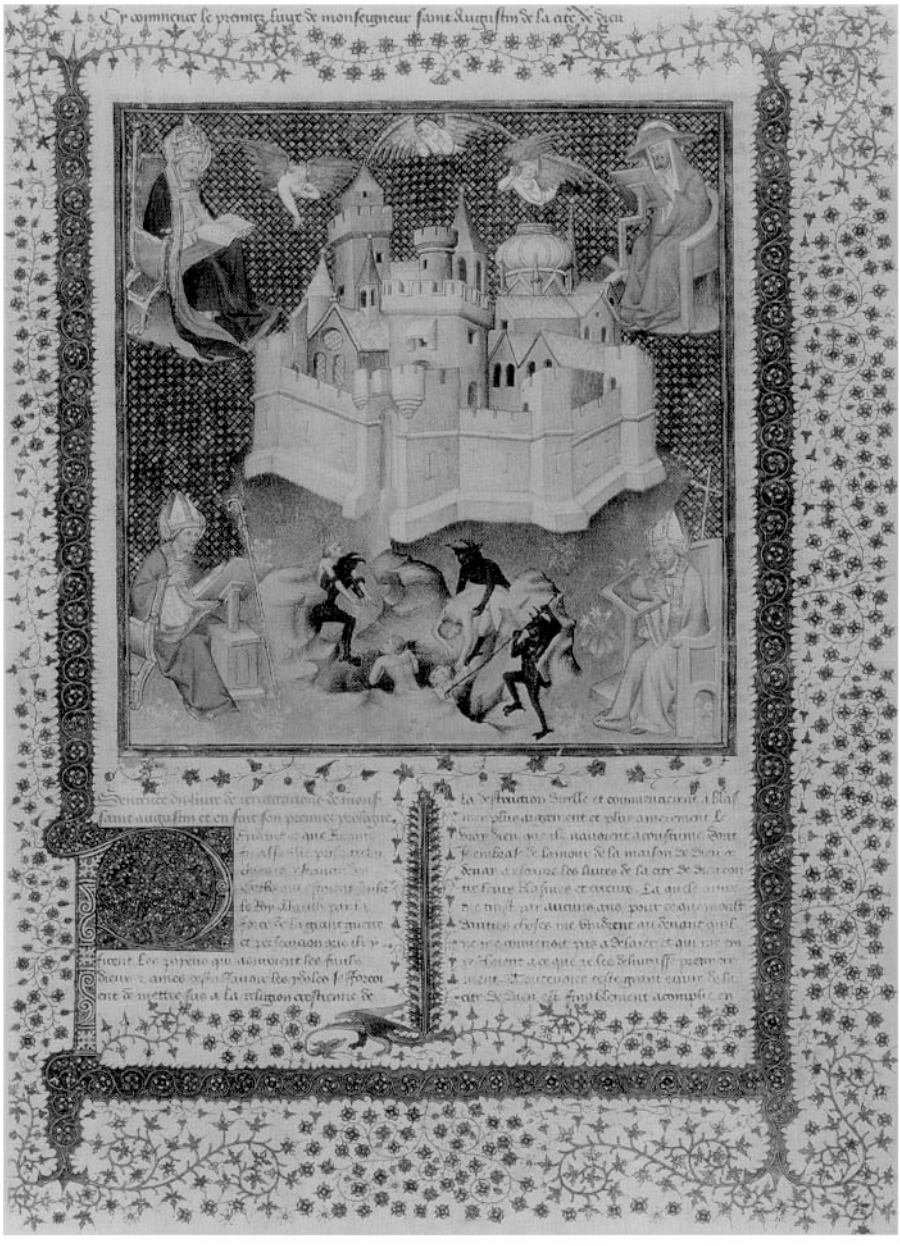
Rhetorical Invention and the Sources of the *Cité des dames*

In addition to the model of the resisting reader made possible by the practice of antiphrasis, Christine's role as author required that her reader-



23. Christine welcomes the saints into the city. The *Cité des dames.* Book 3. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, français 607, fol. 67v. Fifteenth century. By permission.

