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Review Essay: *Jean Renart: The Romance of the Rose or of Guillaume de Dole (Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole)*

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Jean Renart: The Romance of the Rose or of Guillaume de Dole (Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole). Ed. and trans. Regina Psaki. Garland Library of Medieval Literature 92A. New York: Garland Publishing, 1995. xli + 280 pp.

Gina Psaki's edition and translation of Jean Renart's *Roman de la Rose* provides a great service to medievalists by offering a scholarly English translation (as well as a diplomatic edition), of a text which has received increasing attention from scholars in recent years. This late-twelfth-century romance, often referred to as "Guillaume de Dole" in order to avoid confusion with the more famous *Rose* of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, had originally attracted the attention of literary scholars and musicologists for its use of intercalated lyrics, as well as that of historians for its depiction of courtly dress and its extended tournament episode. More recently several critics have called attention to the extreme literary self-reflexivity of the text, while feminist scholars have explored the romance's unusual twist on the wager motif.

Psaki's introduction presents an eminently readable and cogent presentation of the *Rose*—both the text itself and the major critical work done on it. Psaki presents the often disparate views of modern medievalists such as Michel Zink, Roger Dragonetti, and Henri Rey-Flaud in an organized manner which clearly establishes the various "schools" of thought on the *Rose* without sacrificing either the often opposing and nuanced positions of these critics or her own views of both the text and the critics' positions. Psaki's introduction is, as at least one other reviewer has noted, an exemplar of what a scholarly introduction to an edition can, and should, be.

Psaki also acknowledges in her introduction the English translation published in 1993 by Patricia Terry and Nancy Vine Durling.¹ But she quite correctly notes that where the University of Pennsylvania publication (a slim paperback containing "only" a lively prose translation and few notes), was clearly designed for classroom use, her hardcover edition addresses the needs of scholars rather than students. Which brings me to the meat of the book—and this review. Psaki not only offers a facing-page, nearly line-by-line translation but also a new, essentially diplomatic "edition" of Jean Renart's text. The translation is readable without sacrificing either English syntax or the line order of the Old French too often. As such it complements Terry and Durling's prose translation admirably. It is the edition, however, which commands real comment, for although the

¹Jean Renart, *The Romance of the Rose or Guillaume de Dole*, trans. Patricia Terry and Nancy Vine Durling (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

choice of a diplomatic edition is possible because the *Rose* exists in only one manuscript (Vat. Reg. 1725) such a choice is also debatable. Psaki explains that as the three previous complete editions of the *Rose* are all “highly interventionist in nature” her editorial policy will be rather to “actually edit as little as possible...to reproduce the text of [the] manuscript as exactly as possible” (xxx). She goes on to explain that she has reproduced the manuscript even “where it appears ‘faulty,’ and even where the earlier editors have made very persuasive corrections” (xxx). Psaki’s philosophical rationale for such an approach is that modern critical editions are so different from the actual manuscript as to produce “a counterproductive alienation from the material existence of the text” (xxix). She concludes thus that, “If the [post-structuralist] notion of meaning as inhering in expression, of content as inhering in form, is at all valid, then the differences between a medieval manuscript and a standardized printed document of this century *will* influence the way we read” (xxx).

While one can certainly disagree with this philosophical position, I do not think one can argue with the actual end product. This edition succeeds in fulfilling Psaki’s purpose: it provides the reader with a close(r) approximation to actually reading the manuscript. In doing so it enables (forces) the reader to realize just how much intervention even a “conservative” editor is forced to make. While a comparison of key passages from the text in this edition and Lecoy’s SATF volume (in particular the prologue, the first tale by Jouglet and the Emperor’s reaction to it, the scene between Senechal and Lienor’s mother, and the finale as Lienor proves her innocence) did not bring to light any “major” differences, it does demonstrate the slippage, the “mouvance” which can occur between manuscript and edition. To give just one minor example, by retaining the “word” divisions of the manuscript Psaki’s edition “allows” the reader to choose, in line 6–7 “et q[ue] lebiaus miles lapregne / De nantuel uns des preus del regne,” to read “lapregne” as “la pregne” or “l’apregne.” While the difference in meaning between “and that the fair Milon of Nanteuil take it” and “that he learn of it” is not overly significant, this example does, I think, point out the choices an editor usually must make. In other words, rather than “trust” an editor’s decisions this edition forces readers (at least those who don’t look at the facing page translation) to make the choices themselves.

This edition is thus not perhaps what one wants, or needs, at all times, such as when one is reading a text for the first time or when it would be the only edition available—in such situations the expertise and knowledge of an editor is invaluable. However in this case, where a fine scholarly edition exists and is readily available, Psaki’s diplomatic edition is a welcome and an important work of scholarship both for the service it offers in providing a facing-page translation and for the philosophical and method-

ological challenge it represents. No matter how often we say (to ourselves and our students) that an edition is not a “real” medieval artifact, that it is only one possible “reading” of a text, we still often forget and read as if what is printed on the page is what Milon de Nanteuil heard when “Jean Renart” presented him with his “romans de la rose.” This “edition” helps us remember the truth.

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Confident Readings: Medieval and Early Modern (Christian) Spirituality and Its Recent Interpreters

Catherine M. Mooney, ed. *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999. xiii + 277 pp.

Richard Rambuss. *Closet Devotions*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998. xiii + 193 pp.

What is at first most striking about these two books are their differences. Catherine M. Mooney’s edited volume takes on medieval saints (or, really, in most cases, near saints), beginning with Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) and ending with Dorothea of Montau (d. 1394); central to this inquiry are the genres of hagiography, autobiography, and visionary writing. Richard Rambuss’s study focuses largely on the seventeenth century and devotional poets like John Donne, Richard Crashaw, and George Herbert, though he also examines “popular prayer books, devotional manuals, and guides to godliness” (105). The contributors to Mooney’s book represent for the most part the disciplines of history and religious studies, though literary scholars are also included; Rambuss, author of *Spenser’s Secret Career*, approaches his material largely from within English studies. The title of Mooney’s book announces gender as its primary theme, and her introduction situates the volume in relation to “the vibrant research conducted since the 1970s in the field of women’s history” and, more specifically, “religious women’s history” (2). Rambuss’s title points us, via the figure of the closet, to an interest in sexuality and particularly male homoeroticism; his book is importantly informed by Georges Bataille’s “ecstatic theorems on the complementarity of the sacred and illicit” (3) and by queer theory, particularly the work of Michel Foucault, Jonathan Goldberg, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.