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Gina L. Greco and Christine M. Rose. *The Good Wife's Guide: Le Ménagier de Paris: A Medieval Household Book*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2009. xii + 366 pp. Introduction, glossary, bibliography, index. \$24.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-8014-7474-3.

Review by Roberta Krueger, Hamilton College.*

With the *Good Wife's Guide*, Gina L. Greco and Christine M. Rose provide a welcome English translation of the late fourteenth-century Middle French *Ménagier de Paris*, a book of moral and practical instruction ostensibly written by an elderly Parisian bourgeois householder for his new bride, a fifteen year-old orphan of aristocratic birth. Composed around 1394, extant in three fifteenth-century manuscripts, the book exemplifies the late medieval penchant for producing weighty codices that compile diverse didactic and fictional materials deemed useful for the household.[1] Among its tracts, the *Ménagier* includes a treatise on the seven deadly sins; the exemplum of Griselda and the moral tale of Prudence and Melibee; Jean (or Jacques) Bruyant's *Chemin de Pauvreté et de Richesse*, a long verse allegory describing the path to domestic prosperity; guides to gardening and hawking; advice on various domestic matters ranging from the hiring of servants, the purchase of a horse, to stain removal and ridding the bed of fleas; and a cookbook with hundreds of recipes. For its rich blend of pious, social, moral, and economic counsel, for its vivid descriptions of material life and its detailed culinary instructions, and for the frequent interventions of its seemingly experienced, opinionated narrator, the book has long been prized by literary critics and social and cultural historians.

The *Ménagier de Paris* was first edited in 1846 in an unsystematic fashion by Baron Jérôme Pichon, who had purchased what is now manuscript C (Paris Bibliothèque Nationale, nouvelles acquisitions françaises 6739) and consulted the manuscript from which C seems to have been copied, Paris Bibliothèque Nationale MS Fr. 12477, designated as A, as well as the Brussels manuscript (Brussels Bibliothèque Royale 10310-10311), B, whose source is common to that of A.[2] Noting the deficiencies of Pichon's edition, Georgine Brereton and Janet Ferrier prepared a meticulous scholarly edition based on MS A, with corrections for defective readings supplied chiefly from B.[3] Brereton and Ferrier edited only material unique to the *Ménagier*; they omitted the story of Griselda, the tale of Melibee, and Jean Bruyant's verse allegory, all of which follow their sources fairly closely. Even its incomplete state, their edition was a major enterprise: Brereton labored twenty years before illness prevented her from finishing. After her death in 1969, Ferrier seems to have devoted more than a decade to filling in the gaps and preparing the work for publication.

More recently, Karin Ueltschi offered a fine modern French translation of the Brereton/Ferrier edition in the Lettres Gothiques series that reproduces the original, includes translations of Griselda and Melibee (taken from the Pichon) and retains *Le Chemin de Pauvreté et de Richesse* in Middle French verse, placed in an appendix.[4] A partial English translation by Eileen Power, *The Goodman of Paris*, has an archaic style (i.e., "quoth she") and is out of print.[5] Greco and Rose's translation is the only English translation of the entire work, and it provides the only modern-language translation of the *Chemin*, which, as the authors note, deserves further critical scrutiny as an integral part of the *Ménagier* than it has previously received.

In the *Good Wife's Guide*, Greco and Rose convey in clear, fluid prose the distinct registers of a diverse work that ranges from pious exhortations and Biblical exempla to fabliau-like tales, veterinary remedies, and flavorful recipes and whose narrative voice alternately expresses religious reverence, patriarchal authority, masculine anxiety, husbandly solicitude, and a sometimes obsessive attention to domestic details. Selective spot-checking suggests that this translation is highly reliable. My only significant quibble is not with the text itself, but with the authors' misleading explanation in their introduction of the Middle French title, *Le Ménagier de Paris*. They claim that this "means [sic] *The Parisian Household Book*" (p. 2). Yet they accurately translate the term "nouvel mesnagier" in the *Chemin de Pauvreté et de Richesse* as «newly made head of household» (p. 185). In both cases, "ménagier" refers to a person, not to a book.[6] "The Parisian Householder" would be a more accurate literal translation of *Le Ménagier de Paris*. Eileen Power's somewhat antiquated "*Goodman of Paris*" is not far from the mark. Fortunately, the title chosen for the authors' own translation, *The Good Wife's Guide...A Medieval Household Book*, neatly describes both the function of the book and its intended audience.

