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A WOMAN OF EXCELLENT CHARACTER: a case study of dress, reputation and the changing costume of Christine de Pizan in the fifteenth century

How did artists and writers of the fifteenth century dress the woman writer? Images of an author writing or presenting their codex to an aristocratic patron are common in deluxe manuscripts produced in the late Middle Ages. But what if the writer is female? Will she be portrayed as a respectable court servant or as an aristocratic lady in damask and miniver? This study examines the relationship between text, dress, and changing social status of Christine de Pizan as revealed in the author portraits accompanying her book *Le Trésor de la Cité des Dames* from its first appearance in 1405 through four additional manuscripts produced later in the century.¹

Dress is a powerful indicator of status in any given period in human history. Medieval sumptuary laws relegated the wearing of certain ceremonial garments, fabrics, and furs to members of the royal family alone. The fact that these laws were broken at every possible opportunity by the lesser aristocracy and the aspiring merchant class testifies to their power. As Christine's reputation increased throughout the century, so did the visual portrayal of her social class, causing artists to propel her, through the dress she is given in later portraits -- elaborate, costly and fashionable garb -- to ever higher social standing, in direct opposition to fact and her own written word.² The confusion engendered by having a female textual authority blurred conventions used by book-making workshops dictating how a writer of great reputation should be depicted. Whose directions should the artists follow? Christine's written admonishments in *Le Trésor* to dress according to one's station in life? The early miniatures with Christine sensibly clad? Or the romances popular with her new patrons, favoring depictions of slender ladies encased in unwieldy

gowns? The tension between text, visual models, and the ever-increasing fame of the author provide a variety of visual solutions to the problem of dressing the greatest woman writer of the Middle Ages.

Le Trésor and Christine's Ideas on Proper Dress

Le Trésor is an allegorical dream-poem comprised of a dialogue between Christine and three Virtues: Reason, Rectitude and Justice. In the Prologue Christine is admonished by the Virtues to waste no time resting from her labors after writing *La Cité des Dames*, but to immediately begin its sequel, *Le Trésor*, a guidebook for women on how to live and work prudently. The text is then divided into three parts, each addressing the tasks particular to a different class of women: queens and princesses in Part One; aristocratic ladies of the court, manor and city in Part Two; and, middle-class and lower-class women in Part Three. Through lecture and discussion the Virtues and Christine describe the proper conduct and responsibilities for women of every class.

Le Trésor is the companion text to *La Cité des Dames*, a work written by Christine during the preceding year.³ *La Cité* builds a feminine utopia of words, created through a spirited debate between Christine and the Virtues on the history of women. *Le Trésor* has a far more ambitious aim; through the ostensible edification of one female, Margaret of Burgundy,⁴ Christine creates a vehicle to advise and guide all women.⁵ "Christine" writes L. M. Richardson "after having made herself known as the champion of her sex, then desired to become its counselor."⁶ Lectures detailing the dangers of extravagance in dress, and in dressing above one's station abound in *Le Trésor*:

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Figure 1: Reason, Rectitude and Justice appear to Christine in a Vision; The College of Ladies; *Le Trésor de la Cité des Dames*, *La Cité des Dames* Master. Courtesy of the Trustees of the Boston Public Library, MS fr. Med. 101, folio 361, 1405-10.

Let us suppose, for example, that a woman is of excellent character and without any bad deed or thought in her head: but no one will believe it, for she is seen wearing clothing above her station. Many bad judgements will be made against her, however good she may really be. It therefore behooves any woman who wants to preserve her good reputation to be modest and conservative in her clothing. Her garments should not be too tight nor the neckline too low, nor should she take up other unchaste fashions, nor new-fangled things, especially indecent ones.⁷

Christine warns particularly against dressing above one's station in life; duchesses should not wear the gowns of a queen, nor ordinary ladies that of countesses. As garments became tighter and more figure revealing, women dressing too fashionably, she claims, risk attracting the attention of dangerous men who "may think she is doing it in order to be desired and lusted after."⁸ Christine's remarks on proper attire might simply reveal the biases of an older woman against current fashion:

No one is satisfied with his social standing, but rather each one wants to look like a king ... Is this not truly a great extravagance that a Parisian tailor reported the other day? He made a *cotehardie* for an ordinary lady who lives in the province of Gatinais. He had used five ells (according to the Paris measure) of wide Brussels cloth in making it. Three quarters of the train touched the ground, and the full sleeves reached to her feet, and God only knows how correspondingly large the head-dress is and how high the points are! It is actually an extremely ugly and unbecoming outfit as anyone who really looks at it will agree.⁹

She complains fashion is dangerous because it continually changes, requiring both men and women to accumulate huge debts and risk the moral sin of pride in order to have the latest "fancy."

Pride expands from extravagant dress to discourteous public conduct, causing, Christine claims, the disgraceful habit of "jostling women trying to get in front of each other in processions at weddings and other gatherings."¹⁰ She addresses these remarks particularly to ladies married to well-to-do merchants who seem, in her opinion, all too eager to display their wealth by aping the dress of aristocracy.¹¹

The Portraits

Christine de Pizan is one of the first vernacular authors to supervise the copying and illustration of her codices for the French Court. Under Christine's direction, and by artists of her own choosing, most of her manuscripts were richly illustrated with miniatures. The changing costume found in portraits of Christine de Pizan can be understood in light of "current" taste in fashion and propriety espoused by Christine, as opposed to those held by aristocratic patrons later in the century. How closely do artists follow Christine's intent in both word and image? How does an artist portray a respected woman writer during her lifetime; after her death? Should this be as a conservative widow, as she wished? Or as a scholar, aristocratic nun, or fashionable young noblewoman?

