

1991

# The question of authorship of Christine de Pisan's war manual, *Le livre des fais d'armes et de chevalerie*

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## Recommended Citation

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<https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd/163>

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The question of authorship of Christine de Pisan's war manual, Le  
livre des fais d'armes et de chevalerie

by

Melissa Anne Biederman

A Thesis Submitted to the  
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS

Department: English

Major: English (Literature)

Approved:

Signature redacted for privacy

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In Charge of Major Work

Signature redacted for privacy

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For the Major Department

Signature redacted for privacy

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For the Graduate College

Iowa State University  
Ames, Iowa

1991

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## Introduction

The course of literary history is full of examples of critics who try to establish immutable rules for analyzing works of different writers and different periods, as though there were a single set of universally applicable rules (i.e. formalist and structuralist criticism).

On the other hand, from time to time, literary movements crop up which reject the immutability of rules pertaining to literature, an example of which is Deconstruction, whose proponents feel that:

there is no philosophical school or tradition that doesn't carry along with it a background narrative linking up present interests with past concerns. Most often this selective prehistory involves not only an approving treatment of ideas that fit in with the current picture but also an effort to repress or marginalize anything that doesn't fit. (Norris 172)

The works of Christine de Pizan and their treatment over the centuries since her death serve as an excellent example of the changing nature of criticism and how critical approaches to literature are adapted to suit the needs of different ages. This appears to have been the case in the critical history of Christine's war manual, *Le livre des fais d'armes et de chevalerie* or, in Caxton's English, *The Book of the Faytes of Armes and Chivalrye*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I have made use of Caxton's 1489 English translation of Christine's manual in writing this thesis.

The history of the reception of the rest of Christine's work makes the lack of interest in her war manual more intriguing. For Christine was immensely popular in her own time and, after a few centuries in which Christine was out of favor, the eighteenth century saw her regain her popularity. The zenith of her success came in the 1970s, as the feminist movement challenged the prevailing, male-dominated canon of literature. Christine, who was an anomaly in her own time, was now hailed as a precursor to the woman's movement. She was erroneously labeled "the world's first feminist writer" (proto-feminist is more appropriate).<sup>2</sup> "Christine indeed appears always to have considered herself as somewhat of an anomaly...she adapted male poetics for female authors, for there was no female model" (she attempted to change system) (Huot 371-72). That which cannot be placed in a system presents the critic with two choices: (1) change the system to allow for the anomaly; or (2) minimize the importance--and hence the impact--of anomaly. Hence marginalization. Modern critics changed Christine's marginalized status and that of her works, with one notable exception.

Beginning in the 1970s, an ever increasing number of Christine's works were read, translated, and annotated. Dissertations on her works began to appear, and the Christine de Pizan Society came into existence. Yet, her war manual was not part

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<sup>2</sup> Hindman (472-73) "do[es] not find it useful, at least for the present, to assess whether Christine, if not a feminist, might still be thought of as a forerunner of the women's movement, because this has the effect of isolating her from her context and, therefore, possibly misrepresenting her."

of this resurgence. The critics who have considered the manual have briefly commented on and dismissed it as the writing of a "traditionalist whose writings lack original ideas...nothing more than the repetition of received ideas" (Huot 361), or in the most laudatory instances, "a translation" (Pinet 358-62), and a "popularization of Vegetius" (Willard 180).

History has seen fit to relegate *Le livre des fais d'armes et de chevalerie* to the status of a second class text, or even a forgery, a plagiarism, without looking at the time in which it was created, the many ways in which it deviates from the source texts, and the highly creative style of the second half of the manual, a portion of the work on which no one has commented.

The debate over Christine's authorship, most particularly in regard to the war manual, began in her own time. "She was censured by some for pillaging from other authors" (Edmonds 36). "Opponents [of the time]...treated her with patronizing condescension or even claimed that monks and clerks had forged her work" (Davis 159). Christine herself "tells us that some individuals accused her of having 'monks and students forge her works,' so incredulous were they that a woman could be a successful writer" (Hindman 460).

This thesis will show that Christine's work does indeed rely on Vegetius; yet her work is creative and original, both in its style and in its content. The second half of the manual makes use of some material from Honore Bonet's *Tree of Battles*, but in its style and in its choice of material is the most creative part of the work.

Christine's manipulation of her sources is in itself evidence of her creativity for, as she says, through the character of Bonet:

It is good that you take and gather of the tree of battles that is in my garden, some fruits of which you shall use. So shall vigor and strength the better grow within yourself therefore to make an end of your present work, and to build an edifice pertinent and desirable to the sayings of Vegetius and the other authors of which you have taken help. You must cut asunder some of the branches of this said tree and take of the best and upon the same timber you shall set foundation of one of your said edifices. . . . (L4r).

### Description of the Manual

We must now turn our attention to the manual itself. For it will provide the proof of Christine's creativity, of her attention to the manual's practicality and to the impact the manual had on its own society and on successive generations. The manual is divided into four parts. The first two parts rely mainly on a famous ancient Roman work, Vegetius's famous war manual, *De Re Militari*. This work had been translated into numerous languages over several centuries and would be an ideal—and much respected—source. The last two sections rely on *The Tree of Battles*, a work on warfare by one of Christine's contemporaries, Honore Bonet.