responses be transferred into her textual constructions. In the authorial subject position that emerges in the *Cité des dames,* the rhetorical process of *inventio* provides the means by which Christine could incor-



24. The celestial city. Augustine, the *Cité de Dieu*, translation by Raoul de Presles. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms français 23, fol. 4r. Fifteenth century. By permission.

porate her readerly experiences into her writing. That Christine's writing is all drawn from her reading illustrates several traditional aspects of medieval rhetoric as a descriptive and prescriptive discourse; medieval rhetorical treatises essentially assume the intertextual basis of discourse, particularly narrative, almost to the extent of eliding the reader and the writer. In such a context, the use of "sources" becomes an important theoretical issue; indeed, the process of finding or discovering exempla to support the assertions of a rhetorical argument was known as invention (*inventio*). In the *Mutacion*, Christine lists the five parts of rhetoric: "la primeraine, invencion, / Et l'autre, disposicion, / Elocucion et memoire, / Prononciacion nottoire" (8043–46). This comment (almost a commonplace) was probably drawn from Bruneto Latini's *Livor de tresor*; its presence in this discussion of rhetoric suggests the extent to which a writer such as Christine might see narrative as commentary, as an opportunity to re-present and gloss earlier texts and traditions. This connection between reading and writing allowed Christine, in her authorial role, to adapt her narrative voice to her experiences as a reader.

In the *Cité des dames*, the process of invention is paramount: having framed her allegory, so to speak, by her architectural metaphors and the proverbial assertions of Dames Raison, Droiture, and Justice, Christine proceeds to "populate" her city through the discovery of appropriate female figures in source texts that provided the standard narratives regarding these *dames*. As a rhetorical strategy, *inventio* yielded up traditional stories to be adapted to her purpose. Although most of Christine's writing shows a fairly obvious adaptation of earlier texts to her own contexts, the revisionist plan of the *Cité des dames* required more careful discovery and use of sources than any of her earlier texts. The "invention" of Dido demonstrates the revisionist possibilities of such rhetorical strategies.

In reading Matheolus, Christine confronted the tradition of Dido as a lustful woman. In a predictably conventional fashion, Matheolus includes Dido in a list of wanton women of antiquity (Semiramis, Phasiphaë, Scylla, Myrrha, Byblis, Caunus, Phaedra, and Phyllis) undone by *libido*.[51] In Jean Le Fèvre's French version of the *Lamentations* of Matheolus, Dido is presented as an example of a "femme luxurieuse" (1571). Le Fèvre provides a thirteen-line summary, which notes Dido's "grant outrage" for Eneas when he arrives as her guest, her subsequent lament over her "fole amour," and her suicide. In addition to Matheolus, Christine had encountered several different versions of Dido's story by the time she came to include her so prominently in the *Cité des dames*. In the *Mutacion*, as we have seen, she adapted the Eneas-Dido story from the French prose synopsis of the *Aeneid* in the French *Histoire*.[52] Elsewhere in her poetic texts she refers to Dido as an abandoned woman, suggesting her acquaintance with the Ovidian Dido of *Heroides* 7—available to her in a

French poetic paraphrase that was interpolated into book 14 of the *Ovide moralisé*, as we have seen.

In addition, Christine would have been aware of the standard versions of Dido as an abandoned woman undone by desire in Dante's *Commedia* and Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*—two texts she implicitly rewrites in the construction of the *Cité des dames*.[53] And her text of the *Roman de la Rose* might have included an image of Dido falling on the sword, a particularly graphic version of the specular Dido, as we noted in chapter 1. Christine's representation of Dido and her story in the *Cité des dames* also evokes the "historical" Dido as she encountered her in *Des cleres femmes*, the illustrated French version of Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus*. Christine drew a good deal of her material on classical women from *Des cleres femmes*, but in every case she appears to have carefully revised and adapted Boccaccio's version to her purposes.[54] Christine's Dido in the *Cité des dames* is a textual response to Boccaccio's privileging of the historical over the Virgilian version of Dido's story.

