Book Review

"The Song of Roland": Translations of the Versions in Assonance and Rhyme of the Chanson de Roland. Trans. Joseph J. Duggan and Annalee C. Rejhon. Turnhout: Brepols, 2012. Pp. 519.

This volume presents readers with a new translation of the Oxford Digby 23 (O) version of the *Song of Roland* and, for the first time in a modern language, a translation of the rhymed versions found in the Châteauroux and Marciana V7 manuscripts (CV7). The pair of translations is the latest component of an ambitious project that has edited the entirety of the extant French texts of the *Song of Roland*, most of which have not been available until now in an accessible and reliable format.[1] These translations come on the heels of a vocal and growing body of research investigating the nineteenth-century reception and canonization of the *Song of Roland* and the multifaceted ways in which the privileged O redaction of this text has influenced our reading of the French medieval *chanson de geste* corpus.[2] Duggan and Rejhon's meticulous work is poised to transform Roland studies by broadening the visibility of the multiple versions of the Roland to a larger audience of both scholars and

[1] *La Chanson de Roland – The Song of Roland: the French Corpus*, ed. Joseph J. Duggan, 3 vols. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005).

[2] See for example Margaret Jewett Burland, *Strange Words: Retelling and Reception in the Medieval Roland Textual Tradition* (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2007); Zrinka Stahuljak, *Pornographic Archaeology: Medicine, Medievalism, and the Invention of the French Nation* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2012); Andrew Taylor, *Textual Situations: Three Medieval Manuscripts and Their Readers* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2002); Michelle R. Warren, *Creole Medievalism: Colonial France and Joseph Bédier's Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2011).

nonspecialists, and thus pave the way to discussions concerning canonicity and national literatures.

Duggan and Rejhon's introduction is a concise survey of the most salient aspects of these manuscripts' respective medieval and modern histories. As Duggan-Rejhon indicate, and as recent investigations into the topic have reaffirmed, the canonical position of the Oxford Roland was established early on in the modern textual emendation project, starting with Francisque Michel's 1837 edition.[3] All other versions have since occupied a secondary status as corrupt readings contaminated with later romance influences, useful only to address difficult readings in O. Duggan and Rejhon's approach stands apart from previous editions and translations in their care to sidestep the hierarchical reading of the manuscript stemma and to present the rhymed CV7 tradition on equal footing with the Oxford version. The translators present the two manuscripts as artifacts of specific moments in the transmission of the epic; while the Oxford version belongs to the climate of the First Crusade at the end of the eleventh or beginning of the twelfth century, the two manuscripts of the CV7 rhymed tradition emerged in northern Italy courtly reading circles roughly a century later. The language of CV7 is a uniquely hybridized language specific to this northern Italian context. Even if Old French is still a base language, it is "shaped by interference from old Northern Italian phonemes, morphemes, syntax, and meanings" (Duggan, *The French Corpus* 2:56). External evidence confirms a northern Italian provenance: both the C and V7 manuscripts appear in the library catalogues of the dukes of Gonzaga and many codicological features point to a northern Italian readership (Duggan, *The French Corpus* 2:57ff.).

The translators' introduction is succinct yet informative and gives both nonspecialist and specialist audiences the necessary background to productively read and compare the O and CV7 redactions. As Duggan

[3] The modern history of the Oxford text is particularly well recounted in Andrew Taylor's chapter on the topic, "Bodleian MS Digby 23," in *Textual Situations* (see n. 2).

explains in the introduction to the critical edition of CV7 (but not in the introduction to the translation), a set of shared errors between these two manuscripts indicate that they descend from a common model (Duggan, *The French Corpus* 2:29-35). The edition, upon which this translation is based, takes V7 as the base manuscript and "is an attempt to produce the text that served as the common model of C and V7" (Duggan, *The French Corpus* 2:33). Even though the passages in which these two redactions differ considerably are indicated in the translation's notes, the merging of the two redactions to arrive at the text of a missing common ancestor will inevitably be a point of debate among scholars of epic.

For readers unfamiliar with the alternate versions of the *Song of Roland*, the CV7 redactions propose a number of striking elaborations on Rolandian themes and characters, while also introducing a variety of new material. The plot of CV7 follows Oxford for the first half (up to laisse 267) and then elaborates a unique reading of the Aude and Ganelon episodes with 125 additional innovative laisses. The rhymed courtly reworking of the Roland poem elevates the stature and narrative weight of key feminine figures such as Aude (Oliver's sister and Roland's fiancée), Giborc (the wife of Girart de Vienne), and Berthe (Charlemagne's sister). As Duggan notes in his critical edition of CV7, Alda was the name of Francesco Gonzaga's mother, a detail that raises questions about the historical specificity of the text and the audience for which the Roland epic was modified and amplified (Duggan, *The French Corpus* 2:26-27).

