

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Pizan, Christine de. *The God of Love's Letter and The Tale of the Rose: A Bilingual Edition*. Ed. and trans. Thelma S. Fenster and Christine Reno

Christine McWebb

Volume 45, numéro 2, printemps 2022

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1094847ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v45i2.39790>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

McWebb, C. (2022). Compte rendu de [Pizan, Christine de. *The God of Love's Letter and The Tale of the Rose: A Bilingual Edition*. Ed. and trans. Thelma S. Fenster and Christine Reno]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 45(2), 341–343. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v45i2.39790>



Pizan, Christine de.

The God of Love's Letter and The Tale of the Rose: A Bilingual Edition. Ed. and trans. **Thelma S. Fenster and Christine Reno.**

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: Toronto Series 79. Toronto: Iter Press, 2021. Pp. xvi, 209. ISBN 978-1-64959-006-0 (paperback) US\$41.95.

This new edition and translation into English of Christine de Pizan's (1364–1432?) early poems, the *Epistre au dieu d'amours* (1399) and the *Dit de la rose* (1402) is a welcome update of Thelma S. Fenster and Mary Carpenter Erler's 1990 edition and translation of both these works, *Poems of Cupid, God of Love. Christine de Pizan's Epistre au dieu d'Amours and Dit de la rose* (Leiden: Brill). Other translations of these poems have been published since 1990, with my own reproduction of Fenster and Erler's work as part of my *Debating the Roman de la rose: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Routledge, 2007, repr. 2011) being the most recent, reflecting the increased scholarship on Christine de Pizan's vast corpus. There are four extant manuscripts of the *Epistre au dieu d'amours* that the authors considered, two of which also contain the *Dit de la rose*. These manuscripts are part of large volumes of Christine's collected works, the production of which was supervised by the author herself and three of these manuscripts are believed to have been copied by her as Gilbert Ouy et al. established in the *Album Christine de Pizan* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012, 194, 222, 325, 240). For this new edition, Fenster and Reno chose the earliest extant manuscript for both texts as their base manuscript, Chantilly Condé 492, opting for a genetic presentation, whereas in the former edition, Fenster and Erler used manuscript British Library Harley 4431 of Christine's collected works for the *Epistre au dieu d'amours* and Chantilly Condé 492 for the *Dit de la rose*. This new approach allowed the authors to trace the changes from one manuscript to the next, which is important in that it allows the reader to better understand Christine's editorial shifts over time.

Both poems hold significant value in the context of Christine studies and further our understanding of her early thought on gender roles and the roles of women in contemporary society. It is for these reasons that Fenster and Reno provide an elaborate introduction detailing Christine's argument about and reactions to the misogynistic voices of her male counterparts, first and foremost the second author of the thirteenth-century *Roman de la rose*, Jean de Meun. After a contextualization of the *Roman de la rose* in the framework of previous

and contemporary anti-feminist writings, the authors outline Christine's reactions to the defamation of women voiced by the second author of the *Rose*, particularly as she expresses them in the *Dit de la rose*. To underscore the level of misogyny with which Christine was confronted through the writings of her male colleagues, Fenster and Reno decided to add Jean Gerson's *Poem on Man and Woman* (translated by Thomas O'Donnell), which the known cleric composed for his two sisters.

Three terms that are frequently used by Christine in her poems attracted Fenster and Reno's attention: nature, condition, and inclination. These terms are used in medieval anti-feminist writing to make sweeping generalizations about women's nature, such as the statement found in the *Lamentationes Matheoluli* (1290–91) that women are somehow less than human and certainly inferior to men. As the authors show in their introduction, Christine takes it upon herself to meticulously deconstruct these three terms to show a more nuanced and equalizing female condition. A fourth term that merits discussion in the introduction of this work is that of *meurs*, often translated as social norms. Again, in her writings Christine frequently refers to female *meurs* in terms of social and moral behaviour refuting the misogynistic and often generalized arguments of her male colleagues. Before turning to the discussion of the extant manuscripts themselves, Fenster and Reno usefully place the *Epistre au dieu d'Amours* and the *Dit de la rose* in the context of the immediate intellectual climate in which Christine lived and wrote: the court of Charles V, which was known for its vast library holdings and general propensity for intellectual thinking and learnedness. Lastly, the authors explain the historical value of chivalric orders, such as the Order of the Rose, which is at the centre of the *Dit de la rose*. While it cannot be proven that such an order created and run by women existed, the authors point to similar orders that did exist and were structured in a woman-centric fashion, such as the Order of the Dame Blanche à l'Écu Vert and the Cour amoureuse dite de Charles VI. Female agency is at the heart of these orders as it is at the heart of the *Dit de la rose* itself.

The edition follows and clearly indicates the folio numbering of the base manuscript. The translation aims to avoid anachronisms and to remain as loyal as possible to the original. With an ancillary apparatus as complete as the one the authors provide—including primary sources (manuscripts, editions, translations) of the two poems, a bibliography of selected works by Christine de Pizan, secondary and reference sources, as well as rejected readings,

variants, and extensive notes, an index of proper nouns and selected topics—this bilingual edition represents a great resource for students and scholars of late medieval literature and Feminist and Gender Studies in the French- and English-speaking world.

CHRISTINE MCWEBB

University of Waterloo

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v45i2.39790>