

After careful examination of this dynamic, the author turns his attention to analyses of the poems themselves from a number of perspectives. His observations are cogent, insightful, and persuasive. One of his most interesting revelations is how diverse were the structures and tonalities that could be assumed by the poetry of ideas. It could present itself in modes ranging from the philosophical to the lyrical, from the elegiac to the satirical, from the lighthearted to the heroic, and in formats extending from expansive scientific tracts to the evanescent bagatelles of fugitive verse. In assessing the value as these poems as works of art, though wholly cognizant of their deficiencies, the author does not fail to underscore their merits. Making the case for their rehabilitation, Chométy shows that this poetry may be appreciated on both a didactic and an aesthetic level. It remains to be seen whether his work will occasion a reassessment of these poems on the part of either scholars or the public at large. At the very least, the author demonstrates that reconsideration is in order.

In addition to the acuity of his arguments and assessments, the author impresses by the breadth and scope of his knowledge and research. His footnotes provide a wealth of valuable information and references, complemented by an extensive bibliography. Particularly helpful is a glossary with biographical information on the lesser-known poets of his focus. Chométy's writing is both exacting and commanding, and the reader is advised to have a thorough knowledge of rhetorical terminology. As a scholar of ideas, Chométy provides a study of ideas that is at once rich and richly rewarding.

La Rochefoucauld. *Maxims. A New English Translation*. Translated by Edward M. Stack. New York: Vantage Press, 2005. iv + 129 pp. \$8.95. Review by D.J. CULPIN, UNIVERSITY OF ST. ANDREWS

In this edition, La Rochefoucauld's text is prefaced by a short Forward which gives the date of original publication, and situates the *Maxims* within the salon culture of seventeenth-century Paris; brief mention is also made of stylistic aspects of the maxim as a literary form, and of their ability to provoke controversial reactions, both among their original readers and now. In addition, a short Biographical Note about La Rochefoucauld is appended to the text, but, with these two exceptions, the translator offers us a completely

plain text, uncluttered with notes or critical apparatus. This is no bad thing, since the text is therefore left to speak for itself. But, in consequence, two questions arise: which text is being offered? and, how well is it translated?

The first of these questions is not, at first glance, easy to answer. The Forward and the Biographical Note both state, without qualification, that the text was published in 1665. However, as is well known, La Rochefoucauld's text was progressively modified and enlarged between the first edition (1665) and the fifth edition, now regarded as definitive (1678), which was published two years before La Rochefoucauld's death. Edward Stack's translation contains four parts: Maxims (numbered 1-504), Posthumous Maxims (505-562), Suppressed Maxims (563-641), and Additional Maxims (642-650). That is to say, Stack's text reproduces the 504 maxims of the 1678 edition, supplemented by additional items now traditionally printed as an appendix to La Rochefoucauld's text. Even so, Stack's numbering of that additional material is not transparent: he does not follow the numbering of either Jacques Truchet or Jean Lafond, who have produced the most authoritative recent editions of the *Maximes* (Paris: Garnier, 1967; and Paris: Gallimard, 1976). Instead he reverts substantially to Gilbert's edition, published in the series *Grands Ecrivains de la France* between 1868 and 1883. However, the nine maxims (642-650) which Stack includes under the heading Additional Maxims are not found in the *Grands Ecrivains* series: they come from different sources and are included by Truchet as numbers 19, 32, 33 and 34 of his Posthumous Maxims. Of these, Stack splits number 33 into three separate parts (maxims 664-666) and number 34 into four parts (667-50). There is, therefore, a degree of invisible editorial intervention in the text of which the reader will be unaware.

