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Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the Mutability of Fortune*. Trans. and ed. Geri L. Smith. Toronto: Iter Press; Tempe, Ariz.: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2017. xvi + 294 pp. Bibliography and index. \$44.95 US (pb). ISBN 978-0-8669-8570-3.

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Christine de Pizan is one of the most preeminent figures of the Middle Ages, and her aura and writings have far surpassed the limits of French literature. Indeed, specialists in English, history, and many other disciplines have been teaching and producing scholarship on her writings. Lastly, students and scholars of gender and women's studies have been interested in her ideas, and it is not unusual to see her books taught in translation in the gender studies classroom.

One limitation to a larger diffusion of Christine's ideas comes from the fact that not all of her works are available in translation, let alone even in modern French. The *Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune*, which Geri L. Smith edited and translated brilliantly as *The Book of the Mutability of Fortune*—hereafter *Mutability*—, is finally available to non-French speaking people. However, as Smith explains in her introduction, her work is also one of the very few modern editions of *Mutability*, as only one other, edited by Suzanne Solente (1959) was available before. [1] Smith, then, proposes not only a much-needed translation, but also a new critical view of a text on par with the most recent scholarship on Christine de Pizan.

As Smith explains, her translation, although abridged, is the first to make this very long text (more than 23,000 lines) available; indeed, only excerpts had been previously translated. It is a very complete and important piece of scholarship that Smith produces here. Her introduction offers a good panorama of Christine's literary style, as well as a general introduction to her works and life. She also presents *Mutability* in depth, explaining its historical context, as well as its importance in Christine's life. Smith offers a quick analysis of the themes of the text, as well as a very thorough examination of its afterlife, namely its reproduction in print after it was first written by Christine, from the Middle Ages to modern times.

This introduction is very important and interesting to non-specialists who will find cultural, literary, and historical approaches to the many facets of her history and of her writing, as well as to specialists. The appendix at the end of the volume is also of critical importance, as the author compiled the most recent sources of scholarship on the different facets of Christine's life, all ranked by themes. Finally, the volume concludes with a very detailed index and a complete bibliography of Christian scholarship.

Smith's translation was direly needed. Translating a text is obviously destined to make a non-speaking audience discover an author. However, the act of translation goes well beyond this simplistic definition. A good translation must also address the state of critical studies and analysis of the author and of its work. *Mutability* is a book whose importance in the development of Christine as an author is tremendous. In it, she documents in verse the allegorical sex change that enabled her transformation

into an author. This edition enables an Anglophone audience to discover the pivotal importance of *Mutability* in Christine's act of writing. Smith's translation is also a crucially important tool for specialists of Christine, who already know the original text in French, because it provides them with fresh visions and analysis of the text, which will eventually help them to delve deeper into the original material.

This translation, in prose, is easy to read, fluid, and shows a great mastery of the original source. Smith's work is remarkable in the treatment of the relationship between Fortune and Christine, which is crucial in the creation of the text. The very beginning of *Mutability*, in which the author explains how she reacted to the harshness that Fortune bestowed upon her, is particularly intense. Christine appears as a determined author who will not shy away from explaining how Fortune impacted her life, both positively and negatively: "...I will not keep quiet about the good or bad that I may be able to recount, even though my understanding of her deeds might be subject to reproach" (p. 1). What Christine explains here is how she will present herself completely and fully in the pages to follow, without eluding any of the harsh events she went through. The trope of complete and total truth presented here, as well as her destiny intertwined with Fortune, are beautifully rendered in the translation. What might be the best passage of the whole book is the description of the shipwreck that "turns" Christine into a man. The moment of this realization comes as both a dire necessity ("I had to be that way, by necessity, in order to rescue myself and my household, if I did not want to die there" (p. 47)), and also a life-changing commitment to her new status ("as you are hearing, I am still a man, and I have been one for a total of more than thirteen years" (p. 48)). However, the struggle is real for Christine, who misses her identity and womanhood, but chooses to obey the rule of Fortune, and continues in the direction that was given to her: "But it would please me considerably more to be a woman, as I was used to being when I would speak with Hymen. But since Fortune has taken me away from there, and I will never dwell there again, I will remain a man" (p. 48). Smith's translation relates the changes that Christine must go through as a mythical, allegorical, and intellectual journey. Her choice helps the reader to read *Mutability* with much fluidity, like a commentary that Christine develops to catalogue her change. Her journey is vivid, and the reader feels deeply connected with her words, thrown into the tremendous events of her life as a writer. *Mutability* is then much easier to approach, even for those familiar with the text. Smith's translation completely exposes *Mutability* as the grand narrative of Christine's life, a cornerstone of her intellectual journey that truly unleashes the internal and external forces which turned Christine into a writer, and which helped her shape herself to face the intellectual and societal ordeals that she would have to go through.

The merits of Geri Smith's work are many. *Mutability* is available to all in an edition that enhances its general readability and puts it at the center of current scholarship on medieval women and Christine de Pizan. The scope of potential readers is huge, as all will have their needs met: undergraduate students will find here an easy entry into the world of Christine de Pizan, which will complement her already available other works; graduate students and scholars—even those experts on the subject—will benefit from new, fresh material on this important piece of literature. All these reasons make Smith's translation a new essential in Christian studies, which is bound to become a must-read to all interested in and working on Pizan.

NOTE:

[1] Christine de Pisan, *Le livre de la mutacion de fortune*. Suzanne Solente, ed. (Paris: A & J Picard, 1959).

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