Chapter One of Book One includes what critics have called Christine's apologia for being a woman (Willard 184, Davis 174). Although she herself writes "it [writing war manuals] is not the

custom and out of the usage of women who commonly do not entremete, but who spin on the distaff and occupy themselves in things of the household" (A1r), we should not assume that she felt herself unequal to the task. It has been suggested that this introduction is reminiscent of the humility topos, which was a convention of writers of the middle ages (Curtius 407-13). Apologies, such as the one in Christine's manual, may also be found in works such as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, in which the narrator (a Chaucer-persona) demeans his own story-telling abilities: "also I praye you to foryive it me/Al have I nat set folk in hir degree/ Here in this tale as that they sholde stonde:/ My wit is short, ye may wel understonde" (Chaucer 113).

Yet Christine's introductory apology appears to have an alternate purpose as well, that of easing what might be a troubled reception. Males reading this text might be put off by the knowledge that the manual was written by a woman. Christine relies on her reputation, on the hope that "my past works" which were received quite favorably, would reinforce her resolve as well as her influence, "like one who has beaten down many strong edifices [her past writing success] is more hardy to charge himself to defy or to beat down any strong edifices, when he feels himself garnished of desirable stuff [success in writing the war manual]" (A1v).

Further evidence that Christine was herself troubled by the possibility of negative reaction comes in the introduction to the second half of the manual. Christine pleads with Bonet to know

whether or not her undertaking might find favor with her intended audience, or whether, because she is a woman, her work might be dismissed: "I pray you tell me if any rebuke shall now be cast to the regard of my work." Bonet answers: "Dear love, to this I answer you, that the more that a work is witnessed and approved by more folk, the more it is authorized and more authentic" (L5v). Although it may be construed as another example of the humility topos, the assertion of Christine's abilities and worthiness in this dialogue between the Christine-persona and the master also appears to be authorization and commendation for undertaking to make her work accessible to the most people.

In light of the preceding comments, it is significant that Christine envisions herself as a knight facing battle. This vision of herself most strengthened her, and perhaps just as well, caused many critics of her time, and of successive times, to feel the need to write her out of the work. After all, how reconcilable is the image of a gentlewoman with that of an avenging warrior?

Further evidence of Christine within the text is the very Christine-like prayer offered to the goddess Minerva, originally associated with tasks such as weaving, later given such attributes as expertise in warfare. For Christine identified herself most closely with that goddess—a woman whose accepted role had significantly changed—as much for her wisdom as for her power over more masculine endeavors: "by virtue of your high understanding over all other women...you began and gave manner and order in arranging

battles and assailing and fighting in this manner" (A1r). The prayer to Minerva is traditionally out of place in a work of this kind, yet fitting for Christine: in most of her works Christine offers a prayer to Minerva. Willard writes that in *The Book of the City of Ladies* (*Le livre de la cite des dames*), "Christine asks Reason for names of women who have been inventors [like Christine herself]. . . there [is an account] of Minerva's invention of armor. (Minerva was one of Christine's favorite goddesses, appearing repeatedly in her other writings.)" (*Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* 140). The manual prayer is, in light of this comment from Willard, an instance of Christine's creative originality, a textual identification of Christine as author. If one views this introductory prayer as anomalous to the general theme and structure of the work—it was omitted from most copies—then one must take care not make too much of the fact that Minerva is a goddess. For though the name is feminine it is also Latin in derivation, which might explain its gender marking. There is therefore no necessary contradiction between the feminine image of the goddess and her status as a warrior. The same applies to Christine. Undoubtedly the fact that Christine was female made her authorship of the manual disturbing to many.

### Medieval Reception of the Manual

The manual was indeed influential in her time and following her death, yet in most cases, only after she was removed from the text. Some subsequent medieval copiers, unable to accept a woman as author of a manual for soldiers, attempted to resolve such a problem by removing, or attempting to remove, all mention of Christine from the text. In her biography of Christine, Willard writes: "A curious fate awaited Christine's treatise, however. Although there still exists a group of manuscripts naming Christine, there are other copies where no author is mentioned, where the invocation to Minerva at the beginning has been suppressed, and where even masculine pronouns replace the feminine form in the original text. The scene at the beginning of Book III, where Honore Bouvet [sic] appears to Christine...is also suppressed, and in [Group B, which omits Christine from the text] Bouvet and Christine are replaced by *L'Auteur* and *Le Disciple*" (*Christine de Pizan* 186). Arguably, it may have been thought that by omitting Christine, the copiers might enable the text to gain authority over soldiers who might otherwise have dismissed the writing on warfare by a woman: "It can only be concluded that the anonymous version (the most successful copy in France) reflects the disbelief that a woman could have written such a text" (Willard 187). Willard cites an editor of Caxton who researched differing attitudes toward Christine on the part of those who dealt with the manual. This editor grouped copies of Christine's work into two groups, "Group A, which acknowledges

Christine's authorship, and Group B, which does not mention any author and in some cases replaces Christine's references to herself with masculine pronouns" (Willard 180).<sup>3</sup> According to Willard, whose research on textual irregularities among the copies of Christine's manual is as yet unmatched, very few, if any, of the French texts retained the Christine-persona. In some instances Christine was denied recognition as author of the text; the author was "anonymous" or authorship was credited to a male writer (Willard 182). In most cases, especially in France, editors "masculinized" the text before distribution. It was unthinkable that a woman could provide accurate and, more importantly, useful information on warfare.

