

Chapter Five Robertson shows how the author of Hali Meidenhad transformed conventions of the treatise on virginity to establish a spiritual model for women rooted in the material circumstances of everyday life. The lives of saints Katherine, Margaret, and Juliana are the subject of Chapter Six, which argues that the triumphant feminine spirituality illustrated by these lives is nevertheless determined by male assumptions about women's limitations in the religious sphere. Chapter Seven discusses "Sawles Warde," arguing that its adaptation of the Anselmian homily "De Custodia Interioris Hominis" evidences its author's understanding of the spiritual needs of an audience of female contemplatives. In Chapter Eight Robertson compares the style of the AB texts with that of Anglo-Saxon prose religious works, proposing that similarities between the two may be explained by their male authors' shared perceptions about the spiritual needs and capacities of the marginal groups—women and the unlettered laity—who formed their respective audiences. Chapter Nine reviews the debt of the AB texts to twelfth-century theology and philosophy, arguing that the physicalized spirituality of these texts is best understood in relation to that century's valorization of the physical world, which was evidenced in such widely disparate areas as scientific thinking, scriptural exegesis, and interpretation of the Incarnation.

The tenth and final chapter exemplifies this book's larger engagement with questions of central relevance to recent feminist theory. Here Robertson considers what it means to speak of a female style when such a style can also be seen in other, later texts obviously composed for different occasions and for audiences of mixed gender. In these terms, how should we understand the usefulness of gender as a category of analysis? Similarly, the book's analysis of the practical and cultural significance for medieval women of a spirituality grounded by the body may be seen in terms of contemporary debates about body, gender, and essence in feminist theory. As Robertson suggests, the complex and widely differing valences of body and physicality, especially female physicality, in the Middle Ages, prompt us to consider how best to apply current feminist paradigms when we advance interpretations about the symbolic and real power of women in such a historically distant era.

Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience will be of interest to scholars and students of medieval literature, feminist criticism and theory, and the history of spirituality and religion. Writing an important and previously neglected chapter in the history of English prose, Robertson brings the AB texts into a lively dialogue with the literary traditions and cultural forces that shaped them. At the same time, her book illustrates the valuable contribution that feminist criticism can make to a revised history of medieval English literature.

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Thelma S. Fenster and Mary Carpenter Eler. Poems of Cupid, God of Love. Christine de Pizan's *Epistre au dieu d'Amours* and *Dit de la Rose*; Thomas Hoccleve's *The Letter of Cupid*; editions and translations; with George Sewell's *The Proclamation of Cupid*. E.J. Brill: Leiden, New York, 1990.

The only awkward element of this book is its full title, an unavoidable itemizing of

contents for which Fenster and Erler are hardly to blame. They, and Brill, have produced an elegant volume containing three relatively short narrative poems written at the turn of the fifteenth century, all of which undertake the defense of women in the face of the injuries they suffer from faithless and hypocritical lovers and the anti-female bias of the male literary tradition.

Thelma Fenster contributes editions and translations of Christine de Pizan's Epistre au dieu d'Amours (Letter of the God of Love) and Dit de la Rose (Tale of the Rose), written in 1399 and 1402 respectively. Both texts are closely linked to the Debate of the Rose, an epistolary exchange in which Christine and Jean Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris, expounded their objections to Jean de Meun's portion of the Romance of the Rose. Fenster's introduction explains the relationship of the Letter and the Tale to the debate, and assesses them in terms of their sources and influences.

Mary Carpenter Erler adds an edition and translation of Thomas Hoccleve's poem Lepistre de Cupide (The Letter of Cupid). Hoccleve's work, written in 1402, is a loose translation of Christine's Letter, shorter than hers and differing from it considerably. Erler's introduction shows in detail how he adapts Christine's text, discusses the influence of Chaucer on Hoccleve, and broaches the question of the poem's attitude toward women. Erler also provides, as an appendix, George Sewell's The Proclamation of Cupid. Sewell's text is a translation of Hoccleve, and is reprinted here for the first time since the early eighteenth century.

