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MEDIEVAL ANXIETIES: TRANSLATION AND AUTHORIAL SELF-REPRESENTATION IN THE VERNACULAR BEAST FABLE

by

Richard Lee Garrett

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree
in English in
the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2011

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Jonathan Wilcox

ABSTRACT

My dissertation examines the concept of vernacular translation in the Middle Ages, particularly examining French and Middle English texts. It focuses on a specific genre of literature popular in the Middle Ages but relatively ignored in contemporary literary scholarship: the beast fable. My argument is that some of the principal writers of vernacular fables from the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries—Marie de France, Geoffrey Chaucer, John Lydgate, and William Caxton--subtly exhibit, through their translations, a conscious awareness of, and anxiety about, the question of authorial identification--the role, identity, and authority of the "author" during their respective periods. Beginning with a historical survey of the Western, Aesopic fable, an examination of its didactic function, and a review of how medieval audiences perceived this genre, I then provide a brief history of Western translation theory, exploring how translators from Cicero to Dante to Seamus Heaney perceive the task of the literary translator. This section ends with a description of the relatively new academic discipline of Translation Studies and how it has informed, and indeed transformed, contemporary ideas about the translation of literature.

In the principal chapters of my dissertation, I analyze various fables of Marie, Chaucer, Lydgate, and Caxton, applying to these tales some of the theoretical ideas presented in earlier chapters, and I conclude by drawing a connection between these writers and translators yet also demonstrating that each expresses his or her anxieties about authorial representation and translating in a different way. For all of these writers, their self-promotion or search for authorial legitimacy expressed through fable is part of a

broader literary reflection on the complex position occupied by vernacular literature in the Middle Ages. In this dissertation I am offering a fresh perspective of the medieval vernacular fable and a fuller picture of the nuances of this genre, infinitely more interesting and provocative than many would believe or suggest. My research, I hope, advances our views of the vernacular fable in the Middle Ages, and it also helps to revive or perhaps initiate interest in some important yet neglected literary works of the Middle Ages, works which merit much more attention than contemporary scholars have given them.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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Graduate College
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English at the May 2011 graduation.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project has been in many ways an arduous yet exciting journey. Pursuing a Ph.D. has been one of the most difficult yet fulfilling endeavors I have attempted to accomplish in my life. It has been a wonderful experience that has helped me grow intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. I would like to thank all who have directly and indirectly contributed to this work.

I am grateful to Dr. Jonathan Wilcox, my academic advisor, whose steady support over the years has given me the positive energy I needed to complete this dissertation and who has helped me grow intellectually. My idea for exploring translation in the dissertation stemmed from a seminar taught by Dr. Wilcox in 2002. I thank him for his ongoing encouragement and advice throughout the various stages of my Ph.D. program, and I am particularly grateful for his extensive, useful critical feedback and suggestions during the writing process of my dissertation.

I would like to thank my doctoral committee members Dr. Claire Sponsler and Dr. Kathy Lavezzo, who gave me much useful feedback on my Lydgate and Chaucer chapters, respectively. They also provided support and suggestions during my comprehensive exams. Thanks also go to my committee members Dr. Connie Berman and Dr. Claire Fox, who have helped me in various stages of my doctoral program as teachers and advisors.

I would like to thank the University of Wisconsin-Platteville library for the hundreds of books and monographs I was able to borrow through its Universal Borrowing system and for the numerous articles I obtained through its interlibrary loan department. I would also like to thank the libraries of the University of Dubuque, Clarke College, and Loras College for allowing me to use their facilities and providing a pleasant, comfortable work space for me over the last four years. Thanks also go to the institutions that have given me funding to conduct my doctoral

research: U.I.S.G, G.S.S, the T. Anne Cleary Scholarship, and the department of English at the University of Iowa.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to my parents for helping me fulfill all my dreams. They have given me a precious gift—helping me become who I want to be. Their unwavering support, in countless ways, has given me the means and resolve to complete the doctoral program and this dissertation. I hope I have made them proud, particularly my late father. This dissertation is a tribute to him and to my late brother.

My siblings as well have offered unflinching support and encouragement during the duration of my doctoral studies, and I thank them for this. I owe thanks to my brother Doug in particular for procuring some important articles for me that were unavailable in France when I lived there while doing research for the dissertation.

Finally I would like to thank my wife Catherine and daughters Anna and Mélanie. Over their brief lives my daughters have had to endure numerous lengthy periods of time without their father at home. And writing this dissertation would not have been possible without the loving support of my wife. I cannot thank her enough for her unbounded patience and her kindness, commitment, and friendship throughout the research and long years of writing of this dissertation. She has encouraged me to finish graduate school whenever I had doubts about wanting to continue. Catherine has helped me develop a love for languages, other cultures, travel, intellectual work, inner-growth, and self-discovery. She has encouraged me to live life to its fullest intellectual, spiritual, and emotional potentials. Her own wanderlust and experience abroad have influenced my own appreciation for life abroad. Sharing this difficult yet exhilarating journey with her has been a wonderful experience.