Dido and the Reader

In addition to her frequent encounters with Dido in a variety of vernacular texts, Christine also comments that she herself had already told Dido's story on several occasions; as Droiture notes in book 2: "toy meismes autreffoiz en tes dittiez en ayes parlé" (2.219) (you yourself have spoken of [her] earlier in your works). Christine had mentioned Dido frequently in her poetry, not only in the *Mutacion de Fortune* but also in her lyric poetry and in her *Epistre au dieu d'amours*.[55] In all these other references, the Dido referred to is essentially the "Virgilian" Dido—the figure known for her passion for Aeneas and her suicide upon his departure. Yet in constructing the *Cité des dames*, Christine's reliance on *Des cleres femmes* provided her with a fairly authoritative account of the non-Virgilian, "historical" Dido.

Boccaccio's Dido has some attractive features for the context of the *Cité des dames*. She is initially identified as a wise, powerful city builder —a woman who possesses masculine qualities and strengths—a figure much like the author Christine constructs in the *Mutacion*: a widow whose widowhood turns her into a man. Had Christine's immersion in a medieval humanistic tradition that privileged the Virgilian version of the Dido story not been so complete, she might have simply presented her invention of the Boccaccian Dido as a straightforward exemplum. However, given her own experience of the Virgilian version of the Dido story—which she had frequently rehearsed in her own writing—she clearly had to reconcile the Dido Boccaccio provides her with the more traditional one she already knew.

For Christine's purposes in the *Cité des dames*, Boccaccio's Dido made possible a revision of her traditional counterpart, a revisionary perspective that is exemplified in Christine's two-part arrangement of the Dido narrative in the *Cité des dames*. The exemplum drawn from Boccaccio's text is placed in book 1 to illustrate the virtue of prudence, and the more recognizably "Virgilian" Dido appears in book 2, in a shorter, less elaborate exemplum that represents her as a woman remarkable for "amour ferme." This division into two parts is reinforced by the placement of each version: the first version occurs near the end of book 1; the second version is placed approximately two-thirds of the way through book 2; the locations of these two exempla are suggestive.

The placement of Dido's story in book 1 of the *Cité des dames* addresses the problems of lineage and history that Christine confronted in the composition of the *Mutacion*. Book 1 contains the stories of forty-two women, the majority of them from the classical tradition. These women are grouped in three general categories: warrior women, women associated with writing or other "civilizing" skills, and women who exemplify prudence, according to Christine's categories. Camilla's story, including her support of Turnus's cause, occurs in the first category; Dido and Lavinia—separated only by the story of Ops—conclude the narrative of book 1. These three Virgilian women suggest that the *Aeneid* story forms a significant subtext for the narrative of book 1; indeed, Christine explicitly comments on Virgil's preeminence as a poet and appears to consider the *Aeneid* story a fairly authoritative version of history that her own text implicitly challenges or corrects. Lavinia's story (based on Boccaccio's version), contains a brief synopsis of the *Aeneid* and extols Lavinia's prudence in raising her son, Julius Silvius, so that he remained safe from the threats of Ascanius, a jealous stepbrother (1.22). Christine notes that Lavinia governed the realm in her son's minority, and this act insured the lineage and founding of Rome: "Duquel enffant dessendirent puis Remus et Romulus, qui puis fonderent Romme, et les haulx princes rommains quis puis vendrent" (1.122) (From this child descended Romulus and Remus who founded Rome, as well as the great Roman princes who came later [p. 97]). The short exemplum on Lavinia inserts female agency into the foundation myth of the *Aeneid* story. In this regard, Lavinia's role complements Dido's: both are extolled for their prudence.

