Trading Tongues
Jonathan Hsy

Published by The Ohio State University Press

Hsy, Jonathan.
Trading Tongues: Merchants, Multilingualism, and Medieval Literature.
The Ohio State University Press, 2013.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/27530.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/27530

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=1017482
Charles d’Orléans: Exilic Imagination

The chapters in Trading Tongues have examined translingual writing across many contexts, including Chaucer’s portrayals of polyglot urban life (chapter 1), poetic explorations of maritime trade (chapter 2), first-person reflections on language use by Gower and Caxton (chapter 3), Kempe’s intricate narratives of travel (chapter 4), and heterogeneous collections of texts compiled by late medieval merchants (chapter 5). My discussion of Charles d’Orléans in chapter 2 traced some of the movements—literary, linguistic, and geospatial—of a remarkable aristocratic poet who resided in London for years as a prisoner of war. As seen in that discussion, Charles’s acts of self-translation—including the composition of two versions of a Channel-crossing poem, one in French and one in English—suggest the fluid deterritorialization of language that often underlies translingual writing. The French rendition recounts motion toward England, and the English version sails toward France, but neither places the speaker (or reader) on solid ground.

Since Charles left his collection of English works behind in England when he finally crossed over to the Continent (and possibly abandoned all efforts to compose new material in English altogether upon his return to France), the poet appears to have retroactively deemed English a lit-
erary language of little consequence. Nonetheless, the poet’s decision to produce such a massive poetic sequence in English during his time abroad complicates our understanding of the relative status of the two vernaculars for this poet. Rather than reinforcing conventional notions of linguistic difference, Charles explores the possibility for an inverse relationship between the cultural prestige of any given language and the power (cultural or political) that such a language affords. That is, his work reveals that a high-ranking aristocrat trained in the arts of courtly composition in French *formes fixes* could—under conditions of exile—find himself subject to the will of foreign guardians and keepers, and end up writing in a comparatively low-prestige literary language.

Ardis Butterfield, for one, has invoked Dipesh Chakrabarty and Gaytari Spivak in identifying medieval English as “subaltern” and “culturally subordinate to French” a generation or so before Charles, and we just might see in the poet’s English writings some affinities between the medieval poet and postcolonial writers who may or may not be able to speak from vantage points outside of hegemonic discourses.¹ In composing a rich cross-linguistic oeuvre that incorporates his native and an acquired tongue, Charles navigates a low-prestige language of English while simultaneously (in his status as a courtly lyric poet) claiming membership within an aristocratic Francophone hegemony. Charles might be said to inhabit, as Susan Crane provocatively posits, “an early, elite version of post-colonial hybridity.”² Insofar as his two tongues reach across a body of water, Charles might embody not so much a hybridization (combination or mixture) of two cultures but rather a strange form of self-dispersal.

One of Charles’s most self-referential poems directly confronts the troubled status of his own speech, inviting his audience to contemplate his peculiar existence between and across tongues. Ballade 72 and its French counterpart both provide a catalogue of *formes fixes* that structure many of the poet’s previous compositions: “Balades, chançons, et complaintes/Sont pour moy mises en oublye” [Ballades, songs, and complaints: I have neglected them all] (1–2); or, in Middle English, “Baladis, songis, and

---

¹. Ardis Butterfield, “Chaucerian Vernaculars,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 31 (2009): 25–51, esp. 49. Butterfield writes of Chaucer (and not Charles) here, but her characterization of a poet struggling to write in Middle English is apt: “[at] times he seems to stutter, to find the experience of writing a subaltern language overwhelming” (49–50).

complayntis—/God wot they are forgote in my party” (3071–72). In this poem, the speaker describes his words as profoundly unordered and disjointed, and in the English rendition of this poem his tongue (i.e., organ of speech) evades the speaker’s command: “All plesaunt wordis in me disyoentis” (3082), “I wold hit mende but what my tonge ne may” (3091); and “[m]y tunge hem wrestith fer out of aray” [my tongue wrests them (i.e., words) entirely out of order] (3103). Such English lyric moments certainly resonate with arguments that Charles “exemplif[ies] a kind of ’subaltern disjointedness’” in his own acts of self-translation. We might extend this insight to note that the speaker’s awkward or even recalcitrant tongue only manages to produce, in English, “wordis . . . disyoentis,” and Charles’s poetry as a whole embodies an uneasy subversion of sociolinguistic power dynamics. His circumstances have rendered him a high-status French speaker who is uneasily confounded by the oppressive force of a low-prestige English vernacular: a language that he perpetually struggles, through writing and (presumably) speaking, to master.