However, the Caxton text, which retained all of Christine's references to herself as well as her persona, became in England the most widely read and copied version of the manual. The Caxton text was adhered to religiously in both England and Italy throughout the fifteenth and much of the sixteenth century. Henry VIII of England made no move without reference to Christine's war manual (Willard 182, Contamine 120). Therefore, although many French copies deleted all in-text references to Christine, the version which was most read and used in England, retained her.

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<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that in almost every case of masculinization of the text, the prayer to Minerva and Christine's "apologia" was retained (Willard 180). The 1489 Caxton text, which was the most widely read and the most frequently copied, falls into Group A, the group which retains Christine within the manual, and it is for this reason that I have chosen to use his copy of the work.

Christine herself appears to be aware of this potentially troubled reception. Her insistence that she will have: "much like the doctrine given by many authors" (A1r) is evidence of this. She urges her readers to try to place as little emphasis on her gender as possible, and to listen to the meaning of the words instead:

It pertains to this matter to be more executed by feats of diligence and wit than by subtleties of words polished. . . .intend not to treat [this matter in any way] but to the most plain and understandable language that I know. And because this [manual is a] thing not accustomed and out of usage to women. . . . If I, a woman, charge myself to treat [warfare, I will follow the] teaching of Seneca who says to pay attention to what is said, not to whether or not the words are good. (A1r)

Obviously, such an admonition does not occur in any of Christine's sources, which is one reason for denying the accusation that the manual is a mere translation. It also confirms the suggestion made by Willard that Christine intended the manual to have practical value, that her writing style was intended to be "clear and understood by all men" and for that reason, Christine would not "treat these matters except in the most plain and understandable language that I know" (A1v-r). Her most understandable and hence accessible parts are found in the second half of the manual. Willard writes: "Christine was perhaps clever in judging that this conversation [between the Christine-persona and Bonet] would offer a good way to present rather dry legal material to men of action who, in some cases, were barely literate" (Willard 186). The

practical purpose of the work is reinforced in the many instances where she makes mention of those "who shall now read or hear" the manual (i.e.-L4r). Yet, judging from later copyists' alterations of the text, Christine's statement of intent did not, apparently, settle the issue for the critics.

### Survey of Modern Scholarship

Modern critics have taken up the debate over authorship where Christine and her contemporaries left off. Those who encounter the manual find that it yields nothing original. P.G. Campbell, for example, appears to be uncertain whether Christine copied Vegetius directly (and therefore created a new translation), or rather borrowed from J. de Vignai's French translation of *De Re Militari*. In either case, the issue of Christine's creativity is marginalized. Campbell's summary of the manual minimalizes the more creative parts of the manual. Campbell insists that "there can be no doubt that [Christine] relied" on these works (Campbell 217) and appears content to leave it at that. M.-J. Pinet, in her study of Christine's work, seconds this idea in a chapter titled "Her Translations" (Pinet 358), writing that Paul Meyer has proven the link between Christine and J. de Vignai's translation of *De Re Militari* (Pinet 359). According to Pinet, there is, in fact, a trail of translations, which runs as follows: 1, the Latin of Vegetius; 2, John de Meung's

translation; 3, that of J. de Vignai; and 4, the translation of Christine, following this precedent (Pinet 359).<sup>4</sup> Tracing the history of Christine's sources appears sufficient for Pinet in describing the manual, and she probes no further. It is important to note that Pinet is herself a source for Willard's article on Christine's manual.

Philippe Contamine, author of the historical work, *War in the Middle Ages*, finds Christine an invaluable source. Yet, even Contamine does not entirely refrain from criticizing the manual. In a section entitled "Teaching the Art of Warfare," Christine's manual is lumped with other medieval attempts to copy Vegetius's famous treatise on warfare, *De Re Militari*. Contamine, discussing other writers who copied Vegetius, writes that Christine "in the *Art of Chevalerie* acted in exactly the same fashion" (Contamine 210). This comment is damaging, for it is insufficient in describing the whole manual. Moreover, readers are expected to reconcile such minimalizing comments with the emphasis Contamine places on Christine's text. The manual ought to be considered important if judged by Contamine's frequent and often respectful use of Christine's war manual throughout the rest of his work. Not fifty pages before this comment, Contamine uses Christine to validate his own comments on the medieval art of warfare (156). It may appear that Contamine was at once considering her work original and

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<sup>4</sup> "Il donne alors: 1<sup>o</sup> le latin de Vegece; 2<sup>o</sup> la traduction de Jehan de Meung; 3<sup>o</sup> celle de J. de Vignai; 4<sup>o</sup> celle de Christine, calquee sur la precedente" (Pinet 359).

worthy of citation, while dismissing it as one of many medieval translations of Vegetius. This ambivalence characterizes the best of the manual's critical reception. Consultation with Ernst Robert Curtius's famous work, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, proves this criticism, proves that calling the text a translation, is partially accurate: "For the Middle Ages, all discovery of truth was first reception of traditional authorities, then later—in the thirteenth century—rational reconciliation of authoritative texts. A comprehension of the world was not regarded as a creative function but as an assimilation and retracting of given facts; the symbolic function of this being reading" (Curtius 326). Curtius's description of medieval use of authorities illustrates how differently creative originality was viewed in Christine's time. A medieval writer could create something that was perceived by others as original and creative, even though it mostly contained material from other sources.