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INTRODUCTION

What is a beast fable? It is a story with talking animals followed by a moral. Sounds simple, doesn't it? But rather than being simplistic stories for children, tales of talking beasts that illustrate some kind of moral instruction, fables can be highly entertaining yet subtle, provocative stories, tales that reflect real tensions present in medieval societies. A reclamation of the fable, particularly the medieval vernacular fable, is needed. In this dissertation I am offering a fresh perspective of the medieval vernacular fable and a fuller picture of the nuances of this genre, infinitely more interesting and provocative than many would believe or suggest. I will further define and refine the genre and describe the fable tradition in Chapter 1 and successive chapters. I will also explore the concept of vernacular translation in the Middle Ages, particularly examining French and Middle English texts. My argument is that some of the principal writers of vernacular fables from the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries—Marie de France, Geoffrey Chaucer, John Lydgate, and William Caxton--subtly exhibit, through their translations, a conscious awareness of, and anxiety about, contemporary socio-cultural conditions, with the primary issue common to all of these writers being that of authorial identification--the role, identity, and authority of the author during their respective periods. Specifically, I argue that the respective translations of these fables (from Latin and Eastern sources for Marie, and generally from French sources for Chaucer, Lydgate, and Caxton), rather than simply unobtrusively, or even anonymously, replicating the tales in a different language, are conscious rewritings intended as a means of self-advertisement for these writers. This self-advertisement, stemming from a sort of

medieval status anxiety, comes in multiple forms and is expressed differently for each of the fabulists/translators under consideration here.

For Marie, the self-advertisement functions as a way to promote herself as an individual artist, author, and translator, especially a *woman* artist, author, and translator writing in the Middle Ages. Moreover, Marie's fables convey a distinct originality, experimenting with various genres, forms, and ideas that are absent in the Aesopian tradition. Similar to Marie, though perhaps more subtly, Chaucer in his fable translations, particularly in *The Manciple's Tale*, is also calling attention to himself as an individual author, attempting to convey truths as a fourteenth-century *auctor* while at the same time establishing his voice as a writer of fiction. Through the beast fable he is able to achieve this balance, while at the same time critiquing some of the established literary conventions of the day.

Writing in the early-fifteenth century, Lydgate manifests his search for self-legitimacy as a poet through fashioning himself a disciple of Chaucer, and while some Chaucerian themes do reappear in his fables, the tales also exhibit some original ideas and features, such as a more sympathetic view of lower classes and expansion of legal commentary. As a translator and fabulist straddling both the medieval and early modern periods, Caxton, rather than calling attention to himself as an individual artist, instead examines his role as writer in the public sphere, with its attendant obligations and risks. In his fable translations he attempts to reconcile the artistic voice with the expectations and demands of the public, the latter perhaps exerting more pressure, thus producing fables more reflective of contemporary culture than those of his predecessors. Caxton's fables represent a paradigmatic shift of sorts regarding literary translation, with "literal"

translations being in vogue in the late fifteenth century. Yet despite their perceived literalness, Caxton's fable translations also reflect an anxiety over the unstable and violent political situation of late fifteenth-century England.

Notwithstanding these different circumstances and roles in which Marie, Chaucer, Lydgate, and Caxton found themselves, there are two features common to all of them: all four were writers and translators associated somehow with the royal court and with their respective monarchs (but as I explain in chapter five, Lydgate, although unquestionably the writer in this study most closely aligned with a royal patron, given his close relationship with King Henry V, wrote his *Isopes Fabules* and *The Churl and the Bird* before he became Henry's preferred poet) and as such occupied positions wherein they had to negotiate conflicting roles and desires, attempting to reconcile their own ideas about authorship with the needs and demands of the court; in addition, and more significantly for this study, each of these writers demonstrates an acute awareness of the uncertain status, complex role, and hazardous position of the vernacular translator in the Middle Ages, and this awareness is often reflected in the prefaces, narratives, and morals of their fables.

Another form which these authors' self-advertisement takes is that of meta-translation: Marie, Chaucer, Lydgate, and Caxton each, in her or his own fashion, is calling attention to not only her or his role as author and artist, but they also are advertising and defending their use of the vernacular language, an activity viewed with, at best, ambivalence and, at worst, hostility during the Middle Ages. To rewrite a classic text, a text whose original author was considered an *auctor*, was not looked at askance, yet, perhaps paradoxically, writing in a vernacular language *was*. It was this snare,

among others, in which medieval translators found themselves caught. For all of these writers, the self-promotion is part of a broader literary reflection on the complex position occupied by vernacular literature in the Middle Ages. As a rule translation into the vernacular was seen as questionable or suspicious during this period by these writers' respective cultures, particularly in the case of the English translators. For Marie, writing in French (specifically Anglo-Norman—the fact that she was translating in this dialect and not continental French may have caused her some anxiety, but we have no evidence of that) was less tenuous and risky than was the situation for her English successors. The twelfth century marked a linguistic shift in European literature, with many French translations (of mostly Latin texts) and some "original" French literary forms (such as the *fabliau* and *chanson de geste*) appearing on the scene, but French literature had not yet fully established itself as a legitimate challenger to Latin by this time. Nevertheless, French, at least, was a romance language like Latin, and, for almost three hundred years in England, the language, along with Latin, of belles-lettres. Particularly for Chaucer, Lydgate, and Caxton, writing in Middle English, a language that was a relative newcomer in relation to other European vernacular literatures (particularly French, which had been an established literary language for well over two hundred years before Chaucer) and of course to their classical precursors, authorship had an inherently dubious quality.

Because of this humble status for the English writer, he or she was effectively compelled to take a posturing position when endeavoring to translate from a Latin or French source, thus the prevalence of the modesty *topoi* seen in the prefaces and prologues not only of Lydgate and Caxton but even in those of Chaucer himself. And,

despite writing in "the high cultural tradition of France,"[1] Marie also employs the modesty *topos* in regard to her translating, clearly expressed, for example, in the prologue to her *Fables*, which I will examine closely below.