This English poem, in foregrounding the subjective experience of stifled speech and the struggle to establish an intelligible ordering of words, evokes some of the challenges of second-language expression. Not only does it portray a disobedient tongue unable (or unwilling) to wrest words into order, but it also explores an affective response to the incapacity to speak in a profoundly altered social environment. Both versions of this poem decouple the physical capacity to speak from the subjective experience of speaking itself. The phrase in the French balade, “mon langage” [my speech or language] (10) is rendered in the corresponding English poem as “my tonge” (3080), and the French “cueur” [heart] (38) has its counterpart in the English phrase “my tonge” as well (3108). Thus two French words, langage and cueur, are collapsed into a shared English word “tonge”—eliding the notions of the tongue as language (culturally marked system of speech)


4. On the resonance of Chaucerian “dis lyon” and desjoindre in a Continental French and postcolonial context, see Butterfield, “Chaucerian Vernaculars,” 47.

and tongue as organ (bodily instrument of speech). Notably, the English version of this poem—when read aloud—forces the speaker’s tongue to trill the “r” so distinctive to Middle English; that is, the poet’s “tonge [is] rol-lid” in the last two lines, emphasizing the tongue’s very status as a physical organ.⁶ If this ballade pair is read along the lines of Charles’s movement from French into English, we witness the collapse of distinctions between language and tongue, but if we imagine the poet moving from English to French we discern instead a complex splintering of these connotations.

I provisionally speak as if the French came “first” and the English “second,” but I am not invested in establishing a definitive sequence of composition here. Crane reminds us of the “bidirectionality” of Charles’s work as a whole, demonstrating that the poet could have composed some works in English and then created French counterparts.⁷ Like the bivernacular English poet John Gower, who examines the capacity to carry “deux langues . . . dans un testier” [two tongues in one head], Charles explores the complexity of simultaneous processing of tongues.⁸ Both the poetry of Gower and Charles exhibit the creative potential of a translingual, tongue-tied craft. Whether in English or in French, even superficially monolingual texts demand we read bilingually, sustaining a linguistic (if not cultural) double consciousness.

Written after Charles had returned to France, Rondel 179 expresses the poet’s profound sense of alienation from his own tongue—even when it speaks in French:

Le trucheman de mon pensee  
Qui parle maint divers langaige,  
M’a rapporté chose sauvaige  
Que je n’ay point acoustumee.  
En françoys la m’a translatee . . .

[The interpreter of my thought, who speaks multiple languages, brought back to me some wild thing to which I was not at all unaccustomed. He translated it into French for me . . .]⁹

⁶. A fifteenth-century Middle English treatise on phonetics states that “if þe tunge be more bowed, and in maner with a tremelyng folowyng afterward, than is ’r’ gendred.” David Burnley, The History of the English Language: A Source Book, 2nd Edition (Harlow, UK: Longman, 2000), 181–84, at 182. I have slightly altered Burnley’s punctuation.


⁸. See discussion of Gower in chapter 3.

⁹. Arn and Fox, 560 (Champion R211, MS p. 399). My English translation of this particular poem deliberately diverges from Arn and Fox.
The “trucheman” [interpreter or translator] of the poet’s thoughts—possibly the speaker’s own tongue, i.e., his organ of speech—cannot articulate a particular word, and instead of providing the correct expression it brings back to the speaker a certain “chose sauvaige” [wild or untamed thing]—perhaps a vulgar expression unsuitable for courtly speech, or even (in the context of Charles’s prior travels) an unexpected English word instead of a proper French one. The poet’s estrangement from his own tongue is made most clear in his heart’s response to this “chose sauvaige” [wild thing]: “Venez vous d’estrange contree,/Le trucheman de ma pensee?” [Do you come from a foreign land, O interpreter of my thought?] (11–12). Even after Charles has crossed back into France, the poet struggles to tame the ghost of a now geographically and temporally distant English linguistic existence. When Charles elsewhere rebukes the English and “leur mauvais langaige” [their ugly tongue], the repatriated French poet eschews his prior attempts to “go native” overseas.10

The language- and Channel-crossing Charles exhibits a powerful exilic imagination. His poetry vividly evokes movements across space while expressing ongoing displacement from (and longing for) an imagined home that is always geographically or temporally “elsewhere.”11 In envisioning a poetic speaker perpetually in transit—and even in a form of self-dispersal—Charles does more than traverse tongues: he comes close to unmooring notions of native land and native tongue entirely.

