

Poetry of Charles d'Orléans and His Circle: A Critical Edition of BnF MS fr. 25458. Ed. John Fox & Mary-Jo Arn. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 383/Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance 34. Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in coll. with Brepols, 2010, lxiii + 957 pp., \$ 120.00/€ 100.00.

Shortly before his liberation from almost twenty-five years of captivity in England, Charles d'Orléans (1394–1465) sorted through the bilingual verse he had written and ordered the production of two manuscripts to contain it. The resulting book of English poetry, British Library MS Harley 682, was published in a new edition by Mary-Jo Arn in 1994;¹ with the help of the eminent Middle French scholar John Fox, Arn has now turned her attention to the related manuscript of the French texts, Bibliothèque nationale MS fr. 25458. Despite striking similarities in their initial design, the histories of these two books diverge in ways which have implications for their edition. For while Harley 682 was left behind in England upon the duke's repatriation, Charles took the French manuscript back to France with him and continued to add new compositions to it, often in his own hand; in

¹ Mary-Jo Arn, *Fortunes Stabilnes: Charles of Orleans's English Book of Love*, MRTS 138 (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1994). Arn and Fox have both argued convincingly for Charles's authorship of the English verse.

time he also opened the book to members of his court and visitors to his home at Blois, freeing up previously blank spaces and adding extra leaves to accommodate the steady flow of text. MS fr. 25458 accordingly provides an invaluable record both of almost all the French poems now attributed to Charles and of the increasingly social dimension assumed by his writing after his release. The manuscript's patchwork organisation makes it difficult to determine precisely when individual texts were added to the book, however, and for this reason it has also typically been felt to present a challenge to potential editors. Fox and Arn's work is the first to present a solution to this conundrum since the pioneering work of Pierre Champion.² I cannot comment on the quality of the text reproduced here as I have not seen MS fr. 25458; my analysis focuses instead on the editorial mentality which has shaped this presentation of Charles's poetry, on the introductory material, and on the English translation of the text by R. Barton Palmer.

Fox and Arn's work is founded on a detailed study of MS fr. 25458 published by Arn in 2008.³ In it she provides the rationale for the new arrangement of Charles's poems adopted in this edition: it is based on the order in which the verses appear to have been copied into the manuscript; this order, it transpires, can be established more accurately than Champion managed. In her portion of the Introduction, Arn begins by giving a description of MS fr. 25458 (xviii–xix) and an outline of the main ways in which her disposition of the poems differs from the order in which the individual texts are currently given in this manuscript and from that arrived at by Champion (xix–xxvii). Understandably, Arn does not attempt to reproduce the argument of her previous study here and readers are referred back to the earlier work for a more comprehensive justification of the points she summarises on this occasion. While a detailed discussion of Arn's codicological method accordingly falls beyond the scope of this review, the goal of representing the copying order of MS fr. 25458 which Fox and Arn have set themselves will give some readers pause for thought and ought briefly to be considered. We may object, for example, that as a result of their attempts to untangle MS fr. 25458 the editors have created a book which, while true to itself, almost certainly never actually existed. Indeed, I for one would be tempted to argue that the disarrangement of the manuscript and its texts as they have come down to us reflects the poet's disinterest in recording the very process which Fox and Arn hope their edition will illuminate, namely "the development of [his] art" (xxvii). This, after all, is not the narrative which Charles elects to have presented in the late bilingual Latin-French copy of his work which is now Grenoble MS 873; nor is it something which appears to have interested the copyists of the other manuscripts of Charles's poetry which are based on MS fr. 25458: MSS Carpentras 375 and Bibliothèque nationale fr. 1104 are both transcribed more or less mechanically from the duke's book.⁴ It is thus

² See Champion's study of MS fr. 25458, *Le Manuscrit autographe des poésies de Charles d'Orléans* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1907), and his edition, *Charles d'Orléans: Poésies*, I. *La Retenue d'Amours; ballades, chansons, complaintes et caroles*. II. *Rondeaux*, CFMA 34 and 56 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1923, 1927).

³ Mary-Jo Arn, *The Poet's Notebook: The Personal Manuscript of Charles d'Orléans* (Paris, BnF, MS fr. 25458), *Texts and Transitions* 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008).