The authors have wisely eschewed archaic language and aimed for clarity and simplicity in modern English. I found myself wishing that they had retained the term "Distinction" to describe the book's major divisions and that they had kept French nomenclature Griseldis and Gautier for Griselda and Walter, as they do for most of the *Ménagier's* named figures, so that these characters might be more easily distinguished from those in the *Clerk's Tale* and in Boccaccio. But these are minor matters of taste. Greco and Rose deserve our thanks for making this important late medieval tract available in its entirety to students who do not read modern French. (Those who read French should use Ueltschi's translation for all but the *Chemin*, since her version is closer in style and lexicon to the original Middle French, reproduced on the facing page.) Thanks are due also to Cornell University Press for making the book available in a handsome, reasonably-priced paperback edition so that it may find its rightful place as assigned or recommended reading in courses on Medieval History, Medieval European Literature, and Women's Studies.

The Greco/ Rose translation is accompanied by a lengthy introduction, a glossary of culinary terms, and a bibliography of editions, dictionaries, and critical works consulted. The Introduction provides a thoughtful discussion of the narrator's literary enterprise and domestic agenda, offers an overview of conduct books and literary sources, and concludes with a lengthy comparative analysis of the *Ménagier's* Griselda exemplum and Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*. The extent of this last section, which comprises one third of the entire introduction, suggests that the authors address their translation primarily to students of medieval English literature.

Although these pages contain much that is helpful and stimulating, students unfamiliar with continental literature might have been better served by a more streamlined presentation that would have placed the *Ménagier* more precisely in its French context. Medieval conduct books might have been more coherently presented in chronological order in "Contexts: Conduct Books and Household Books" (pp. 18-28), with description of their specific milieu, generic register, and audience, and with complete bibliographical references for all editions cited.[7] One understands the desire not to overburden the bibliography of a translation for English-speaking students with French criticism in French or English. But since some quite specialized studies are included (among them an inaccessible conference paper given by Greco on the *Jehan de Saintré*, a didactic work composed more than half a century after the *Ménagier*), it is surprising to find no mention of classic works such as those by Alice Hentsch (on medieval didactic literature for women),[8] Elie Golenistcheff-Koutouzoff (on the Griselda story in late medieval France),[9] and Diane Bornstein (on medieval courtesy books).[10]

Students will no doubt be unaware of the introduction's lacunae and occasional misrepresentations of French material. But some professors may be disconcerted to find Christine de Pizan described as "bluestocking" (p. 23), an often pejorative term unfortunately associated with Gustave Lanson's infamous dismissal of her as a mediocre "bas bleu."^[11] If Christine may have known *Le Ménagier*, her career did not exactly "coincide," as the authors claim, with its composition (p. 23, n. 35); Christine's most important didactic works were written at least a decade later than the household book, and her career extended until 1430.

Rose and Greco offer a strong interpretation of this work, underlined by occasional broad sweeps that deserve closer scrutiny: e.g., "Men in the book are angry or potentially angry all the time" (p. 41). Their comparative analysis of the *Clerk's Tale* and the *Ménagier*, which contributes to the extensive critical discussion that accompanies Chaucer's retelling, seems better suited for a scholarly article than for a general introduction. Instructors might have preferred a sparser approach that would encourage students to attend to the subtleties of both texts and draw their own conclusions.