The textual city of Christine's allegory appears analogous to Dido's founding of Carthage so that the placement of Dido's story in book 1 responds explicitly to the problems of lineage and history that Christine confronted in the composition of the *Mutacion*. Throughout book 1, Raison stresses the inventiveness and agency of the women discussed. In general, book 1 showcases the role of women in the establishment of civilizations or in the discovery of civilizing arts: Christine notes the

contribution of warrior women to their civilizations (Lampheto, Marspasia, Thamiris, Orithyia, Zenobia, Artemisia, Penthesilea); the contribution of city builders (Semiramis, Dido); the contribution of women to the arts of writing (Proba, Sappho, Carmentis, Minerva); and the contribution of women to the settlement of civilization (Nicaula, Ceres, Isis). All these women share the qualities of resourcefulness and agency, so that their contributions overlap in the sequence of the text. The arts of writing, exemplified by women such as Proba—who rewrote the *Aeneid*—and the arts of civilization that contribute to the establishment and defense of cities are given equal value. The texture of book 1 emphasizes the importance of writing/textuality and city building to give the overarching allegory of the *Cité des dames* a powerful resonance; this texture contextualizes the city-building activities of Dido, queen of Carthage, in a way that suggestively represents the textual city as a whole.

Dido is the most eminent of the city builders mentioned in book 1 of the *Cité des dames*. The Dido exemplum, which emphasizes the *prudence* and *avis* needed to found Carthage, is itself an exceptionally prudent rearrangement of Boccaccio's exemplum; many of the phrases and some complete sentences in Christine's Dido exemplum are lifted directly from *Des cleres femmes*.[56] Yet this compilation transforms Boccaccio's version and results in a subtle but purposeful revision of the figure of Dido. Christine's "invention" of Dido demonstrates the revisionary potential of "compilation" in the production of narrative: by relying closely on a textual antecedent, Christine ostensibly presents the Dido story as she found it in her sources. By presenting her transformation of the Dido exemplum as though it were traditional, Christine claims textual authority for her revision and essentially denies its status as a revision. The rhetorical possibilities of *inventio* facilitate a compilation of textual antecedents from a revisionary perspective.

In the *Cité des dames*, the standard details of the "historical" version of Dido's story are all subtly adjusted so that they emphatically support the thematics of Dido's agency, especially her intellectual feats. Many of these revisions are simply a matter of adjusting small details of plot. For instance, the text of *Des cleres femmes* states that Sychaeus, Dido's husband, knew that Pygmalion was covetous, and he consequently hid his treasure and money. In the *Cité des dames*, it is Dido who recognizes the covetous nature of her brother and who consequently advises her husband to hide his treasure, advice that he accepts, so that his vulnerability results from his failure to follow all of Dido's advice: "mais ne garda pas bien sa personne des agaiz du roy, si que elle luy avoit dit" (1.119) (but [he] neglected to protect his person against the king's ambushes, as she had advised him [p. 92]). Whereas the text of *Des cleres femmes* states that after Sychaeus's death, Dido made her decision to flee either on the

advice of someone or "du propre conseil de sa pensee," the text of the *Cité des dames* removes any doubt about Dido's decisive agency; she simply "fu admonnestee par sa meismes prudence." The Dido exemplum throughout shows such small shifts in emphasis, each of which might seem minor in itself; but taken together they present a substantial revision of the story.

A standard anecdote in the historical versions of Dido's story relates how Dido shrewdly hides the treasure she takes with her on her flight and substitutes worthless objects instead in order to deceive her brother's men. The revisionary gestures of the *Cité des dames* are particularly evident in Christine's treatment of this incident. She rearranged and changed the plot slightly in order to stress the intellectual agency of Dido in her role as leader. The comment "plus grant malice fist ceste dame" (1.119), a phrase borrowed directly from *Des cleres femmes*, where it is used as a summary statement toward the end of the anecdote, is moved to an introductory position in order to direct the interpretation of the anecdote that follows. In addition, many of the narrative elements of this incident are amplified. This anecdote had been transmitted more or less intact from Justin to Boccaccio to the French text Christine knew. In Boccaccio's version, Dido hides her treasure and substitutes bags of sand, which she orders her followers to throw overboard once the ship is at sea. Once they have done so, she advises her followers that they might find it difficult to return to the greedy Pygmalion now that the treasure he coveted is lost. In the *Cité des dames*, this incident is more elaborate and contains a more sustained demonstration of Dido's cleverness. Dido, having hidden her treasure, places heavy, worthless items in the bags, which she then presents to Pygmalion's men who pursue her, so that they will allow her to go on her way undisturbed. Later, after she has landed in Africa and is involved in building her city, they return to demand the treasure, having discovered the deception. At this point, Dido provides them with two possible interpretations of the missing treasure: either the messengers stole the treasure and substituted the worthless items or "pour le pechié que le roy avoit commis de son mari faire occire, les dieux n'avoyent pas voulu que il jouyssist de son tresor, sy l'avoyent ainsi tresmué" (1.120) (because of the sin committed by the king in having her husband murdered, the gods had not wanted him to enjoy her husband's treasure and so had transmuted it [p. 94]). This incident constitutes the most extended departure from *Des cleres femmes*; while it simply amplifies an anecdote that existed in the anterior text, it does so in a way that purposefully highlights Dido's wit and intellectual abilities. Such emphasis on Dido's agency shifts the focus of the narrative to enhance the significance of Dido's role in the events depicted.