In her article on Christine's war manual, *Notes on Christine de Pizan's Treatise on Warfare*, Charity Canon Willard finds the question of authorship particularly intriguing. She indicates that, in cases in which Christine has been removed from the manual, the text is "well enough known to be easily identified" (180). Willard, moreover, notes the aspects of the manual that are identifiably Christine's: "[the] long dialogue between master and disciple [is] in the style Christine had devised in *The Book of the City of Ladies*" (186).

Willard is the most famous and positive of Christine's critics, yet she herself shows critical ambivalence. Willard praises Christine at almost every turn for undertaking such an enormous task (especially as a woman), stating at one point that Christine's "reference to contemporary problems makes it evident that something more than a translation was intended" (Willard 181). Yet, in trying to prove that Christine's manual had "practical value" (Willard 180) at the time it was first published, Willard finds the work yields nothing original, either in thought or in presentation. In a dismissive comment, Willard calls Christine's manual merely a "popularization of Vegetius" (Willard 180).

Such a judgment may prove misleading to the burgeoning number of scholars working with Christine's writings. For Willard's numerous articles are generally considered to be the closest thing to gospel on Christine's life and work. Yet, as will be seen in later sections of this thesis, Willard fails to pay close attention to the last half of the manual. Willard's article was presented at a conference on medieval warfare, in which Willard attempted to provide her audience with reasons for having chosen this little known piece. She at once praises the work for its uniqueness (regarding its female author), and its importance to the medieval world and to the advancements made in the art of warfare in the middle ages. Yet, if Christine's work was nothing more than an attempt to bring Vegetius to her contemporaries, it would seem unworthy of Willard's attention. Willard concludes her piece by

stating her intention to complete a modern translation of Christine's war manual. Is this not a dead end, in light of Willard's comment?

Willard's article does not pay sufficient attention to books three and four, i.e. the second half of *The Book of the Faytes of Armes and Chivalrye*. If so, she would not call the manual a "popularization of Vegetius." For indeed, the two halves of Christine's work are so disparate that they might as well have been published as two separate works. Yet, no critic has made any mention of this, except to say that the first half copies Vegetius, the second, Bonet. Much more is going on, in the way Christine uses her sources, in the way she presents her material, and in the overall impact of the second half of the book, by far the more creative part of the manual.

The most scathing critic, Sylvia Huot, finds the material a piece of propaganda, and bland at that, "lacking in original ideas...nothing more than the repetition of received ideas" (Huot 361). Again then, my question: why bother to read the work at all? An even more staggering notion arises when I consider my reactions to the work after careful scrutiny: has Huot read Christine's work carefully all the way through? The answer would appear to be no, as anyone reading the manual would be struck by the marked difference between halves one and two. The problem many critics have with the manual--a perceived lack of originality--would also be resolved if they paid more attention to the second half of the manual. For

that is where Christine's originality—recalling Curtius's definition—chiefly appears. The next section of this thesis will show Huot's statement to be dismissive and insufficient for describing the manual as a whole.

### Christine's Use of Sources

Christine does look to several authors, such as Vegetius and Bonet (as well as some minor sources), for validation of some of her strongest points, as well as finding kindred spirits in discussing issues of great importance to her (Willard 183).

In the case of Vegetius, his situation was strangely similar to Christine's own. At the time Vegetius wrote, the Roman empire was crumbling; the Roman forces were in disarray, and defeat seemed imminent. Vegetius wrote *De Re Militari* in an effort to instill some pride in the Roman army, as well as to advocate the training of Roman youths (Intro. to Vegetius 2, Vegetius 13-17). Christine faced much the same problems. France was torn apart by civil wars, and the young king (Charles VI), due to mental instability, was unable to assume proper leadership of the country. And, after several decades of relative peace France was unprepared for a civil war and imminent attacks from the English.

Christine, like Vegetius, sees the danger that lies in infighting at the expense of national defense. She wisely makes use of Vegetius's work in the first half of her manual (Willard 180-81).

For Vegetius's work had been widely used and heralded throughout the centuries: "Vitruvius and Vegetius were regarded as authorities on fortification in the Middle Ages" (Curtius 52 n.). Bonet is inserted into the discussions in the first half of the manual as well. "The opening chapters of Book I, however, are devoted to a discussion of the "just war," reflecting not only concerns of Bouvet [sic], but also of the Italian legist John of Legnano..." (Willard 184). It is of some significance that Bonet himself borrowed freely from the work of John of Legnano. It helps place Christine's use of sources within the practice of her time.