Since Greco and Rose delve into considerable detail about the Griselda story, one wishes that this fecund tradition were presented with greater clarity and scope. A fuller, more precise account of the story's evolution from Boccaccio's vernacular Italian tale to Petrarch's Latin translation, to the various French versions, including that of Philippe de Mezières (source for the *Ménagier*) and the anonymous *Griseldis* to Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* (which draws on Petrarch and the anonymous French version)—with references to appropriate editions and translations—would have been helpful for students new to this material. The authors' discussion (pp. 28–29) and footnote (p. 29, n. 43) are confusing and potentially misleading, since they imply that *Le Ménagier de Paris* is considered to be one of Chaucer's sources. Without providing a specific page reference, Greco and Rose state that J. Burke Severs "...notes that several details in the *Clerk's Tale* are likely from the *Ménagier* and not another French source, and he posits that Chaucer indeed knew the text" (p. 29, n. 43). Yet if one consults Severs's *The Literary Relationships of Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale,"* one finds an entire chapter devoted to a meticulous comparative analysis of the anonymous *Griseldis*, the *Ménagier's* Griselda, and the *Clerk's Tale*. Severs concludes that, in the light of "overwhelming evidence... not *Le Ménagier*, but the anonymous translation, constituted Chaucer's additional source for the *Clerkes Tale*."^[12] Textual evidence aside, it seems unlikely that a text written around 1394 would have been a source for *The Clerk's Tale*; Chaucer's putative French travels occurred more than a decade earlier, and there is no evidence that *The Ménagier*, whose extant manuscripts are all Burgundian, circulated in England.

Although such matters are important to scholars, they need not be rehearsed for students, and in any case they don't alter the importance of the *Ménagier* and its counterparts in the late medieval literary landscape. Even if Chaucer did not know the *Ménagier de Paris*, he may well have known a similar didactic compilation for women. As Golenistscheff-Koutousoff demonstrates, the Griselda story circulated in seventeen manuscripts from the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, among them six that also contained *Le Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry*, composed in 1372 (Golenistscheff-Koutousoff, pp. 33–42). That most of these manuscripts post-date the *Ménagier* does not preclude the existence of an earlier copy that Chaucer may have known. Whether or not the *Ménagier* author "reinvents the conduct book as a gloss on the figure of Griselda," as the authors claim in their concluding remarks (p. 43), his inclusion of Griselda as a model of patience and obedience within the household was common practice for other late medieval moralists. Indeed, the narrator tells his wife that he seeks to tell her the story so that she will know what others know: "Since others are familiar with it, I very much wish that you also may be familiar with it and be able to converse about such things as

everybody else does" (p. 119). Viewed in this light, the author's inclusion of her story seems less a reinvention of the conduct book than an act of conspicuous cultural imitation.

A word must be said about Greco and Rose's representation of previous scholarship on this weighty tome. Even as they acknowledge their reliance on Brereton and Ferrier's edition and notes, the translators seem unnecessarily dismissive of their predecessors' efforts. They assert that the Brereton/ Ferrier edition "presents an incomplete version of the work" and "feels disordered and misrepresented [sic]" (p. 4) because it does not include Griselda, Melibee, and the *Chemin de Pauvreté et de richesse*. The Oxford edition would have been undeniably enhanced (and more expensive to produce) had it included the entire compilation. But Greco and Rose overstate the case when they claim that Brereton and Ferrier did not feel that these texts were "an essential part" of the work (p. 4). In fact, the editors devote an appendix to a meticulous comparison of Philippe de Mezières's and the *Ménagier's* versions of Griselda (Brereton and Ferrier, *Menagier*, pp. 332-5). Their critical articles, cited in the bibliography, analyze the book's didactic sources as integral to the householder's moral project. Since Brereton and Ferrier present the text in the order that it appears in the base manuscript (with folios numbers indicated in parentheses), it is hard to understand the translators' claim that their work feels "disordered." I have found the edition, on the contrary, very well organized for ease of reference to manuscript A.