⁴ The Grenoble manuscript is described by A.E.B. Coldiron in her monograph *Canon, Period, and the Poetry of Charles of Orleans: Found in Translation* (Ann

pertinent to note that Fox and Arn's edition is shaped more closely by modern (twentieth-century?) literary critical preoccupations than by a desire to reproduce a late medieval text as it appears to have been encountered by its readers. Still, as Arn writes, we are free to approach the edition in the way which best suits us (xxvii) and the editors provide the apparatus necessary in order to read the poems in the manuscript order (this apparatus is explained in their Note on the Text [1]).

The remainder of Arn's section of the Introduction comprises two biographical sketches of the duke designed to fill in historical background (xxviii–xxxv) and outline his relationship to the world of books (xxxv–xl). These notes give the reader an overview of the available scholarship while at the same time drawing on some less well known historical sources in order to stress, for example, the extent of the duke's military and political engagement prior to his imprisonment (xxxix). Useful as they are, these contributions are not free from error. First, while there is some confusion surrounding the means by which Charles's half-brother, the Bastard of Orleans, came into possession of the County of Dunois – he may have received it either from his brother Charles or from the Dauphin (Charles VII) – the title was certainly not bestowed upon him by Louis d'Orléans, as Arn asserts (xxviii).⁵ Secondly, Arn's statement that Charles's deposition at the trial of his former son-in-law, Jean d'Alençon, "was completely ineffective in saving the man's life" (xxxviii) is misleading: the trial did not end with Alençon's execution and at least one biographer allows that Charles's speech (of which Arn takes a rather dim view) may have been instrumental in securing this outcome.⁶ Finally, given the emphasis Arn places on the importance of the public role played by Charles before his capture, it is odd to read her wistful description of his later life as a time "when the distractions of dynasty, of politics, and of care are stilled" (xxxv). Philippe Contamine has demonstrated that Charles remained politically active throughout his final years: he continued to travel across France on official business, negotiated advantageous marriages for his children and was present at a number of important meetings, including the Council of Tours at the end of December 1464 (just a few days before his death at the beginning of the following month).⁷

The Introduction is completed by an illuminating note from Stephanie A.V.G. Kamath on the literary context of Charles's poetry (xl–l) and contributions by Fox on the poet's narrative and verse forms (li–lix) and his language (lix–lxiii). Fox, who is responsible for the French text, also records his editorial activities in the Textual Notes (809–17) and, in a welcome addition for those interested in poetic activity at Blois, provides a detailed index of the writers who contributed to Charles's book (829–41). Other end matter includes a formal description of MS fr. 25458 by Arn (819–21); a list of the duke's autograph lyrics (823–25); a brief description of the other manuscripts and early prints containing Charles's work

Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 2000) 112–44 and 191–200. For MSS Carpentras 375 and BnF fr. 1104, see Champion 1923, xvi–xviii and xx.

⁵ See Enid McLeod, *Charles of Orleans: Prince and Poet* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1969) 173.

⁶ McLeod 1969, 334.

⁷ Philippe Contamine, "Les Derniers mois de la vie de Charles d'Orléans d'après un document inédit", *Bulletin de l'Association des amis du Centre Jeanne d'Arc* 10 (1986): 19–30.

(more could have been included here; Champion's descriptions will remain indispensable) (826-8); an up-to-date bibliography (843-52); an index of first lines tallied with Champion's edition (but not with Mühlethaler's)⁸ (853-70); explanatory notes to the text (871-910), and a glossary of Middle French words (911-957).