Moreover, the translation of *fables* in the vernacular was an even more dubious activity, as fables were seen as the province of the classical, scholastic tradition. In the realm of medieval literary criticism, the fable has received scant attention. Of course this is due in part to the notion that the fable is generally thought of as less a medieval genre than a classical or neo-classical one. Most scholars associate the fable genre with the classical world, even those fables written in the Middle Ages,[2] most of which are in Latin and adhere to a formulaic structure and content carried over from their classical predecessors. Many also see the fable as an early modern genre, reaching its apotheosis with La Fontaine in the seventeenth century.[3] Thus the perception among modern readers that the fable seems to have somehow inauspiciously circumvented the Middle Ages in its evolutionary journey may not be an altogether invalid one. Moreover, as a literary

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[1] *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory*, 1280-1520. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, et al., eds. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999. 10.

[2] Generally, even those few studies focusing on vernacular medieval fables, such as Edward Wheatley's *Mastering Aesop: Medieval Education, Chaucer, and His Followers* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), examine fable in terms of its classical origins: Wheatley argues that the fable's popularity in the Middle Ages was due to its capacity to teach Latin grammar and thus its dominant presence in medieval classrooms. He speaks of the Middle Ages' "appropriation of fable" and its "appropriation of the verse Romulus collection as a Latin curricular text." *Mastering* Aesop, 4.

[3] See Gregary J. Racz, "Straight to the Source: Using Phaedrus and La Fontaine to Retranslate Fable V, 25, of Felix Maria Samaniego," January 2000, in *Salvaging Literary Models in Translation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, in which Racz refers to "the once only marginally respectable, but now (post-La Fontaine) solidly canonical fable."

genre fables are often dismissed as nursery tales and not a serious art form worthy of study. Any non-literary person asked about fable would most likely think of "Aesop's Fables" (or, in France, the tales of La Fontaine, which, despite their artistry, are more commonly found in the children's section of the library or bookstore), a few of which he or she might still remember from childhood bedtime stories. And contemporary scholars generally view the fable with a degree of circumspection as to its literary merit; this was not the case, however, for medieval readers and writers, who saw, among other merits, the pedagogical benefits of the genre. Edward Wheatley suggests that "scholastic practices . . . served as the lenses through which medieval readers, including Chaucer, Lydgate, and Henryson, viewed fable."[4] Wheatley then goes on to assert that modern critics view the fable in much more simplistic terms than would a medieval audience or reader, who generally would have seen the fable in association with "curricular practices."[5] Notwithstanding the modern deprecation of fables, the fabular lineage in literature is indeed a significant one. My research, I hope, advances our views of the vernacular fable in the Middle Ages, and it also helps to revive or perhaps initiate interest in some important yet neglected literary works of the Middle Ages, works which merit much more attention than contemporary scholars have given them.

Chapter One introduces and provides background on the fable, focusing on the "Aesopian" or "beast" fable yet also briefly addressing the Eastern fable, a possible source for Marie's fables. In this chapter I discuss fable as a genre, noting that attempts to neatly categorize fables as a distinct genre are inherently problematic. More significantly,

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[4] *Mastering Aesop*, p. 52.

[5] *Ibid*, p. 52.

however, I trace the history of the “western” or Aesopic fable, with an emphasis on the Latin fabular tradition and collections, as these serve as the foundations and basic source materials for medieval fables. This chapter explores the historical pedagogical function and ambivalent status of the fable from the Middle Ages to the present, arguing that fables are much more complex and serious than the common or stereotypical perception would have us believe. For most medieval fabulists, particularly those writing in Latin, fables were regularly seen as a classical genre, characterized by a narrative, often with beasts representing general human types, followed by a stock moralization on these types, such as ‘”the strong” and “the weak,” for example. These medieval authors, such as Walter of England with his deliberately checklist-like morals and stock, unimaginative narratives, seem to have felt bound by a millennium-long decorum that should not be violated.

I will show, however, that often the characters in vernacular fables, rather than representing “types,” possess real human qualities that represent the anxieties and concerns of contemporary medieval people, and In some that a few medieval writers of fable collections, particularly Marie de France and Geoffrey Chaucer, were willing to subvert the established order for the fable, displaying an originality by spicing up the narratives with features of the fabliau and a more developed, witty, dialogue, often marked by colloquial diction and/or satire and irony, along with more sophisticated morals. As I suggest in this chapter and elaborate in successive chapters, the medieval vernacular fable is a self-parodic genre, an ideal vehicle for medieval writers to question certain literary forms and values and thereby challenge prevailing cultural norms. This idea goes against the prevailing view that the medieval fable is essentially a conservative

genre. These notions offer a fresh perspective on the medieval vernacular fable and perhaps will help us to understand why these texts are important and worthy of further investigation.

Chapter Two serves as a survey of literary translation and translation theory, tracing theoretical discourses on translation from Roman antiquity to the present. It is in part basically a theoretical history of western translation, wherein I examine some of the earliest efforts to theorize translation, such as statements and commentaries by Cicero and Jerome, and compare these ideas to subsequent theories of translation in the Middle Ages and Modern periods, concluding with a description and explanation of "Translation Studies," a relatively new, emergent academic discipline, focusing on literary translation, which looks at all aspects of literary translation and not just "theoretical" issues. This chapter examines an array of notions and statements about translation from a diverse group of philosophers, theologians, theorists, literature scholars, poets, novelists, and translators themselves, including, for example, St. Augustine, Boethius, King Alfred, Etienne Dolet, Walter Benjamin, Maurice Blanchot, Rita Copeland, Lawrence Venuti, Jorge Luis Borges, Vladimir Nabokov, Seamus Heaney, and Gayatri Spivak. From all of these various, often wildly divergent, theories about translation, it seems reasonable to conclude that translation, whether an art, science, or linguistic exercise, is inherently "original" for a number of reasons, one of which is that any translation is closely linked with the translator's specific socio-cultural context and milieu. Thus translation is, notwithstanding comments to the contrary from some observers, an activity of substantial significance and not an exercise whereby the translator is, or should be, "invisible." This was the view, essentially, of translation in the Middle Ages and thus manifestly translated

works by such writers as Marie, Chaucer, Lydgate, and Caxton were often extremely popular. The chapter concludes with my asserting that the fable translations of these four authors do, as Benjamin suggests, add a "foreignizing" element to the original or source fables, specifically reflecting values of the translator's culture and particular professional/artistic situation.

