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# Review of Schwam-Baird, Shira, ed. and trans. *Valentin et Orson: An Edition and Translation of the Fifteenth-Century Romance Epic*

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to erroneous conclusions" (568). Along the way and throughout this book the authors make abundantly clear that they believe that previous work on the siege of 1453 is poor because it is infected by old ideologies, hampered by an inability to read the necessary languages, beset by deficient reasoning, and harmed above all by insufficient visits to Istanbul.

Thomas F. Madden, Saint Louis University

Schwam-Baird, Shira, ed. and trans. *Valentin et Orson: An Edition and Translation of the Fifteenth-Century Romance Epic.* Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2011. Pp. 543.

The anonymous fifteenth-century French romance epic *Valentin et Orson* has captivated the reading public since 1489, despite its prolixity. This ever popular story concerns two twin brothers abandoned at birth in a forest. One is rescued and raised by King Pepin the Short and the other by a mother bear. The twins spend their lives seeking their true identity and earning knightly fame. Shira Schwam-Baird makes their saga available to contemporary readers in her scholarly edition of the Middle French prose work with a facing-page translation into modern English. This book comes after a decade of critical debate over *Valentin et Orson* by scholars such as Helen Cooper, Lorraine Kochanske Stock, Michelle Szkilnik, and Jacqueline de Weever; Schwam-Baird herself has added to the discussion major articles in *Fifteenth-Century Studies* (vol. 27), *Medievalia et Humanistica* (vol. 34), and *Olifant* (vol. 26.1). Her bilingual edition now represents a major contribution to fifteenth-century scholarship which will allow scholars, undergraduates, and general readers to access the entire work and its fascinating characters.

The attractive volume is composed of an Introduction; the Middle French *Table des Chapitres* with facing-page translation; the edited Middle French text and facing English translation; an appendix A, which lists prior editions of *Valentin et Orson*; an appendix B, which provides descriptions of the forty woodcuts from the 1489 Maillet edition; and a bibliography of primary and secondary sources. An index would have made the volume easier to use, given the multiplicity of characters and places involved. Similarly, the inclusion of some of the 40 woodcuts from the 1489 incunabulum would have enhanced the interest and appeal of the ACMRS volume for the reader, since the author discusses them at length in her introduction (xix–xxi) and appendix B (535–37), yet only the crowned and mounted figure from folio 1v of the Pierpont Morgan Library copy of the Maillet edition is included as the translation's cover image.

In her Introduction, Schwam-Baird briefly adduces the popularity of the fifteenth-century romance epic *Valentin et Orson*, considered

by scholarship to be a *mise en prose* of a lost verse narrative. She then states that the "full translation in this volume of the Middle French text into English precludes the need for a lengthy plot summary" (xii) and provides a brief allusive synopsis of the complex story. However, a detailed plot summary would have been appropriate in this case, given the prospective readership of the volume which includes non-specialists. Alternatively, the author could have added a third appendix with charts showing the relationships between the characters, Christian and pagan, to help the reader keep track of the large cast.

In a discussion of "Genre" (xii–xvii), Schwam-Baird explains the polymorphic nature of the Middle French work, containing, as it does, elements of epic, romance, fabliau, and saint's life. She summarizes past scholarly thought concerning the evolution of the *chanson de geste* and the chivalric romance, citing Georges Doutrepont in particular since he explains the fusing of elements from these works in the late Middle Ages in his 1939 study of *mises en prose*. Schwam-Baird also cites Danielle Quéruel's 1991 study of such works in the fifteenth century in which the French scholar states that ". . . l'écriture en prose du XVe siècle tend à abolir les distinctions formelles entre les genres littéraires . . ." (xvi). Schwam-Baird ends her discussion of genre by concluding, using *Valentin et Orson* as an example, that late-medieval audiences craved "prose adventures of all sorts" (xvii).

Schwam-Baird then discusses the 1489 incunabulum of *Valentin et Orson*, describing its importance as a visual and textual artifact and providing details of the three extant copies found in New York, London, and Paris (xvii–xix). She reviews prior editions and translations into English, highlighting Henry Watson's early sixteenth-century translation (xxi–xxiii). In "Editing and Translating Principles" (xxiii–xxv), Schwam-Baird explains how she expanded abbreviations and corrected errors in the Maillet text, indicating her actions in footnotes. She states her position on the translation of the Middle French narrative as follows: "Although I believe in translating as literally as possible, excessively awkward language has a negative impact on clarity, and clarity in English was the over-arching principle to be balanced with fidelity to the original text" (xxiv). Further, she explains that to relieve monotony, she has "sometimes introduced in the translation a variety of adverbs and conjunctions" (xxiv). However, there is no system to indicate these changes and other editorial gestures which I observed (including adding or eliminating words, changing active to passive voice and vice versa, etc.) to the Anglophone reader who cannot check the original Middle French. An organized and consistent system of italics, brackets, parentheses or footnotes to mark the many such alterations would have obviated this.