Christine's fierce opinions on the subject of dress are given form in the very way she allows herself to be portrayed in miniatures produced under her supervision. Although she insisted upon modesty, common-sense, and even humility in dress in her writings and in her portraits, Christine's admirers commissioning copies of her texts after her death elevate their favorite authoress to a higher status by having Christine portrayed in garments reserved for women in the class above her actual station of court author and scribe.

Portraits of Christine painted after 1430 alter her appearance significantly, through elaborate headdresses, costly furs, forbidden fabrics, and gowns Christine would have regarded as quite immodest.

Six miniatures containing portraits of Christine will be analyzed in this study. Three of these illustrate the action described in the Prologue of *Le Trésor* sometimes combined with classroom scenes described in Parts One, Two and Three of the text. (See Figures 1, 3, and 4). Two depict unusual scenes from *Le Trésor*: Christine in discussion with the Virtues (Figure 5), and a presentation scene (Figure 6). A second miniature from the early period illustrating Christine presenting a copy of her collected works to the Queen of France has also been included to demonstrate the approved dress of three classes: a Queen, her ladies, and her civil servant (Figure 2).

The early miniatures of *La Cité* and *Le Trésor* were painted by an artist known as *La Cité des Dames Master*, and they serve as models for illustration of the texts after Christine's death, although they are imitated with varying degrees of faithfulness to the original.¹² Portraits of Christine found in those miniatures produced under her supervision (Figure 1 and 2) show her wearing garments befitting an upper-class wife, and are in keeping with her own philosophy. In both, Christine is dressed as a respectable court clerk, in a costume she so approved of -- a modest *cotehardie*, simple vertical headdress and wimple -- that it became her standard apparel in all early portraits.¹³

Figure 1 is taken from one of two extant illustrated manuscripts of *Le Trésor* which can be safely dated to this early period.¹⁴ It is a product of the *La Cité des Dames Master's* workshop, and is populated with the well-proportioned



figures rendered in primary colors characteristic of that atelier.¹⁵ This manuscript contains only one illustration, combining two scenes within a single miniature: on the left, Christine is roused from her rest by the Virtues to write a "sequel" to *La Cité*; on the right we see the "College of Ladies," a grouping of women of various classes receiving instruction from one of the lecturers, a new allegorical figure in this scenario, Dame Prudence.

On the left side of the miniature, in a carefully articulated interior scene, Christine reclines on a bed. She is portrayed in a manner similar to all the portraits of her painted during her lifetime: a royal blue *cotehardie*,¹⁶ with a short, square-ended hanging sleeves worn over a darker gown with visible long sleeves. No doubt these garments reflect her own modest manner of

dressing as a widow of a court clerk, since she consistently allowed their use in such depictions. It certainly serves to make her instantly recognizable to the viewer. Christine's headdress is comprised of several fine white linen veils, widely stretched between two horns made of wire or some rigid form.¹⁷ Like her gown, her headdress is equally unchanging in these early miniatures, and it represents a type favored by *La Cité des Dames* Master, seen repeatedly in many productions of this workshop, and is typical of headdresses worn in the first decade of the fifteenth century.¹⁸ The artists of this workshop often include a sheer wimple, befitting her status as widow, covering the shoulders and chest area normally exposed by the neckline of the *cotehardie*. The Virtues are dressed in variations of the fashionable *houppelande*¹⁹ and *cotehardie*, and wear

identical gold crowns over the blonde hair coils also favored by *La Cité des Dames* Master. Christine is given the following command by the three Virtues, who refuse to let the weary writer rest:

Take your pen and write. Blessed will they be who live in our city to swell the numbers of citizens of virtue. May all the feminine college and their devout community be appraised of the sermons and lessons of wisdom. First of all to the queens, princesses, and great ladies, and then on down the social scale we will chant our doctrine to other ladies and maidens and all classes of women, so the syllabus of our school may be valuable to all.²⁰

These students of good citizenship, listening to a lecture given by Dame Prudence at the "College of Ladies" occupy the right side of the miniature. Eleven women of different social rank are seated to the front and side of Dame Prudence enthroned before a lectern with an open book. These eleven ladies represent all the classes that the three parts of *Le Trésor* were designed to instruct. Four crowned queens or princesses sit on either side of the honored speaker. To the left and right, visible in profile, and placed in a position of honor close to the lectern, are two aristocratic women: the one on the left in a *bourrelet*,²¹ and; the one to the right in a white vertical headdress. Seated on a long brown bench, with their backs to us, are five ladies of varied social status; three working women wear hoods with long *liripipes*²² and simple gowns, and; two, with vertical headdresses, wear costly *houppelandes*, indicating by their placement on the bench their affiliation with the merchant class. The lecturer, Dame Prudence, is clad in a fur-lined cloak and gown, the *robes royaux*²³ worn by royalty during ceremonial functions, and gold rays radiate from her head and crown.

Figure 3: Reason, Rectitude and Justice appear to Christine in a Vision; The College of Ladies, Lecturing to Queens and Princesses; Le Trésor de la Cité des Dames, Unidentified Flemish workshop. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque royale Albert ler, Brussels BR 9551-2, folio 2, ca. 1430.

The ladies discussed in the text -- princesses, aristocrats, merchants, artisans, and laborers -- can all be identified by virtue of their dress and placement in the miniature. The artist, under Christine's direction, has duplicated the notion of one's proper place in the social hierarchy, consistently advocated by Christine throughout the text, by placing royal ladies close to Dame Prudence in the center, and relegating the *bourgeoisie* to modest benches. However hierarchical the

placement of the figures in the miniature might be, all classes of women are invited to inhabit the City of Ladies. The college lectures are designed to make them, one and all, citizens worthy of such an illustrious habitat.

For purposes of comparison, let us turn to the frontispiece of a magnificent edition of Christine's *Collected Works*, executed between 1410-15, also a product of *La Cité des Dames* Master²⁴ (Figure 2). It illustrates the official presentation of the manuscript by Christine to her patron

Figure 4 (facing page): Reason, Rectitude and Justice appear to Christine in a Vision; Le Trésor de la Cité des Dames, Master of the Amiens 200. Courtesy of the Beinecke Library, Yale University, MS 427, folio 1, 1450-60.