**Wild Tongues, Across Time**

What are the consequences of bringing the translingual poetics of a medieval writer like Charles d’Orléans into conversation with postcolonial contexts? *Trading Tongues* has discussed the local contexts of particular medieval writers, but these readings have also suggested broader vistas, charting possible new trajectories for comparative literary study. The translingual oeuvre of Charles, most conspicuously, invites us to think beyond

---

10. Arn and Fox, B76, “Comment voy je ses Anglois esbaÿs!” [How I see the English confounded!] (Champion B101, MS p. 124), line 28.

functional and pragmatic analyses of code-switching to more imaginative understandings, and his poetry allows us to more deeply explore how writers express the subjective experience of linguistic disorientation.

As we have seen, Charles powerfully illustrates the awkward, internally fraught process of training a tongue to speak, or not to speak, as social circumstances shift. For modern translingual writers, the unruly tongue can attract intense focus and anxiety, becoming a highly charged locus for theorizing identities across changing environments. In pursuing some of the connections between medieval and modern writers, I am most interested in exploring translinguistic expressions of identity outside the purview of any particular social dynamic. In this discussion, I examine how cross-temporal comparative literary analysis can help us think more carefully about how we describe the processes of language contact and understand the literary effects of linguistic disorientation.

In her evocative essay “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” Gloria Anzaldúa writes of her life across the borderlands between Mexico and the United States, adopting a mixed-language posture that is “neither español ni inglés, but both,” a deliberately hybrid style that resists what Mary Catherine Davidson has called “normative monolingualism.”¹² Anzaldúa asserts a hybrid tongue in resistance to Spanish- and English-speaking purists on either “side” of the border. Her mother, “mortified that I spoke English like a Mexican,” chides her to speak English properly: “Qué vale toda su educación si todavía hablas inglés con un ‘accent’” [What is all your education worth if you still speak English with an “accent”]? (76). When she infuses her Chicano Spanish with English words, “various Latinos and Latinas” rebuke her for speaking an impure Spanish: “Pocho, cultural traitor, you’re speaking the oppressor’s language by speaking English, you’re ruining the Spanish language” (77). When she is seated in a dentist’s chair, she is told: “We’re going to have to do something about your tongue. . . . I’ve never seen one so strong or as stubborn,” prompting Anzaldúa to ask the reader: “How do you train a wild tongue?” (75). Since Anzaldúa is one of many “who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castilian) Spanish nor standard English,” she decides not to subdue her tongue nor to make it conform to either language. Her mode of expression takes the form of a defiantly hybrid tongue, “neither español ni inglés, but both . . . a forked tongue, a variation of two languages” (77).

Anzaldúa employs the motif of a “forked tongue” to characterize her resistant hybridization of U.S. English and Chicano Spanish. In *Out of Place: A Memoir* (1999), Edward Said interrogates his own unruly tongue, but he does so through a narrative strategy that conveys a pervasive sense of subjective unease. Composing his text entirely in English, Said nonetheless describes the perceived wildness of his tongue across two domains of linguistic understanding. He writes of his “already overdeveloped embarrassment about myself” as a child, listing “my face and tongue” among the features criticized most (63).\(^{13}\) He adds these remarks on his tongue:

> The moral and physical shaded into each other most imperceptibly of all when it came to my tongue, which was the object of a dense series of metaphorical associations in Arabic, most of which were negative and, in my particular case, recurred with great frequency. In English one hears mainly of a “biting” or “sharp” tongue, in contrast with a “smooth” one. Whenever I blurted out something that seemed untoward, it was my “long” tongue to blame: aggressive, unpleasant, uncontrolled. (68)

Said employs two sets of metaphors—“sharp” (English) and “long” (Arabic)—to effect in his readers a bilingual, cross-cultural understanding of his own tongue. Although modes of thinking about his tongue differ in each language, both work to assert its untamed quality. When Said enters an American-administered Arabic class in Cairo, he subdues this troublesome tongue into near-silence:

> Somehow I had to conceal my perfect command of what was my mother tongue in order to fit in better with the inane formulas given out to American youngsters for what passed for spoken (but was really kitchen) Arabic. I never volunteered, rarely spoke, often crouched near the back of the room. (82–83)

Rebuked for his unruly tongue—“sharp” or “long,” depending on whether one thinks in English or in Arabic—the young Said works to constrain his own “native tongue” within the space of a classroom that purports to teach him how he should speak it. Whereas Anzaldúa’s narrative establishes a resistant hybrid voice that confidently speaks across tongues, Said’s tongue finds itself domesticated, stifled.

Throughout this book, I have stressed the role that close readings of literary texts can play in shaping our understandings of, and our critical narratives for, the phenomena of linguistic contact and traversal. What we can discern in all these writers—medieval and postcolonial alike—is a pervasive desire to address both the phenomenological and affective aspects of speaking across shifting sociolinguistic realms. For Said, the classroom scenario allows him to explore how his body and his language are disciplined and constrained, and his reflective meditation on his awkward, stifled tongue recalls how Charles writes about his own ambivalent relationship to “my tongue” and “mon langage.” For Anzaldúa, the experience of life across tongues takes a different trajectory, granting her the platform for an intellectual justification for her mixed style of writing. She characterizes “Chicano Spanish” as a “border tongue” that is “not incorrect” but rather a vibrant “living language” (77). Adopting the academic tone of sociolinguistic discourse, she continues: “Change, evolución, enriquecimiento de palabras nuevas por invención o adopción [evolution, new words enriched by invention or adaption] have created variants of Chicano Spanish, un nuevo lenguaje” [a new language] (77). By evoking the borderlands as a dynamic zone of linguistic exchange, Anzaldúa establishes a compelling narrative of language contact that asserts the expressive power of a mixed voice.

Much of what makes Anzaldúa’s writing so intensely resonant is the particular sociopolitical circumstances against which she writes. Her mixed-language posture conspicuously bridges two tongues, challenging the significant power differential between the status of de facto official and institutional forms of U.S. English (on one hand) and culturally marginalized varieties of immigrant Chicano Spanish (on the other). For the medieval poet Charles, code-switching bivernacularity is quite another matter, as his language crossing transpires under a very different set of social and historical circumstances. The poet is, first of all, a high-ranking aristocrat, and we have seen throughout this book that there was a considerable degree of fluidity between Middle English and French vernaculars through trans-Channel commerce and travel.14

14. Moreover, the linguistic movements of Charles and others in his elite circuit were often subject to volatile and shifting geopolitical power dynamics. Charles wrote poems in English during his time as a prisoner of war, and Charles’s own English captor, the Duke of Suffolk, began to compose lyrics in French while he was under the captivity of Charles’s half-brother Dunois. Susan Crane, “Anglo-Norman Cultures in England, 1066–1460.” In The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, repr. 2002), 35–60, at 59.
Since the sociopolitical implications of writers like Charles and Anzaldúa are so disparate, I find it most productive to concentrate on how cross-temporal literary comparisons can help us think more creatively about the ways writers seek to express their affective attachments to languages and how they conceive the motion of languages across space. In the case of Said, the institutionalized space of the classroom provides a setting for exploring an uneasy disciplining of the body and the tongue. Anzaldúa’s mixed-language writing most readily invites comparison with the work of Charles through her exploration of a more capacious sort of place: the U.S./Mexico border, which she presents as an unsteady marker of linguistic difference and a constant site of affective longing. Acknowledging the border as an imaginative construct, Anzaldúa describes the borderlands as a “vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (25), and the text offers a flowing mixed-language passage that contrasts the dynamic qualities of the open sea with the unnatural stability of a land border. “Oigo el llorido del mar, el respiro del aire [I hear the cry of the sea, the breath of the wind], / my heart surges to the beat of the sea,” she writes, adding: “The sea cannot be fenced, / el mar does not stop at borders” (24, 25).