The accuracy of the translation is also open to question in a number of respects. The first of these concerns the themes with which La Rochefoucauld is dealing. According to the Forward, "La Rochefoucauld's analysis of human actions makes the premise that all actions are the result of a single motivation. In this case, the motivating factor is self-interest, or egocentrism. Life is a complex of business-like ruses, all based on self-preservation, self-pity, self-esteem, personal pleasure and all other forms of selfishness." This is true, but, for La Rochefoucauld, terminology is important, and the dominant motivation which he identifies is *amour-propre*, self-love. This term is used 16 times in the 504 maxims of the fifth edition, and a further 8 times in the Posthumous and Suppressed maxims. Stack, however, does not use it once

in the major part of his text, the only part published by La Rochefoucauld. Instead he replaces it 14 times by “self-esteem,” once by “self-interest” and on one occasion suppresses the term completely. This cannot be because the term “self-love” is judged inappropriate, since it does appear among the supplementary material in maxims 510, 531, 563, and 582. In these later sections *amour-propre* is also replaced three times by “vanity” and on one further occasion by “self-esteem.” However, the consequence of these substitutions is that La Rochefoucauld’s text loses the cynicism or ferocity that it has in French: in English, self-esteem generally carries a far less pejorative connotation than self-love. Similar remarks could be made about La Rochefoucauld’s use of the term *passions*, often rendered (as in Maxim 12) as “emotions,” or the term *humeur*, rendered as “mood” (Maxim 45). This last point undermines somewhat the assertion made in the Forward that the maxims “transcend temporal boundaries”: the seventeenth-century view of ‘humour’ and ‘humours’ does not.

Accuracy, however, is also relevant to the issue of style, and the specificity of the *Maxims* lies, as Stack recognizes, in the brevity and precision of their formulation. La Rochefoucauld’s brevity is a challenge to any translator, but it is singularly not captured on a number of occasions in this version: for example maxim 423 (“Peu de gens savent être vieux”) is rendered as “Few people know how to act old when they reach the right age for it,” in which the last eight words are redundant. Similarly, the emphasis which La Rochefoucauld gives to his maxims is clear from his choice of vocabulary and the placing of his words, whereas this edition makes use of other devices such as italics (maxim 56), the use of bold type (maxim 49), or the inexplicable use of centring for one maxim (84) followed by left-justification for the next (85). On some occasions a generalized human characteristic is printed in upper-case characters (such as “SINCERITY” in maxim 62), while on other occasions it is not (for example “Gracefulness” in maxim 67). The reader notices these differences but is given no clue to their significance, and will be completely unaware that they do not correspond to anything similar in the French version of the text.

Finally, accuracy has to do with the straightforward rendering of the French which in this translation has, on a number of occasions, been misunderstood. In maxim 73 (“On peut trouver des femmes qui n’ont jamais eu de galanterie; mais il est rare d’en trouver qui n’aient jamais eu qu’une”) the

term *galanterie* is rendered as “compliment” when it surely means what the first edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* (1694) calls a “commerce amoureux” (“an affair”). Similarly, in maxim 401 (“L'élévation est au mérite ce que la parure est aux belles personnes”) *élévation* is translated as ‘promotion’, a term which is not only anachronistic when applied to seventeenth-century society, but which also fails to capture the sense of *dignité* (“dignity”) to which the Academy Dictionary so clearly points. On other occasions too, the sense of the original has not been grasped, or has not been conveyed in English. For example, maxim 404 reads in French as follows: “Il semble que la nature ait caché dans le fond de notre esprit des talents et une habileté que nous ne connaissons pas; les passions seules ont le droit de les mettre au jour, et de nous donner quelquefois des vues plus certaines et plus achevées que l'art ne saurait faire.” In the phrase “les passions seules ont le droit de les mettre au jour,” *les* refers to *talents* (“talents”) and *habileté* (“skill,” “craft” or “cunning”) – so, passion will reveal our talents and our cunning; but the translation mistakenly reads “only passions have the right to show themselves.”

La Rochefoucauld will inevitably pose enormous difficulties for any translator, and one is grateful to those who seek to keep his work alive in the English-speaking world. But other translations, such as Leonard Tancock's largely unannotated text, first published by Penguin Books in 1959, will better serve the needs of readers seeking to grasp the meaning or flavor of the original French *Maxims*.