In the preface of her book, Kate Langdon Forhan clearly states that the purpose of her project is to “present the political paradox of Christine” (vi). The rather broad terms “political” and “paradox” beg for clarification in order not to mislead the reader. It must be pointed out that “political” in this case refers in the main to questions of royal leadership and princely behavior with the purpose of instructing political scientists and theorists, especially those concerned with contemporary issues, in the political thought of medieval France (vii). Though the author sporadically mentions Christine de Pizan’s “feminist” politics for instance, these views, though crucial to Christine, are largely omitted from this study with the exception of a brief discussion of the Livre de la cité des dames and the Livre des trois vertus. Admittedly, a lot has already been done on this topic and perhaps does not need to be taken up here. At the same time, however, by announcing the political theory of Christine in the title of the book, it seems to me that her views of the social function of womanhood undoubtedly ought to be part of it. Christine de Pizan’s works which are the focus of Langdon Forhan’s analysis are predominantly Le Livre des fait et bonnes moeurs du roi Charles V le Sage, Le livre de la cité des dames and the following Livre des trois vertus, Le livre de prod’homiel/prudence, Le livre du corps de policie, and, more marginally, the later Livre de la paix. In line then with her stated objective and her targeted audience, Langdon Forhan succinctly precedes each thematic discussion of Christine’s so-called political works with a socio-political contextualization of the question at hand where she frequently draws parallels between the 15th and 20th/21st centuries. Often, unfortunately, the reader feels wanting: one has the impression that the author but scratches the surface of the respective topic and, to be sure, modernists would require a much more detailed presentation of the social and political circumstances that shaped Christine’s thought.

In my view, what Langdon Forhan calls paradoxical may more appropriately be labeled as multifaceted. For instance, Christine’s views on the role of women are often referred to paradoxically as either progressive and forward-looking or conservative and prudish. This debate reflects perhaps more a paradox of our own
time as we anachronistically impose our feminist ideas on Christine’s writings. Without getting into this debate, it should suffice to say that, though progressive and daring in her writings, Christine nevertheless stayed within the realm of the possible given the limitations for women of her time. Moreover, Christine’s political progressiveness and conservatism to which Langdon Forhan alludes in the conclusion reflects perhaps the fledgling humanist thought of the late Middle Ages rather than a paradox in her views. In fact, Langdon Forhan herself attests to Christine’s theoretical consistence in the preface of her book as she proposes to offer the reader “a sustained and internally consistent political theory [of Christine], showing both the development and the continuities in her ideas” (vii).

Rather than proceeding chronologically, Langdon Forhan structured her book thematically. After a very general overview of the political turmoil of the waning Middle Ages, she addresses such issues as the origin and evolution of the “mirror for princes” genre which Christine adopts for several of her works, such as L’Epistre d’Othéa, Le Livre des fait et bonnes moeurs du roi Charles V le Sage, Le livre de prod’homie/prudence, Le livre du corps de policie, Le Livre de fâis et de chevalrie, Le Livre de la paix, as well as her mirror for women Le livre des trois vertus. Langdon Forhan calls this book a mirror for princesses which is imprecise since the advice offered by the four virtues is not only limited to women of the nobility. To this Langdon Forhan adds two other books of instruction, the Enseignements de Christine à son fiiz and the Proberbes moraux. For a discussion of the mirror image and its ensuing literary genre Langdon Forhan refers to Ritamaray Bradley’s influential but dated article in Speculum, “Backgrounds of the Title Speculum in Medieval Literature” [29 (1954): 100-115]. But Herbert Grabe’s Speculum, Mirror und Looking-Glass: Kontinuität und Originalität der Spiegelmetapher in den Buchtiteln des Mittelalters und der englischen Literatur des 13. bis 17. Jahrhunderts (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1973) and even more so Einar M. Jónsson’s Le miroir: Naissance d’un genre littéraire (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1995) may have been more useful and complete sources.

In the next chapter she takes up the symbolically charged image of the body politic continuing the discussion of the sources of the Livre du corps de policie, namely John of Salisbury’s Policraticus and Giles of Rome’s De regimine principum begun in Chapter Two. This is followed by an analysis of Christine’s views on kingship, justice, and the law. Here, the author’s argument is that Christine had little legal knowledge herself and relied on legal popularizers such as Brunetto Latini and his Li Livres dou trésor (c. 1260) as well as on commentators/translators such as Nicole Oresme. Quite disappointingly, the notion of justice is too exclusive and the works discussed too limited. The tripartite division of ratio/aequitas/justitia is
taken up by Christine in the allegories of Reason, Righteousness, and Justice who
are the counselors in her diptych the *Livre de la cité des dames* and the *Livre des
trois vertus*, and their allegorical connotations are inextricably linked. Rather than
merely focusing on the allegory of justice, the author ought to have expanded her
analysis to Reason and Righteousness as philosophical pillars of the medieval le-
gal system. Langdon Forhan neglects to include such works as the *Trésor* and, more
importantly, the *Débat sur le Roman de la rose*. In the debate epistles in particular
Christine explicitly formulates legal arguments for such crimes as rape and defa-
mation. This topic has recently been discussed by Earl Jeffrey Richards in “Chris-
tine and Medieval Jurisprudence” (*Contexts and Continuities. Proceedings of the
IVth International Colloquium of Christine de Pizan, Vol. III*, Glasgow: University
legal theories we still have a great deal to learn about her “feminist” politics. In
light of these shortcomings, I find rather ill-founded Langdon Forhan’s argument
that “Christine de Pizan’s view is that justice is never an exclusively personal vir-
tue; moreover, she does not have a truly substantive view of justice” (119).

The book ends on a chapter on Christine’s theory of peace and just war where
Langdon Forhan once more cleverly contextualizes the writer’s views within the
more global contemporaneous discussions. Here, the *Livre des trois vertus*, which
discusses the importance for diplomacy and pacifism for women, comes to its due
recognition. In the conclusion, the author summarizes the various so-called para-
doxes in Christine’s theories on the aforementioned topics. I am surprised at
Langdon Forhan’s statement that “North Americans and Europeans are by and
large shielded from the worst aspects of war” (133). This may be true for North
Americans, yet I would like to remind the author of the fairly recent atrocities
which took place in the former Yugoslavia, not to mention the fact that in Euro-
pean history, with the exception of the most recent era, the time span between
two wars was never greater than fifty years.

To sum up then, Langdon Forhan’s book is undoubtedly an important contri-
bution to “Christine” scholarship, in particular since her political theories as they
pertain to the ruling classes have largely been an ignored topic. However, this book
could have greatly benefitted from deeper analyses. Given the general overtone of
the background information on late medieval social and political history, the au-
dience who will stand to profit most from this work are Christine scholars with
sufficient knowledge in her works and those who are already knowledgeable in
the socio-political history of late medieval France.