Next, in "Sources of the Story" (xxv–xxvi), Schwam-Baird calls attention to the research of Arthur Dickson concerning the romance epic's sources in his *Valentine and Orson: A Study in Late Medieval Romance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1975). However, readers are left to consult Dickson's work themselves (specifically pages 266–68) if they are curious to know the forty or so sources from which Dickson felt the anonymous author drew inspiration or reworked material. Finally, in an interesting essay of her own, "Orson, the Wild Man" (xxvi–xxxii), the editor/translator discusses Orson's metamorphosis from a raging beast to an embodiment of chivalry.

The edition/translation itself makes up the bulk of the 543-page volume. The English text is generally lucid and clear, containing a few mechanical errors (examples: "every" for "ever" [59]; "his" for "this" [127], redundant "my" [171]). There are occasional misconstructions of the Middle French original, however, which create erroneous statements in the English text (examples: "you" for "I" in the sentence "Now you see clearly . . ." [69], where the French is "Or voy je clerement . . ." [68]; "two thousand warriors" [485] for "one thousand" where the French is "mil combatans" [484]). More careful copy editing could have avoided these and other infelicities, including some unfortunate choices of English vocabulary. Overall, the translation reads well and accurately conveys the content and the tone of the original.

Schwam-Baird devotes the majority of the footnotes she includes to the edition of the Middle French *Valentin et Orson*, indicating in many cases the lesson of the original which she has emended. The notes which accompany the text of the English translation are very limited. They deal primarily with identifying Arthurian motifs or proverbs which the editor/translator validates by referencing the collections of Joseph Morawski and James Woodrow Hassell. She identifies twelve proverbs, but my close reading of both texts revealed ten or so others (examples: "on dit communement que trop tard est de fermer l'estable quant le cheval est perdu" [58], Hassell, C127; "Trop a temps vient qui mauvaises nouvelles aporte" [294], Hassell, N40). Some notes do explain geographical or historical details; for example, "The historical emperor Alexander reigned 912–913" (17). However, the editor/translator could have greatly increased the number of such notes to make the text more comprehensible to general readers, regarding both historical figures and medieval motifs/beliefs. The following are but a few examples of the many notes that could have been added to enhance the text: a note on the historical figures of King Pepin and his wife Queen Bertha; a note explaining the motif of "la princesse lointaine," to enrich the modern reader's appreciation of Valentin's love for Esclarmonde sight unseen

(201); a note explaining the medieval belief that making the sign of the Cross over a drink could reveal poison (347).

In summation, *Valentin et Orson* is a compelling work; this translation allows contemporary readers to better appreciate the evolution of the medieval epic. In addition, it illustrates fifteenth-century literary tastes, attitudes toward magic, and relationships between Christianity and Islam, and it invites readers to engage its relevancy because of themes such as the search for personal identity and spiritual salvation.

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Varvaro, Alberto. *La Tragédie de l'Histoire: La Derniere Œuvre de Jean Froissart.* Paris: Garnier, 2011. Pp. 202.

The present volume is a welcome addition to the study of Jean Froissart's late-medieval narratological masterpiece. In the last few decades, the traveling chronicler-poet of Valenciennes has somewhat regained his status as an important author and source, specifically of political and social history in the fourteenth century, in addition to his more traditional role as a source of medieval chivalric and military history. New editions of his poetry and the *Chroniques* have emerged, facilitating the re-evaluation of Froissart both as a chronicler and literary author. Book IV of the *Chroniques*, however, remains the least studied section of this great prose œuvre to date, and a book dedicated to this "tragedy of history," as Varvaro perceives it, has been long overdue.

Alberto Varvaro's study builds on research undertaken in his partial edition of the *Chroniques* Book IV (*Livre de Poche*, 2004) and his article "Aspects littéraires du Livre IV des *Chroniques* de Froissart: l'espace du non-dit" (Diffusion De Boccard, 2006), which provided a solid foundation for an argument centered on the literary qualities of the text, overlooked in earlier critical works concerned more with Froissart's historical inaccuracies. In the current volume, Varvaro makes a rigorous and deeply contextualized case for the complex narrative strategies and techniques used by the now mature writer in his last work, refuting Froissart's reputation as a "fascinating but superficial storyteller" (79). As a result, Varvaro's exploration of key episodes highlights the existence of uncharted depths in the Book IV text, such as "le non-dit," a silent or implied commentary which is woven into the very fabric of the narrative, hidden underneath the surface story that always appears "fluid and unproblematic" (80). This considerable section of the volume (57–101), dedicated to the narrative structures of the Book IV text, is preceded by two parts which are equally important for the study of the last book of the *Chroniques*. The first part functions as an introduction to Book IV,