Chapter Three will concentrate on the *Esope* of Marie de France, a name often given to her *Fables*, although perhaps a misnomer given that almost two-thirds of her 103 fables derive from a source other than Aesop. One of the appeals of studying and writing about Marie's fables is that they have been largely ignored by critics. These fables, although not popular with scholars today[6], were unquestionably popular during the Middle Ages. At least twenty-three manuscripts containing the *Fables* are extant, while only five exist for the *Lais*, which have been, paradoxically, much more fashionable in modern scholarship[7]. All of the manuscripts for the *Fables* date from the thirteenth-fifteenth centuries.[8] This esteem in which Marie's contemporaries held her fables certainly makes the tales worthy of more scholarly attention than they have received thus far. Moreover, those who have endeavored to comment on the *Fables* have generally

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[6] Two "scholarly" Modern English translations of Marie's *Fables* have been published since 1984--by Mary Lou Martin (1984) and Harriet Spiegel (1994)—which include introductions that generally and briefly examine the fables. In other recent scholarship, critics such as Howard Bloch (2003) and Emanuel J. Mickel (1974) have produced monographs on all three of Marie's texts: the *Fables*, *Lais*, and the *Espurgatoire Seint Patriz*. To date, however, the only book-length study that focuses on Marie's fables as its subject is in French: Sahar Amer's *Ésope au féminin: Marie de France et la politique de l'interculturalité*. Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999.

[7] See Alfred Ewert, ed., *Marie de France: Lais*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965. xviii-xix.

[8] See Harriet Spiegel, ed. and trans., *Marie de France: Fables*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994. 5.

looked at them as simply a later example of the classical genre of the beast fable, indeed as "simply translations" from the Latin, ascribing little literary value to them.[9] But these tales merit much more attention and consideration; a close, specific analysis would highlight the value of these fables. Furthermore, this chapter will show that the fable is quite entertaining for its own sake, rather than for instructive purposes, pointing to its close ties with the fabliau.

Perhaps more than any of her Middle English successors, Marie manifestly exhibits an acute awareness of and anxiety over the notion of authorial identity and authorship. Indeed she seems almost preoccupied with the issue, which I clearly demonstrate. I closely examine Marie's prologues and epilogues to her three major works that convey this anxiety, but Marie's fables themselves contain a wealth of material that attests to not only her originality as a translator, but also to her concern with the role and position of the author/translator writing for the court during the twelfth century.

In Chapter Four, I will explore Chaucer's *The Manciple's Tale*, not only lesser-known as a beast fable than *The Nun's Priest's Tale* but a tale much more neglected in general than its counterpart. In this chapter I argue that this relatively ignored beast fable should be studied more extensively for what it says about authorship and translation. In this fable, as he does in *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, Chaucer reveals an anxiety about the position and status of the author in the form of the story-teller, looking at notions of

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[9] See, for example, Gaston Paris, *Esquisse historique de la literature française au moyen âge*, 1926, who says of Marie's fables, "Most are only mediocre translations fom the Latin" and that they "have no literary value." More recently, M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background* (1963) has called the *Fables* "simple and straightforward," while Paula Clifford, in her study of the *Lais* (1982), identifies the *Fables* simply as "a translation." Notable exceptions to the generally dismissive attitude toward Marie's fables are the recent studies by Bloch (2003) and Amer (1999).

power—of the story-teller and his or her audience—and the potential loss of that power for the author. In this tale Chaucer addresses more fully the concept of patronage and its pressure upon the writer. Moreover, in the *Manciple's Tale* Chaucer explores in depth questions of language, its risks, and its consequences, examining even more fully than he does in the *Nun's Priest's Tale* notions of discretion in speech and language. He also addresses the theme of freedom versus restraint, applying it to the position of the medieval author. I argue in this chapter that through the *Manciple's Tale* Chaucer is revealing the fable's capacity for resistance: the beast fable is an instrument for the poet to question and satirize contemporary poetic conventions. The *Manciple's Tale* does this, I argue, through its suggestion that concealment is the key to success and survival and, paradoxically, to revealing truths. The beast fable affirms the importance and necessity of ironic, slippery, subtle expression. In this chapter I also address the *Manciple's Tale* as a translation, comparing it with its sources, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and its two principal, Old French sources, the massive *Ovide moralisé*, written early in the fourteenth century, and the mid-fourteenth-century *Voir Dit* by Guillaume Machaut. I demonstrate Chaucer's originality as a translator and show that his translation choices and strategies reflect this concern with the tenuous position of the medieval author/translator and with establishing oneself as a serious poet.

