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Most of us think of Christine de Pizan as a proto-feminist. Her 1405 *Book of the City of Ladies*, which appeared in an English translation by Earl Jeffrey Richards in 1982—many years before the critical edition of the Middle French original (by Richards and P. Caraffi in 1997)—arrived at a most opportune moment in feminist studies. English translations were in fact the motor for the rapid expansion of de Pizan studies, and the *City* is to this day her most studied text in the anglophone world. But we need to remember that the author of the earliest modern study of her works, Raymond Thomassy in his 1838 *Essai sur les écrits politiques de Christine de Pisan*, saw her predominantly as a political writer. Why this was so is amply illustrated in the excellent study and translation of de Pizan’s *Book of the Body Politic* (1406–1407) by Angus J. Kennedy (1940–2021), one of the pioneers in Christine de Pizan studies and a scholar of extraordinary learning and generosity.

De Pizan’s treatise lays out in three parts the precepts for princes, nobles, and knights, and the Third Estate for creating a harmonious and peaceful society that profits all of them. Women do not make an appearance here, though they may be subsumed into the class of princes as well as that of merchants and laborers. In several previous works de Pizan had already restored women to their rightful places in history and society; she had also directly addressed the French queen Isabeau de Bavière as a peacemaker in a letter of 1405. In the *Body Politic*, dedicated to the dauphin Louis of Guyenne, she turned to the men whose
conduct determined the smooth functioning of society, political stability, and ultimately the fate of France.

Based on his definitive edition of *Le livre du corps de policie* (as found in the autograph manuscript Chantilly Musée Condé 294) that appeared in 1998 with Champion in Paris, Kennedy’s volume offers an erudite and lengthy introduction, a precious concordance of the Latin and fourteenth-century French translations of de Pizan’s major source, the Roman historian Valerius Maximus (first century CE), as well as detailed bibliographies and a very useful annotated index of proper names and titles. All in all, this is a model of what such a volume should look like. The fact that it appeared as the fourth text by de Pizan in the excellent and affordable series “The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe” ensures that it will find a wide audience.

Kennedy produced numerous editions, bibliographies, and influential articles on de Pizan’s many works. Like almost all Christian texts, the *Book of the Body Politic* was not edited until the twentieth century, and even Thomassy’s study devoted only two pages to it. Kennedy’s translation supersedes that of Kate Langdon Forhan (1994), which was based on the flawed 1967 edition by Robert Lucas, and whose multiple problems are laid out here on p. 50. Kennedy captured well de Pizan’s “style clergial,” a formal, notarial style, or, in Kennedy’s words, a “labyrinthine, muscular” style (52), characterized by long sentences with many subclauses. While adhering to de Pizan’s often convoluted syntax, Kennedy produced an accurate and highly readable version of her earnest exhortative voice. It is fascinating to see how in the twenty-three years that have passed between Kennedy’s edition and his translation the bibliography of critical works devoted to de Pizan’s political writings has grown from four to eleven pages. Kennedy’s list of all currently available editions and translations of de Pizan’s works is extremely valuable, as is his study of the manuscripts and the source materials. What is missing here, of course, is the detailed linguistic study Kennedy offered in his edition. De Pizan was an innovator in her use of the Middle French language and enriched its vocabulary immensely, but this achievement is not relevant to the English translation.

Was de Pizan’s *Body Politic* a mere compilation of ancient sources and what were in fact her contributions to the concept of the body politic that had become popular through John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus* of 1159? Kennedy answers these questions in his extensive introduction in which he demonstrates that de Pizan’s role in adapting her ancient authors was “an active, creative” one (39). As Kennedy’s informative
notes make clear, the bulk of de Pizan’s work reproduces parts of Valerius Maximus’s *Memorable Deeds and Sayings*, available to de Pizan in the French translations with glosses and commentaries by Simon de Hesdin and Nicolas de Gonesse. De Pizan rearranged Valerius’s examples of rulers’ great deeds, choosing from this vast work precisely those stories that best illustrated the points she wanted to make and connecting them astutely to the political situation in early fifteenth-century France. One especially telling transformation de Pizan introduced with respect to her other major source, the *Policraticus*, was placing the clergy, the “soul” of the body politic for John of Salisbury, into the Third Estate, alongside merchants, tradesmen, and agricultural workers. She also moved the seat of wisdom from the heart to the head, thus enabling her to emphasize that her lessons on good statesmanship should be imparted to the realm’s head(s), the king and his heir, who at that moment faced a country in crisis: the Hundred Years War with England was far from over; the Great Schism of the Western Church had delivered two warring popes; the madness that plagued the French King Charles VI appeared more and more frequently; and civil strife was brewing. In fact, Louis of Orléans, one of her patrons, was assassinated on the orders of his cousin, the Duke of Burgundy, in the very year that de Pizan finished the *Book of the Body Politic*. No wonder, then, that social and political harmony was the major theme of her book. As for the “common or simple people,” she emphasized that the feet of the body politic are absolutely necessary as support for the whole body; they needed to be appreciated but also kept in their place. Numerous popular rebellions in the decades preceding this work had served as warning signs for de Pizan. Preventing civil war was de Pizan’s (ultimately futile) goal—then as now, a goal we cannot lose sight of. Kennedy in this last work of his long career helps us to understand this lesson.

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