

writing will find something of value to enlighten their understanding of this intriguing writer and the radically changing world she inhabited.

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**Barbara K. Altmann and
R. Barton Palmer, ed.
and trans. *An Anthology
of Medieval Love Debate
Poetry*. University Press of
Florida, 2006. pp. xii + 397.**

With the publication of *An Anthology of Medieval Love Debate Poetry*, the University Press of Florida adds an exciting contribution to its growing roster of scholarship on and editions of medieval texts. This anthology collects and translates five lesser-known but important poems by the major medieval authors Guillaume de Machaut, Geoffrey Chaucer, Christine de Pizan, and Alain Chartier. Both Altmann and Palmer are well-qualified to translate this volume. Altmann edited *The Love Debate Poems of Christine de Pizan* for the University Press of Florida (1998). In addition to *The Love Debate Poems*, Altmann also co-edited *Christine de Pizan: A Casebook* (2003). R. Barton Palmer has edited and translated many Old French works, including five poems by Guillaume de Machaut for the Garland Library

of Medieval Literature (1984-1993). The *Anthology* brings together five “acknowledged masterpieces” by the four poets as exemplars of a tradition defined by its preoccupation with “questions of love and gender” (1). The introduction traces the love debate genre from its origins in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Old French and Latin *débats du clerc et du chevalier*, in which ladies consider whether knights or clerics make better lovers, and in thirteenth-century *jeu-parti* poems, where two speakers dispute over questions of love and ask a judge to render a verdict. The introduction also addresses the influence of courtly romances and the *Roman de la rose* on Guillaume de Machaut’s creation of what the editors consider to be the standard form in the middle of the fourteenth century.

The collection begins with Guillaume’s *Le Jugement dou roy de Behaingne* in which a knight and a lady ask who is worse off, a man whose lover betrayed him or a woman whose faithful lover died? The king of Bohemia ultimately determines that the knight suffers more pain, setting the scene for the sequel, *Le Jugement dou roy de Navarre*, which appears here after the former text, as it does in the manuscript tradition. In *Le Jugement dou roy de Navarre*, Guillaume himself participates in the debate, when a lady (later revealed to be *Bonneüirté*, translated as “Happiness” or “Good Fortune”) accuses him of deliberately offending women in the earlier debate’s conclusion since

she knows “well you are not drunk / When you compose and write” (ll. 870-871). Guillaume goes on trial before the king of Navarre, at which point several allegorical witnesses corroborate the Lady’s claim and Guillaume is sentenced to compose a series of poems to compensate for his error. In the next poem in the anthology, Chaucer’s *The Legend of Good Women*, another narrator tries to defend himself against the accusation that the poet has sinned in previous writing. In this case the God of Love accuses Chaucer’s narrator of causing his followers to abandon his service. When Chaucer is found guilty, a lady (later revealed to be Alcestis, a faithful wife from Greek mythology) steps in and remits the sentence from death to a commission, demanding “a glorious legend / Of good women, maidens as well as wives, / Those who all their lives remained true in love; / And tell of the false men that betrayed them” (ll. 483-486). Chaucer completes ten such legends, including those of Cleopatra, Dido, and Philomela. Chaucer’s poem is then followed in the anthology by Christine de Pizan’s *Le Livre du Debat de deux amans*, in which a jolly squire and a somber knight address the question of whether love brings joy or sorrow to true lovers. Christine’s narrator, a melancholy lady who has lost her beloved, and two female chaperones observe the discussion, which concludes without a verdict when the narrator suggests that the duke of Orléans would make an excellent judge. The final work in the anthology, Alain Chartier’s *Le Livre des quatre dames*, also ends without

offering a judgment; in this case, the debate concerns which of four unnamed ladies is the unhappiest. The battle of Agincourt has produced each lady’s sorrow: the first lady’s knight died in battle, the second’s is a prisoner of war, the third’s is missing in action, and the fourth’s is a deserter. The unnamed narrator, whom the ladies ask to resolve the dispute, suggests that his beloved lady would be a better judge. The poem ends when he sends his account of the debate to his beloved and commends himself to her with the request that she render an opinion, whether pronounced “from your own lips, or at least [written] out” (ll. 3485-3486). The *Anthology* then concludes with a brief bibliography.

The translations themselves are polished and readable. Chaucer’s *Legend* is the only translation that seeks to maintain some of the original’s versification. The translators render it in pentameter verse, omitting the rhyming couplets, for, they explain in the “Preface,” “Chaucer’s English is more readily adapted into modern English” (xi). Although they occasionally modify Chaucer’s word and phrase order for readability, there are still a few examples of convoluted phrasing as in “And this makes men trust much less those women / Who are true as was ever any steel” (ll. 333-34). Still, the translation is enjoyable and conveys a sense of Chaucer’s style. Although the French translations make no effort to reproduce the versification typical of the French debates, the translators capably convey the original

stylistics. For example, after a lengthy and abstract sentence in Christine de Pizan's *The Debate of Two Lovers*, the translators note, "the long sentence that runs from line 124 to 135 is a common Middle French construction describing what a hypothetical observer would have seen at these festivities" (302, n. 4).

The *Anthology* collects works in an under-studied genre by well-known authors and, by putting the works into dialogue (even debate) with one another, shows how they voice opinions on issues like gender politics, literary politics, and the uses and abuses of authority, issues of vital interest to medieval audiences and modern scholars. In addition to the explicit themes of heterosexual relationships and gender roles that impel the debates, the works are connected by their constructions of complicated narrative identities, especially in relation to their patrons. Christine's narrative persona is particularly interesting. When the three male narrators—the comically inept ones in Guillaume's and Chaucer's works and Chartier's lovelorn one—are compared to Christine's female narrator, she appears to be surprisingly authoritative. She dares to tell her patron, the duke of Orléans, that, even if the material does not interest him, "it does no harm / To listen to things / On a variety of topics" (ll. 19-21). This anthology, beautifully bound with ample margins, would make an excellent source to introduce these topics in Women's Studies

courses, literature courses, and medieval culture courses.

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Constance Brittain Bouchard. *"Every Valley Shall Be Exalted": The Discourse of Opposites in Twelfth-Century Thought.* Cornell University Press, 2003. pp. xi + 171.

“**E**very Valley Shall Be Exalted” continues the trend of recent inquiries into a topic which has often gone unremarked-upon by earlier historians: namely, that the use of opposing categories in twelfth-century French culture was not limited to Scholasticism, but instead permeated all aspects of medieval intellectual culture. Catherine Brown's work on opposites and dialectic and Sarah Kay's work on contradictions, both slightly earlier than Bouchard's book, begin to explore how oppositional thinking was a cornerstone of the intellectual tradition of the High Middle Ages.¹ Bouchard's book is broader and more holistic, using texts from the genres of literature, philosophy, theology, jurisprudence, and natural philosophy to explore the use of opposing categories in scholastic thought, literature, religious conversion,