Christine's use of material from Honore Bonet is a more interesting matter, as it is his work that was consulted in forming the more creative half of the manual. More important however, is Christine's relation to Bonet. They were contemporaries; Bonet's work appeared in France only a few years before Christine's. Christine was a member of the court; she would have had access to knowledge about any state problems arising from weak national defenses before it would have been available to Bonet. As a close friend of the Duke of Orleans, she was also familiar with the ever-changing state of affairs (Lucas 164-65, Willard 175). Bonet, although a contemporary, was secluded from court circles. As a result, his material was more idealistic than practical. His material, especially his concerns for the state of the church in times of war, was of philosophical significance during this time (the time of the Great Schism as well of civil war) but of little

practical importance. His ideas regarding the church's involvement in war had potential practical value, if they could be disseminated to the widest audience (Coopland 19, 21). Christine, whose earlier writings had gained her much fame and a certain degree of power, was a writer who would provide the avenue through which Bonet's work would reach a wider audience.

The differences between the two works ought, however, to discourage any critics from dismissing Christine's work as a copy of Bonet's. As some critics have already mentioned, Christine's work contains pieces of Burgundian propaganda to which Bonet would have had no access, and which indicate that her manual intended to have some social impact (Willard 183). Christine, through the character of Bonet, reminds her audience that her dependence on earlier authors was standard procedure: "the more a work is witnessed and approved of [by] more folk, the more it is authorized and more authentic, and therefore if any do murmur after the guise of evil speakers, saying that you begot this from other places, I answer them that it is a common use among my disciples to give and depart one to another of the flowers that they take diversely out of my gardens, and also that those who help themselves are not the first to have gathered them" (L5v).

It is clear from references in Christine's work that the audience was intended to be France as a whole, and the young king in particular (Lucas 164, Willard 185): "It is true that it is lawful for a prince to do what he feels is right against another, as much as a

just prince shall and ought to do, feeling himself wronged by another's might and power. He must then obey the goddess of law in deportment and in forbearing, without doing more to defend justice" (A4v). In fact, the first seven chapters of Book One are devoted to princely duties, an attempt to educate the young king in proper deportment for royalty in times of war. And, education of the king was of utmost importance to the nobles, as members of the king's court. The struggle for power between the noble houses of Burgundy and Orleans threatened to bring down both houses as well as the French empire. It was therefore imperative that Christine's work be accessible to the nobility (Willard 180-81) .

It is significant that nobles comprised a large section of the reading audience. Aside from clerks, nobles were the only members of society who were literate; therefore, it would be ridiculous not to assume that a large portion of Christine's audience would be the French nobility. Members of the nobility had commissioned all of Christine's earlier works, and she was therefore dependent upon them for her livelihood. Willard (184) believes the commissioning authority to have been John the Fearless (SansPeur) of the House of Burgundy, "the [only] person at the royal court [who] might have been taking a sufficiently great interest in the Duke of Guyenne [the king]." If this hypothesis is true, it partially explains the disparity between the two halves of the manual. Nobles were familiar with Christine's earlier work; they

would therefore be expecting writing similar to Christine's others. The second half echoes Christine's earlier texts.

This is not a complete explanation, however. As Christine herself states, she intended her manual to reach beyond the nobility to a wider audience, and to the soldiers in particular, "to consider those who have been exercising and are expert in the art of chivalry are not communal clerks nor are instructed in the science of language" so that, "by the help of God [the manual] may be clear to and understood by all men" (A1v).

#### The First Half of the Manual: Minor Changes

As stated before, Christine drew heavily from Vegetius's manual, *De Re Militari*. And, indeed, the first half of the manual makes good use of Vegetius's work. However, from the first there are instances of details which would not have occurred to Vegetius and would not have been factors in Vegetius's own creation. An important subject within the manual as a whole is the topic of just war (a war sanctioned by God). In fact, the second chapter of book one places the fate of war in God's hands: "here shows how wars and battles begun out of right and Just quarrel is a thing of Justice and suffered of God" (A2v). Vegetius's text was commissioned by a Christian emperor (Theodosius I); however, his text contains no Christian references. Yet in Chapter Four of Book One (supposedly

part of the Vegetius translation), we find: "all Christian princes are held to bear and sustain the church and his patrimony against all men who would befoul it...for by the law of God a man may not take nor usurp anything of others. It is unwise to covet, and God alone may seek revenge" (A3r-A4v). It is perplexing how any critic, after reading passages such as this, could look at the manual and dismiss it as a translation, since the topics included were unknown to Vegetius. Looking at Bonet's work offers a logical explanation. Much of the sentiments expressed about religion in the first half echo those found in Bonet's *Tree of Battles*. Although Christine does not acknowledge Bonet in the first half, it is clear that she inserted material from Bonet into the material borrowed from Vegetius. Manipulating sources is an instance of originality (Curtius 326).