Chapter Five, focusing on the fables of John Lydgate, argues that Lydgate's fables reflect a conscious concern with contemporary social conditions and with his proper position in fifteenth-century English society. In his fables Lydgate addresses his multiple and conflicting roles as a poet, translator, and provincial monk. These fables, written quite early in his career, display a consciousness of and sympathy for the peasant classes

yet also reveal the self-conscious maneuvers of an aspiring prominent poet. Although reflecting a self-consciousness in his use of his name, Lydgate in his fable translations, rather than asserting himself as an individual artist, instead examines his role as writer in the public sphere, with its attendant obligations and risks. In his fable translations he attempts to reconcile the artistic voice with the expectations and demands of the public, including a perception of Lydgate as a rewriter following in the formidable footsteps of Chaucer. I demonstrate that one of Lydgate's strategies for self-advertisement is, perhaps ironically, his manifest representation of himself and his writing vis-à-vis Chaucer and the other *auctors* who preceded him. Like those of Chaucer, Lydgate's fables reflect a concern with the idea of hiding truths in order to convey them. Moreover, Lydgate also associates himself with, or at least conveys a sympathy for, another, unexpected group—the peasant classes. An additional method of self-promotion Lydgate employs is, also ironically, his exploitation, to an extreme degree, of the humility *topos* regarding not only his merit as a poet but also his use of the English language in the face of French and Latin literary hegemony.

The final chapter examines the fables of William Caxton, translated from the French in a collection Caxton titles *Aesop*, and an additional, non-Aesopian fable, "The labourer and of the nyghtyngale," which has as one of its sources Lydgate's *The Churl and the Bird*. My argument in this chapter is that, more than any of the other vernacular medieval fabulists who preceded him, Caxton in his fables, and in his *Life of Aesop*, reveals an acute awareness, and often a tension, concerning the political and economic exigencies of his time, in this case the late fifteenth century. Even more so than Lydgate, Caxton is concerned with the public sphere and its reception of his work. His fables are

less of an artistic endeavor than a pragmatic, entrepreneurial one, and his translations, more literal or "faithful" to his sources than are the translations of Marie, Chaucer, and Lydgate, are more representative of the modern conception of what a literary translation should be. Although Caxton was primarily an entrepreneur, this fact should not necessitate a view that he does not merit serious consideration as a translator, and perhaps therefore as an author. In fact, I will argue that it is precisely in his *métier* as entrepreneur where his significance as a translator lies. Enamored of the great medieval texts and writers, Caxton printed and translated these texts on a large scale but did so with an eye to the changing cultural and economic landscape and emergent economic opportunities in the field of literature. His fables therefore represent a bridge between medieval and modern ideas about literature and translation.

Scholars of medieval vernacular fables will no doubt note that I have not included here a study of Chaucer's *The Nun's Priest's Tale*. Some of my reasons are obvious: *The Nun's Priest's Tale* is certainly one of the most popular and most-studied of *The Canterbury Tales*. There have been countless scholarly attempts to decipher the real meaning of the tale. To articulate an original argument about this tale would be a formidable task indeed. *The Manciple's Tale*, on the other hand, has historically been less popular with critics and some aspects of the text remain unexplored. Indeed examining the tale in the context of beast fable itself is one of these relatively untapped areas, as is its being a translation. *The Manciple's Tale* is a more apposite choice for this dissertation because it is one of Chaucer's most distinctly original translations, as I will demonstrate.

Moreover, I have chosen not to include the fables of the Scottish poet Robert Henryson, writing at the end of the fifteenth century. Henryson composed thirteen beast

fables, based at least in part on the Romulus collection.[10] I am not examining Henryson's *Morall Fabillis* in this dissertation for a number of reasons: in addition to matters of space, Henryson wrote in Scots (Middle Scots), and my intention here is to focus on the medieval French (Anglo-Norman) fables of Marie de France and their subsequent influence on the corpus of medieval English fables; more significantly, Henryson's fables (and Henryson himself), as I read them, do not fit my argument as neatly as do those of Marie, Chaucer, Lydgate, and Caxton: each of these fabulists and their fables can be understood in terms of their precise historical contexts; all four were writers and translators associated somehow with the royal court and with their respective monarchs and as such occupied positions wherein they had to negotiate conflicting roles and desires. And their fables and prologues often articulate anxieties about their roles as authors and translators, anxieties about the reception of their work. These fables thus can make statements about these conflictual obligations. Along these same lines, Marie, Chaucer, Lydgate, and Caxton exhibit in their fables an anxiety resulting from their contemporary cultural milieus, which includes tensions associated with patronage. Henryson, though, seems to be a more independent poet/translator who is less beholden to or connected to his audience and one whose fables exhibit these anxieties to a lesser degree. Perhaps this perception stems in part from the fact that we know so little about Henryson compared to his English counterparts.

In the hands of the French and English fabulists, the medieval fable becomes a device for not only questioning and exploring the nature of truth (or, perhaps more

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[10] See excerpt 3.18 in *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, et al. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999. 281.

accurately, truth-telling) and fiction, but also for legitimizing oneself as an author and translator. What follows is an attempt to affirm the importance of these four writers in the realm of beast fable, but also in the field of vernacular translation, and thus show their significant roles in helping to establish the concept of the medieval author.

CHAPTER 1

BEAST FABLES AND THE AESOPIAN TRADITION

> Thenne, sith it is soo that suche thynges as be recounted and indede of fables and tryphlis reportynge of the paynful jewesse and dedely woo of helle hugely procure the myndes of peple unto compassion and to observe justyce and equyte, of a more forcyble apparence it is to be extemed that historyal mater, which is the very assured maistresse of trouthe, as the very tendre moder of philosophie, frameth us unto maners and to vertue addressith.

