Christine de Pizan comes from elsewhere: first of all, from another language.¹

Linguistic hospitality, therefore, is the act of inhabiting the word of the Other paralleled by the act of receiving the word of the Other into one's own home, one's own dwelling.²

1] Over six hundred years ago, a young foreign-born widow wrote about struggling to feed her kids, wearing a patched-up coat to do battle with creditors, fending off humiliating remarks and unwelcome sexual innuendoes without disgruntling anyone in power. She wrote not in the language of her birth, but in the language of the country she made home.

2] The first time I saw Christine's name, it was inside a book I happened upon while wandering a library I had permission to enter. On page 284:

CHRISTINE DE PIZAN (c.1365-c.1430)
"Those Things I Have Here Refuted"

See also Vision and Transformation.

3] Christine often referred to herself as seulete, a woman alone, small and of little consequence in comparison to the established male auctores of her day. In a time and place unaccustomed—even hostile—to solitary women, Christine undertook to produce manuscripts for royals. In this astonishing action, she wrote herself into a literary world inhabited by men, and her example continues to enlarge that world through the newness and possibility of her language.

² Ricoeur, On Translation, xvi, trans. Kearney.
Translatio studii is Latin for the transfer of learning. The term might also be rendered as knowledge transfer.\textsuperscript{3}

That Christine's works are read and studied centuries after their making seems a small miracle of knowledge transfer. In part, it was achieved through Christine's own brilliance and fortitude. In part, it was the support of those in power who helped her—and those who continue to bring her writing into language anew.\textsuperscript{4}

One day, fortune brought me into the generous presence of a community who brought the possibilities offered by Christine into language I knew how to read. One of these, a leading scholar of medieval French and Italian literature, answered my most basic of questions, as if they were among the most critical he had ever heard.

Q. Do you think Christine spoke Italian at home with her mother?
A. Well, hmmm. We can't know for certain, but yes, yes. I imagine she did.

The phenomenon known as xenoglossia is the sudden, seemingly miraculous, ability to use a language one has not learned. The term, sometimes confused with glossolalia, refers not to the unintelligible utterances of speaking in tongues, but to an immediate facility with—and understanding of—an existing language otherwise unknown. It might be considered the ultimate in knowledge transfer: to become fluent, all at once, in the language of a foreigner, sometimes called guest, or stranger.

When I first saw Christine's name, French was not a language I knew at all well. I am learning it still. Poetry was the language that brought us together.

Poetry comes to know that things are. But this is not knowledge in the strictest sense; it is, rather, acknowledgment—and that constitutes a sort of unknowing.\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{3} See Colman, "Reading the Evidence in Text and Image," in Imagining the Past in France, 55.
\textsuperscript{4} The first full-length translation into English of Le Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune was published as recently as March of 2017 by Geri Smith under the title: The Book of the Mutability of Fortune.
\textsuperscript{5} Hejinian, The Language of Inquiry, 2.
As we do know, in 1418, civil violence and foreign invasion caused Christine to flee Paris. She is believed to have spent the last dozen years of her life in an enclosed abbey, a kind of exile-by-circumstance. With the exception of two manuscripts, no writing from these years are known to exist, but the more I learned about Christine, the more I began to wonder What if . . .?

Of another exceptionally generous world-class scholar, I asked:

Q. What drew you to study Christine?
A. The manuscripts, she said. Their beauty took my breath.

In Old French a gloss was a word needing explanation, hence later: the explanation itself. More recently, it is to gleam, glow, to shine, as a blaze.

In learning the language of Christine, I first looked to the translators and scholars who brought her to me. I looked to dictionaries and chronicles. I glossed and erased. But the knowledge itself was conveyed by another language that had taken up residence within me, though I had yet to know it.

Translation, or "translacion" as she calls it, is not a neutral subject for Christine. She will never write in Italian, but her native language exists within her like a source or a potential resource.

I set about to listening, which is to say reading. And writing, which is to say listening. In this way, the first texts appeared. That writing spoke of study. And of dreams.

From everywhere, images invade the air, go from one world to another, and call both ears and eyes to enlarged dreams. Poets abound, the great and the small, the famous and the obscure, those who love and those who dazzle. Whoever lives for poetry must read everything. When one allows [her]self to be animated by new

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6 "Here is told how she lost the master of her ship," is an erasure of an existing translation by Kevin Brownlee from Suzanne Solente's mid-twentieth century edition of Le Livre de la mutacion de Fortune par Christine de Pisan. Found in Selected Writings, 104-107.
7 Cerquiglini, 265.
images, [s]he discovers iridescence in the images of old books. Poetic ages unite in a living memory. The new age awakens the old. The old age comes to live again in the new.8

17] This one, descended from Christine's Book of Deeds of Arms and Chivalry (1410), speaks of war.

18] In writing the contemporary manuscript that became Xeno » Glossia, I looked to the authorial strategies practiced Christine: intertextual assemblage, hybrid mixtures, lyrical sequences set beside blocks of lamp-black prose. I took note of organizational rubrics, imaginative re-workings, the appearance of real-life mothers and marvelous guides. With the help of borrowed dictionaries and those who had transferred knowledge before me, I gathered Christine's teachings like leaves and arranged them, as for an unknown royal, into books on a screen.

19] English—my language of birth—was the language of composition, what translation theorists call the target language; but the language from which I translated wasn't the Middle French of Christine. The source language was illumination. Which might be to say: The light comes in the name of the voice (in nomine vocis venit claritas).9

Q. But how does one gain access to light?
A. One country opens its library to the world.

20] Amid the cadence of questioning, in the light of illumination, a guest emerged. She spoke a language I needed to learn, and because I understood her immediately, I named her Marina, after the oceans of our native homes. A young woman of imagining who serves as scribe for Christine during her undocumented period of exile, Marina made this particular xenoglossia possible. She refused silence to what is unknown.10 Whether she translated me or I translated her, I cannot say.

8 Bachelard, 25.
The work of translation might thus be said to carry a double duty: to expatriate oneself as one appropriates the other. We are called to make our language put on the stranger’s clothes at the same time as we invite the stranger to step into the fabric of our own speech.  

See also Vision and Transformation.

The balades, virelais, rondeaux, and venditions of Christine’s poetic apprenticeship emerged out of dance and song traditions; their lyrical music depended on an understood knowledge of fixed forms. The question then became: How might I convey such music to unfamiliar ears? Maybe more urgently: How might the voice of the woman who composed these breathtakingly beautiful manuscripts resonate six hundred years after the keen grief, fierce desire, and determined brilliance that compelled their making?

To know that things are is not to know what they are, and to know that without what is to know otherness (i.e., the unknown and perhaps unknowable).

Whether the completed Xeno » Glossia transfers the what—or, maybe more accurately, the je ne sais quoi—of Christine's poetry is not for me to say, but its making allowed me to enter the pitch and timbre of that more deeply, in what Earl Jeffrey Richards recalls as the here and now. What remains constant: To register a voice that sings across time and space is to understand our own experiences have always been shared by others, foreign and strange. Maybe this is the way literature—and its making—expands the possibility for knowing, the capacity for compassion, the ability to recognize stranger as guest and sit together in the shared light of the name.

Puis me prist aux livres des pouetes, et comme de plus en plus, alast croissent le bien de ma congoiscence. [Then I occupied myself with the books of the poets, and more and more the measure of my knowledge increased.]