When Christine uses Vegetius, she so indicates in many, if not most instances (B1r-B2v, B5v-B7v, C1r, C4v-C8r, D2v-D4v, D8r-E2r, E7r, F3r, F4r, F6v, H5v, H7r, I3v, K1v-K2r, K6v-K8r, L2v). Apart from relying on Vegetius, Christine displays a vast knowledge of ancient warfare and history, citing instances from the histories of Pyrrhus, Hannibal, and Scipio as examples of desirable behavior in warfare. Vegetius does not do this. Yet, although Books One and Two recount these intriguing histories, for the most part they contain nothing beyond practical material. This half of the manual is made of lists of necessities for engaging in battle and mounting assaults on land and sea.

There are occasional instances in the first half in which attitudes are expressed which cannot have come from either Vegetius or Bonet. That is no more true than in the instance in which Christine speaks of the important role of women in times of war: "[In ancient Rome] the ladies of the proper minion brought their jewels and rich adornments. With their good will they brought and delivered them to satisfy the needs of the town and city, which afterward were greatly restored" (A5v); "There must be a great store of cords and strings for ballesters and longbows and sinewes and other stuff to make them withal. And if it happens that sinewes are not recovered...namely the hairs of women are just as good for making crossbows, cords, and strings withal" (H6v). Yet even here, Christine is able to find an instance of women helping men within Vegetius's work: "The worthy ladies of Rome that had right fair and long hair trailing to the ground...chose to be defiled and naked from their right fair and yellow tresses of locks for to succour the ire of the city..." (H6v-r). The assertion that women are invaluable in cases of emergency is an instance of what Quilligan calls "textual gender" (229). Such instances occur with greater frequency in Books Three and Four; the preceding quote is part of an unusually impassioned section for Books One and Two. On the whole, the first half of the manual is dry reading; there is not much to hold a reader's attention, which helps to explain the diversity of the second half of the manual. For, if the nobles were part of the intended audience, in addition to the soldiers, there would need to be some

interesting material to gain and to hold their attention. And the subject of Books One or Two would hardly be expected to appeal to the nobility.

### The Second Half of the Manual: Major Changes

It is necessary to restate the importance placed upon authorship of the manual, and the questioning of Christine as author. For Christine seems to have prepared for this. It is seen most in the second half of the manual; it is indeed the explanation for the creation of a persona—taken to be Christine herself—and a "master," namely Bonet. It is a dialogue between these two characters which frames the second half of the manual: "when she wished to draw heavily on Honore Bonet for her *Le Livre des fais d'armes et de chevalerie* she decided to have the author give his permission to her in a dream" (Edmonds 36). Granting permission is further evidence that Christine was preparing the manual for accusations that it was not written by her alone, that she copied from sources such as Bonet.

Christine recounts a dream in which Bonet appears at the foot of the bed and urges her to undertake the task of creating this manual, of "picking of the fruit of my tree" (a reference to Bonet's *Tree of Battles*). And one cannot be said to have stolen what is freely given: "I am hither now come to be your help in the performing of this present book of knighthood and of feats of arms, where you

by great diligence and moved with a good will do occupy yourself" (L4v). Because of this frank acknowledgement of sources, it seems less likely that Christine stole from Bonet than that she "consulted" with him. Moreover, consulting with Bonet does not rob Christine of her power over the text. Quite the contrary. If one looks at Bonet's work, one finds that Christine was stringent in choosing elements of Bonet's work which she wished to include in her own. She excludes a great deal of material, most notably the section in Book One on the angels. The material she does borrow from Bonet she makes editorial choices over as well. She is ruthless in omitting much of Bonet's attention to the church and to the Armageddon-like effects of war on society. She finds most helpful Bonet's discussions of safeconduct and ransoming of prisoners captured in battle and in siege of cities.

Quilligan sees this dialogue between a character intentionally representing Christine and another character as a perfect example of what she calls the text's "textual gender." She writes that "by means of the speaking presence in the text of a visionary female figure of authority, whose textual gender is made more literal by its coherence with the author's own, Christine appears to establish her specific, female authority on oral and prophetic grounds, different from a mere textual tradition" (Quilligan 229).

### Differences Between Christine's and Bonet's Work

Much material from Bonet's work is similar to that found in the second half of the manual, yet what is borrowed is not as important as what is omitted. Although Vegetius was a source for the first half, and a most important one, Christine added much to the first half from Bonet's work, material that was new and particularly applicable to her own time (such as the Christian sentiments). The result was a work that was mostly her original compositional creation (see also N2v, O4v, O8r-P1r for evidence of this in the second half of the manual). And this is true of the second half of the manual as well, incorporating select material from Bonet's *Tree of Battles*.

Christine draws most from those sections of Bonet's work which deal with the problems regarding ransom and safeconduct, and, in a particularly interesting instance, the problem arising from a foreign student living in a city under siege (O1r-O2v). It seems crucial to Christine (i.e. to the persona that stands for Christine within the text), and to the master with whom she converses, that all persons who might be affected in times of war be accounted for. This is in keeping with Christine's pacifist tendencies (previously displayed in Christine's works *Le Livre de la Paix*, *Corps du Policie*, *Le Livre des fais et bonnes meurs de Charles V*, and *L'Avison Christine*, and later to be expressed in *La Lamentation sur les Maux de la France*), as well as with Bonet's idealistic vision of war in his

own manual. They believe, however, as their "dialogue" proves, in the justifiability of warfare and in the etiquette required for movements of any and all people in the battle area.

