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The French Balades. John Gower. Ed. R. F. Yeager. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2011. 182 pp. \$15.00. ISBN 978-1-58044-155-1.

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The English poet John Gower's (d. 1408) greatest boon seems also to have been the reason for his fall into relative obscurity and his lamentable omission from syllabi. His writings include a substantial body of Middle English, Latin, and Anglo-French, and his trilingual approach reflects the culture in which he lived. In his 2005 article in the *Chaucer Review*, prominent Gower scholar R. F. Yeager draws attention to the lack of critical scholarship—either in French or English—on the English poet's *Cinkante Balades* and the *Traitié Selonc les Auctour pour Essampler Les Amantz Marietz*. It is a state of affairs Yeager hopes—and works—to change with his careful work in this volume, which makes these texts accessible to a much wider audience.

Yeager's edition includes the full texts, in their original Anglo-Norman French as well as his own English translation, of the *Traitié Selonc les Auctour pour Essampler Les Amantz Marietz* and the *Cinkante Balades*. It also includes a general introduction, an introduction to each text, explanatory and textual notes, two appendixes, and a bibliography. Yeager's translations of both texts show his familiarity and years of expertise as a scholar of Gower. His words are clear and precise, and they do not take away from the directness of the Anglo-Norman. Yeager takes care not to add or subtract anything from Gower's language, nor does he change the structure of the English (except when it would result in extreme clumsiness). In short, it is a clean, literal translation that allows readers to see Gower as Anglo-Norman writer in a trilingual world.

The general introduction provides pertinent and accessible insights into Gower's project, his relation to Chaucer and French influences (notably those of Guillaume de Machaut and Eustache Deschamps), and his reasons for the fact that these two texts have received little attention. The book is short, but its brevity lends itself to classroom use, which is the self-stated goal of the Middle English Text Series. Yeager imagines a debate between Gower and his longtime friend Geoffrey Chaucer in which Gower "caution[s] Chaucer not to tie his chance at immortality to a vernacular both poets considered to be woefully and whimsically mutable" (1). Nonetheless, Chaucer hedged his bets on the emergence of this vernacular, and, as Yeager writes, "literary history has . . . thus far proven Chaucer's the better wager" (1). His introduction and sometimes his notes are sometimes (perhaps necessarily?) too speculative, but they will appeal to the undergraduate audience, and they set the stage for a better understanding of the text and the conditions of its production.

The introduction to the *Traitié Selonc les Auctour pour Essampler Les Amantz Marietz* begins by contextualizing the text at hand, its dating, and its potential audience, against the better-known *Confessio Amantis*. Though he has focused on the question of audience more closely in "John Gower's Audience: The Ballades" (*Chaucer Review* 40 [2005]: 81–105), here he aptly and concisely provides the background for less-experienced readers to parse the context of love and marriage from a medieval perspective. Yeager bridges the gap between modern readers, "whose vision of marriage begins with love and (with luck) evolves into one form of religious service or another" (6), and the urgency of the question of marriage in Gower's time, explaining the theological import of original sin and the reasons why, in the face of postlapsarian humanity, for the medieval church marriage was condoned as the "most *desirable* human condition" (6, emphasis given). He also provides convincing

evidence about the dating of the *Traitié*, as well as a list of manuscripts and translations.

Yeager's introduction to the *Cinkante Balades* includes information about the structure and "groupings" of the ballades, as well as a synopsis of the various theories about when Gower would have composed them. He places Gower's text in relation to the *Cent Ballades*, written by the most erudite members of the French court in the last few decades of the fourteenth century. Yeager then uses the challenge of responding to the *Cent Ballades*, taken up not only by Gower, but other writers including Christine de Pizan and Oton de Graunson, to date the *Cinkante Balades* to 1390–93 (rather than "the assumption of Henry [IV]'s coronation as a prompting occasion for the love balades" [53] as others have argued [51]). Yeager also provides relevant information about the manuscript and versification of the text.

The notes to the text, especially the translations of marginalia, are easy to follow. At times, however, I found myself wondering if for undergraduate readers, more notes might have been helpful, especially regarding references to mythology or medieval cultural references. The first appendix, which includes the Quixley translation of the *Traitié* as well as a convincing analysis of the potential translator, is very useful (though it does not include textual notes or glosses). There is a second appendix, "A Note on Gower's French" by Brian Merrilees, and a bibliography, which, though thorough, might be improved for classroom use if it were separated into primary and secondary readings.

All in all, Yeager's translation/edition is a significant and valuable contribution to the field and, at only \$15, it will be easy to incorporate into the classroom. His careful work and translation shine through and invite further work on the Anglo-Norman Gower.

