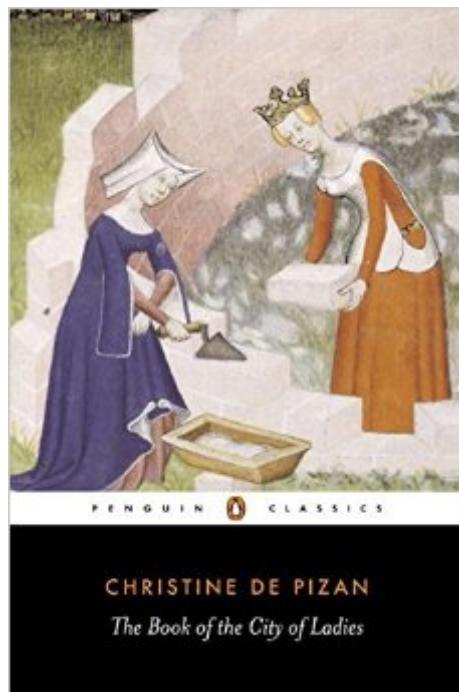


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The Book Of The City Of Ladies (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

A fascinating insight into the debates and controversies about the position of women in medieval culture, written by France's first professional woman of letters. The pioneering Book of the City of Ladies begins when, feeling frustrated and miserable after reading a male writer's tirade against women, Christine de Pizan has a dreamlike vision where three virtues—Reason, Rectitude and Justice—appear to correct this view. They instruct her to build an allegorical city in which womankind can be defended against slander, its walls and towers constructed from examples of female achievement both from her own day and the past: ranging from warriors, inventors and scholars to prophetesses, artists and saints. Christine de Pizan's spirited defence of her sex was unique for its direct confrontation of the misogyny of her day, and offers a telling insight into the position of women in medieval culture. The Book of the City of Ladies provides positive images of women, ranging from warriors and inventors, scholars to prophetesses, and artists to saints. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

This is the third time I write a review for this book. The previous reviews never made it. Here I go again: From an age when women were expected to play a silent and obedient supporting role, Christine de Pizan demonstrates that intelligence and grace are very useful allies. One of the first women that we know of to write professionally in order to make a living, Christine's life was a mixture of privilege and loss. Her "Book of the City of Ladies" is definitely our net gain, though, since we can appreciate the beauty of well-applied talent. The author set out to write a history of women from the female perspective, giving us a different view of many famous (plenty of them mythical) women who have served as scapegoats for damaging stereotypes that perpetuated misogyny in traditional history, literature, and philosophy. Thus, Pizan deals with Queen Dido in a manner different to that adopted by Virgil, and Lavinia --who does not say a word in "The Aeneid"-- rules as a queen according to this "Book of the City of Ladies." Medea receives some help from Pizan's editing (there is no mention of the princess of Colchis killing her children to punish Jason), Circe gets in just 14 lines far better press than with Homer, and even female characters from Boccaccio's "Decameron," like Ghismonda and Lisabetta, are described from subtly better angles, particularly Lisabetta, who proves to be an intelligent woman who uses deduction to find out what had happened to her lover, and doesn't need a ghost to tell her, as in the "Decameron." Pizan's book is a pleasure to read.

THE BOOK OF THE CITY OF LADIES by Christine de Pizan is an allegory written in the early 1400s as an effort to defend womankind from spurious attacks by the male gender. The BOOK itself serves as the city, the protection and community of good women who show that the defamatory collective statements about women (they are greedy, they are inconstant, they are not chaste, etc.) are not true. De Pizan was born in 1365 in Venice. When she was a small child, the French King Charles V gave her father a position at his court (he served as astrologer). The family's close ties to the court afforded Christine a good education, which was unusual at the time (and opposed by her mother). Though the family's fortunes faded, Christine made a happy marriage and had three children. When her husband died in 1389, de Pizan turned to writing to make her living. She became a highly respected voice on the status of women. The book is structured around three ladies of heaven coming to visit Christine and charging her with building the City of Ladies. Christine has just been reading a book by Matholus, who is deeply critical of womankind, and Christine is upset and discouraged. The women are Reason, Rectitude and Justice. While they help her build and populate the city, Christine asks them to defend womankind against various charges she hears

brought against women, and they do so, each getting her own book of the work. The responses are examples of women in history, some biblical, some historical, some mythological (but these are explained by the Christian Christine as being real women whose fame was so renowned that their societies thought they were goddesses and began to worship them).

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