Rebecca Jacobs

Title: “The Legacy of Christine de Pizan”
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Paper written for: History B352: Middle Ages (Fall 2012)

Rebecca Jacobs is a senior at IPFW. She is a history and anthropology major with certificates in international studies and Native American studies. She is a recipient of the Chancellor’s and Withers scholarships. She ran for IPFW women’s cross-country and track and field teams for three years. Rebecca’s special academic interests include ethno-history and the study of indigenous cultures particularly in South America.

Abstract

This paper discusses the legacy of Christine de Pizan and what she contributed to her time period as a writer and as a proto-feminist. Christine was a French author writing in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. She was the first female to make a professional career out of writing. She is important in both the history of literature and women because not only did she produce many important works that were available to large numbers of middle and upper class people because they were written in French, but she also gained a reputation as a champion of women due to the stances she took in her writing and in a public forum during the debate over the Romance of the Rose. The controversy over how Christine de Pizan is viewed in regards to her stance against misogynistic literature and whether she should be regarded as a champion of women’s rights begs the question of why is she remembered today and considered important. This paper analyzes why Christine was different from both women and men of her time in regards to her life events, her works such as The Book of the City of the Ladies and The Three Virtues, as well as her participation in the debate of the Romance of the Rose while also recognizing the goals that she had. Christine had never said that she wanted to radically reform medieval society. She wanted access of knowledge for all people and for women to be respected in writing and in society because of her strong virtuous conviction. Through this evidence it can be concurred that while a product of her time Christine was a unique individual and influential in creating the building blocks in changing the views and stereotypes of women in the Middle Ages.

Bibliographical Note

Rebecca made extensive use of anthologies on Christine de Pizan’s writings, political stances, and analysis by scholars of her works. She supplemented this with analysis of Christine de Pizan’s writings including The Book of the City of the Ladies and The Three Virtues. She used letters from Christine de Pizan, her allies, and opponents over the debate of the Roman de la Rose found in an edited volume Debate of Roman de la Rose by Christine McWebb. She also used secondary sources written by historian Rosalind Brown-Grant for evidence in her research.