

A Companion to Alain Chartier (c. 1385–1430): Father of French Eloquence.

Daisy Delogu, Joan E. McRae, and Emma Cayley, eds.

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Alain Chartier was first called “le pere de l’eloquence françoise” by Pierre Fabri in the *Grant et vray art de pleine rhetorique* (1521). This very fact demonstrates his long-lasting impact, which is one of the main theses of this fine collection of essays dedicated to the works and influence of the late medieval French poet. Chartier was born in Normandy in the 1380s, in the early years of the reign of King Charles VI the Mad. The Valois of France were engaged in a decades-long dynastic battle with the Plantagenets of England for control of the French throne; internally, France was torn asunder in civil war; and the Catholic Church had a deep rift through its middle, with the Great Schism. This volume successfully situates Chartier in this turbulent world, and emphasizes his dual nature: politician and poet, diplomat and author, writing in both prose and verse, in both Latin and the vernacular, a fierce royalist and nationalist dedicated to the cause of peace. However, while most scholarship tends to separate out these various strands of the Charterian identity, the critical approach here is to reconcile these seemingly competing characteristics into one single, holistic vision of the author.

Bringing together fourteen eminent scholars, with essays organized coherently into four parts, the collection opens with an introduction authored by its three editors, Daisy Delogu, Emma Cayley, and Joan E. McRae. Outlining his literary and philosophical underpinnings, with sources ranging from Aristotle and Boethius, through the Bible and church fathers, to the *Roman de la Rose*, Guillaume de Machaut, and Christine de Pizan, the introduction’s authors demonstrate that Chartier is an “inheritor of a set of poetic forms, literary themes, and language that are no longer entirely satisfying” and that he therefore successfully “ushers in new ways of thinking and writing about ethics, the individual and society, the relationships of men and women, and the role of the poet in society” (2). In turn, he then becomes a model for later generations of French and other European writers. The

approximately 200 extant manuscripts and several incunable editions of Chartier's works, and the contemporary translations into five languages (Middle English, Spanish, Italian, Catalan, and Middle Scots), are a testament to how widely his works circulated in his own time and succeeding centuries. Taken in aggregate, the essays here treat all of Chartier's works, those in French and in Latin, in prose and in verse, the well-known works and the neglected ones, from a variety of disciplinary and methodological approaches (historical, art historical, and literary). The volume also engages with the question of Chartier's intertextual relation to communities of writers and readers in his own time and in the centuries since. Another dominant thread is the treatment of what the authors consider Chartier's most enduring structural contribution: the open-ended dialogue, an innovation he utilizes in order to explore multiple voices and points of view, and to bridge the various competing strands of his authorial and intellectual identity.

Finally, the volume successfully develops the notion of the political Chartier, theorizing him as an *engagé* poet. What is most intriguing is that several of the contributors see Chartier's political engagement not only in those Latin prose works where it has traditionally been located, but even in his French-language courtly verse, often dismissed as frivolous. Several contributors, such as Jean-Claude Mühlethaler and Craig Taylor, demonstrate how Chartier successfully contributes to the development of a "burgeoning French national sentiment" (165), reorienting "chivalry away from individual achievement and toward service to king and the common good" (7).

This is an extraordinarily useful collection of essays that will be of interest to Chartier experts and newcomers alike. It engages with the major critics and trends in Charterian scholarship, opening it up in new directions and suggesting possibilities for yet further research, such as the poet's notions of masculinity; likewise, there is more work to be done on Chartier's fixed form poems and his Latin works. Each individual essay makes a unique contribution while also coinciding with the volume's overall aims; the collection's thorough citations will be valuable to any scholar, as will the selected bibliography of primary and secondary sources. These essays offer insightful and engaging perspectives on the literary and political contributions of Alain Chartier, raising up his voice as one simultaneously calling us to political action, and inviting us to participate in the community of readers and writers.

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