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Christine de Pizan. *The Book of the Body Politic.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. xli + 113 pp. $44.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-42259-8.

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In the first line of Kate Langdon Forhan's introduction to *The Book of the Body Politic*, Christine de Pizan is described as "the first woman of letters of France" (p. xiii). Despite continuing controversy over her status as "the first feminist," it seems likely that the former title, at least, will remain firmly in Christine's grasp. Like many claims to distinction, however, Christine's has its drawbacks. In her case, "letters" has been perhaps too closely tied with "literature," which may help explain why the *Body Politic* has waited so long for a translation into modern English.

Eric Hicks[2] states, "the habit has never really been formed of entering Christine's name in the canon of political authors" (p. 8). It is thus gratifying to see that the *Body Politic* has not only been translated, but is published in the series of Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought. Although the title of the book would seem to categorize it definitively as a political work, its didactic nature has often caused critics to see it as one of Christine's "moral (or even moralistic) treatises, *rather than* as [a] vehicl[e] for serious political thought" (Hicks, p. 9). Indeed, Diane Bornstein, in her edition of the Middle English translation of the text, characterizes the *Livre du corps de policie* as "a mirror for the prince," while designating only the *Livre de la paix* as "a political treatise" (p. 11). Obviously Bornstein[1] would not have wished to deny the political nature of Christine's work, but the compulsion to separate works into clearly defined genres has contributed to the ambiguous status of Christine's oeuvre.

This edition, in the self-described "major student textbook series in political theory" (p. iii), shows that such a conflict is unnecessary. In her introduction (the volume also includes a glossary, chronology, and bibliographical note), Forhan explains that "the 'mirror for princes,' or prince's handbook, was an important genre for the development of political thought throughout the Middle Ages" (p. xvii). After a clear and concise presentation of the political situation in France at the time of the composition of the *Body Politic*, Forhan's analysis of the text, in addition to summarizing its sources and structures, emphasizes its political aspect, demonstrating, for example, how the reading of Christine's "exempla" would have been affected by contemporary events. In the space of twelve pages, Forhan presents a good deal of useful information, and a reader with little knowledge of the period would be able to approach the text with much more confidence after reading her introduction.

In my opinion, more linkage between the introduction and the bibliographical note would have been helpful. In the introduction, for example, Forhan mentions that Christine "draws a different political lesson" (p. xviii) from the tale of the revolt of the limbs against the belly than did Livy, Marie de France, and John of Salisbury, but she does not explain the differences. A reference at that point to Forhan's own essay on "Polycracy, Obligation, and Revolt" would have pointed a curious reader in the proper direction better than does its separate mention in the bibliographical note. My main criticism of the introductory material is its lack of reference to other political writers of the fifteenth century. There is little explanation of how Christine compares with her contemporaries in terms of political philosophy, nor are there indications of where to look for further information, aside from the general works on medieval political thought cited in the bibliographical note.

Turning to the translation itself, we find that Forhan's strength lies in transforming Christine's weighty "style clergial" into a much more accessible text. The pedantic nature of the subject matter requires slow going in any language, but Forhan's attempt to render "a lively rendition of [Christine's] thought" (p. xxv) is generally successful. Forhan's decision not to attempt a reproduction of the "style clergial" seems extremely sensible. As it is, the multiple dependent clauses and circuitous structures of Christine's text sometimes produce awkward passages in the translation. I believe the translator could have allowed herself even more liberty than she did in rearrang-

ing Christine's prose, for there are many instances where a rephrasing or the addition or deletion of a few words would have made her text more comprehensible.

I will give only a few examples, since the nature of Christine's prose is to make each one quite lengthy. The French is from Robert Lucas'[3] critical edition of "Le Livre du corps de policie," upon which Forhan based her translation.

Forhan is most successful in her division of Christine's monumental sentences into shorter units. Her attempt to conflate repetitive structures, however, does not always work as well. For example, in Book I, Chapter Seven, we read:

<blockquote>Mais quant il estudiera la loy de Dieu par en estre bien enforme si comme doit estre tout bon crestien il avisera le peril de iceulx biens au regart de l'ame, c'est assavoir que se bien n'en use il est perdu et que le fais de la grandeur de seigneurie qu'il a n'est que ung droit office transitoire de peu de duree et qu'il couvient laissier en brief temps, c'est assavoir a la mort, et comment c'est chose obscure et espoentable que icelui trespas et le compte que il lui conviendra rendre devant le juge a qui riens n'est occult ne cele, et qu'il en aura la paye selonc le merite (p. 16). </blockquote>

Forhan's version eliminates some of the doubling and rearranges some of the dependent clauses:

<blockquote> But when he studies the law of God, in order to be well informed on it like any good Christian ought to be, he will warn himself about the peril of these gifts for the soul, that is, if he does not use them properly, he is lost. The grandeur of lordship is only a transitory right of office of short duration and which he must leave in a brief time, that is, at death, which is a dark and painful thing. He will pay the accounts that he must render before the judge from whom nothing is hidden nor concealed, according to his merit (p. 12).