The above statement, translated from the fifteenth-century historian Poggio Bracciolini's *Bibliotheca Historica of Diodorus Siculus* by John Skelton (c. 1488),[1] is a derogatory remark about the perceived "fictionality" of fables (and perhaps a slighting allusion to Dante's *Inferno*), "tryphlis" that appeal to the emotions and that are contrasted with the truth of "historyal mater." If literature is indeed concerned with a search for "truth," then the fable would seem to be inherently beyond the realm of literature. Why, then, have so many great writers of literature chosen to write fables? And why have a number of distinguished philosophers, thinkers, and artists praised the virtues of the fable? It might be said that it is the fable which expresses truth more simply and yet more intricately than perhaps any other literary form.

Naturally when one speaks of the beast fable, one speaks of Aesop. For many the adjectives "beast" and "Aesopian" preceding "fable" are interchangeable. Although not all beast fables that we read or hear today (or that people in the European Middle Ages

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[1] See Skelton's Prologue to the *Bibliotheca*, excerpt 3.15 in *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, et al. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999. 271-3.

heard or read) originated with Aesop, we can nevertheless securely place most of these tales in the Aesopian tradition. Tracing the precise origin of "Aesop's fables" would prove a daunting task, made difficult in part because one cannot say with certainty that Aesop himself ever existed. Herodotus, writing in the fifth century BC, considered Aesop to be a historical figure, perhaps a contemporary of Homer, who lived on the island of Samos in the Aegean Sea, near the coast of modern Turkey.[2] Legend has it that Aesop, a mute slave, was divinely rewarded with the gift of speech and then used his new-found power to outwit various adversaries, gradually rising to the position of advisor to the king of Babylon. He supposedly recounted the beast tales in order to save his life after being arrested for insulting and denouncing the citizens of Delphi (the official charge was theft). Despite his story-telling prowess, the Delphians nonetheless executed him by hurling him from a cliff.[3]

Some might perceive Aesop's tragic (and ironic, given the legacy) fate as suggesting that the fables were not an especially effective genre of persuasive speech, but the history of the fables themselves proves otherwise. "Aesop's fables" are one of the longest-lived and most widely diffused genres of ancient Greek and Roman culture, marking a tradition that flourished for more than a thousand years in Greece and Rome, and they then experienced a rebirth in the High Middle Ages, enjoying another millennium of popularity lasting until the present day. Aesop's fables have been so frequently published that it is widely assumed that in Europe only the Bible has more editions.

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[2] *The Histories*, trans. Robin Waterfield, ed. Carolyn Dewald.

[3] See *Life of Aesop*, trans. Lloyd Daly, in *Anthology of Greek Popular Literature*, ed. William Hansen, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1998.

Usually considered children's literature, Aesop's fables have the reputation of being small and simple tales. Most assume that everyone has read, or heard, the fables. The Aesopian motifs of sour grapes, a wolf in sheep's clothing, the lion's share, the hare versus the tortoise, and much more have become a part of Western culture. As a slave and teller of tales featuring animals, Aesop has been seen as the ancestor of and lumped with Uncle Remus and his popular children's stories from the American South.[4] It would be easy to explain away the continuing popularity of Aesop as a vestige of childhood story time, but adults can re-engage Aesop and find much more than they might imagine. These well-known "children's" stories and their moral lessons have been loved by such august adults as Aristotle, Erasmus, and Leonardo. Plutarch included Aesop in his gathering of the Seven Sages of ancient Greece. As Socrates awaited execution, he versified Aesop. One of John Locke's last projects was an edition of Aesop (1703; Locke died in 1704), and Martin Luther translated twenty Aesopian fables into German.[5] Perhaps the fables reached their literary apogee with the seventeenth-century French translation of Jean de La Fontaine, whose verse fables, most of which are retellings of Aesop, are one of the masterpieces of French literature. Are Aesop's beast fables simple stories? Few things in literature are as complex. Their unmitigated appeal to great writers, thinkers, and philosophers over the last two millennia attests to their *gravitas*.

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[4] It is worth noting here that Joel Chandler Harris opens his Introduction to *The Complete Tales of Uncle Remus* with a comment on the stereotypical categorizing of beast fables as children's or "non-serious" literature: "I am advised by my publishers that this book is to be included in their catalogue of humorous publications, and this friendly warning gives me an opportunity to say that however humorous it may be in effect, its intention is perfectly serious." From Harris' *The Complete Tales of Uncle Remus*, ed. Richard Chase, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1955, xxi.

[5] See Willis G. Regier, "Aesop's Translators Have Had Varied Agendas," *The Chronicle of Higher Education, Chronicle Review*, February 15, 2008.

In large part the corpus of beast fables owes its survival to the schools of antiquity and the Middle Ages, and this may be one reason that fables have been associated with children and children's learning over the last millennium. Even today the practice of anthropomorphizing animals in order to teach children is a fundamental precept of education for children, popularized through children's media. This use of animals for educating children derives from the classical era, when teachers used beast fables to smooth the transition from nursery to grammatical or rhetorical training. One of the most explicit depictions of the educative role of fables comes from the Roman rhetorician Quintilian, who declaimed,

> Therefore let pupils learn to paraphrase fables of the Aesopic sort, which follow closely upon the stories of the nursery, in plain and unexcessive language; and thereafter to effect the same simplicity of style in writing. Let them learn to resolve metrical verses into prose, next to convey its meaning while changing the words, and then to reshape it more freely in a paraphrase; in this it is permitted both to abridge and to elaborate, so long as the poet's meaning remains intact. This task is difficult even for polished instructors, and the person who handles it well will be qualified to learn anything.[6]

Quintilian's statement carries a double significance in the context of this study, in that it also serves as a commentary on translation and the constitutive importance of grammatical and rhetorical education in primary schools in establishing and maintaining methods of literary translation. In addition to serving as an ideal vehicle for engaging and enabling students to practice grammar and rhetoric, beast fables were used, apparently, as material for translation exercises.