Christine was not inclined to delve into either the pope's role in warfare, or the insistence by Bonet throughout his own work that war is an indication of Armageddon (Bonet 81-82). Interestingly, most of Christine's ideas on the role of the church in warfare occur in the first half of the manual in the parts which ostensibly had no link to Bonet's work. Christine agrees with, and indeed makes good use of, Bonet's pacifist writings. Yet she is reluctant to place such an insistence on peace solely upon the church. In fact, in direct contradiction to Bonet's work, Christine finds the roles of Pope and Emperor to be irrelevant in a struggle for peace: the only discussion of Pope and Emperor occurs early on in this half, Chapter Three of Book Three (L6v-L6r).

The Christine-persona in many cases shapes the argument at hand, rather than letting the "master" take control. Evidence of this is found in Chapter Nine of Book Three: "Master, another question I make depending on that other aforesaid" (M5v). However, the greatest evidence of Christine's originality, of her personality asserting itself within the text, occurs on pages O8r-P1v. The discussion at hand is the role of a widow in times of war: "Yet I demand of you: I suppose that a lady who is a widow holding a lordship is oppressed wrongfully by war of a great lord or knight, to the widow's help goes a gentleman moved by pity. . . ." (M6v-M7v).

Christine was herself a widow; besides advancing the interests of women, this passage is one which betrays her personal interests. In light of this, there would seem to be no mistaking that Christine is an integral part of the text.

Christine takes Bonet on in a section concerning the waging of just war, as Bonet, in his *Tree of Battles*, defined it. Christine's attitudes are in strong opposition to Bonet's, as she herself admits: "And you [Bonet] have touched of it all enough in the beginning of this book that to all Just war may go every man who will and take wages for serving the same . . . I say to you that every man who right wisely will expose himself to war ought to be right informed of the quarrel and know whether the challenge be just or not . . . I will you know that if the quarrel be Unjust, he who thus exposes himself dampens his soul" (M2v-M3v). Bonet's attitude toward duty is based solely upon loyalty: one ought to lay down one's life without question and without hesitation, if the king should so desire.

In discussing Imperial Law, Christine shows her ideas differ from Bonet's. Bonet details his argument according to Lombard's law; Christine's is motivated more by the realities and differences that arise in each situation (Bonet 196-98, Christine Q4r-Q5r). Both believe in the rights of women, though to drastically differing degrees. For instance, Christine devotes much of Chapter Nine of Book Four (Q5r-Q8v) to the rights of women when accused of a crime. Here Christine draws upon Lombard's law for evidence, as Bonet did in citing instances of Imperial Law. Christine writes: "if a

man accuses his wife that she has betrayed or bespoken for to make him die either by poison or by some secret death . . .if this women can find a kinsman of hers or some other friend who will fight for her . . .the Lombardy law will that he shall be received for to fight for her against whoever will blame her" (Q5r-Q6r). Bonet's attention to this subject is scant at best. Bonet's discussion of a woman poisoning her husband is almost identical to Christine's, yet the material is not as fully developed. Furthermore, with the exception of "the eighth case of case of wager of battle according to Lombard law" [a woman being accused of adultery], the majority of Bonet's discussion makes no mention of women. They are simply not of concern to him; that is not the case with Christine.

The last chapter of Christine's manual, a discussion of heraldry, is almost verbatim the words of Bonet (Christine S4v-S5v, Bonet 205-06). They discuss the merits of each color found on a uniform or a coat of arms—i.e. purple for royalty: "the second colour is purple, that we call in French red or vermillion, and it represents fire" (Bonet 206)/"The second color is purple which we call red, which represents fire" (Christine S4r-S5v). Christine's work is identical to Bonet's in the discussion of each of the colors under discussion. They part company however, in their discussion of the color black. This once again brings to the fore the discrepancy between Christine and Bonet in their attention to religious matters. Christine writes: "The other color is black that men in armory call sable, that represents the other and betokens sorrow. For it is

farther from the light more than any of the others, and therefore was found that in token of sorrow black raiments should pertain to the sorrowful and heavy" (S4r-S5v). Bonet's work attests to this, with a notable addition: "For the same reason the religious, who should make no account of vain glory, clothe themselves in it" (Bonet 206).

Greatest evidence of Christine's deviation from Bonet is the attitude Bonet held toward women. Regarding the question of whether a queen might judge matters of war, Bonet writes: "I prove first of all that she cannot judge in this battle: first, by authority, and secondly, by natural reason. For common law says that women by their nature are excluded from the deeds of men. . . according to law, they cannot act as judges. . . as it is clear that a woman is subject to man, how can she judge man?" (Bonet 193-95). It is not possible for Christine to have agreed; her debate with her master shows her to be judge of the situations presented, to which Bonet, as his work attests, would have been adverse. Christine omits this topic from her work altogether. An omission of this sort is traditionally Christine; in earlier works in which material was drawn from other sources, Christine often omitted misogynistic opinions (i.e. Christine's *Book of the City of Ladies* versus Boccaccio *De Muleribus Claris*).

