Emma Cayley, Ashby Kinch (dir.), Chartier in Europe

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Alain Chartier has experienced a much-deserved revival in the last few years which includes the founding of a society devoted solely to his work and its contexts (http://people.hsc.edu/alain/). In 2006 Emma Cayley published a fine book on his multi-faceted work. Cayley, together with Ashby Kinch, now offers another glimpse into Chartier’s varied production and its wide-ranging impact throughout Europe in a carefully assembled collection of eleven essays. The volume is divided into three sections: Authorising Chartier; Transmitting Chartier; and Translating Chartier. Like Philippe de Mézières (1327-1405) before him Chartier wrote in both French and Latin, producing works of political importance. But unlike de Mézières, he was also known as a love poet whose influential La belle dame sans mercy (=BDSM; 1424) caused an intense literary and ideological querelle that was not just limited to France. Chartier in Europe explores the transmission of the texts and ideas of this influential author across the borders of different countries which shaped late medieval culture.

In part one, Douglas Kelly and Florence Bouchet study Boethius’ Consolation of Philosophy and the Bible as sources and models for the Livre de l’Esperance (begun in 1428) and the Quadrilogue invectif (1422) respectively. Kelly shows that Chartier’s skillful adaptation of the Consolation introduces new personifications and turns the “suicide-prone” author figure into an Everyman who is finally replaced by the figure of the French nation. The book incites the French to ameliorate the calamitous state of their country by unified action. Similar intentions underlie the use of Biblical examples in...
the *Quadrilogue*, as Bouchet argues. The figure of Clergé doubles for the Acteur and uses the Bible copiously to link religious and political issues, while the Chevalier does not resort to biblical authority in his discourse. Especially interesting is Bouchet’s analysis of the Latin word *murmurare* which, in its French translation of *murmurer*, appears in the *Quadrilogue* and in a number of earlier texts, such as Christine de Pizan’s political works, to designate the verbal activities of a rebellious people. Going back to Moses and Aaron and the rebellious Israelites, this word thus draws its forceful meaning concerning the dangers of rebellion from the Old Testament.

The other two essays in part one concentrate on proverbs and the mechanics of allegory. Dana Symons investigates the verbal play and the signification of proverbial language in the *BDSM*, proposing to show how Chartier makes “the proverbial personal” (p. 53). While this chapter contains some suggestive points, its conclusion is rather confusing, stating that “the fixed nature of the language of proverbs perversely unfixes them” and that the meaning in proverbs is “so fixed that is ceases to have fixed meaning” (p. 56). This statement lacks clarity, as does Symons’ final presentation of the central paradox of the *BDSM*. The list of proverbs Symons appends is a useful aid in identifying the many proverbial phrases that run through the *BDSM*. In her chapter on the *Livre des quatre dames* (1416) Barbara K. Altmann offers the intriguing thesis that each of the four ladies in mourning is an allegorical representation or exemplification of a dominant emotion, such as “Bereaved”, “Vexed”, “Uncertain”, and “Ashamed”. Through these emotions they indict war whose cruel outcome at Agincourt has robbed them of their loved ones. Chartier skillfully repositions the love debate through this “gendered reaction to war” (p. 69).

Part two focuses on the transmission of Chartier’s texts. Emma Cayley, as she did in her book, presents the manuscript tradition as a space of play in which Chartier is the key player in search of prestige (p. 75). Here Cayley concentrates on two manuscripts from Tours (BM MS 978) and the BnF (fr. 1642) to illustrate the two worlds Chartier belonged to and exemplified: that of the “official, humanistic and Latinate world of the Paris chancery” and the “non-official vernacular world of the ‘cour amoureuse’ and courtly debate poetry” (p. 75-76). In a careful, detailed analysis Cayley demonstrates that Chartier is a *magister* in both of these traditions. The close attention to the contents and arrangement of each manuscript reveals how the reception of an author’s work can be shaped by the composition of individual manuscripts. Joan E. McRae, who collaborated with David F. Hult on the 2003 edition and translation of the *Cycle de la Belle Dame sans Mercy* (Paris, Champion), returns to this cycle here by analyzing a number of manuscripts that contain elements of the *querelle*, charting the cyclification and circulation of these texts. Especially important is her analysis of the production of booklets (the example is BnF fr. 924) containing separate poems that were then bound together in a codex. This kind of detail tells us much about late medieval book production and the consumption of the type of poems that form part of the *querelle de la BDSM*. Julia Boffey also makes an important contribution to the study of Chartier in particular and the history of the book in general. She shows that among the earliest printed books two clusters of Chartier’s works appeared: texts concerned with political counsel and the *BDSM*. The geographical range and the diversity of the readers point to Chartier’s growing influence. Boffey adopts the two-fold perspective of the translation into English and the diffusion of Chartier’s texts in French in England.
The English taste for French books encompassed both the English translations and the French originals.

Translations of Chartier’s works into languages other than English are the subject of part three. Clara Pascual-Argente explores the transformations the Quadrilogue invectif underwent in fifteenth-century Castile. She analyzes the crucial role lay noblemen played in the rise of vernacular humanism. In Castile the Quadrilogue was read primarily as a text on chivalry and thus came to form part of the arms vs. letters debate. Where in the French original the Clergé is dominant, in the Castilian the Chevalier is at the center, and the text proposes rhetorical lessons for the chivalric class. Again, we learn much about the production of books and manuscripts as well as about medieval readers. The “paratextual erasure” (p. 129) of the figure of Clergé points to the message that only the noble class can “save a kingdom in danger” (p. 131), a danger that despite the somewhat later period (1449) and different geographical location had much in common with France’s situation in 1422. Catherine Nall focuses on a 1453 creative “rewriting and reinterpreting” of the Quadrilogue by William Worcester. The political context is now that of 1470s/1480s England. Nall carefully analyzes the many Latin annotations which all point to the lesson a reader like Worcester drew from the text: the importance of sage counsel in political matters. William Calin takes us to Scotland where in 1575 John Rolland’s Court of Venus was published, a text hitherto neglected in Scottish studies. Calin makes a good case for rehabilitating this often humorous work in which the narrator overhears a debate between the allegorical characters of Esperance and Desesperance. Calin makes a good case for the influence of the Cycle of the BDSM on the Court of Venus and, in my view rightly, reads it as a “late foreign contribution to the Cycle” (p. 163). Finally, Ashby Kinch zeroes in on Carlo Neri’s 1477 Italian translations of the BDSM and the Le Debat Reveille matin (dated close to 1425). Neri radically recast the BDSM in favor of the lady and also altered the affective state of the narrator, whose contributions here have a more “theatrical effect” (p. 168) than in the French original. Kinch in effect addresses the often problematic term “original”, rightly claiming that a text like Neri’s has to be regarded as a “literary product in its own right” (p. 166) rather than as a mere translation or adaptation. An appendix provides useful line correlations for the Middle English translation by Richard Roos (whose possibly multiple identities are investigated in Boffey’s chapter) and the Italian one by Neri.

The book closes with an excellent updated bibliography and index. This carefully produced volume is a major contribution to Alain Chartier studies and also sheds light on many more general issues of interest to medievalists, such as the composition and transmission of manuscript collections; translations and adaptations and the new meanings they acquire in different locales and time periods; and the circulation and consumption of early printed books.