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Catherine M. Jones, *Philippe de Vigneulles and the Art of Prose Translation*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008. viii + 151 pp. Bibliography and index. \$95.00 (U.S.) hb. ISBN 978-1-84384-158-6.

Review by Valerie Worth-Stylianou, Trinity College, Oxford.

In providing us with the first full-length study of Philippe de Vigneulles's prose rendition of the Lorraine epic cycle, Catherine Jones illuminates our understanding both of late medieval taste for "mises en prose" in general (she reminds us that half of the extant 120 *chansons de geste* were derhymed at least once between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries) and of Philippe's particular and slightly unusual contribution to the genre. Drawing primarily on the first book of the *Chronique* (which relates the Lorraine material to the history of Metz) and book V (treating events in Philippe's own lifetime), she presents Philippe first and foremost as a prominent citizen of the free municipality of Metz, whose literary output was strongly influenced by his pride in the history of his city. Her approach fits well with the avowed aims of the "Gallica" series, which seeks to place close literary readings within a broader cultural and theoretical framework. Thus, each of her four main chapters moves back and forth between Philippe's prose translations, his other writings, and the context in which they were produced. At the outset (p. 10), Jones argues strongly that scholarship needs to move beyond nostalgic regret for the poetry of the original medieval epics. She proposes instead an appreciation of the qualities which made prose versions so popular with fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century readers. It is telling that throughout her study, she is careful to balance comments on translation loss with an awareness of the potential for supplement or *surplus* afforded by the reworkings. A very different policy, it should be noted, governs her own translations in this volume. Aware that she is addressing a readership likely to range from the specialist to students who have little familiarity with early French, Jones judiciously furnishes English versions (in square brackets immediately below the French) of all quotations from Old or Middle French and deliberately opts for a highly accurate but relatively austere or "foreignised" version, so that the reader can perceive the stylistic features of the original.

What distinguishes Philippe from other contemporary prosifiers, and how does Jones justify this concentration upon his work? Whereas Philippe's three other compositions, the *Chronique de Metz*, his *Journal* and the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* have all benefited from complete critical editions and studies, his *Prose des Loherains* (as Jones provisionally entitles the manuscript containing his "mise en prose") remains both only partly edited and largely unstudied. Her first chapter establishes that whereas most prosifiers of the late 15<sup>th</sup> century were commissioned by powerful patrons such as Philippe Le Bon of Burgundy, Philippe de Vigneulles's translation projects were self-imposed, undertaken in his leisure from his profession as a (rich) cloth merchant. Indeed, such was his dedication to his city that he celebrated it both in a fine tapestry and in his writings. Jones regularly draws instructive comparisons between Philippe's prose rendition and the anonymous *Histoire de Charles Martel*, a prose version compiled from the same *chanson de geste* for the Duke of Burgundy.

Chapter two, focusing on the relationship between truth and translation into prose, portrays Philippe as a mediator, aware that his contemporaries found the old French of epic romances offputting. He therefore used his new medium to establish a new affective bond between his readership and the "istoire" he related. He built up a network of comparisons between the heroes of the epic cycle and the cultural

artefacts remaining in Metz, which underscored the veracity of the tales while simultaneously celebrating the heritage of his city. Jones particularly develops connections between the “mise en prose” and Philippe’s other writings, arguing that translation, communication (and humorous incidences of miscommunication) and linguistic  *finesse* were recurrent themes in his work. Although the thematic links between the other works and the prose redaction are occasionally tenuous, I appreciated Jones’s wish to see the latter as a congruent part of Philippe’s literary output.

Philippe’s work was completed in manuscript form in 1515. Although the date makes him a contemporary of the earlier French humanist writers, Jones argues convincingly that Philippe’s work showed little trace of humanist influence, and that it circulated only in manuscript (a useful reminder of the important coexistence of manuscript and print circulation in the earlier sixteenth century). Chapter three, which treats Philippe’s particular engagement with the matter of Lorraine, most clearly demonstrates his late medieval status. While his translation was not marked by significant interventions in the form of moral commentaries, he was not bound to the original text by any philological impulse. Rather, he used the matter of Lorraine as a source which could be abridged, selectively reinterpreted and presented to suit the tastes of his largely bourgeois readership in Metz (in contrast to the more chivalric prose redaction procured for the Duke of Burgundy). In the first Book, notably, Philippe’s version displaced the focus from the eponymous hero, Hervis, to his wife, Beatrice, thereby celebrating a female patroness of Metz (which Jones suggests was a secular parallel to the Church’s adoration of the Virgin, pp. 56-7).

Chapter four engages most closely with the actual practice of translation, or rather of “dérimage,” but it is a task made somewhat difficult by the fact that it is not possible to establish which manuscript of the Lorraine cycle Philippe used. Hence, Jones’s analysis is focused largely on the macro- rather than micro-level. Most importantly, she emphasises his strategies to promote the readability of his prose text: divisions into chapters and chapter titles effectively providing an “elaborate synopsis” (p. 94). Proseification produced two key authorial responses which may seem to have run in opposite directions: the tendency to amplify especially for the sake of clarification, and the process of abridgment, ranging from omission of short formulae (proper only to the spoken verse form of the verse epic) to wholesale omission of passages of some 400 lines. Judged in the light of other fifteenth-century prose redactions, Philippe’s amplifications were circumscribed, his abridgments more marked, and essential to the flavor of his work. What emerges is the contrast between more elegant prose versions (such as those produced by professional translators for the Duke of Burgundy) and Philippe’s individual if rather home-spun text, intended for the edification and pleasure of his fellow citizens of Metz.

It is a shame that the Conclusion of this excellent study is so short (barely over four pages), since it raises several very interesting points which merited fuller development. Jones mentions that Philippe’s “mise en prose” has the “authority of a chronicler” (p. 130), but does not venture any further comparisons between the prose redaction and the *Chronique de Metz*. Surely it is the rise of the chronicle which in part accounts for the new vogue for “mises en prose,” and Philippe stands as one of the rare practitioners of both genres. There is also a tantalisingly brief account of how Philippe’s manuscripts were handed down in Metz. While I accept that Jones could not say much more on this specific aspect, it points to a whole area she leaves uncharted, the reception of Philippe’s work by the sixteenth century (in Metz and more widely) and the afterlife of the Lorraine cycle. Equally, I would have liked the conclusion to branch out a little more by offering a comparison between prose redactions of the Lorraine matter and other “mises en prose” of the later Middle Ages. While the general terrain is set out in the Introduction, the Conclusion misses an opportunity to measure this prosifier’s achievements not only in comparison to those working on the same materials, but also within the genre in general.

These limitations apart, Jones nonetheless has delivered a very well-researched, crisp and imaginative study of a relatively neglected genre and author. The publisher, D. S. Brewer (an imprint of Boydell and Brewer Ltd), has produced a handsome volume which it is a pleasure to read and handle; the legible

typeface and intelligent layout of text are the more precious because of their rarity these days. My only small bone to pick with Brewer (or the author?) on this front is the surprising absence of any illustrations, the more so since Jones highlights the importance of Philippe's own drawings and the beautiful tapestries woven at Metz. These are, however, small shortcomings, and to this reviewer's mind, the study has achieved its aim of rehabilitating intralingual, diachronic translation into prose as a genre no less deserving of detailed study than medieval and early modern translations from Latin into the vernacular, and of drawing particular attention to the significance of Philippe's contribution to that genre.

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