Most important to the topic under discussion in this thesis, as it has been presented before, is to determine whether it is possible

to prove creative originality. It is clear in books three and four that the style is Christine's, although the same cannot be said for the first half of the manual. Books three and four resemble the "discussions" between Christine (or her persona) and powerful, often godly characters in her other works, such as *The Book of the City of Ladies*. From the first chapter of book three, the tone of the writing changes unmistakably to a first person narrative resembling most of Christine's other works: "As I did await entering into the third part of this present book and my wit, almost as weary of the present weight of the labor concerning the two other preceding parts, and as surprised with sleep, lying upon my bed appeared before me the semblance of a creature having the form of a stately man, of habit, of cheer, and of maintenance like a right and wise authorized judge. . . .[Bonet, the master]" (L4v).

It must be stated that the loving epithet "dear love Christine" is not present in most copies of the text (Willard 183). It is possible, however, to find those instances where Christine inserts her gender, if not herself, into the text less overtly. And here again, this is most evident in the second half of the manual. In several instances, the Christine-persona and the master discuss the role of women in times of war.

Here for the first time as well, Christine reveals her feelings regarding this work. Her own sentiments regarding parts one and two are revealing as well: she is exhausted by the work required in writing the first two parts of the manual, and so saying, indicates

that this section is intended to be a respite from that: "As I did await entering into the third part of this present book and my wit, as almost weary of the pesaunt weight of the labor concerning the two other preceding parts. . . ." (L4v). Therefore, Christine herself sees some difference between the two halves, fundamentally in the toll they seem to take on her, and in the pleasure she seems to take in creating the second half.

#### History of the Manual's Reception

Christine's pleasure in creating the second half of the manual appears to have had some impact on part of her audience, at least, for the manual was an instant success upon its publication. It did appear too late to stem the invasion from England; however, it struck a chord with much of the French populace who wanted peace at all costs. It was not the practical aid that Christine had hoped. It was a strong work on peace and national unity, one of many Christine published during her lifetime.

The only English translation of *The Book of the Faytes of arms and Chivalrye* is the 1489 Caxton text is available on microfilm but it is black letter which has been photographed, so the quality is poor. From this it should be apparent that no one has displayed much interest in the manual in modern times. Those who have are cited above yet their familiarity with the text seems at best limited. In

spite of the resurgence of Christine's popularity in the 1970s, the scholars concerned with Christine, now numerous the world over, have neglected this important work. The manual is valuable for practical purposes; moreover, as Contamine's use of the work shows, it has sociological and historical value for the modern researcher as well. And, for those who consider themselves expert on the writings of Christine de Pizan, one would consider such an omission glaring. And yet this is not an unusual occurrence, as those who have done extensive research on Christine will acknowledge.

This appears to me to also be a case of gender trouble. For the 1970s resurrected Christine's work and saw in it early feminist ideas, when indeed the only thing that definitely can be attributed to Christine is a belief that women ought to be better educated. She was not a feminist; that is a modern idea. She may be considered instead a proto-feminist: someone who saw that women were worthy of more than they were receiving from society, yet content, and even agreeable to the subservient role of women to men within medieval culture. Such a progressive attitude toward women explains why medieval audiences might have been reluctant to accept this war text from a woman. Yet it says nothing about modern critics who are generally even more damning in their faint praise of the manual.

The quotation given at the beginning of this thesis would seem particularly applicable in providing an explanation for ignoring the manual: Christine's manual did not fit either into her "feminist

writings" as modern criticism sees it. This text contains very little reference to women (as mentioned in the section on Bonet), and would therefore not advance any feminist critics' agenda. Traditional literary study has also commonly, and perhaps unjustifiably, excluded studies of warfare in its analyses of medieval texts. Christine's manual would therefore be considered to lack the necessary literary qualities to make it interesting and potentially valuable as a literary source.

### Conclusion

Modern critics have judged, and indeed dismissed this medieval text. It is, apparently, not sufficient to stress the anomaly of a female's being the author of a manual of war. Rather than find interest in this fact, modern critics are among the most vehement in denying Christine the credit of authorship.

It is apparent that the *The Book of the Faytes of Arms and Chivalrye* is more than a "popularization of Vegetius," as Willard, its most sympathetic critic, terms it. Nor is the work a mere amalgam of Vegetius, Bonet, and minor sources, a skillfully arranged set of translations. It had impact in Christine's time, and even more in early Renaissance England after her death. A logical explanation for the manual's disappearance after the late fifteenth century is the changing art of warfare. The many advances in technology rendered

Christine's manual insufficient and impractical. Yet, when all of Christine's other works were resurrected in the 1970s, her war manual continued to be ignored. This is unfair; for the originality Christine displayed in manipulating her use of her sources, the attention that is paid to women's interests, and the unique style of the second half makes her manual a work of creativity and originality, interesting to critics looking for more than a mere guide to medieval warfare.

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