

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: CHRISTINE de PIZAN, From *The Book of the City of Ladies*

1. What is the significance of Pizan's choice of reading in the opening section? i.e. She identifies the book as "something amusing and easy to read" (210) that one takes up to relax and take a break from "subtle questions" of serious literary study. But ultimately she finds the book far from relaxing. Why does one make this distinction between "serious" and "light" material, and does this distinction hold?

2. What is the role played by Nature in Pizan's allegory?

Consider: "I could find no evidence from my own experience to bear out such a negative view of female nature and habits" (211).

See also: 1.8.3 with regard to the "dissolute" woman who is "like a monster, a creature going against its own nature, which is to be timid, meek and pure" (214), and the "natural" bond between men and women (213).

3. What is the function of the three exemplae of educated women (214-15)? How do these exemplae relate to her references to, for example, those male authors whose unanimity forces her initially to "give more weight to what others said than to trust my own judgment and experience" (211)?

Consider her assertion that, after long consideration of the literary and philosophical tradition vis a vis women, "that it was as if I had sunk into a deep trance" (211).

4. What is the significance of Pizan's deployment of the allegorical model used by male scholars and commentators such as Boccaccio?