Moving back across time to Charles, we can appreciate more clearly that the poet’s linguistic crossings transpire across a literally fluid border: the Channel/la manche. Although this body of water might appear to mark an entirely natural geographical boundary between the two landmasses of England and France, Charles’s poetry constructs it as a space only contingently associated with any linguistic or political entity. As we have seen, English and French renditions of the same poem place the speaker in transit over the water of the Channel but moving in opposite directions. Even when the poet sets foot on solid ground, the illusory status of the sea as a border still lingers. In Balade 114 (discussed in chapter 2), Charles stands “a Dovre sur la mer” [at Dover by the sea] gazing toward “le pais de France . . . que mon cueur amer doit” [the land of France, which my heart should love] (1–7); yet even when he arrived across the water at Calais in 1433, he was still standing on English territory.

Charles’s crossings back and forth over a fluid border have the potential to invite a closer interrogation of Anzaldúa’s writing style. Her writing, “neither español ni inglés, but both . . . a forked tongue, a variation of two languages,” traverses Spanish and English to evoke life throughout the contact zone, but this sense of linguistic hybridity still preserves at its core a binary system of thought, as Cyrus Patell has demonstrated.15 Although

Anzaldúa certainly exhibits a nuanced understanding of the contours of both U.S. English and Chicano Spanish, foregrounding some of the varieties within each language, her rhetorical invocation of a “forked tongue” has the potential to reinscribe a conceptual binary between languages just as she seeks to transcend dualistic thinking. Charles, by contrast, transports us beyond duality or hybridity per se to a conspicuous form of simultaneity. Insofar as a distinctive poetic voice is concerned, the pervasive allegorical psychomachia throughout his work evinces a multiplicity of selves, a prospect more elusive than a hybrid voice that primarily finds its articulation across two tongues. Indeed, the poet’s remarkable corpus across English and French can overshadow the ways Charles explores concurrent hybridities and modes of difference over his lifetime. The son of a French father (Louis I, Duke of Orléans) and Italian mother (Valentina Visconti of Milan) as well as a Channel-surfer between England and France, Charles creates a varied oeuvre that exhibits the capacity to work across any number of overlapping domains of linguistic difference. Among his mixed-language poems are French/Italian, English/French, and French/Latin rondeaux, and his late-life compilation of his own French work presents it in parallel translation with Latin counterparts.16

In this context, Charles’s poem about the “trucheman” [interpreter or translator] gains a conspicuously manifold resonance. Rather than claiming a hybrid identity or forging a “forked tongue” that combines two languages, Charles imagines a realm beyond the two vernaculars in which he writes, and he does so by drawing upon his own particular political circumstances. As I have suggested, the “trucheman” in his poem designates the tongue or organ of speech, but the word can also refer to a diplomatic or cultural envoy.17 This ambassadorial or emissary sense of “trucheman” is strongly reinforced by the perfect participle “rapporté” [retrieved, relayed, reported], suggesting not so much the idea of the “trucheman” as an extension of one’s self but rather a third party who mediates between self and

---


17. On the “trucheman” not only as interpreter but also potentially a trickster, see Butterfield, The Familiar Enemy, 307.
other. Through this evocative figure, the poet indirectly suggests some of the geopolitical circumstances that underlie his translingual writing in captivity. During his time as a prisoner of war, Charles often sent envoys to negotiate with foreign parties on his behalf in the hopes that his freedom might be secured.\(^\text{18}\)

Taking the poet’s sociopolitical circumstances into account, we see that Charles registers an acute estrangement from his own tongue. He characterizes it as a multilingual “trucheman” who hails from an unspecified foreign land (“d’estrange contree”) and whose point of origin can never be discerned. Extending the resonance of Charles’s personification allegory even further, we could say this mysterious emissary occupies what Homi Bhabha calls “the Third Space of enunciation” outside of hegemonic systems of thought.\(^\text{19}\) Charles obliquely expresses the possibility that one’s thought (“pensee”) might travel through manifold and potentially endless realms beyond binary conceptions of language, nation, or culture. Whatever this “chose sauvaige” [wild thing] is that the “trucheman” transports, we don’t know whence it came nor where it might go next.