Queen Isabelle of France. Here the artist gives us an animated, lively scene detailing the dress and spirited conversation of ladies of the Parisian court. Their costumes correspond to those of the ladies of nobility discussed previously (see Figure 1). In the presentation scene Queen Isabel wears a red embroidered houppe lined in ermine, augmented by her elaborate bourrelet. Christine is dressed in the same garment that becomes her "uniform." The only change is now the

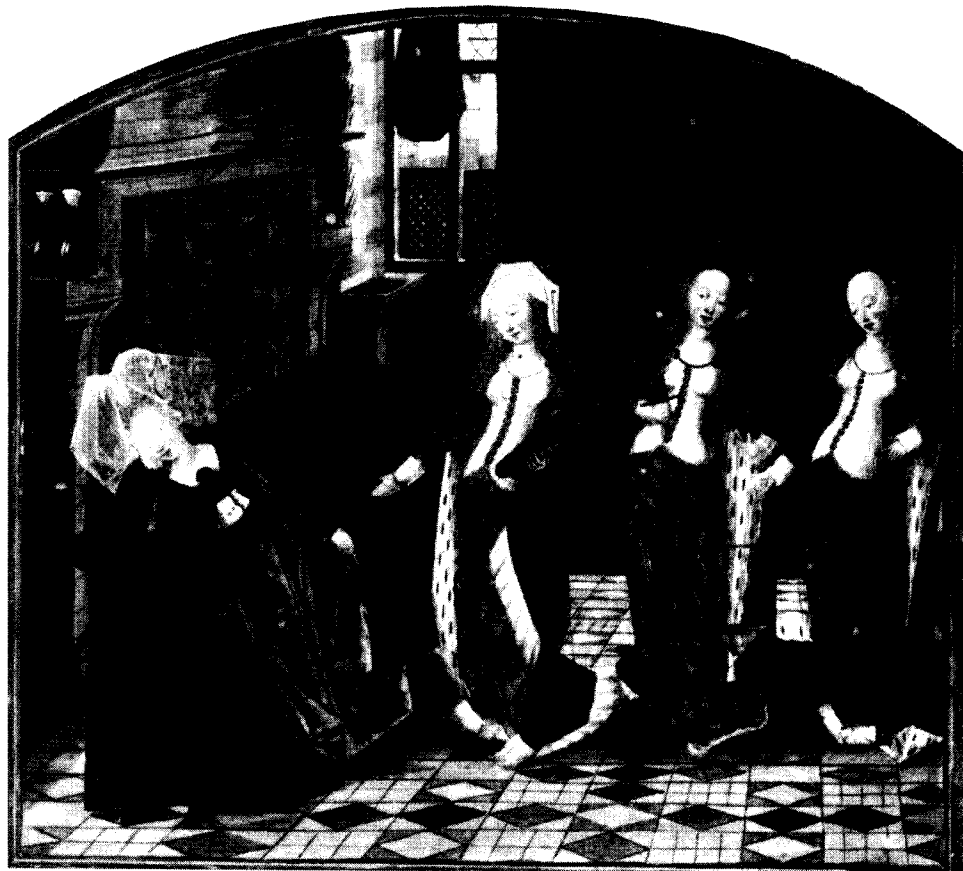


veils of her headdress completely encircle the caul and supporter, instead of simply resting on top of the structure.²⁵ The ladies wear houppelandes, vertical headdresses, damask belts and other costly accessories, favored by the nobility and often imitated by the wealthier burghers' wives.

The next two images of Christine to be examined from *Le Trésor* were produced in the first few decades following her death in 1430, therefore created without benefit of her supervision or approval. The first is located in the Royal Library at Brussels, and may have been produced as early as the year of Christine's death (Figure 3). The second is a large, luxurious edition now located in the Beinecke Library of Yale University (Figure 4).

The miniature illustrating the prologue to *Le Trésor* contains ten figures within two compartments. The soft modeling of these wistful women is markedly different from the style of *La Cité des Dames* Master and workshop. Christine leans upon a large bed covered in red velvet, embroidered in gold, in an interior with a steeply rising perspective. She is not at her desk, or even lying upon the bed, but sits on a folding wooden chair.²⁶ She is wearing a black houppelande with loose straight sleeves, lined in a grey fur, perhaps miniver, visible at both cuff and hem. Her robe is belted with a gold chain, and pleats are visible beneath the white collar. The details of her robe and pointed vertical headdress indicate a date close to 1430.²⁷ The three Virtues are slender and angelic, following no models previously seen for Christine's Virtues in either *La Cité* or *Le Trésor*. They are identical, each with long, curling hair and simple smocks of rose, yellow and blue.²⁸

The Virtues appear again on the right side of miniature, standing on a grassy meadow before three seated Queens.



The background is comprised of a burgundy cloth-of-honor decorated by gold acanthus scrolls. The Queens are seated upon a large throne with a wooden canopy, upholstered in black damask. The Virtues wear the same pale gowns, and gesture to one another, or glance toward their royal students. The Queens are all posed with their heads inclined to the right, as if listening in rapt attention, and the central figure has her hands raised in exclamation. They are dressed in a variety of ceremonial as well as contemporary garments.