Furthermore, Greco and Rose fail to credit their predecessors' significant contributions in establishing the critical framework of *Le Ménagier de Paris*. Claiming that the *Ménagier* has "in the past primarily been admired for its antique horticultural and culinary matter" (p. 2), Greco and Rose imply that they are among the first to read it as "a moral treatise" (p. 2). It may be true that Pichon (in 1846) and Powell (in 1928) were especially intrigued by the compilation's domestic details, which are absent from other notable medieval works on female conduct, such as the *Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry* or Christine de Pizan's *Livre des trois vertus*. But to suggest that neither Brereton and Ferrier nor Ueltschi appreciated the *Ménagier* as a book exhorting proper moral values and social behavior does a grave disservice to their scholarship. Brereton's and Ferrier's extensive scholarly excavations turned up not only detailed information about gardening, hawking and cooking in medieval France, but also a wealth of didactic literary sources, cited in abundant, meticulous footnotes and discussed at length in their Introduction ("The Author and His Wife;" "The Author's Ideal of Marriage;" "Biblical and Literary Sources for the First Distinction" pp. xxi-xxxix). Indeed, Brereton and Ferrier argue strongly that the material of the First Distinction (the moral treatise) is just as important as that of the Second Distinction. They urge readers "...to consider the book as a whole, since for the author the moral and spiritual teaching and the practical instruction are inseparable and equally important guides to success in matrimony" (p. xxx). Contemporary critics may disagree with Brereton and Ferrier's depiction of the "salutary" view of marriage offered by the *Ménagier* (p. xxx) and may object to their portrayal of the husband as a contented, kindly spouse. But readers of any version of *Le Ménagier de Paris* owe a huge debt to Brereton and Ferrier for establishing the literary and cultural milieu in which the putative "good wife" would have received her moral instruction. Their edition remains the cornerstone for scholarship on this work.

Greco and Rose mention that they have consulted Ueltschi's translation, but they appear to have taken scant notice of her fine introduction. Author of a comparative study of medieval French didactic literature, Ueltschi is well positioned to present *Le Ménagier* in a sophisticated critical framework.[13] She is among the first critics to venture the hypothesis that the husband/wife relationship in the frame is a mere literary device, "une simple simulation au service d'un projet littéraire" (Ueltschi, p. 9), an insight apparently overlooked by Greco and Rose who claim that "virtually everyone writing on *Le Ménagier de Paris* has accepted its author as who he claims to be" (Greco and Rose, p. 10). Ueltschi's introduction suggests that the

work's tensions and complexities may arise from the contradictions of a fictional narrator whose attitude towards his spouse ranges from indulgence to intransigence and who displays both humanism and bourgeois conformity (Ueltschi, p. 10). It is unfortunate that Greco and Rose do not convey some sense of her perceptive, nuanced arguments to their anglophone audience. In any case, since Ueltschi's translation was published fifteen years ago, it must be conceded that the *Ménagier de Paris* has been widely received among French scholars as an intriguing and rhetorically complex moral treatise for some time.

The critical apparatus contains a fair number of errors and inconsistencies. For example, the authors refer correctly at one point to the pseudo-Aristotelian *Economics* (p. 40, n. 6) and at another point, incorrectly, to "Aristotle's *Economics*," (p. 20, n. 27). For this important work, students should be referred to the Menut edition of Oresme's French translation of the *Livre yconomique*, which has a fine English translation.[14] The bibliography contains several incomplete or inaccurate entries, the most baffling of which is the attribution of Jane Chance instead of E. Jane Burns as editor of *Medieval Fabrications* (an error repeated on p. 29). Some oddities seem to be the product of a computer-generated bibliography program (e.g., *Epopée des courges: cultures et consommations en Europe, La*). It is unfortunate that more editorial attention was not paid to the critical frame so that it could have been as clear and accurate as the translation appears to be.

Despite these shortcomings, this book is a valuable resource for teachers of medieval literature and history. *The Good Wife's Guide* presents in English one of the most intriguing representations of medieval domestic life and provides a lively example of the complex mix of profane and religious, practical and moral materials that constitute the late medieval household book. Although they should consult the introduction and notes with caution, students will find a highly readable treatise that overflows with interesting topics for further research, a text that can fruitfully be compared to any number of medieval literary works, or that can be productively studied in courses on medieval European culture and history. Scholars unversed in modern French will find a helpful accompaniment to the Brereton/Ferrier edition, which remains unsurpassed as the foundation for scholarly research and critical analysis.

*This review was originally submitted in December 2009.

NOTES

[1] Greco and Rose report the existence of a fourth early sixteenth-century manuscript, Luxembourg MS I:95 (ancient numéro 19), which they were unable to examine directly; *The Good Wife's Guide*, p. 2.

[2] *Le Ménagier de Paris: traité de morale et d'économie domestique composé vers 1393 par un bourgeois parisien*, ed. Jérôme Pichon, 2 vols. (Paris : Crapelet et Lahure, 1846).

