

playing with gender as a means of challenging conventional constructions of male heroism.

Karen J. Taylor should be commended for her success in bringing together a cohesive collection of thought-provoking essays that consistently challenge modern readings of the Middle Ages. The collection will undoubtedly stimulate, provoke, and entertain its readers. While falling short of portraying the Middle Ages as a period of radical views on sexuality and gender, the anthology documents evidence of their interest in these issues and certainly will inspire continued research in the field.

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Richards, Earl Jeffrey, ed. *Christine de Pizan and Medieval French Lyric*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998. ix + 241 pp.

In what was a bumper year for *études christiniennes*, with the publication not only of three collected volumes of essays devoted to Christine but also major new editions of both her love debate poems and of a key political text, this particular work stands out for its important contribution to a relatively neglected area of the author's literary oeuvre: the lyric. Comprising nine essays (only one of which has previously been published) by some of the most authoritative scholars in the field, the volume's principal aim, as set out by the editor in an erudite introductory chapter entitled "Christine de Pizan and the freedom of medieval French lyric: authority, experience, women in the Republic of Letters" (1-24), is to stress the ground-breaking nature of the author's lyric output. This aim is more than amply met, with the essays demonstrating that Christine pushes back the boundaries in her verse not only in terms of formalistic innovation, but also as regards her exploration of the relationship between verse and narrative, and her representation of an authentic female voice long absent from this literary genre.

Christine's innovative approach to the well-established forms of the lyric is most clearly brought out by William D. Paden in his "Christine de Pizan and the transformation of late medieval lyric genres" (27-49). Situating her lyrics within the tradition of both *trouvère* and *troubadour* poetry, Paden argues that Christine radicalizes the carefully defined conventional forms of these genres by introducing a more subjective tone than that of her literary forebears. For example, in addressing issues such as bereavement and widowhood in her

poetry, Christine marks an important break with the more conventional complaints of the lover whose passion is simply unrequited.

The three chapters which follow raise the question of how Christine re-examines the relationship between lyric and narrative. In the first of these, James C. Laidlaw, "The *Cent balades*: the marriage of content and form" (53–82), compares the structure of the *Cent balades* with both Machaut's *La louange des dames* and the *Livre des cent balades* and shows how Christine recasts the conventional arrangement of a ballade sequence in order to create an ongoing narrative about the dilemmas faced by a knight torn between fidelity and betrayal. In her chapter, "Last words: reflections on a 'lay mortel' and the poetics of lyric sequences" (83–102), Barbara K. Altmann continues this discussion of how Christine creates larger narrative sequences out of discrete poems by analysing the thematic relationship between the *Lay de Dame* and the *Cent ballades d'Amant et de Dame* and concludes that the former acts as an envoi to the latter by summing up the perils for women of passionate love. By contrast, Judith Laird and Earl Jeffrey Richards, in "*Tous parlent par une mesmes bouche*: lyrical outbursts, prosaic remedies, and voice in Christine de Pizan's *Livre du Duc des vrais amans*" (103–31), turn to this more obviously self-contained verse narrative which they argue should be read not as a romance but as a dramatized collection of lyric and prose elements. Read in this way, the *Duc des vrais amans* can be seen to stage a dialogue between various male and female voices that exposes the faults and limits of courtly love and values.

The next section of the volume, which also comprises three chapters, examines how Christine's explicitly female lyric voice challenges and subverts the conventions of courtly poetry in order to question the hegemony of the male, lyric subject. In "Clerkliness and courtliness in the *Complaintes* of Christine de Pizan" (135–54), Nadia Margolis analyses how Christine's mastery of the traditionally male clerkly and courtly discourses in her *complainte* poems allows her to expound her vision of woman's real, perilous place in the process of *fin'amor*. Relating Christine's innovative spirit to a more specifically political agenda, Lori J. Walters, "*Translatio studii*: Christine de Pizan's self-portrayal in two lyric poems and in the *Livre de la mutacion de Fortune*" (155–67), reveals how her use of this key topos in Ballade 2 of the *Cent balades* and Ballade 37 from the *Autres balades* and in her universal history enables Christine to represent herself as an authoritative commentator on the political and social ills then affecting the French state. Adopting a more sociolinguistic approach, Christine McWebb, in "Lyrical conventions and the creation of female subjectivity in Christine de Pizan's *Cent ballades d'Amant et de Dame*" (168–83), compares Christine with Froissart in order to show how she revises the often empty formalism of courtly lyric in her attempt to create a new kind of female subjectivity.

The last two chapters of the volume are devoted to Christine's critique of the conventions of courtliness and her concomitant aim to expand the thematic and didactic possibilities afforded by the lyric. Benjamin Semple, "Christine de Pizan's phenomenology of beauty in the lyric and the dream vision" (187–205), argues that Christine increasingly puts formalistic pleasure to the service of ethical teaching in her lyric poetry. In Semple's view, Christine's appeal to the audience's senses in her verse gives way to a more intellectual and internalized meditation on aesthetics in the dream-vision. Finally, Earl Jeffrey Richards, in "Poems of water without salt and Ballades without feeling, or Reintroducing history into the text: prose and verse in the works of Christine de Pizan" (206–29), questions the traditional scholarly view that Christine is typical of late medieval authors in using prose and verse for wholly different purposes. For Richards, it is in bringing extratextual reality and experience into her poems in line with her politically committed prose *oeuvre* and thereby renewing the highly artificial and hermetically closed world of the medieval lyric that Christine most clearly proclaims her aesthetic and ideological independence from her literary predecessors.

The dialogue which this volume stimulates between the different contributors on key issues such as female lyric subjectivity, formalistic inventiveness and attitudes towards courtly conventions, illustrates the benefits of devoting a collected volume to a single, focused topic. With the added bonus that all nine essays are of a consistently high standard, this handsomely produced and intelligently conceived book takes its place amongst the best of recent scholarship on Christine de Pizan.

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