The two scenes in this miniature illustrate the action of the Prologue and the first group of women addressed in Part One of *Le Trésor*. The scene of the Prologue is similar to that found on the left side of Figure 1, for each shows Christine attempting to rest after having completed *La Cité*, only to be prevented from doing so by the Virtues. At least in Figure 3 the Virtues look somewhat

penitent about their demands! On the right side of the composition the artist of Figure 3 illustrates only the highest nobility, the very group Christine addresses in the first series of lectures in Part One of *Le Trésor*. Two other miniatures from this work, not addressed in this study, devote a miniature to the courtly class and a miniature to the merchant class. In the earliest *Le Trésor* 1405-10, is illustrated with only one miniature (Figure 1) allowing the artist to portray all classes of women seated together at the same lecture, is far more egalitarian in spirit.²⁹

Christine, the Virtues and the ladies illustrated in Figure 3 possess the refinement and delicacy admired in the works of the Limbourg brothers, active from 1390 through 1416.³⁰ The artist, however, uses soft, feathery brushstrokes blurring their silhouettes, and models the faces in a wistful, diminutive manner foreign to these great Flemish painters.

No figure in this manuscript is frontal, or stiffly posed. The overall atmosphere of these miniatures is delicate rather than fussy, and the exquisite draftsmanship endows Christine, the Virtues, and the students of the "College of Ladies" with a quaint peculiarity, and a fluid, rather than flamboyant, charm. This sumptuous manuscript was owned by the de Croy family and later became the property of two women book collectors, Margaret of Austria, and later Margaret of Hungary.³¹

The second manuscript, from mid-century is the deluxe edition owned by the Beincke Library of Yale University, produced circa 1460 (Figure 4). This costly manuscript illustrates the text of *Le Trésor* with an unprecedented four miniatures. Due to its overall luxury and the fineness of its miniature decoration, this codex may be one long-presumed lost, belonging at one time to a great admirer and collector of Christine's works, Anne of France (1461-1522).³² The high quality of the Yale manuscript has resulted in many speculative attributions concerning its provenance until John Plummer's definitive attribution of the miniatures to the Master of the Amiens 200.³³

The three Virtues appear to Christine in a beautifully articulated interior space. The artist has rendered the furniture, hangings and decorative elements of this bedroom with the meticulous concern for rigorous detail characteristics of the Flemish. Christine is shown asleep before the fire, on a long, pillow-strewn bench. She leans her head upon her hand and turns away from the Virtues who twist and sway before her with the quiet elegance of Gothic jamb statues.

Christine is no longer modestly dressed in a manner befitting a court official and widow. Her green velvet gown is a modified houppelande, extremely low-cut and tightly-fitted

through the bodice and sleeves, falling in crisp, angular folds about her knees and feet. Her neckline, cuffs and hem are lined in rich brown sable. A wide white damask belt binds her tightly. Christine wears a short flower-pot bonnet, a Flemish variation of the popular *henin*.³⁴ Its veil runs straight up from eye level to two peaks on wires above the cap.³⁵ Her plucked hairline elongates the forehead, and her face is softened by a transparent veil. Christine and the Virtues share the same delicate features: an oval face, a large wide forehead, a negligible chin, a curving nose and a full, small mouth. The Virtues are dressed in robes royaux, consisting of ermine-lined mantels, large brooches, and form-revealing fur plastrons with jewel buttons worn over Italian gold brocades.

This miniature is located above the short text of the Prologue, and never has the narrative been illustrated so gently and quietly. Instead of Christine being physically jarred from her rest by the demanding tug of one of the Virtues, here we see her about to be gently awakened with a light tap. The Master of the Amiens 200 adheres to the pictorial tradition of the *vacatio*, where the protagonist of any vision is always shown asleep, rather than to the text of the *Le Trésor* itself, which contends that Christine was only resting. Also in contradiction to the text is Christine's portrayal as an attractive, nubile young gentlewoman. This is determined by the tightly fitted, rather immodest, fashionable cut of her gown.³⁶ Christine protests vehemently throughout the text of *Le Trésor* against the dangers of dressing immodestly, or above one's station in life.³⁷ The artist has not followed Christine's own rules for proper dress, strictly expressed in this very text and established in her earlier portraits. Rather, it appears to be more important to the artist, and perhaps to the modern

Figure 5: Christine and Reason, Rectitude and Justice Converse in the cité des dames; *Le Trésor de la Cité des Dames*, School of Jacquemart Pilavaine (?). Courtesy of the Bibliothèque royale Albert Ier, Brussels, BR 9235-7, folio 136, ca. 1470.

young patron, to transform Christine into an appealing young lady of fashion.

To suit the courtly tastes of Christine's new admirers, these two miniatures of *Le Trésor* produced during the middle of the fifteenth century break from the models first established by Christine de Pizan and *La Cité des Dames* Master in portraits of the author. Figures 3 and 4 revel in a calligraphy of line, elaboration of dress, ornamentation of headdress, fabric and fur to display a preoccupation with pattern decedent enough to dazzle the eye of any fashionable reader.

Let us now turn to two miniatures of *Le Trésor* created during the final period of production examined in this study, from 1465-1500 (Figures 5 and 6). Each contain both *La Cité* and *Le Trésor* within a single bound volume. By the end of the fifteenth-century *Le Trésor* was the more popular text of the two, and was printed in French three times by the early sixteenth century.³⁸ Vêrard published the first printed edition, dedicating it to the Queen, Anne of Brittany, noted for her education of young women.³⁹ Additionally, nine paper manuscripts of *Le Trésor* (all those examined in this study are hand illuminated on vellum) give evidence of its popularity among the rising middle class, who used the text as a manual of courteous behavior for daughters and wives of the aspiring merchants.⁴⁰

Le Trésor de la Cité des Dames, ca. 1470 contains nine miniatures, six illustrating chapters from *La Cité* and three from *Le Trésor*, and all are the products of the Flemish workshop of Jacquemart Pilavaine, produced from 1465-70.⁴¹ The first miniature illustrating *Le Trésor* (Figure 5) is one of the most unusual representations of the Prologue seen in any of the manuscripts examined in the present study (Figures 1, 3 and 4). Instead of depicting Christine at rest, this artist shows Christine standing in the