**Peregrine Historiography**

In this comparative analysis of Charles and postcolonial writers, I have not only traversed languages (French and Middle English; modern English and Spanish) but also distant spans of time and space. This cross-temporal analysis of translingual writing has added a third dimension (time) to a comparative framework that implicitly traverses different languages and places. My analysis here could be brought into line with what Jacques Lezra has provisionally called a “peregrine historiography”—a nonlinear, peripatetic mode of thinking about contact linguistics and literary exchange.\(^\text{20}\)

Rather than presenting a linear narrative that assumes the progressive unfolding of time—a framework that would identify foundational points of origin and trace the development of distinctly national languages and

\(^{18}\) Charles’s Balade 131, written in England and dispatched to the Duke of Burgundy, is one of many such appeals; in this poem, Charles asks the addressee to help him “purchaser/La paix, aussi ma raençon” [work for peace, and my ransom as well] (9–10). I discuss the manuscript illustration to this poem below.

\(^{19}\) Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 37.

literatures—we might instead adopt a more circuitous outlook, an orientation that attends to the perpetual flow and exchange between languages, literatures, and peoples across time.

My appropriation of the term “peregrine” is a deliberate one, denoting the notion of “peregrine” as a noun (i.e., pilgrim) but more broadly evincing the notion of a pilgrimage as a voyage or process, and not simply a round-trip journey to a given destination. Moreover, the term “peregrine” (as an adjective) transports deeply embedded etymological resonances that denote the strange, foreign, or unfamiliar. This word, first recorded in Middle English as “peregryn,” derives from Latin peregrinus (as adjective, “foreign, exotic,” or as noun, “foreigner”) with cognates in Anglo-Norman (peregrin, “migratory, foreign”) and other languages. This attestation of “peregryn” comes from a text that thematizes peregrination quite well: Chaucer’s Squire’s Tale, a romance that explores the fantasy of mutual comprehension between a “faucon peregryn [of] fremde land” (428) and a Tartar princess, also features the Middle English equivalent of a speech delivered by an emissary in an alien, unspecified language (89–109).

A truly peregrine historiography would characterize a critical mode of inquiry and close reading that is itself peripatetic and wandering: a transhistorical and cross-linguistic outlook that results in moments of wondrous estrangement from conventional disciplinary frameworks undergirded by implicit developmental master narratives. One forthcoming collection of essays, edited by David Wallace and featuring a polyglot assemblage of contributors, is such an endeavor: it restricts itself to a particular time period (the decades following the Black Death), but it nonetheless enacts a peripatetic mode of inquiry in its approach to space. Rather than organizing itself around discrete national languages and literatures, this project “considers literary activity in transnational sequences of interconnected spaces,” positing a set of city-focused itineraries that are not circumscribed by national or linguistic boundaries (medieval or modern). Peripatetic literary and linguistic historiography, in other words, has the potential to expand our thinking about literature on three concurrent fronts: across space, language, and time.


The translingual circulation of Charles, as I have argued, demands that we rethink implicitly linear models of translation in theory and in practice. *Translatio*, movement from one language (or place) to another, is hardly ever “straight,” as Sara Ahmed suggests; born in England to an English mother and Pakistani father and raised in Australia, Ahmed writes of a queer phenomenology that urges us to “rethink the work [of the] ‘straight line’” in our orientation towards the world to generate “alternative lines” of thought, “which cross the ground”—and, I would add, the sea—“in unexpected ways” (83, 20). I posit, in other words, an avowedly peripatetic literary and linguistic historiography: a nonlinear mode of traveling with texts and with languages that embraces Ahmed’s conceptual interrogation of the straight line.

My reading of Charles in conjunction with modern postcolonial contexts stresses how cross-temporal analysis can nuance and advance our understanding of seemingly universal social phenomena like code-switching and translingual writing. Comparative literary analysis across different points in time achieves something much more than a bridging (or effacement) of historical distance: such an approach helps us to more effectively clarify the distinctive features of any given writer in her or his own time and to unpack the implicit metaphors that underlie our own critical modes of thought. In my analysis above, I have shown how Anzaldúa’s terrestrial zone of the borderlands / *la frontera* across the U.S. and Mexico resonates, however surprisingly, with the fluidity of *la manche* / the Channel between England and France in the writing of Charles. Upon closer examination, we see that the medieval poet and modern writer do not conceive the connections between their border crossings and their social identities in quite the same way. Charles imagines a “trucheman de mon pensee” [interpreter of my thoughts] who moves among many languages and cultures (not merely two), and the poet’s mode of thinking maintains a multiplicity that exposes the comparatively binary structure that underlies much of Anzaldúa’s thinking. Modern literature and critical theory certainly provide informative frameworks for engaging with texts composed in the distant past, but medieval translingual writing can expose potential limitations to modern structures of thought as well, even in writing that is so fluid and so richly evocative as Anzaldúa’s.

