

Elegant letterforms and proportions enchant in this enigmatic Renaissance masterpiece and its twentieth-century revival

Geofroy Tory, *Champ fleury*. Paris: Geofroy Tory, 1529; New York: Grolier Club, 1927.

10 3/16 inches x 7 1/8 inches (259 x 181 mm); 12 5/8 inches x 8 7/8 inches (321 x 225 mm), 182 pages (illustrated throughout); 239 pages (illustrated throughout).

Geofroy Tory's *Champ fleury* belongs to the select class of works that continue to enlighten nearly five centuries after publication. Ostensibly a formal treatise on letters and letterforms, Tory's book contains tantalizing hints of a larger and more comprehensive meaning and purpose to its enigmatic text and illustrations.

Tory was by no means the first Renaissance master to conceive a book dedicated to letters and their formation. Such works were in fact distinctive products of earlier humanistic thought and aesthetics, but *Champ fleury* was uniquely created as a fusion of text, craft, and illustration. In addition to providing a brilliantly detailed study of the creation of beautiful letterforms, *Champ fleury* offers fascinating insights into their use in language and literature.

The book's poetic title, *Champ fleury*, translates literally as "flowery fields"; written as a single word, *champfleury* is an old French idiom for "paradise." The title relates to many subjects within Tory's treatise: he compares, for instance, the different forms of letters with those of flowers, each having a unique color and perfume. He quotes classical authors, addressing scholarly "grammarians" and men of letters. Throughout, Tory never loses sight of either art or science, anchoring his book in both Virgil and Euclid — the beauty of flowers is ever held in one hand, while the compass and straightedge repose in the other.

These are two superlative copies of Tory's treatise from the world-class Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection at the Library of Congress. The 1529 original is perhaps the finest surviving copy, with hand lineations in red

surrounding the text. And the 1927 English-language version, published by New York's Grolier Club, is presented in one of only seven lavishly produced large-paper copies of the George B. Ives translation designed by Bruce Rogers. The latter is in a magnificent binding by the famous Parisian bookbinder Georges Mercier.

The earliest notation in the 1529 copy of *Champ fleury* is that of a sixteenth-century Frenchman, Louis Martel of Rouen. It was later owned by the Abbaye de Saint-Pierre at Jumièges, France. The 1927 Grolier Club copy was the property of Lucius Wilmerding (1880–1949), the long-time member and former president of the club under whose direction the edition was published.

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