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 deus. Cest assavoir. In son
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Item les lettres que la
sage Dame ou damoiselle
puet enuoyer a sa maistrise



Cy se fait la presentation de
ce livre a madame la duchesse
de guyenne

refhauler puz
fauye adoubie
femise ma
dame margu
rite de bouillon

une eponse de tres excellent
trime loye due de guenne
attendant la couronne a l'au

Figure 6: Christine Presents Her Book to Margaret of Burgundy; *Le Trésor de la Cité des Dames*, In the Manner of the Master of Margaret of York. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS fr. 1177, folio 114, 1470-80. Reproduced in color on the back cover.

center of a courtyard, in animated conversation with the Virtues. Christine wears a full, white kerchief over a minimal caul,⁴² with another piece of white line, the wimple, symbol of wifehood,⁴³ pinned to mask the neck and chin. Her simple, fully-cut, unbelted blue gown is highlighted by gold hatching lines and an embroidered band. Christine's dress is like that worn by a wealthy burgher's wife, widow or nun, with her voluminous gown, loose sleeves, mantle, and veil.⁴⁴

This miniature does not illustrate the event described in the opening paragraph of the Prologue. That portion of the text states Christine was so tired upon completion of *La Cité*, she begged "only to rest and be idle for a while." The Virtues accuse her of sloth, commanding her to begin the *Le Trésor* immediately. The quiet harmony evident between the figures represented in the miniature does, however, embody the spirit of gentle camaraderie described at the end of the Prologue:

Then I, Christine, hearing the soft voices of my very reverend mentors, filled with joy and trembling, immediately roused myself and knelt before them and offered myself in obedience to their noble wishes.⁴⁵

Although she is not kneeling, she stands smiling and attentive within the walls of the City of Ladies. The figures of the four women are quite solid and robust, with large, oval faces, full lips, round eyes, and rosy cheeks. This manuscript was commissioned by a woman patron, Walburge de Meurs, and was a treasured volume in the later libraries of two other noted women bibliophiles, Louise de Albert and Margaret of Austria.⁴⁶

The final image of Christine to be discussed is found illustrating the Prologue of *Le Trésor* (Figure 6). This Flemish work was executed between 1470-80 in the manner of the workshop of the Master of Margaret of York. Like *Le*

Trésor de la Cité des Dames ca. 1470, this volume contains both texts, *La Cité* and *Le Trésor*. Three of its four miniature illustrate *La Cité*, while the fourth and final miniature illustrates *Le Trésor* in an uncharacteristic manner, by portraying its presentation to Margaret of Burgundy. This miniature does not function as a frontispiece as one might expect, but serves to introduce *Le Trésor* which is located in the middle of this particular codex. Although presentation scenes were quite a common practice in general, the artist is not following earlier models approved of by Christine (Figure 1). Eighty years have passed since the original appearance of the text, and there is now a great deal more freedom of interpretation and emphasis left in the hands of both the artist and the patron. Margaret of Burgundy, who died earlier in the century cannot be the patron of this particular manuscript. Although the full history of this manuscript is unknown, it is first recorded in the library of Louis of Bruges, one of Margaret's descendants.⁴⁷

This unusual miniature is located in the middle of the left column of the folio 114, encompassing the final portion of *La Cité* as well as the beginning of the text of *Le Trésor*. The rubrics beneath the miniature declare that the text is presented to the Duchess of Guyenne, also known as Margaret of Burgundy. The figures in this manuscript are small and attractive with sweet, pretty faces neatly drawn. The folds of their gowns have a certain stiffness, dictated by the predilection of the day. Christine kneels before Margaret,⁴⁸ an action described in the Prologue, but made before the Virtues, not the object of the text's dedication!⁴⁹ This miniature illustrates instead the condescension of a princess toward a favored subject.

The figures of the two women are small, yielding and doll-like in their pose

and configuration. Christine is finely dressed, not as a civil servant, but as a noblewoman in her tightly-fitted, fur-lined blue gown and her square, gold henin⁵⁰ -- an ensemble which would not have met with her approval. She presents a large volume with gold clasps to Margaret. Christine and Margaret are dressed in a surprisingly similar fashion, although Christine's black modesty piece and sheer shoulder scarf cover her breasts more convincingly than does the scanty bodice of the elegant princess. Margaret's wide, sloping, low-cut neckline perches precariously on her rounded shoulders, and her henin has no frontlet, but instead is trimmed by a wide band of black velvet.⁵¹

Margaret of Burgundy is indirectly addressed in the entire first section of the text, which describes the proper education of the princess on her duties and responsibilities -- making this the first mirror for the princess written by a woman. Many copies of *Le Trésor* include Christine's original dedication, perhaps due to the fact that Margaret and her five sisters, through their various impressive marriage alliances, carried *Le Trésor* to a vast number of European Courts, now part and parcel of the Burgundian aristocratic feminine heritage. None, however, include a presentation scene such as the one found here.

Conclusion

The most noteworthy changes in the style and iconography of the portraits of Christine de Pizan in later miniatures accompanying *Le Trésor* occur as a direct result of the increasing popularity of her works.⁵² The stylistic variety in the last phase of deluxe manuscript production of *Le Trésor* is extensive, reflecting the wide audience her books acquired as the century progressed, witnessed by their

translation into English, Portuguese, and Flemish, and in the continuing desire of new patrons for illustrated editions. Carried about the continent by sisters, wives, daughters, and nieces of the original owners, the manuscripts were copied, translated and illuminated by regional artists working in all manner of styles, evident in the great variety of possibilities explored in the five miniatures of this study. There is no single accepted aesthetic utilized by the workshops illustrating *Le Trésor*. The compositions established by Christine's artists (exemplified in this study by Figures 1 and 2) are often duplicated by virtue of their directness and familiarity, but the details of gown, headdress, materials and accessories are constantly altered and updated to make the women more appealing to the contemporary reader. Christine's own costume is as subject to change as that of the princesses, ladies and merchants addressed in the text.