As evidence, one can point to the third book of the bilingual schoolbook known as the *Pseudo-Dositheana Hermeneumata*, written at the beginning of the third century.

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[6] *Institutio oratoria* I.9.2-3, ed. and trans. H. E. Butler. Loeb Classical Library. London, 1921-22. 116-17.

This text, used to teach Greek to Latin speakers and Latin to Greek speakers, features eighteen fables, and these fables figured prominently in the text.[7] And we know that this employment of fables in translation exercises (such as the *Hermeneumata*) continued, perhaps unbroken, in the schools at least to the High Middle Ages.[8] Fables continued to be used in the Middle Ages both as texts for elementary reading and as material for exercises in composition and recapitulation.[9] Despite the skepticism expressed by some thinkers toward fables because of their "fictiveness," fables continued to be seen in the Middle Ages as ideal school texts, as a genre or form that entertains yet at the same time edifies. By their very form fables embodied the Horatian ideal of *delectatio* and *utilitas*. Medieval writers such as Boccaccio remarked on this particular appeal of fables and their double benefit, suggesting that fables provide a means of luring ignorant people into learning.[10] Because of its inherently ethical qualities and capacity for moral correction, the fable attained a status akin to theology. Heinrich Steinhowel, in a German translation/collection of Aesop's fables that served as a principal source for Caxton's *Aesop*, suggests this vaulted status: "Every fable is invented to show men what they ought to follow and what they ought to flee. For fable means as much in poetry as words

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[7] See Ziolkowski, p. 22, wherein he states, "The impression given by the *Pseudo-Dositheana Hermeneumata* is borne out by papyri of Latin versions of Greek fables: of the different exercises prescribed in the *Hermeneumata*, those concerned with fable were the most often practiced."

[8] See James J. Murphy, "The Teaching of Latin as a Second Languagein the 12th Century." *Historiographia Linguistica* 7 (1980): 159-75.

[9] Ziolkowski, p. 22.

[10] *Genealogie deorum gentilium libri* 14.9, trans. Charles G. Osgood, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1930.

in theology. And so I shall write fables to show the ways of good men."[11] No less a theologian than Martin Luther expresses the religious character of fables:

> Faciemus Sion ex ista Sinai aedificabimusque ibi tria tabernacula, Psalterio unum, Prophetis unum, et Aesopo unum.
>
> We will make a Zion out of this Sinai and we will build there three tabernacles, one for the Psalms, one for the Prophets, and one for Aesop. [12]

Elsewhere he surmises, "Surely there is more learning in Aesop than in all of Jerome."[13] It should come as no surprise then that fables featured prominently as exempla in medieval sermons. One of the best-known medieval Latin fabulists, Odo of Cheriton, was a cleric and noted preacher who featured beast fables in his sermonizing and subsequently wrote down these tales in a verse collection, intended for preachers.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, undoubtedly because of this theological quality, the fable was firmly placed in the hands of the Anglican Church. A number of Anglican prelates seized upon the moral/ethical nature of the fables, seeing essential material for their moral crusades, and published numerous additions of Aesop from 1722 to 1912. It was during this period of Anglican dominion, particularly in the eighteenth century, that the fable experienced a "conversion" of sorts in its form, leading to its modern reputation as a children's tale.[14] At the same time, the fable became a weapon in the Protestant/Catholic clash in England, cited by Protestant leaders in their reaction to the Aesopian collection of Roger L'Estrange, which reigned as the dominant

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[11] *Caxton's Aesop*, ed. Robert T. Lenaghan, Cambridge, Mass., 1967.

[12] See John W. Doberstein, "Luther and the Fables of Aesop," *The Lutheran Church Quarterly* 13 (1940): p. 70.

[13] *Ibid*, p. 72.

[14] Willis G. Regier, "Aesop's Translators Have Had Varied Agendas," 2.

English translation from the end of the seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries. Willis G. Regier demonstrates the active engagement of the Anglican Church with Aesop from the eighteenth through the early twentieth centuries:

> Then came the Rev. Samuel Croxall (47 editions between 1722 and 1865), whose translations held sway longer than any other, and whose simplification of the tales bears much of the responsibility for Aesop's relegation to children's reading. Those who followed either continued that trend or combated it by giving close attention to original texts. . . . Croxall began his edition by damning L'Estrange as a papist whose Aesop was perverting and pernicious to children. Croxall ruled Aesop's morals for a century, till overtaken by the Rev. Thomas James (30 editions between 1848 and 1912) and the Rev.George Fyler Townsend (20 editions between 1867 and 1911).[15]

Although the medieval French and English fabulists did not employ the beast fables to engage in religious wars, they did nonetheless, and more subtly than their successors, utilize the fable to, among other purposes, make moralistic commentaries, an argument that will be developed in the chapters below.

Identifying Latin sources for the medieval fabulists (both vernacular and Latin) can be a thorny endeavor. The textual sources of Aesop and other fables from antiquity available to medieval authors were, generally, those of the Latin poets Phaedrus and Babrius. These collections are notable not the least for their being the first published collections of fables in verse form. Moreover, the poems of Phaedrus can be dated to the early first century, making his the earliest extant collection of fables, while those of Babrius were likely composed at the end of the first or beginning of the second century. Medieval fabulists, if indeed they make any reference to a primary (usually a Latin) source, generally cite the "Romulus" tradition. In the prologue to her fables, for example,

[15] Regier, 2.

