

Classic Poetry Series

Charles Duke of Orleans

- poems -

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Charles Duke of Orleans (24 November 1394 – 5 January 1465)

Charles of Orléans was Duke of Orléans from 1407, following the murder of his father, Louis I, Duke of Orléans, on the orders of John the Fearless, Duke of Burgundy. He was also Duke of Valois, Count of Beaumont-sur-Oise and of Blois, lord of Coucy, and the inheritor of Asti in Italy via his mother Valentina Visconti, daughter of Gian Galeazzo Visconti, Duke of Milan. He is now remembered as an accomplished poet owing to the more than five hundred extant poems he produced, most written during his twenty-four years spent as a prisoner of war.

Accession

Ascending to the duchy at the age of thirteen after his father had been assassinated, Charles was expected to carry on his father's leadership against the Burgundians, a French faction which supported the Duke of Burgundy. The latter was never punished for his role in Louis' assassination, and Charles had to watch as his grief-stricken mother Valentina Visconti succumbed to illness not long afterwards. At her deathbed, Charles and the other boys of the family were made to swear the traditional oath of vengeance for their father's murder.

During the early years of his reign as duke, the orphaned Charles was heavily influenced by the guidance of his father-in-law, Bernard VII, Count of Armagnac, for which reason Charles' faction came to be known as the "Armagnacs".

Imprisonment

After war with the Kingdom of England was renewed in 1415, Charles was one of the many French noblemen wounded in the Battle of Agincourt on October 25, 1415. Captured by Sir Richard Waller (with whom a long-lasting friendship emerged that would later fund the refurbishment of Waller's manor house and lead Waller to add the Fleur-de-lis to the Waller Coat of Arms) and taken to England as a hostage, he would remain in captivity for the next twenty-four years, at various places including Wallingford Castle. The conditions of his confinement were not strict; he was allowed to live more or less in the manner to which he had become accustomed, like so many other captured nobles. However, he was not offered release in exchange for a ransom, since Henry V of England had left instructions forbidding any release: Charles was the natural head of the Armagnac faction and in the line of succession to the French throne, and was therefore deemed too important to be returned to circulation.

Poetry

It was during these twenty-four years that Charles would write most of his poetry, including melancholy works which seem to be commenting on the captivity itself, such as *En la forêt de longue attente*.

The majority of his output consists of short poems in the ballade and rondeau meters, written in the French language. A contemporary English translation of some of these poems exists; this is commonly attributed to Charles himself, though some scholars have challenged his authorship.

Freedom

Finally freed in 1440 by the efforts of his former enemies, Philip the Good and Isabella of Portugal, the Duke and Duchess of Burgundy, he set foot on French soil again after 25 years, "speaking better English than French", according to the English chronicler Raphael Holinshed. Meeting the Duchess of Burgundy after disembarking, the gallant Charles said: "M'Lady, I make myself your prisoner." At the celebration of his third marriage, with Marie of Cleves, he was created a Knight of the Golden Fleece. His subsequent return to Orléans was marked by a splendid celebration organized by the citizens.

He made a feeble attempt to press his claims to Asti in Italy, before settling down as a celebrated patron of the arts.

Charles appears in <http://poemhunter.com/william-shakespeare/> Shakespeare's play *Henry V* as the "Duke of Orléans".

Marriage and children

Charles married three times. His first wife Isabella of Valois (daughter of Charles VI of France and widow of Richard II of England), whom he married in Compiègne in 1406, died in childbirth. Their daughter, Joan married John II of Alençon in 1424 in Blois.

Afterwards, he married Bonne of Armagnac, the daughter of Bernard VII, Count of Armagnac, in 1410. Bonne died before he returned from captivity.

On his return to France in 1440, Charles married Marie of Cleves in Saint-Omer (daughter of Adolph I, Duke of Cleves) and had three children:

Marie of Orléans (19 December 1457 – 1493, Mazères). Married Jean of Foix in 1476.

Louis XII of France (1462–1515)

Anne of Orléans (1464–1491, Poitiers), Abbess of Fontevrault and Poitiers.

Fictional Accounts

The critically acclaimed historical novel *Het Woud der Verwachting/Le Foret de Longue Attente* (1949) by Hella Haasse (translated into English in 1989 under the title "In a Dark Wood Wandering") gives a sympathetic description of the life of Charles, Duke of Orléans.

Charles is also a major character in Margaret Frazer's *The Maiden's Tale*, a historical mystery which gives a very sympathetic fictional account of a few weeks of his life in England in the autumn of 1439, shortly before his release in 1440.

Rondel

Strengthen, my Love, this castle of my heart,
And with some store of pleasure give me aid,
For Jealousy, with all them of his part,
Strong siege about the weary tower has laid.
Nay, if to break his bands thou art afraid,
Too weak to make his cruel force depart,
Strengthen at least this castle of my heart,
And with some store of pleasure give me aid.
Nay, let not Jealousy, for all his art
Be master, and the tower in ruin laid,
That still, ah Love! thy gracious rule obeyed.
Advance, and give me succour of thy part;
Strengthen, my Love, this castle of my heart.

Charles Duke of Orleans

Spring

The year has changed his mantle cold
Of wind, of rain, of bitter air;
And he goes clad in cloth of gold,
Of laughing suns and season fair;
No bird or beast of wood or wold
But doth with cry or song declare
The year lays down his mantle cold.
All founts, all rivers, seaward rolled,
The pleasant summer livery wear,
With silver studs on broidered vair;
The world puts off its raiment old,
The year lays down his mantle cold.

Charles Duke of Orleans