

Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme



Pizan, Christine de. *Othea's Letter to Hector*. Ed. and trans.
Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Earl Jeffrey Richards

Teresa Russo

Volume 41, Number 4, Fall 2018

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1061954ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1061954ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Russo, T. (2018). Review of [Pizan, Christine de. *Othea's Letter to Hector*. Ed. and trans. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Earl Jeffrey Richards]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 41(4), 272–274.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1061954ar>

reste maintenant à attendre impatiemment l'édition de la partition et plusieurs études d'attribution afin de donner un corps sonore à l'ensemble.

PASCALE DUHAMEL

Université d'Ottawa

Pizan, Christine de.

***Othea's Letter to Hector*. Ed. and trans. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Earl Jeffrey Richards.**

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 57 / Medieval and Renaissance Texts Series 521. Toronto: Iter Press / Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2017. Pp. xii, 182. ISBN 978-0-86698-577-2 (paperback) US\$34.95.

Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Earl Jeffrey Richards have made boundless contributions to the study of Christine de Pizan's writings with editions and critical analysis of her poetry and narratives. They once again make a great contribution to this area of medieval studies and medieval vernacular literature with their collaboration on a much-needed critical edition in English and new translation of Christine de Pizan's *Epistre d'Othea*.

This didactic work by Christine de Pizan is a poetic text about love written as a letter from the Goddess of Prudence, Othea, to the ideal knight Hector. The *Epistre d'Othea* consists of three elements: one hundred texts in verse followed by a gloss and allegory both written in prose for each text. The gloss provides clarification of the verses with examples of fables, classical sources, and knowledge from ancient philosophers while the allegory reflects on a moral teaching from biblical citations and writings of the Church Fathers that follows the tradition of medieval mythography, such as the *Ovide moralisé* and the works of the Vatican mythographers. The editors maintain the work's original form of all three parts (text, gloss, allegory) in their translation for all one hundred entries in the epistle.

Epistre d'Othea, written between 1399 and 1400, appeared in a critical edition in 1999 (Droz; rpt. as *Epistre Othea* in *Textes Littéraires Français*, 2008) by Gabriella Parussa, and a modern French translation and adaptation (*Lettre d'Othea, déesse de prudence, à un jeune chevalier, Hector*) by Hélène Basso

emerged in 2008 in two volumes. An English translation (*Christine de Pizan's Letter of Othea to Hector*) by Jane Chance first appeared in 1990 with valuable information about Christine de Pizan's verses.

In this new translation, twenty-seven years later, entitled, *Othea's Letter to Hector*, in *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series*, the editors closely consider the syntax and demanding vocabulary in their modern English translation which offers an accurate translation of Christine's French. In a note on the first verse, the editors explain their intention to observe Christine's rhetoric by maintaining her use of hyperbaton, for instance, in their translation of the poetic text. While considering the complexity of Christine's vocabulary, syntax, and rhetoric in their translation, Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Richards still provide a clear translation that is accessible for non-specialists and will be appreciated by scholars.

The edition begins with an in-depth introduction, considering Christine as a writer in the Middle Ages and discussing her writings within the political climate of medieval France. Readers may find the overview handling a significant amount of historical and political information for an introduction to a literary work; however, the editors successfully frame the poetic work and Christine's writings within their comprehensive political discussion. These descriptions of the political culture of her time are further supported with detailed notes useful for scholars researching this period of history and for an understanding of the events that influenced Christine's verses, moral glosses, spiritual allegories, and literary activity overall. The editors demonstrate that the political dimension of the poem involves more than one distinct event that occurred during the life of Christine and during the period in which she was writing.

The descriptions of medieval political thought and historical events are balanced with a discussion of genre and a focus on allegory and textuality in the *Othea*, which literary students will appreciate for understanding Christine's literary production and the author as a female writer in this period. The editors' introduction displays an interdisciplinary element, demonstrating their breadth and depth in the subject. Additionally, the overview brings to light authorities in the studies of Christine de Pizan and highlights literary criticism in this field. Footnotes throughout the epistle further provide important modern references to the work as well as sources that influenced Christine's glosses and allegories. The editors make insightful examinations into literary—classical, biblical, and her own contemporaries—and political links; they further provide,

in the footnotes, information on specific French terms or the language that Christine deliberately applies to the poem or prose explanations of the text. The editors further include an appendix with a list of authors and works cited in the allegories of the epistle; the information, prepared by Cheryl Lemmens, demonstrates Christine's scope of sources and shows evidence of Christine's aptitude with the Latin language. Thus, this volume has a wealth of information for researchers and scholars while its ease in reading the poetic work and prose invites non-specialists to engage with Christine's hybrid text and with the editors' scholarly discussion of the work.

Livre de la Cité des Dames (1405) has been perhaps the most widely recognized text in medieval studies by Christine de Pizan since Earl Jeffrey Richards's translation, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, in 1982. This translation of *Cité des Dames* thrust Christine de Pizan into the mainstream of late medieval studies as a prominent female writer of her age, and the text became a standard to study with other vernacular literatures of this period and in women's studies programs. The *Othea*, surviving in fifty manuscripts, has not received the attention in academia that it had in the Middle Ages among a readership of French and English elites. The editors have provided an important new translation for readers and scholars to consider the female voice in this text as a political intent and to reflect on the epistle's cultural and political influences, as a didactic work in studies of medieval literature, and for its contributions to late medieval mythography. Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Richards's English translation and critical analysis provide a thoughtful awareness to a work that deserves more attention in the field of medieval vernacular literature, and the edition will inspire new scholarship on Christine de Pizan's early verses and literary form.

TERESA RUSSO
Brock University