



CLASSIQUES
GARNIER

« Book reviews », *Encomia*, n° 38-39, 2014 – 2015, *Bulletin bibliographique de la Société internationale de littérature courtoise*, p. 37-41

DOI : [10.15122/isbn.978-2-406-08825-7.p.0037](https://doi.org/10.15122/isbn.978-2-406-08825-7.p.0037)

La diffusion ou la divulgation de ce document et de son contenu via Internet ou tout autre moyen de communication ne sont pas autorisées hormis dans un cadre privé.

© 2018. Classiques Garnier, Paris.
Reproduction et traduction, même partielles, interdites.
Tous droits réservés pour tous les pays.

BOOK REVIEWS

Glyn S. BURGESS Burgess and Leslie C. BROOK, trans. *Twenty-Four Lays from the French Middle Ages*. Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2016. 288 Pp. ISBN: 978-1-7813-8337-7. £25.00 / \$34.99.

With the recent releases of *Marie de France: Poetry* (Norton Critical Editions, 2016) and *The Lais of Marie de France: Text and Translation* (Broadview, 2018), *Twenty-Four Lays from the French Middle Ages* reminds the English-language reader that the Breton lay does not belong to Marie alone. However coincidental the timing, this prose translation of the eponymous 24 lays represents a long-awaited coda to an editorial project over two decades in the making. From 1999's *Three Old French Narrative Lays: Trot, Lecheor, Nabaret* (Liverpool Online Series) to 2015's *The Anglo-Norman Lay of Haveloc* (Boydell & Brewer), Glyn S. Burgess and/or Leslie C. Brook undertook, oversaw, or in some way contributed to critical editions of the majority of texts in this collection. Whereas these previous volumes are geared to the specialist, the work in question has been expertly streamlined, with fresh prose translations and all-new compact introductions. The result is an affordable and readable anthology, perfect for lesiure or classroom use.

The text opens with a 10-page general introduction. In it, the translators briefly address two of the major difficulties associated with the corpus: its limits and its variety. Though they take up a previous assertion that “the narrative lay is to the modern short story what the genre of the romance is to the modern novel” and that the works in this collection “possess all, or at least many, of the characteristics that define the lay” (1), they do not attempt a firm definition. While they list some common lay elements (2-3), their ambiguity allows for the inclusion of *La Chastelaine de Vergi* by virtue of its quaint romance-like qualities, and the omission of, say, *Le Vair Palefroï*, which explicitly calls

itself a “lay.” What they compellingly do, however, is to offer up their choice of texts as a “[demonstration of] the wide-ranging possibilities of the lay as a literary form” (7). This is evident in their subsequent (and admittedly subjective) groupings of the chosen texts into categories:

- Magic and Mystery: *Melion, Tyolet, Graelent, Guingamor, Desiré, Doon, Espine, Tydorel, Trot*
- Fun and Games: *Mantel, Cor, Aristote, Lecheor, Ignaure, Oiselet, Espervier, Nabaret*
- Passion and Tears: *Piramus and Thisbe, Narcisus and Dané*
- Romance and Realism: *The Chastelaine de Vergi, The Lai de l'Ombre, Amours, Conseil*
- The Lay as History: *Haveloc*

Much of the general introduction is devoted to explaining the translators’ organizational choices and providing a preview of the texts to come.

Happily, Burgess and Brook also draw much needed attention to the important 13th-century manuscript, Paris, BNF, nouv. acq. fr. 1104 (MS S). Though it also contains 24 lays (in *francien*), nine of the lays in S are attributable to Marie de France and thus outside the scope of this project. For the 15 remaining non-Marie lays, they have chosen S as the preferred base manuscript. MS S was the subject of a study by Rupert T. Pickens in *Li Premerains vers: Essays in Honor of Keith Busby* (Rodopi, 2011); but S’s status as a near-contemporaneous *recueil* of Breton lays, from which Marie’s name has been erased no less, merits more critical consideration than it has heretofore received.

In addition to the general introduction, each of the lays has its own concise preface. Whereas the introductions to the critical editions are expansive, often many times the lengths of the texts they present, here the introductions are consistently three pages or less. The format of each introduction is highly standardized: the first paragraph provides minimal information on the manuscript(s) and the lay’s length. The second paragraph summarizes the plot. One or more subsequent paragraphs explain the way that the lay fits into the translators’ assigned category, from Magic and Mystery to The Lay as History; and when applicable, the translators draw comparisons with lays of Marie de France. A short section for “Further reading” is provided, though typically limited

to three to five articles. More “further reading” can be found in the bibliography.