The editions prepared by Fenster and Erler are particularly useful in that they come complete with a full critical apparatus, something less and less common at the moment. (A large factor in the inclusion of such material may have been the authors' willingness to provide Brill with camera-ready copy.) After the introductory discussions of the literary issues raised by each work, the poems themselves are preceded by sections describing manuscripts, language and versification, and translation policy. Lists of rejected readings and variants follow (for Christine's two poems), as do textual notes addressing points of philology and codicology, notes explaining specific passages and references, a list of proper nouns (again, for Christine's work), glossaries, and selected bibliography. One could wish that for ease of reference the presence of notes were signaled in the text of the poems at each appropriate line. But that quibble aside, it should be noted that the thorough scholarly treatment of the texts' technical aspects makes the editions valuable for the investigation of many aspects of the poems beyond their literary merit.

The translations make Christine's and Hoccleve's poems available to readers unversed in the original Middle French and Middle English. Fenster and Erler have chosen to render the poems into modern English verse, unrhymed in the case of Christine, rhymed for Hoccleve. Fenster explains this choice cogently (32), arguing that the sacrifice of metrical regularity, obviously a fundamental aspect of the original, is not necessarily compensated for by greater accuracy or neutrality if the translation is given in prose. My personal preference is for the greatest literal precision possible in a translation free from the constraints of meter and rhyme. But Fenster's English verse manages to remain admirably faithful to Christine's texts; the most obvious concession to the demands of iambic feet is the frequent contraction of verb forms (for example, on the first page of the Letter of the God of Love: "they'll" [15]; "plaint's" for "plaint is" [23]; "That's" [26]; "who're" [29]; "Who've" [34]; etc.), an element which gives the odd

colloquial jolt to an otherwise graceful rendition. Erler's translation of Hoccleve is at once both more and less literal, often reproducing the rhymes of the original, but also occasionally adding and subtracting phrases where Hoccleve's text is difficult to mold into the rhythm of modern English (for example: "and made to weep" [49] is not in the original; "in fact, he just can't wait to go" [61] expands on the previous line, replacing a phrase meaning, as Erler's Glossary explains, "his heart is on fire"). But these are the accommodations required of translators who undertake the difficult task of making poetry of poetry, and they do not detract from the quality of the work here. Both Fenster's and Erler's translations read well, are reliable, and represent their originals to good effect.

On a larger scale, the composition of the book makes it worth even more than the sum of its not inconsiderable parts. The authors' Preface states that, "In publishing [Christine's and Hoccleve's] texts together here for the first time, it is hoped that readers of both may be served." That statement could be expanded to include Sewell. By gathering three versions of the same work and providing translations for readers who cannot manage the medieval languages, Fenster and Erler give us a case study in reception history, translating, intertextuality, and the evolution of a genre—defenses of women—as well. The changes made by Hoccleve and Sewell reveal a good deal about shifts in taste and literary preoccupations of their respective circles. Demonstrating Christine's influence is important as a reminder that her work must be considered in the context of other (male) poetry of the late Middle Ages, particularly in light of the popularity her work enjoyed in her own day. If her works are read in isolation, it is difficult to appreciate fully her success in presenting to a contemporary audience a rewriting of her literary forefathers and a challenge to the firmly entrenched, misogynistic ideas that were part of their legacy.

The high cost of Brill's volumes notwithstanding, this book should find a wide readership in and beyond the fields of Middle French, Middle English, and gender studies.

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### THREE RECENT WORKS ON SPANISH WOMEN

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1. Giles, Mary E. The Book of Prayer of Sor María of Santo Domingo: A Study and Translation. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990. Pp. ix, 214.
2. Kagan, Richard L. Lucrecia's Dreams: Politics and Prophecy in Sixteenth-Century Spain. Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1990. Pp. xiii, 229.
3. Surtz, Ronald E. The Guitar of God: Gender, Power, and Authority in the Visionary World of Mother Juana de la Cruz (1481-1534). Philadelphia: University of