I end the peregrinations of this book with a return to familiar territory. Recalling the introduction’s theme, I turn to a visual representation of

medieval London. British Library MS Royal 16 F. ii (c. 1500), a luxurious copy of French poems by Charles d’Orléans with a few English rondeaux dispersed among its contents, contains a famous illustration of Charles at work in the city: the lyric poet, in exile from France, writes in captivity in the Tower of London (fol. 73r). On the right hand side of the frame, Charles sits at a desk within the White Tower (with each turret bearing a flag with England’s coat of arms and a golden crown). In the center of the image, he peers out of a window, and on the left-hand side of the illustration, he stands just outside in the courtyard, dispatching the poem to a messenger. In the foreground of this image, four boats float by Traitor’s Gate; in the distance—beyond the Tower of London itself—four more boats arrive at Billingsgate, and beyond that, London Bridge (with shops, residences, chapel) traverses the Thames. In the horizon, we discern the barest outlines of London’s topography: a hint of steeples, including St. Paul’s.

This image lends prominence to domestic spaces, urban commerce, and water transport. In its portrayal of crowded living spaces, the illustration situates the poet in a bustling city with ready access to networks of trade and travel. Within this visual frenzy of activity, Charles appears not once, but three times: seated in the Tower composing a text indoors, looking out a Tower window with his body half-extended out of the building, and standing outside dispatching the text. Through this tripling of Charles, the image implies a narrative (he composes a poem, awaits a messenger, and dispatches it), but I am most interested in the overall effect of this figurative multiplication. Depicting Charles in three types of spaces—interior, liminal, and exterior—it presents the poet in perpetual motion. This illustration not only evokes Charles’s busy writing environment, but it also exemplifies the critical approach to his work that I have advocated: an understanding that sustains his multiplicity and foregrounds his transit through networks of exchange.

Anne E. B. Coldiron has suggested that Charles, due to his motion back and forth between England and France, could be considered a type of “cultural amphibian.” If we take this designation literally, then this


25. The lines of text just below the image confirm an emissary reading. Charles reports “nouvelles d’Albion” [news from Albion, i.e., England] (1) from “deça la mer” [this side of the sea] to the Duke of Burgundy, and the envoi suggests the balade’s intended transit over the water. Arn and Fox, B131 (Champion B89, MS p. 219).

26. Coldiron, 10. Although Coldiron does not make the attribution, this phrase also
Figure 6. Charles d’Orléans in the Tower of London. Detail of a page in a manuscript containing a selection of his French poems with some of his English works. London, British Library, MS Royal 16 F. ii, fol. 73r.
illustration—with its remarkable portrayal of land and river transport—evinces the poet’s parallel existence on solid ground and water: his capacity to think across terrestrial and fluid domains of linguistic difference. To recall a phrase from this book’s introduction, *Trading Tongues* has attended to the “roots” and “routes” of medieval culture, or—in reference to the world evoked in this illustration—it has concurrently traced the features of languages in contact (on land) and in dispersal (over sea). Poised at the juncture of land and water, this medieval translingual writer and “cultural amphibian” invites the prospect of conversations with other such figures across time: past and present polyglots negotiating life across linguistic habitats.

By ending my study of medieval translingual writing through cross-temporal comparisons, I have sought to place contemporary and past perspectives in dialogue and ask how historically disparate modes of thinking can come into contact with and inform one another. Modern theory can readily be invoked as a strategy for looking back to medieval texts in fresh ways, but I encourage us to think more carefully in terms of facilitating exchange between writing in the past and reading in our present. Medieval writing, in other words, can show as much potential to transform our own modes of thought as modern perspectives are equipped to change our views of medieval writing. It is my hope that this book will encourage more of us to adopt critical modes that can allow for simultaneous forms of orientation toward our respective objects. Through this book’s journeys across language, space, and time, I invite readers to experiment with manifold, inter-temporal perspectives: to adopt interpretive approaches that might unleash the full potential of peripatetic modes of thought and perception.