The prose translations themselves are not significantly different from the facing verse translations previously published. This is not surprising given the translators’ dedication to accurately reproducing the meaning of the text while ensuring that the resulting translation is readable, in verse as in prose. Some examples of general variants between the two translations include minor verbiage changes, more natural pronoun-antecedent relations, displacement of “he said/she said,” and other syntactical changes that do not alter meaning. At times, verses may be reordered for flow. In both verse and prose translations, verb tenses have been homogenized to the past. Notably, *Conseil* and *Haveloc* are entirely new translations, as they use a different base manuscript. Occasional footnotes are scattered throughout to alert the reader to specialized vocabulary, tricky terms, cultural references, inconsistencies between manuscripts, problematic verses, and missing text. These are kept to a minimum but are helpful, when they do appear.

Although this translation is not a substitute for the various critical editions that precede it *Eleven Old French Narrative Lays* (Boydell & Brewer, 2007), *Twenty-Four Lays from the French Middle Ages* has its own place in any personal library, particularly when re-reading for enjoyment. Moreover it is a strong choice for use in the undergraduate classroom, as both a supplement and as both a supplement and a fascinating counterpoint to the better-known lays of Marie de France.

Tamara Bentley CAUDILL
Jacksonville University

*
* *

Samuel N. ROSENBERG, trans. *Robert the Devil*. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018. Pp. vii, 157. \$19.95. ISBN: 978-0-271-08016-1.

With an international reputation as one of the most accomplished translators and editors of Old French texts, Samuel N. Rosenberg gives us the first modern English translation of the anonymous 13th-century French romance, *Robert le diable* (*Robert the Devil*). The Old French tale contains 5078 lines of octosyllabic rhymed couplets. The author, most likely inspired by an oral tradition, recounts the legend of the eponymous hero, Robert, the son of a duke and duchess of Normandy. His childless mother calls on Satan to help her conceive and the result is a diabolical offspring who terrorizes the region. When Robert reaches adolescence, his mother confesses to him the history of his birth and he leaves Normandy for Rome to seek redemption under the guidance of the Pope and a hermit. His journey ends with his sainthood. The tale was not only popular in the Middle Ages, it also survived in various forms in the seven centuries after its composition. In the 19th century the story was adapted by Giacomo Meyerbeer through his opera, *Robert le Diable*, and gave its name to *Le Ballet de "Robert le diable"*, a painting by Edgar Degas.

Rosenberg begins his introduction with a brief summary of the narrative, then traces the history of the transmission of the legend from a Latin *exemplum* in the 1250s up to modern cinematic interpretations (1–4). He puts into English free verse the Old French version of the critical edition of Eilert Löseth (Paris: Société des Anciens Textes Français, 1903) and explains his presentation of the translation: “The section divisions usually repeat those of the edited text [by Löseth], with the major difference that all passages of dialogue in the translation are preceded and followed by spaces to make the story easier to follow” (5). The book includes notes for lines that require explanation (151–152), a useful bibliography for further study of the text (153–154), and an index (155–167).

Rosenberg's work is meticulous and his modern translation captures the rhythmic orality of the original Old French text in clear English as is demonstrated by his rendering of these two brief passages from Löseth's edition:

Or entendés, grant et menor:	Now hear this, young and old:
Jadis, al tans anchienor,	Once there was, in days gone by,
Avoit un duc en Normendie	A noble duke in Normandy
Dont bien est drois que je vous die.	Whose tale it's fit to tell you. (vv. 1–4)
« Diable, » fait el, « je te proi	“Satan,” she cried, “Help me I pray!
Que tu entenges ja vers moi:	Henceforth my wish is addressed only to you.
Se tu me dones un enfant,	Hear my plea and vouchsafe my desire!
Che te proi dès ore en avant. »	Grant me a child!” (vv. 45–48)

Rosenberg's work makes this important 13th-century text available for the first time to an Anglophone audience who cannot read Löseth's Old French edition or Alexandre Micha's modern French translation (Paris: GF-Flammarion, 1996). Scholars and students alike will benefit from his fluid and accurate translation.

Logan E. WHALEN
University of Oklahoma