Christine's writings and the miniatures she supervised indicate that she was acutely aware of the power of dress to establish hierarchical levels in the illustrations. *La Cité des Dames* Master clothes the heavenly Virtues in the costume of the aristocracy -- houppelandes and robes royaux -- although they are greatly simplified and restrained in their execution in the early period⁵² (Figure 1 and 2). Other workshops were available to her for the illumination of *La Cité* and *Le Trésor*, and yet she chose one willing to portray her as a sensibly dressed individual whose social status is easily determined through clearly delineated items of dress (Figure 1 and 2).

This restraint is immediately swept away once Christine is no longer alive to supervise and dictate the composition and content of her miniatures. Although she insists upon modesty and restraint in

clothing, in the decades following her death, her new readers cannot resist elevating their favorite author to an ever higher status by dressing her in garments reserved for those far above Christine's actual station as respected Court writer. (Figures 3, 4 and 6).

One of the three portraits of Christine (Figure 5), although painted 60 years after the first copy by the *La Cité des Dames* Master, (Figure 1) still reverberates with the harmony, action, pride and cooperative spirit one finds within Christine's very words. She and her companions are not so burdened with elegant and fashionable frivolities of dress that they are prevented from lively discussions. Christine's garments once again take on a sensible flavor; her wimple, kerchief and plain gown appear fine, but hardly fashionable or frivolous.

Christine had ambitious goals for the miniatures accompanying *La Cité* and *Le Trésor*, depicting not only her own portrait, but her entire involvement in the process -- in the narrative action and elucidating discussion found in the texts. The miniatures sanction the scholarly action of women with the divine approval indicated by the presence of the Virtues. Visionary meetings, calls to labor, lecturing, listening and learning activities of the text are underscored by the visual images Christine commissioned from *La Cité des Dames* Master (Figure 1). In these miniatures the focus is always on the author-protagonist, Christine, who thereby becomes a model exemplar for all women through her ideas and actions, expressed visually through the wearing of practical, prudent and appropriate clothing. This clarity erodes over the century, for we find the splendors of court life implied by the interaction of Christine and such magnificent allegorical creatures as the Virtues exploited by later workshops. Garments

become more costly and ornate; our author, by virtue of her great accomplishments, and the honor bestowed upon her by such celestial creations, takes on the demeanor and costume of a high-born lady, and begins to strike more refined poses as a result.

Christine understood the social order, and advised against trying to circumvent one's position in society through imitation of the sumptuous dress of the aristocracy. It appears that her new readers, however enlightened, and their artists, could not resist or dismiss the inclusion of contemporary fashions in dress as indication of the rank and status of a true, genteel woman such as Christine. Dress was a vital and immediate visual indication of the rank of those portrayed, and as Christine's reputation increased in the decades following her death, so must her social class, causing artists to propel her, through elaborate, costly and fashionable garb, to ever-higher social standing, in direct opposition to fact, and her own written word.

¹ *Le Trésor de la Cité des Dames (The Treasures of the City of Ladies)* is also known as *Le Livre de Trois Vertus (The Book of the Three Virtues)*. It survives in 21 manuscripts, eight are illustrated with miniatures, and three early printed editions, none illustrated. See Kennedy, A.J. *Christine de Pizan: A Bibliographic Guide*, London: Grant & Cutler, 1984, 105 for a complete list. For an analysis of the text and its influence, see C.C. Willard "The Manuscript Tradition of the *Livres des trois vertus* and Christine de Pizan's Audience." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27 (1966): 433-444.

² Christine de Pizan, 1364-1430, was Italian by birth, and daughter of

Thomas de Pizan, court physician, astrologer and alchemist to King Charles V of France. Her husband, Etienne de Castel was one of the king's secretaries. Christine, as poet and author, held the status of high servant of the court, not that of an aristocrat. See Charity Cannon Willard "Christine de Pizan: The Astrologer's Daughter," *Melanges a la Memoire de Franco Simone*, (Geneva: 1980), 95.

³ Although *La Cité* and *Le Trésor* were written as companion texts, indicated in the Prologue of *Le Trésor*, they were rarely bound together in handwritten or later printed editions. Two manuscripts included in this study, BR 9235-7 (Figure 5) and Paris BN MS fr. 1177 (Figure 6) were bound with the first text, *La Cité*.

⁴ *Le Trésor* was dedicated to Margaret, eldest of the six daughters of John the Fearless, upon her engagement to the Dauphin of France, Louis of Guyenne. The book was commissioned by her powerful grandfather, Philip the Bold. Margaret left Burgundy as a child-bride of eight to be brought up in the disreputable Parisian household of her future husband. Christine's book was meant to offer guidance not only to the young princess, but to those responsible for her upbringing. See E. Yenal, *Christine de Pizan: A Bibliography*, (London: Scarecrow, 1982) 43-44, 46-47.

⁵ *Le Trésor* enjoyed a wider distribution across Europe than its sister text *La Cité*. 5. See Kenedy, 107.

⁶ Richardson, Lulu McDowell, *Forerunners of Feminism in French Literature of the Renaissance: From Christine de Pizan to Marie de Gournay* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1929), 30.

⁷ Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, trans. Sarah Lawson. (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 150.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 149-153.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 134-135.

¹⁰ This personal view breathes life into every page of the text as she comforts those with "husbands who behave very distantly toward their wives and give no signs of love." *Ibid.*, 136, 63.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 135-138.

