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The Boke of the Cyte of Ladyes / Edited by Hope Johnston

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Christine de Pizan. *The Boke of the Cyte of Ladyes*. Trans. Brian Anslay. 1521. Ed. Hope Johnston. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts & Studies* Vol. 457. Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, 2014. 622 pp.

Reviewed by MELANIE SIMOES SANTOS

This critical edition of *The Boke of the Cyte of Ladyes* (1521), the earliest extant English translation of Christine de Pizan's *Cité des dames* (1405), provides a detailed bibliographic and contextual framework for the text and would serve as a valuable resource for medieval and early modern scholars. Hope Johnston presents Brian Anslay's English translation alongside the Middle French text on facing pages to facilitate a comparative study. In its focus on translation theory, the French text's English circulation and reception history, and Anslay's editorial practices, Johnston's introduction sketches the multiple avenues for scholarship that such a comparison opens up.

The *Cité des dames* presents its pro-feminine arguments in the form of a prose allegory. Visited by three female virtues, Reason, Rectitude, and Justice, Christine is given the task of constructing a metaphorical stronghold for her sex using the legends of classical, historical, and Christian "good" women. Each of the three allegorical figures narrates one of the book's three sections, providing examples of women's fortitude, intelligence, and capacity to lead. Written by a prolific female author whose works were popular in both France and England during her lifetime, the *Cité des dames* offers modern readers a view of contemporary discourses surrounding the status and abilities of women. Johnston provides a relatively brief introduction to the literary concerns and thematic elements of the book, instead concentrating on the *Cyte of Ladyes* as translation. While concise, the sections of the introduction that treat the text's literary qualities provide thorough footnotes and present the reader with a comprehensive record of the various strands of scholarship on the book and its author. The rest of the introduction provides a bibliographic analysis of Anslay's English translation. Johnston offers biographical details about the translator, noting that he served as Yeoman of the Cellars for Henry VIII and occupied an administrative position in Catherine of Aragon's household, which may have allowed him access to the manuscript of the *Cité des dames* that formed part of the royal collection (Royal MS 19.A.xix [L], British Library, London). Noting the "structural similarities" between Anslay's *Cyte of Ladyes* and the royal manuscript, Johnston uses L as the base text for the Middle French facing-page translation in this edition (xxv). She accounts for this editorial decision in a comprehensive introduction to bibliographical scholarship on the French manuscripts, focusing on the only modern editions of the text—two unpublished Ph.D. dissertations dating from the mid-1970s. Johnston provides a comparative analysis of these editions that not only addresses their respective base texts, but also examines the textual history of the surviving manuscripts, noting corruptions, deteriorations, and authorial revisions that occur over time. She reproduces Monika Lange's table of the manuscript groups in order

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to chart a progressive sequence and record the text's redaction history. In this way, Johnston arrives at her own conclusion about the relationship between the L text and Anslay's English translation. Turning to the printed edition of the English text, Johnston provides information about London printer Henry Pepwell. She includes a brief overview of his inventory, noting details including type set choices, the use of woodcuts, and general stylistic conventions. Notes on the five extant copies of the printed text address their current condition, collation, decoration, binding, marginalia, and provenance.

In her comparison of the Middle French text and the English translation, Johnston offers a thorough introduction to Anslay's editorial choices and the possible critical implications of his interventions. She identifies three categories of changes to the base text: deliberate alterations, editorial changes made by Anslay as translator, and misreadings or misunderstandings of the French text. While she notes that Anslay's translation remains relatively faithful to its source, even resorting to awkward grammatical forms to produce a literal translation, Johnston also points out the various power dynamics implicit in such a project. Citing feminist scholarship on the English text, Johnston addresses the gendered stakes of mediating a female-authored text through a male translator. There are moments in the English text where Anslay explicitly identifies or inserts himself into the narrative, providing notes and correcting references in his source. Johnston identifies these deviations from the original French text in her annotations. The *Cyte of Ladyes* enacts a series of translations that will be of interest to scholars with varying theoretical investments, including translations of language, nation, and historical period.

In her note on editorial principles, Johnston states her aim "to make the *Cyte of Ladyes* accessible to readers with an academic interest in the work." To this end, her edition normalizes capitalization, adds punctuation and page breaks, and silently expands abbreviations while supplying missing words and letters in square brackets. Textual variants are recorded at the foot of the page, while annotations glossing allusions and citing scholarship specific to certain passages and themes are collected in endnotes. Like the introductory material, the notes in this edition focus on bibliographic details; explanatory notes are brief and presuppose a familiarity with *The City of Ladies*. Johnston also inserts folio references and pagination for the Middle French text and Anslay's English translation in the texts themselves, allowing readers to compare the edited texts with the originals. The appendices include a short glossary of obscure English words, an extensive bibliography that lists manuscripts, early printed books, facsimiles, modern editions and translations, and a comprehensive catalogue of secondary sources. This edition fulfills its stated goal, serving as an invaluable reference text for scholars seriously engaged in the study of *The City of Ladies* rather than appealing to a general or undergraduate readership. The facing-page translation of the L text and the comprehensive analysis of manuscript history in the introduction will be of interest to scholars of the Middle French *Cité des dames*, while the detailed notes on the English printed edition may also appeal to those interested in book history. As part of the Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies series published by the

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Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Johnston's edition of the *Cyte of Ladyes* makes accessible two texts formerly not generally available.

Melanie Simoes Santos is a PhD candidate in the Department of English specializing in early modern literature at the University of Toronto. Her research interests include women's writing, gender and form, and feminist theory. Specifically, her work examines virginity and queer temporality in the literature of Reformation England.