The details of the ox hide and the negotiations over the purchase of

land—standard elements in the story of the historical Dido that survive even in *Aeneid* 1—lent themselves naturally to this interpretive framework; throughout, the *Cité des dames* presents an intensified version of the plot narrated in *Des cleres femmes*. But this intensified version is contextualized differently in Christine's version. This contextual shift is most evident in the placement of the most synthetic statement made about Dido's character in Boccaccio's version: the assertion that occurs early in the exemplum that Dido puts aside her feminine nature ("condicion feminine et couraige de femme") and takes on the power and force of a man. In Christine's text, this assertion is positioned at the end of the exemplum, where it acquires the force of a conclusion:

> et ne parloit on se d'elle non, tellement que pour la grant vertu qui fu veue en elle, tant pour la hardiesce et belle entreprise que fait avoit comme pour son tres prudent gouvernement, luy transmuerent son nom et l'appellerent Dido: qui vault autant a dire comme *virago* en latin, qui est a dire celle qui a vertu et force de homme. (1.120)
>
> She was spoken of only in terms of her outstanding strength, courage, and her bold undertaking. Because of her prudent government, they changed her name and called her Dido, which is the equivalent of saying *virago* in Latin, which means "the woman who has the strength and force of a man" (p. 95)

Whereas Boccaccio's praise of Dido in *De claris mulieribus* all builds to her suicide to avoid a second marriage and to protect heroically her status as a chaste widow, Christine's version has retained only the narrative details of Dido's agency and cunning; of course, Christine's narrative omits any mention of Iarbas or of Dido's suicide, since her story is taken up again in book 2. Christine's revision of Boccaccio's Dido in the *Cité des dames*, book 1, makes use of selection and rearrangement to eliminate the implicit misogyny that contextualizes Boccaccio's praise of Dido.

Dido's qualities as a virago in book 1 give way to her attributes as a lover in the exemplum that appears two-thirds of the way through book 2. Following the model of antiphrasis, book 2 features a series of women who are named and discussed by Droiture in order to illustrate a series of virtues that explicitly act as counterexamples to the series of vices consistently named in the misogynistic tradition represented by Matheolus. In book 2, the women named tend to exemplify virtues rather than accomplishments, though in some cases, especially in the case of the Sibyls, the virtues possessed by women lead to significant accomplishments as well. As an example of women's constancy in love, Dido's story

follows a long discussion of thirteen women from the classical and Judaic tradition, as well as from historical accounts, who are exemplars of chastity (Susanna, Sarah, Rebecca, Ruth, Penelope, Mariannes, Antonia, Sulpitia, Lucretia, the Queen of the Galatians, Hyppo, the Sicambrian women, and Virginia). At this point in book 2, Droiture briefly rehearses the Virgilian version of the Dido story as it appeared in the *Mutacion;* this passage of the *Cité des dames* would almost appear to be a prose redaction of the earlier poetic text. In the context of book 2, where the stories of chaste women are presented as counterexamples to the charge that women are lustful, the Virgilian Dido—usually noted for her destructive desire—becomes an exemplum of constancy that is implicitly elided into the category of chastity.