[3] *Le Menagier de Paris*, eds. Georgine E. Brereton and Janet M. Ferrier (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

[4] *Le Mesnagier de Paris*, eds. Georgina (sic) E. Brereton and Janet M. Ferrier, transl. Karin Ueltschi, *Lettres gothiques* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994).

[5] *The Goodman of Paris (Le Ménagier de Paris): A Treatise on Moral and Domestic Economy by A Citizen of Paris* (c. 1393), ed. and trans. Eileen Power (London: Routledge, 1928).

[6] The first definition of “mesnagier,” according to Godefroy, is a “habitant,” resident, inhabitant; in six fourteenth- and fifteenth- century examples, this is clearly the meaning; the second definition is “ouvrier,” worker; and the third is “‘économome, administrateur,” economist or administrator. Frédéric Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française et de tous ses dialectes du IXe au XVe siècle*, vol. 5 (Paris : Vieweg, 1888), pp. 293-4.

[7] In one instance of such lack of precision, the authors begin their list of conduct books with Christine de Pizan's *Treasury of the City of Ladies*, which dates from 1405, and end with Philippe de Mezières's *Livre de la vertu du sacrement de mariage*, which was written more than twenty years earlier. They cite the English title of *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, providing in the bibliography only Caxton's edition, which was translated and printed in 1484. The version closer to the *Ménagier* is the original French text composed in 1372 by Geoffroy de la Tour-Landry, *Le Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry pour l'enseignement de ses filles*, ed. Anatole de Montaiglon (Paris : P. Jannet, 1854 ; reprt. Millwood, NY : Kraus, 1982).

[8] Alice Hentsch, *De la littérature didactique du moyen âge s'adressant spécialement aux femmes* (Cahors : Couselant, 1903 ; reprint Geneva : Slatkine, 1975).

[9] Elie Golenistcheff-Koutouzoff, *L'Histoire de Griseldis en France au XIVe et au XVe siècle* (Paris : Droz, 1933).

[10] Diane Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower: Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1983).

[11] Charity Cannon Willard first drew English readers' attention to what she calls Lanson's “ill tempered observation” that categorized Christine as (in Willard's translation of his words) “the first in that line of insufferable bluestockings whose indefatigable facility was equaled only by her universal mediocrity;” Charity Cannon Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* (New York: Persea Books, 1984), p. 222. I am sure that the translators did not intend to disparage Christine. However, for Christine scholars the term “bluestocking” has a strongly pejorative ring.

[12] J. Burke Severs, *The Literary Relationships of Chaucer's Clerkes Tale* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1972), p. 176. In a more recent review of Chaucer's sources, Amy Goodwin states that “Severs suggests that Chaucer *may* [emphasis mine] have been familiar with the adaptation of Philippe's translation by the compiler of the *Ménagier de Paris*, for there are a few details contained in the *Clerk's Tale* some which originate in Philippe's translation and others which are thought to be unique to *Le Ménagier de Paris*;” see Amy Goodwin, “The Griselda Story in France” in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), p. 133. However, close examination of the corresponding discussion in Severs leads once again to his insistence that such small details are not enough to counter the overwhelming evidence that Chaucer used the anonymous translation: “I do not feel that they can justify any belief that Chaucer had before him a text of *Le Ménagier* as he was writing the *Clerk's Tale*.” See Severs, *Literary relationships*, 174. The most Severs will concede is that “it is conceivable that [Chaucer's] imagination may have been affected by a previous reading or hearing of [*Le Ménagier*]” (p. 176, n. 8). In any case, there is no need to draw students into such scholarly debates. One can simply assert that the *Ménagier* is an outstanding example of the sort of didactic compilation in which Griselda's story circulated.

[13] Karin Ueltschi, *La didactique de la chair: approches et enjeux d'un discours en français au Moyen Age* (Geneva: Droz, 1993).

[14] *Maistre Nicole Oresme: Le Livre de yconomique d'Aristote*. Edited and translated by Albert D. Menut. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, n.s. 47/5. Philadelphia, Penn.: The Society, 1957.

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