Like many familiar laisses and oft-cited lines of the Oxford *Roland*, the scene recounting Aude's fainting and sudden death undergoes extensive revision in CV7. In this amplified segment, King Charlemagne attempts to hide Roland's and Oliver's deaths from Aude, having her instead believe that Roland is enthralled with another woman's beauty: "Duke Roland has taken a wife, / the daughter of Florent, king of Val Serie; / for her beauty he has forsaken yours" (CV7 7028-30[4]). After an

[4] Unless otherwise indicated, all translations for both O and CV7 are taken from the Duggan-Rejhon translation under review.

elaborate plan to hide Roland's death from Aude, Charles eventually reveals the truth, even if she has already learned the essence of the tragic events through a series of dream visions. Aude visits the two paladins in a church and, after long prayer, Oliver speaks to her "as if alive" (CV7 7367). This vision liberates her from grief and she then dies after finishing her prayer. Aude's death in CV7 ends with a textual reference to the O reading:

> The king looks at Aude, thinks she has fainted;
> when he raises her up, he finds she is dead. (CV7 7432-33)

> Aude the fair has gone to her death.
> The king thinks that she has fainted. (O 3723-24)

Aside from the innovations of Aude's death in CV7, there are many other inserted laisses that open the poem up for comparative readings and discussions. As soon as laisse 1, the CV7 *Roland* makes subtle yet suggestive alterations to well-known Rolandian themes and thus opens new territory for textual analyses. The first line opens with: "King Charles of the daunting beard / has been in Spain for a full seven years," (CV7 1-2). (*Cf.* "Charles the king, our great emperor, / has been a full seven years in Spain" O 1-2). Small modifications in the Italian versions of the *Song of Roland* suggest important ties to the sociopolitical matrix of early modern northern Italy. William Kibler has suggested that by anticipating Ganelon's betrayal within the first laisse of the poem, the poet shifts the narrative focus in a significant way towards a feud-and-vendetta plot centered around Roland and Ganelon: "for Charles has none who merely serve him half-heartedly / save Ganelon, who betrayed him by deceit" (CV7 12-13). This narrative turn brings to light a political mechanism much different than the one underlying the Oxford *Roland* and may be more accurately interpreted within the context of the feuding communes

specific to the northern Italian context. [5] The entire "copied" portion of CV7 makes similar adjustments by trimming and adding to fashion a new take on the epic.

In another example, laisse 92, which is unique to the rhymed tradition, works to portray a Roland who is seething with a desire for vengeance, while at the same time it anticipates the well-known conclusion to Ganelon's treachery:

> [. . .] "I do not wish to refuse:
> Ganelon the felon will cause us great pain.
> But by him who guides all the world,
> if God allows me to return to France,
> I intend to pay this man back harshly:
> I will have him dragged to death behind three nags."
> (CV7 1497-1502).

The CV7 Roland character undergoes important modifications as well that demonstrate the direction of the Carolingian-centered Franco-Italian epic context and the later Renaissance epic tradition of Pulci, Boiardo, and Ariosto.[6] Laisse 70, which does not appear in O, is a narrative parenthesis devoted to glorifying Roland:

> On a mountaintop Roland arms himself:
> he puts on his gold-lacquered hauberk
> and laces on the helmet that is tempered hard.
> Never will it be dented by blow of any weapon.
> He girds on Durendart, whose pommel is golden;
> at his neck hangs his strong bossed shield; (CV7 1167-72)

[5] William W. Kibler, "The Roland after Oxford: The French Tradition," *Olifant* 6 (1979): 275–92. See especially 277-79.
[6] Jean-Claude Vallecalle, "Roland est sage : remarques sur la personnalité du héros dans *L'Entrée d'Espagne,*" *PRISMA* 10.1 (1994): 71-80.

Reminiscent of depictions of Roland in the visual arts—especially the statue at the entrance to the Verona cathedral—this image of Roland sets the stage for his later qualification as the *senatore Romano*, protector of the Holy Church. In another important revision, the poet of CV7 explicitly identifies Roland's love for Aude, which is not the case in O:

> On her right hand that she holds extended
> she has a ring in which she places great trust
> that Roland gave her as a sign of love.
> [. . . . . .]
> Count Roland would have had in her a true love
> had he survived and enjoyed a long life! (CV7 6734-40)

The bellicose Roland with whom most students of the epic are familiar gives way in CV7 to more courtly reading of the character. Similarly, the figure of Aude takes on new dimensions and at times occupies a contradictory orientalist position on the question of Christians versus pagans: her "fur coat is from Nubia, / fashioned in the kingdom of Esclaudie" (CV7 6679-80); she rides a "Sorian mule" and "is dressed in silk brocade from Almeria"(CV7 6731-32).[7]

Léon Gautier once bemoaned the courtly influences in later redaction of the Roland epic, declaring that "les âmes y sont moins mâles. Tout s'alanguit, s'attiédit, s'efféminе."[8] Such revisions, as found in the CV7 version, place the epic squarely in the center of the debate surrounding the courtly romance influence on epic and the question of late epic that continue to be at the forefront of critical assessments of Old French epic. Even though the foundational prejudices of our discipline's early

[7] Sharon Kinoshita discusses this point in detail. See "Epic Revisions," in *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2006).
[8] Léon Gautier, "Introduction," *La Chanson de Roland* (Tours: Alfred Mame, 1887), xxxvii-xxxviii.

history are well on their way to being dismantled, the Duggan-Rejhon translation gives scholars a vital tool to continue the work of dismantling the Oxford *Roland* edifice. While the cost of this volume does not make it practical for course book orders, these translations will nonetheless benefit immensely those who regularly teach the *Song of Roland* and will permit a new, decentralized, and up-to-date angle of discussion on the unavoidable importance of the Roland epic. Duggan and Rejhon's fluid and accurate translation opens the mutability of medieval textuality to a nonspecialized audience and provides a useful point of access for scholars unable to read the challenging idiom of the Franco-Italian original.

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