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"What's Love Got to Do With It: Love and Marriage, Medieval and Modern"

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Quotations from Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies*ⁱ

1. Julia

[Christine speaking to Rectitude]

However, my lady, I've just remembered something that the philosopher Theophrastus . . . said about women hating their husbands when they're old . . .

Rectitude replied, "Come now, Christine hold your tongue! I can immediately find plenty of examples which contradict these opinions and disprove them completely."

"In her time, Julia was the noblest of Roman ladies, being the daughter of Julius Caesar . . . She was married to the great warrior, Pompey. . . . [T]his Pompey, though now elderly and decrepit, was at the height of his glory. . . . Despite the fact that his wife, the great lady Julia, was still a very young woman, she loved her husband so deeply and so truly that she met her death in a very unusual way. It so happened that, one day, Pompey went to make a sacrifice . . . During the ritual, Pompey was holding on to one side of the slaughtered animal as it was being laid on the altar, when his robes became splattered with blood from the creature's wound. He therefore took off the robe which he was wearing and sent one of his servants back to the house with it to fetch him a fresh, clean one.

"As luck would have it, the servant who was carrying the robe ran into Julia, Pompey's wife, who saw her lord's clothing all covered in blood. Knowing that those who distinguished themselves in Rome were often the target of the envy of others who attacked and sometimes killed them, the dramatic sight of her husband's blood convinced her that some ill must have befallen him. She was seized by a great pain in her heart as if she had suddenly lost all will to live. Being pregnant at the time, she fell to the floor in a faint, all colour drained from her body and her eyes turned up in their sockets. It all happened so quickly that there was no time to give her any help or to allay her fears before she expired."

2. Christine presents to Rectitude claims that men do not benefit from marriage.

"And many people attest, that wives love their husbands and their company so little that nothing else annoys them as much. For this reason, in order to escape and avoid such inconveniences, many authorities have advised wise men not to marry, affirming that no women – or very few – are loyal to their mates. Valerius wrote to Rufus along these lines, and Theophrastus remarked in his book that no wise man should take a wife, because there are too many worries with women, too little love, and too much gossip, and that if a man marries in order to be better taken care of and nursed in sickness, a loyal servant could better and more loyally care for him and serve him and would not cost him nearly as much . . ."

3. Rectitude responds to Christine.

A]s for this Theophrastus, whom you have mentioned, and who says that a man can be cared for by his servant as loyally and as carefully as by his wife – ha! How many good women there are who are so conscientious in caring for their husbands, healthy or sick, with a loyal love as though their husbands were gods! I do not think that you will ever find such a servant.

4. Rectitude's comments on women who are constant in love/love foolishly.

But these pitiful examples, as well as many others which I could also tell you, should in no way move women's hearts to set themselves adrift in the dangerous and damnable sea of foolish love, for its end is always detrimental and harmful to their bodies, their property, their honor, and – most important of all – to their souls.

ⁱ Quotation 1 is taken from Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Rosalind Brown-Grant (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 117-118. Quotations 2-4 are taken from Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Earl Jeffrey Richards (New York: Persea Books, 1982), 118, 120, 202. The original Middle French of Quotation 1, the Julia story, appears below and is taken from Maureen Cheney Curnow, ed., “The *Livre de la Cité des Dames* of Christine de Pisan: A Critical Edition” (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1975), Book 2, chapter 10, pgs 832-33.

Mais, dame, encores me souvient que le philosophe Theoffrascus . . . dit que les femmes heent leurs maris quant ilz sont vieulx Responce: “Ho! Chiere amie, tais toy, je t'ay tontost trouvé exemples contraires a leurs diz par quoy le rendrons non voirdisant.

“Julie, fu en son temps la plus noble des dames rommaines, fille de Julius Caesar Ceste dame fu femme de Pompee. . . . en souverain honneur estoit ja enviellis et debrisiez. Mais nonpourtant la noble dame Julie, sa femme, qui encores moult jeune estoit, l'amoit de si tres parfaite, loyalle et grant amour que elle en fina sa vie par diverse aventure. Car il avint un jour que Pompee . . . voulst sacrefier . . . et comme la beste sacrefiee fust sur l'autel et Pompee par devucion la tenist d'un coste, sa robe ful touilliee du sanc yssant de la playe de la beste, par quoy il se despoullia et envoya la robe que vestue avoit par un de ses serviteurs en son hostel pour querir une autre nette et fresche.

“Sy avint par malle fortune que celluy qui portoit la ditte robe, encontrra Julie, la femme de Pompee, laquelle, quant elle vit la robe de son seigneur si touilliee de sanc, adonc pource qu'elle savoit bien que aucunesfoiz avenoit a Romme que a ceulx qui estoyent les meilleurs on courroit sus par envie et a la foiz les occioit on, fu surprises soudainement par le signe, qu'elle vid de certaine creance que ainsi fust avenue de son mary par quleque fortune, par quoy tele douleur soubdaine luy prist au cuer comme celle qui plus ne vouloit vivre. Elle, estant grosse d'enffant, chut pasmee, palle et destainte, les yeux tournez en la teste; ne si tost n'y pot estre remede mis ne celle paour ostee qu'elle ne rendeist l'esperit.”