Throughout her writing, Christine extols chastity as the preeminent feminine virtue, the one quality that allows women to defeat all enemies and to transcend the trials of this world.[57] By contrast to the inherent misogyny of Boccaccio's model of female chastity as a category that made possible the masculine control of female sexuality, Christine's presentation of chastity reflects her convictions, often repeated in her writing, that women might be empowered through chastity. The militant value of chastity is clearly represented in the *Cité des dames*, book 3, where female, Christian martyrs and saints transcend torture and repeated attempts at sexual assault through their steadfast commitment to chastity.[58] Although book 3 of the *Cité des dames* repeatedly celebrates the importance of chastity among Christian women, this group of pagan women known for their chastity and their resistance to rape in book 2 is emphatically placed to suggest that chastity is not a virtue found only among Christian women, but a universal female virtue.

The Virgilian version of Dido's story, however, cannot be presented as an example of chastity, since, in her sexualized relation to Aeneas, Dido misses an opportunity for a life of chaste widowhood. Boccaccio's Dido, who explicitly exemplifies the potential of chastity for widows—and whom Boccaccio rhetorically holds up as a model for widows contemplating marriage—lacked the textual authority accorded to the Virgilian Dido, and Boccaccio's version ultimately becomes absorbed into the Virgilian version in the course of the *Cité des dames*. But Christine does not rehearse the standard versions of the Virgilian Dido as she knew it from texts such as Matheolus or the *Roman de la Rose*, in which Dido's is a cautionary tale of "fole amour." In the *Cité des dames*, book 2, Christine adjusts the Virgilian story to exemplify "d'amour ferme en femme": constancy replaces chastity and thematically connects Dido's stories to those of chaste pagan women in book 2. In such an appropriation of the Dido story from its Virgilian readings, Christine not only recontextualizes the love affair between Dido and Aeneas in order to extract an appropriate

reading of it for her purposes but also implicitly comments on the entire tradition that had categorized Dido in terms of her sexuality, the tradition represented by Dante and Jean de Meun. In the process, Christine revises the notion of chastity in relation to Dido's story. Thus she manages to recuperate Dido from the contradictory set of texts and traditions where she found her, without completely denying her sexuality.

The two Dido exempla of the *Cité des dames*, taken together, represent the negotiation of a complex set of traditions necessary to the formation of a textual city. Traces of this process of negotiation are visible in the dual citation evoked in the narration of Dido's suicide. The text first states that Dido killed herself by throwing herself into a fire, but this assertion is immediately modified by the acknowledgment of an alternate tradition, based on *Aeneid* 4: "Et autres dient que elle se occist de la meismes espee de Eneas" (2.220) (Others say she killed herself with Aeneas's own sword [p. 189]). This dual set of endings for the story constitutes Christine's adaptation of the version found in the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*. As we saw in chapter 3, the *Histoire* includes a brief encapsulation of the historical version of the story sandwiched into the narration of Dido's affair with Aeneas: at this point, while Dido is contemplating what she should do about Aeneas, Iarbas demands that she marry him. She constructs a large pyre and prepares to throw herself into it but is saved from suicide at the last moment by her people. She then proceeds to become involved with Aeneas, whose departure causes the suicide by sword. In the *Cité des dames*, Christine acknowledges both possibilities for Dido's death—suicide by fire or by sword—as a reaction to the narrative in the *Histoire*. Christine's exemplum concludes, however, with the remark that the figure of Dido enjoyed more renown than any other woman of her time. The contradictory versions of Dido's death support this assertion that Dido enjoyed textual fame as a woman who "passoit en renommee toutes les femmes de son temps" (2.220). That this textual fame also replaces the specular circulation of Dido in Boccaccio, Jean de Meun, and the *Histoire* is emphasized by the fact that none of Christine's texts contain an image of Dido.[59]

