

authorship" of this view entirely to Descartes, as if he had had no antecedents or contemporaries they cite Peter Ramus—for one (p.73).

This paragraph and the next touch upon points made in a larger synoptic discussion of authorship in Andrea Lundsford and Lisa Ede, *Singular Texts: Plural Authors' Perspectives on Collaborative Writing*, (Edwardsville, Ill: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1990), pp. 72-102.

3 See Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University Press, 1984), esp. p. 291.

4 *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), cited in Lundsford and Ede, p. 90.

5 "The Pervasiveness of Patriarchy," p. 80

6 "Feminism and the Discipline of Old French Studies: *une bele disjointure*," forthcoming in *The Discipline of the Discipline*, R. Howard Bloch and Stephen G. Nichols, Jr., eds. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).

BOOK REVIEWS



Jane Chance, *Christine de Pizan's "Letter of Othea to Hector"*. The Focus Library on Medieval Women. Newburyport, Mass: Focus Information Group, 1990.

Jane Chance is Series Editor of the Focus Library of Medieval Women, a series of very reasonably-priced translations dedicated to making available important works about and by medieval women. Another title published by Focus, Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski's work on Margaret of Oingt, was reviewed in *MFN* No. 10 (Fall 1990), and the cover of Chance's book promises forthcoming volumes on St. Bridget of Sweden, 14th-century German convent literature, and Hrotsvit of Gandersheim.

Medievalists of all stripes will be pleased to have access to another of Christine de Pizan's works in English, given the large amount of critical attention she has garnered in recent years. While editions and translations are steadily appearing, only a small number of Christine's texts are available in English at the moment (among them Earl Jeffrey Richards' *Book of the City of Ladies* [New York: Persea, 1982], Charity Cannon Willard's *A Medieval Woman's Mirror of Honor: The Treasury of the City of Ladies* [New York: Persea/Bard Hall, 1989], and Thelma Fenster and Mary Carpenter Erler's *Poems of Cupid, God of Love* [Leiden and New York: Brill, 1990]).

The *Letter of Othea to Hector* is the first of Christine's very learned texts. Intended as a book of instruction for a young man about to begin training as a knight, it consists of one hundred short chapters, each of which contains a short verse passage describing a mythological figure, a gloss elucidating the social lesson to be learned from the text, and an allegory explaining its spiritual lesson. It was an important and very popular work in its day, but the same dense freight of mythology, philosophy, scripture, and Church Fathers that gives it its appeal can also make it heavy going for students no longer acquainted with all the source material to which Christine refers.

The strength of Chance's book lies in the considerable supporting material provided for the text, in which her interest in mythography is put to excellent use. The *Letter of Othea* itself occupies only a little more than half the volume; the rest is commentary that will make this difficult text much more accessible to the students whom she intends as her audience. The introduction consists of four parts: I. "The Life and Works of Christine de Pizan;" II. "The Origins of Christine's Gynocentric Mythography: The

Debate over the *Rose*;" III. "The Mythographic Tradition and the Medieval Genealogy of the Gods;" and IV. "The 'Letter of Othea' as a Mythographic Text."

The text itself is followed by a useful interpretative essay, entitled "Christine's Minerva, the Mother Valorized," which examines the "subtle power of [Christine's] feminism and her ability as a thinker and writer" (122), as shown in the "Letter of Othea." The essay demonstrates how Christine "feminizes the mythographic tradition" (123), particularly by reworking the figure of the mother.

The several appendices, "A Medieval Genealogy of the Gods," "A Chronological List of Major Medieval Mythographers," and "A Table of Sources for Mythological Figures in Christine de Pizan's 'Letter of Othea,'" allow one to reconstruct in schematic form much of the information from both Chance's introduction and the mythological portions of Christine's text itself. There are suggestions for further reading at the end of the volume and a detailed index of proper names to facilitate access for those researching a particular topic.

Unfortunately, the translation and background information on Christine are not as carefully done. For example: five of the seven notes to the Preface, which discusses the reception and manuscript history of the "Letter of Othea," are flawed by errors of varying degrees of seriousness. The chronology of Christine's life, times, and works neglects to mention several of her major (verse) texts, and the *Cent Ballades*, one of those omitted, is misidentified later (in Part I of the Introduction, 6) as the *Cent ballades d'amant et de dame*. The Chronology also lists various milestones of Chaucer's career while excluding any reference to the French authors of the day, whose work Christine knew and drew on. Indeed, the link between Chaucer and Christine is much more tenuous and unproven than one might infer from Chance's chronology and introduction, whereas a comparison of Christine's mythography with that of Machaut, Froissart, and Deschamps might have given a useful assessment of Christine's place in the French tradition.

Chance's translation of the "Letter" uses as its source the one existing critical edition of the work, prepared by Halina D. Loukopoulos as a dissertation for Wayne State University in 1977 and based on British Library manuscript Harley 4431. A check of selected passages of the translation against the corresponding text in Harley 4431 (on microfilm) reveals considerable inaccuracy and misreading. In all fairness, I must say that I did not have access to Loukopoulos' dissertation, and cannot determine, therefore, where the problems originate. Scholars of Middle French should be warned, however, that this is not a reliable rendering, as errors of syntax, punctuation, and vocabulary abound.

Nevertheless, this book does an important service by resurrecting and providing a reader's guide for a very rich work, a veritable "thesaurus of mythology, catechism, allegory, and feminism" (viii). As Chance says, the *Letter of Othea* should be profitable reading for students in a wide variety of courses.

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Thought: A Review of Culture and Idea. Number 254, September, 1989, "Gender and the Moral Order in Medieval Society." Guest Editor, Thelma S. Fenster.

The papers in this collection were delivered at Fordham University's Medieval Studies Conference in March 1988. They are of considerable interest and deserve a wider audience than is likely to come their way.