¹² *La Cité* and *Le Trésor*, as well as other manuscripts by Christine are illustrated by one of her favorite artists named *La Cité des Dames* Master by Millard Meiss for his miniatures accompanying the first of these notable works. *La Cité des Dames* Master's style exemplifies the influence of Italian art in the monumentality of the well-proportioned figures, the use of green under-painting to achieve flesh tones and the clarity and order of the architectural environments. Bright, primary colors, active poses and delicate landscapes also characterize the compositions of this workshop. Meiss, "The Exhibition of French Manuscripts of the XIII-XVI Centuries at the Bibliothèque Nationale," *Art Bulletin XXXVIII* (1956): 153.

¹³ Christine is depicted ten times in this same costume in miniatures produced under her supervision for *La Cité* and *Le Trésor* alone, not including the many portraits accompanying the forty poetic and prose works outside the scope of this study. See accounts and images in my dissertation, *An Assembly of Ladies: The Fifteenth-Century Pictorial Tradition of Christine de Pizan's La cité des dames and Le Trésor de la cité des dames*, University of Washington, 1989.

¹⁴ The other is Paris, Bibliothèque National MS fr. 25294. The earliest identifiable owner of Boston, MS f. med. 101 is Jean de Poitiers, Seigneur de Saint-Vallier (1499-1566), according to a note in fifteenth-century hand. See Willard "The Manuscript Tradition"

433. The next recorded owner is N. Yemeniz, who purchased the volume at a sale in Paris in 1867. Erwin Rosenthal became the owner in 1919 having bought the volume from Leclere, a Parisian dealer. In 1943 the volume was purchased by the Public Library of Boston.

¹⁵ The manuscript had originally been dated to the mid-fifteenth century until Meiss identified it as belonging to the workshop of *La Cité des Dames*. See *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry: The Limbourgs*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1974), 12-15.

¹⁶ The cotehardie is a tightly fitted garment made of one or two pieces, worn under a more formal outer garment such as a houppelande or a surcoat, or it may be worn alone. It is first noted in the middle of the fourteenth century and remained popular throughout the first few decades of the fifteenth century. It was worn at various lengths by men, often dangerously short, but it was always long when worn by women, but often scandalously low-cut. It is called a kirtle in England and a *gamurra* or *camora* in Italy.

¹⁷ For a useful, if unromantic, analysis of the vertical headdress see Cheunson Song and Lucy Roy Sibley's "The vertical Headdress of the Fifteenth Century Northern Europe", *Dress 16* (1990): 4-15. The authors categorize Christine's headdress as Type I, consisting of a caul, external supporter such as whale or fish bone, and a veil. Underneath the cap-like netting of the caul are two coils of hair, which also serve as a supporting element for this headdress.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, see also M. Scott, *The History of Dress Series: Late Gothic Europe 1400-1500*, (New Jersey: 1980), 90.

¹⁹ The *houppelande* is a costly, voluminous over-gown of varying

length for men, always worn long for women, requiring the use of a large quantity of fabric. It was fashionable in every part of Europe from 1380-1420. It was often heavily embroidered, and worn with a wide variety of collars and sleeves depending on the date. The wearing of a houppelande always indicates wealth, and often, status.

²⁰ Christine, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, 32.

²¹ The *bourette* is a millinery phenomenon of padded rolls of fabric Queen Isabelle is credited with having introduced to France, popular in various forms throughout the fifteenth-century.

²² The *liripipe* is a long tail of fabric extending from the peak of a hood, worn in the fourteenth century, and commonly worn by the middle and lower classes in the fifteenth century.

²³ The *robes royaux* are a set of garments worn by the royal family and some members of the aristocracy on ceremonial occasions, incorporating many earlier elements of dress "frozen" from the fourteenth century. The female robes royaux generally consists of a cloak, and open or sideless gown with a plastron, worn over a cotehardie.

²⁴ British Library, Harley 4431. See S. Hindman "The Composition of the Manuscript of Christine de Pizan's *Collected Works* in the British Library: A Reassessment" *British Library Journal 9* (1983): 93-123.

²⁵ Song and Sibley, 7.

²⁶ A common piece of fifteenth century furniture found along the Mediterranean. S. Whiton, *Interior Design and Decoration*, (New York: Lippincott, 4th ed., 1974), 95, 97.

²⁷ This might qualify as a Type II headdress according to Song and Sibley's system for an internal support

resembling a bourette is visible, 7. See Scott, 111, figs. 48 & 49.

²⁸ The use of the this kind of garment is often found in depictions of the Virgin in fifteenth-century northern painting. The same garment, however, was worn by the Virtues and other allegorical figures in theatrical productions in Burgundy, the most famous being the well documented Feast of the Pheasant held in 1454. Scott, 151-154. The twelve Virtues wore satin gowns edged in white fur. On other occasions the Virtues wore smocks with long gold threads.

²⁹ With the addition of two more miniatures in BR 9551-2, not discussed in the present study, the artist is able to adhere more rigorously to the structure of *Le Trésor*, even if this seeming faithfulness mars the egalitarian undercurrent of the text. *The Treasure*, 109, 145 and 180.

³⁰ See Meiss, *The Limbourgs*.

³¹ M. DeBae, *La Librairie de Marguerite d'Autriche*, exhibition catalogue Bibliothèque Royal Albert I, Bruxelles, 1987, xvii, & 56. Margaret of Austria acquired the de Croy library in 1511. L.M.J. Delaissé, *Le Siècle d'or de la Miniature Flamande*, Bruxelles, 1959, 35-36, no. 27. Paul Durrieu attributes this manuscript to the Workshop of Guillebert de Mets, once known as "The Master of the Silver Skies," due to sky made of silver scumble or underglaze still extant on folio 46. For more on this master see P. Durrieu's discussion in (*La Miniature Flamande au Temps de la Cour de Bourgogne (1415-1530)*, (Bruxelles, 1921), 15. The msot recent reference on this workshop is found in G. Dogaer *Flemish Miniature Painting*, (Amsterdam, 1987), 33-37.

³² This manuscript was virtually unknown until its appearance at a sale in Paris in 1968, *The Yale University Library Gazette*, 52 no. 4, (1978); 244.