Christine's "invention" of Dido not only illustrates her revisionist self-fashioning as a female reader of antiquity, but it also demonstrates her awareness of the connections between gender and interpretation. In the *Mutacion*, where she explicitly notes that she has become a man, she presents a version of Dido that is consistent with the construction of history and narrative found in texts such as the *Histoire*. In the *Cité des dames*, where she programmatically reads history from a female subject position, she "invents" a version of Dido that is quite distinct from any other representation. This Dido illustrates the politics of self-fashioning for Christine as an author. A figure such as Dido—whether Virgilian or

historical—represented the selfsame more than the other. As a woman of wit and agency, a widow who constructs a city, Dido effectively figures Christine's textual construction of her authorial self. Not only does Christine's representation of herself as a woman who becomes a man upon her husband's death in the *Mutacion* and the *Avision* replicate the tradition of Dido putting aside her female nature in order to go into exile, but the standard statement that Dido is a virago resonates powerfully with the fact that Jean Gerson labeled Christine "virilis illa femina" and "illa virago" during the *Rose* debate.[60] In addition, Christine's emphasis upon her role as the builder of a textual city, vividly represented in the pictorial tradition that accompanies the *Cité des dames*, invites a comparison between Christine the author and Dido the city builder.

In reading Dido as part of her authorial self-fashioning, Christine's affinity for this classical figure would be consistently mediated by the masculine bias of textual traditions. The Virgilian Dido is most prominent in the historical traditions that privilege the thematics of lineage based on masculine genealogy, such as the *Histoire*. Although prominent, the Virgilian Dido is essentially removed from the meaningful structures of medieval history, as the *Mutacion* demonstrates. Likewise, Boccaccio narrates the biography of a woman who commits suicide as an act of self-preservation. In the textual realities of late medieval humanism, it appears that for the female reader to recognize herself in the "other" of the masculine text is to risk erasure. The pro-female reader, fashioned in the writing of the *Cité des dames* and tutored by Raison, Droiture, and Justice, is Christine's response to such risk. And Christine's "invention" of Dido is emblematic of the rhetorical possibilities that make that response an identifiably feminist textual strategy.

Such feminist subjectivity depends nonetheless on textual cultures, and Christine's feminist self-fashioning is produced only within the revisionary potentials within such cultures. The rhetorical figure of antiphrasis allowed Christine the author to invert the categories of textual misogyny experienced by Christine the reader. The rhetorical process of *inventio* allowed Christine the reader to discover the exempla of history that might support the process of antiphrasis as narrative strategy. However, Christine's construction of herself as reader is not always consistent with her construction of herself as author. One aspect of her authorial identity required that she become a man; another required that she represent herself—both textually and visually—as a female reader. Within these shifting identities, her readerly experience authorizes rhetorical resistance to textual misogyny, as we have seen, although her writerly self seldom critiques the sexual politics of contemporary institutions. When writer and reader become closely identified, as in the *Cité des dames*, the resulting narrative appears closest to a modern concept of

feminist writing. That such feminist identity is not sustained—in fact it disappears from Christine's sequel to the *Cité des dames*, the *Livre de la tresor des dames*—does not negate the interventionist potential of the *Cité des dames*; rather, it suggests that the authorial identity found in the *Cité des dames* is a self-conscious construction, fashioned within the social context of courtly culture and the late medieval humanism specific to the French courts of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

Christine's feminist self-fashioning results from the rhetorical strategies implicit in her invention of Dido. Conversely, the complexity of Dido's textual presence in medieval culture—specifically in the manuscript culture of late medieval humanism within which Christine worked—made possible the sort of compilation and subtle revision of her story in the *Cité des dames*. To the extent that Christine's authorial identity is fashioned in response to the discursive textuality of her culture, her feminist self-fashioning results rather directly from her invention of Dido and the textual strategies at work in such inventions. Dido's significance for Christine's self-fashioning is emblematic of the feminist possibilities Dido represents in literary history. By contrast to Dante's reliance on Virgil, and the elaborate intertextuality implied by Virgil's presence as Dante's guide in the *Inferno*, Christine's reliance on Dido, especially on the countermemory represented by the historical Dido, makes Dido rather than Virgil the central figure in the textual drama. Dido thereby becomes the originary literary figure who engenders the late medieval feminist writer.