The translation is certainly simpler to follow than Christine's prose. The doubled "mort/trespas" and the complicated structure this entails is simplified into "death, which is a dark and painful thing"; but conversely, the repositioning of "pay" and "render" as active verbs (vs. "il en aura la paye") near the beginning of Forhan's third sentence leaves "according to his merit" dangling and makes that sentence somewhat confusing.

Such occasionally clumsy structures do not overly harm the translation. More seriously, there are instances where some of the meaning is simply lost. For example, when Christine criticizes excessive taxation in book I, Chapter Twenty, Forhan translates: "Without doubt, taxes like these are used for superfluities or for any other reason than pure necessity, it is sinful for those who established it" (p. 20). The suppression of the conditional "if" ("se tel avoir est prins pour emploier en usaige superflu" [p. 33]) makes it seem as if all such taxes are used frivolously; the conditional nature of the sentence is not immediately evident.

While an omission such as this might be viewed as translator's prerogative, it is difficult to see how other changes can be anything except cases of careless translation. As an example, book I, Chapter Four, describes Valerius' account of "how the ancients introduced the young to good manners."

<blockquote> He told of the chivalry and bravery of the good, and gave good examples, telling them that nothing leads to honor as well as virtue. At meals, he has songs sung about the deeds of the noble dead [...] (p. 9). </blockquote>

In the French, however, the grammatical subject is "ilz" (the ancients), not "he" (Valerius). While the English reader would not notice this type of change, it seems an unnecessary alteration of Christine's meaning.

Other instances of careless editing concern matters other than translation. In lieu of notes, the edition supplies a glossary of potentially difficult medieval terms and names. Since the glossary is in the introductory material, the reader has the option of skimming it for unfamiliar terms before beginning the text, or of using it only occasionally when encountering one of the starred words in the text. This is a useful feature, but several words that are starred do not appear in the glossary, whereas others are hard to locate: for example, Anselm (p. 61) is found in the glossary under S for Saint Anselm, but a reader who was ignorant of Anselm's identity would be hard put to realize his beatitude.

As far as the Bibliographical note is concerned, one important reference is quite faulty: *Politics, Gender, and Genre: The Political Thought of Christine de Pizan* is mistitled as *Gender, Genre, and the Politics of Christine de Pizan*, and Forhan mistakenly states that Sheila Delany's "Mothers to Think Back Through" essay is in the 1992 collection, when actually it is "History, Politics, and Christine Studies: A Polemical Reply," not Delany's 1987 article, that is included.

Further editorial errors concern punctuation, particularly missing or misused commas. While these are minor lapses, I feel that their accretion mars an extremely useful book. We have all encountered students who lack a command of proper punctuation, and it is a shame that a text meant for student use would perpetuate many of

the errors they themselves commit: absent commas after appositives ("when Cyrus, the king of Persia had finally conquered" [p. 49]) and clauses which are unseparated by punctuation ("he immediately went to one of the exits and made a large and deep ditch apparently so that his enemies could not come after him by this route" [p. 87]). In sections of the book, these errors occur every few pages or even several times a page. In addition, poor editing is apparent in such phrases as "principle points" (p. 48) and "it was an [on] account of this recreation that his understanding was clearer" (p. 99). My aim here is not to catalogue examples, but only to illustrate various types of lapses in translation and editing that are numerous enough to damage the presentation as well as the simple comprehension of the text.

To summarize on a more positive note, this English edition of the *Book of the Body Politic* does succeed in making an important text of Christine's available to those who would be unable to read the original fifteenth-century French. Its introductory material is quite useful and readers who pick up the book on their own will be able to get quite a lot out of it. Were I to use this book in a class, however, I would feel obligated to offer alternate translations of several passages to my students, as well as to point out the editing lapses. I would no doubt use the book despite these problems, and I feel that were I simply to assign the reading without comment, they would skim over most of the "problems" I see in the edition without even noticing them. Again, Forhan's strength is in the flow of her text; I read it through completely in English before comparing it to the French, and despite the occasional awkward structure, there were few instances that actually gave me pause or left me bewildered as to their meaning.

Notes:

[1]. Bornstein, Diane, ed. *The Middle English Translation of Christine de Pisan's Livre du corps de policie.* Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1977.

[2]. Hicks, Eric. "The Political Significance of Christine de Pizan." *Politics, Gender, and Genre: The Political Thought of Christine de Pizan.* Ed. Margaret Brabant. Boulder: Westview, 1992.

[3]. Lucas, Robert H., ed. *Le Livre du corps de policie.* Geneva: Droz, 1967.

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