³³ A rich range of colors, from cerulean blue, to a burnished gold, and a delicate sense of space mark the work of this master. *Ibid.*, 244. Based on works attributed to this master it can be concluded that The Master of the Amiens 200 worked in Hesdin, Mons and Amiens. For a list of these works see John Plummer *The Last Flowering: French Painting in Manuscript 1420-1530* (Oxford University Press, 1982), 14-15.

³⁴ *Henin* or *hennin* was an insulting term used to describe the tall headdresses worn by women in the late fifteenth century. It is a term abandoned by Sond and Sibley, replaced by the more general term of "vertical headdress" with its six types, 5. Many terms in art history, "Romanesque" and "Gothic" for example, were originally derogatory, but have now become part of the standard stylistic language used by historians to refer to a period and its characteristic style. I prefer to use the term *henin*, in spite of its negative origins, because it was used in the period, although admittedly it can be misleading with regard to the shape or arrangement of the headdress. Generally it is made of rich fabric stiffened with wire or padding and placed on the head at an angle of about forty degrees. It was usually cone shaped in France, and rose to great heights, blunt or squared at the ends, in Flanders. It was covered by veils held up by wires. The hair is rarely visible when worn, but often a dark loop called a "frontlet" can be seen at the forehead, used to keep the often unwieldy *henin* in place.

³⁵ This is also known as the "butterfly" headdress, categorized as Type VI by Song and Sibley, and is actually a type of cap instead of a caul or *bourrelet*, 11. This Flemish version of the *henin* worn by Christine is identical to those seen

in portraits of Isabella of Portugal, Duchess of Burgundy, as seen in the *Breviary of Philip the Good*, ca. 1460.

³⁶ Around 1460 the most fashionable ladies of the Burgundian court wore revealing, tight-fitting gowns, whereas prosperous middle-class women had looser robes with baggy sleeves. Scott, *A Visual History of the Costume of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1986), 94-95, fig. 97.

³⁷ *The Treasure*, 130-133, 149-153.

³⁸ *Le Trésor* was first printed by Antonious Vêrard, in 1497, second by Michel Le Noir in 1503 and finally by D. Janot in 1536, all Paris publications, and all testaments to the continuing popularity of this text.

³⁹ Willard, "The Manuscript Tradition," 435-436.

⁴⁰ All of the miniatures in this study are painted in tempera on vellum or parchment (calfskin or sheepskin) in keeping with the traditional illuminating techniques utilized before the invention of the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century. *Ibid.*, 439-440.

⁴¹ Dogaer attributes the miniatures in this manuscript to the School of Jacquemart Pilavaine, active in Mons from 1450-80. Delaissé agrees with this attribution, 59.

⁴² This may be a simple veil and wimple arrangement, rather than a "vertical headdress." Such head gear is customary for fifteenth-century married women, widows and nuns. It comes closest to the Type IV or V headdress construction described by Song and Sibley, although it lacks an intricate veil, or an obvious internal supporter, 9-11.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁴ Nun's habits are "frozen" elements from the dress of respectable wives and widows at the time of a particular order's origination. Headdresses, cut

and color of gown vary from region to region, depending upon the century of origin for each particular order. See H. Norris' discussion of Margaret of Anjou's costume and hood from an illumination of 1475, "The Roll of Our Fraternity of Our Lady," In *Costume and Fashion: Senlac to Bosworth*, 2 (London: J.M. Dent, 1927): 418-19, figs. 574 and 575.

⁴⁵ *Le Trésor*, 31-32.

⁴⁶ It became part of the library of Charles le Croy, inherited, along with BR 9551-2 previously discussed (Figure 3), by Margaret of Austria in 1511. A noted bibliophile, 193 volumes have been retrieved from the 390 texts comprising her library at the time of her death. Probably the most well-known manuscript's in her impressive collection is *Trés Riches Heures du Jean duc de Berry*. For more on this manuscript's history see M. Debae xvii, Dogaer, 61, and C.C. Willard, *Christine de Pizan, Her Life and Works*, (New York, 1984), 213.

⁴⁷ Willard, "The Manuscript Tradition," 439.

⁴⁸ The splendid patterned brocades seen in many Netherlandish, Flemish and French paintings were all imported from Italy before 1498. A. Geijer, *A History of Textile Art*, (London: 1968), 61, and 148-151.

⁴⁹ *Le Trésor*, 31-42.

⁵⁰ Song and Sibley's Type VI headdress, 11.

⁵¹ About 1470 a broad band of black fabric was attached to the base of the *henin* across the front from side to side of the head, with ends hanging down to shoulder level. Margaret's relative, Mary of Burgundy, is seen in a similar *henin* in many of her portraits during her short life from 1458-1482. This is an elaboration of Song and Sibley's Type VI headdress, supported by a cone-shaped cap, 11-12.

- ⁵² Christine is depicted in nearly every work she wrote that was illustrated. For examples of portraits of Christine from her other texts such as *La Cité des Dames* or *Epistre Othea* illustrated under her supervision, which vary little from the examples discussed in the present study. See Hindman, *Epistre Othea*, Toronto: Pontifical Institute, 1986 and Meiss, *Limbourgs*, and my dissertation.
- ⁵³ One need only examine the choking collars, rich brocades hung with gold bells and *bezants*, multi-colored, enormous *chaperons* and extravagant costumes worn by the mannered figures painted by the contemporary Limbourg brothers to realize how plain and cursory are the costumes of Christine and her Virtues.

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Front cover: "Fountain of Grace" from the School of Jan Van Eyck. *Prado Museum, Madrid.*

Back cover: Christine Presents Her Book to Margaret of Burgundy; *Le Trésor de la Cité des Dames*, in the manner of the Master of Margaret of York, 1470-80. *Courtesy of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.*

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