A major innovation of this edition is its complete English version of Charles's poetry, presented here in facing page translation. Unfortunately, however, an excellent opportunity to provide scholars outside the field of Middle French studies with a reliable point of entry to the verse has been missed here as R. Barton Palmer's rendering of the text repeatedly falls short of the precision one expects from a scholarly edition. Taking the opening narrative section and the accompanying "Copie de la lettre de retenue" as a sample (4-24; 457 lines in total), I spotted four clear instances of mistranslation: "Oncques ne vis maison jour de ta vie" ['Never on any day of your life have you seen a house'] is rendered 'Never, on any day of my life, have I seen a house' (l. 47); "Lors, quant de nous approuchier je les vy" ['Then, as I saw them approach us'] is translated as 'Then, as we saw them approach' (l. 127); "Vers moy vindrent me prenant par la main" ['They came towards me and took me by the hand'] becomes 'With her in hand, they came my way' (l. 141); and "je senti que trop rioit [= *cueur*, cf. l. 221] de joye" ['I felt it/him laughing broadly with joy'] is given as 'I felt myself smile broadly from joy' (l. 223). Such basic mechanical errors do not inspire confidence and closer examination of the sample extract reveals that they are the product of a general inattentiveness to Charles's text. Lines are made conditional in English which are not conditional in French (l. 10, l. 63), indirect speech reported in the French *imparfait* is rendered by the English present (ll. 184-6), Beauté's switching between the future indicative and the present subjunctive is not marked (ll. 361-78) and word order is incorrectly reproduced (l. 146, l. 150). Palmer twice includes information in his English version which is not given the French text (l. 123, l. 421).

On more than one occasion in these lines the slackness of Palmer's translation is liable to encourage misreadings of the French poetry. By giving the opening as 'Long ago, when Nature had me / Come into this world ...' the translator situates the narrative more securely in the distant past than does the poet. Charles begins: "Ou temps passé, quant nature me fist / En ce monde venir"; a more neutral rendering of the initial adverbial phrase here would be 'In times past' (indeed, this is the translation which Palmer uses for the same expression later in this section at l. 172 and l. 207). For a poet whose representation of time has been found to be particularly complex and meaningful, such distinctions are important. Likewise, by translating "ce que devant est dit" ['that which is said before'] as 'what has been said above' (l. 92) and by rendering "Pour en joir par noz lectres patentes" ['So he may enjoy them by our letters patent'] as 'So he may enjoy them by these letters patent' (l. 411) Palmer's rendering strays too far from the French, stressing the materiality of the text at hand more forcefully than does Charles ('above' would have been the most obvious rendering for *ci-devant* but this is not what the text gives).

Random sampling of the remainder of the translation reveals that mistakes and infelicities such as those found in the first 457 lines of the text persist throughout Palmer's version. In at least one instance, moreover, an important cultural refer-

⁸ Jean-Claude Mühlethaler, *Charles d'Orléans: Ballades et rondeaux*, Lettres Gothiques 4531 (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1992).

ence has been missed: in chanson 40, “Faisant la peneuse sepmaine” is rendered simply as ‘Enduring my torment’ (l. 2) and ‘Passing a week in pain’ (l. 8), but “la peneuse semaine” is a phrase used by Machaut and the Bourgeois de Paris (among others) to refer to Holy Week; Palmer’s partial reading is doubled here by an editorial note which explains that the significance of the line is “metaphorical” without providing any further information (887). Fox and Arn’s edition has been impatiently awaited. Nevertheless, the frequency of errors in the translation leaves one wishing that more time had been devoted to checking both this important aspect of the work and the accompanying notes.

Scholars of Charles d’Orléans’s French poetry have been used to skipping between two editions of the verse since the publication of Jean-Claude Mühlethaler’s text of the ballades and rondeaux in 1992.⁹ Another edition has now been added to the mix. For information on the French manuscripts besides MS fr. 25458, readers will continue to consult Champion. For the notes and modern French glosses he supplies for the duke’s ballades and rondeaux, they will turn to Mühlethaler, whose new edition of the coterie verse in MS fr. 25458 also looks set to become the standard text.¹⁰ For the verses not edited by Mühlethaler and for a sense of what this fascinating manuscript can reveal about Charles’s evolution as a poet, they may henceforth refer to Fox and Arn’s work.

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⁹ See note 8 above. Mühlethaler presents the poems he edits in the order in which they appear in MS fr. 25458.

¹⁰ Virginie Minet-Mahy & Jean-Claude Mühlethaler, *Le Livre d’amis: Poésies à la cour de Blois (1440–1465)*, Champion Classiques Série Moyen Age 28 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2010).