Marie de France, in addition to invoking Aesop (her collection is often titled *Esope*), also writes,

> Thus those who wish to mend their ways
> Can think about what wisdom says.
> The ancient fathers did just this.
> The emperor, named Romulus,
> Wrote to his son, enunciating,
> And through examples demonstrating,
> How it behooved him to take care
> That no one trick him unaware.[16]

Pace Marie, there is no evidence suggesting Roman emperor Romulus Augustus (or any other emperor named Romulus) wrote fables; in fact no evidence exists that there was ever any fabulist named Romulus. Modern scholars concur that the Romulus collection, dating from the fourth century, is anonymous and that it is for the most part composed of the fables of Phaedrus, with a number of others stemming from different sources.[17] The compilation takes its name from the dedicatory letter, which purportedly was sent from a certain Romulus to his son. During the Middle Ages, beginning in probably the eleventh century, the *Romulus* circulated in various reworkings, some prose and some in verse. The most popular medieval collection, known as the *Anonymus Neveleti* (and mistakenly as the fables of Walter the Englishman), was likely compiled at the end of the twelfth century. It survives today in more than a hundred manuscripts.[18]

Much of the material that came down to Marie de France, Chaucer, Lydgate, and Caxton as beast fables originated in the medieval *bestiaries*, moralized treatises in Latin

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[16] Harriet Spiegel, trans., *Fables*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994. 29.

[17] Ben Edwin Perry, ed. and trans., *Babrius and Phaedrus*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965. xxv.

[18] *Ibid*, xxvi.

that, for the most part, were translated from the second-century Greek *Physiologus*. These early beast fables were meant to instruct, to teach the public moral and religious lessons. The question then arises, "Why would authors choose to write simple tales about animals in order to teach moral and religious precepts?" Answers to this query range from the overly-simplistic (and perhaps presumptuous) to the more subtle and complex. According to some critics, the beast tale was the ideal vehicle to disseminate moral lessons to an uneducated audience. In his Preface to his English translation of the Old French bestiary of Pierre de Beauvais, Guy R. Mermier asserts, "This public, for the most part, was ignorant, could not read or write, and therefore animal stories were used so that these naïve souls could grasp more concretely the lessons and stories of the Old and New Testaments, the basis of the new Faith."[19] There may be some truth to this contention, but a more likely, and certainly more intriguing and compelling reason, is that posited by Jan Ziolkowski. In commenting on the function and significance of beast fables as a literary medium, he writes:

> Although in the hands of a propagandist animals can be used to inculcate the values of an existing regime, they can also help the literary subversive to attack the status quo. . . . Animals permit authors to take risks that they cannot take in stories explicitly about human beings. In particular, beast fables and beast folktales provide underdogs (the pun is purposeful)—whether oppressed classes or endangered individuals—with the means to express their viewpoint and to pass on advice to enable those like them to survive. Through beasts they can comment upon the powerful, express their resentments and frustrations, and fulfill in fantasy dreams that they could not realize in life.[20]

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[19] *A Medieval Book of Beasts*, Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992. vi-vii.

[20] Jan M. Ziolkowski, *Talking Animals: Medieval Latin Beast Poetry, 750-1150*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993. 6-7.

How does beast fable make all this possible? Ziolkowski adds, “To caricature enemies or oppressors as animals is a relatively safe form of humor, since often the targets of such mockery will refuse to make themselves ridiculous by acknowledging that any resemblance exists. . . . The related practices of humanizing animals and animalizing human beings have long been the mainstay of many adult insults and jokes, especially ones concerned with class and ethnic struggles” (7). Phaedrus, a freedman (former slave) and the author of the earliest extant collection of fables, dating to the early first century A.D., summed up the close relationship between beast tales and class oppression in explaining the origins of fable:

> Nunc, fabularum cur sit inventum genus,
> brevi docebo. servitus obnoxia,
> quia quae volebat non audebat dicere,
> affectus proprios in fabellas transtulit,
> calumniamque fictis elusit iocis.
>
> Now I will explain briefly why the type of thing called fable was invented. The slave, being liable to punishment for any offence, since he dared not say outright what he wished to say, projected his personal sentiments into fables and eluded censure under the guise of jesting with made-up stories. (Book 3, Prologue 33-37, trans. Perry 254-55).

As a former slave, Phaedrus knows whereof he speaks. It is interesting to note that, along with Aesop, one of the earliest and most important progenitors of the fable was a slave (as was Uncle Remus, the fictitious storyteller of the Brer Rabbit tales from the late nineteenth-century American South). Many of Phaedrus’ fables have social implications, such as “The Frogs Asked for a King” (Book 1, no. 2, trans. Perry 193-95), which comments on the dangers of tyranny, and “The Meeting of the Wolf and the Dog” (Book 3, no. 7, trans. Perry 266-69), whose moral states, “How sweet liberty is.” The fable also appealed to those of other classes and stations during the classical Greco-

Roman period. In the fifth century B.C. Socrates "was reputed to have busied himself while in prison with the versification of Aesop's fables. The philosopher's choice of activity fits well with the theory that ancient fable was a weapon of the small and weak against the mighty" (Ziolkowski 8).

In the Middle Ages, fabulists were not part of the underclasses because, of course, they wrote their stories and thus had to be literate and learned. Many medieval fabulists, in fact, were courtiers or somehow closely associated with the king or royal family. Indeed every fabulist under consideration in this study—Marie de France, William Caxton, John Lydgate, and Geoffrey Chaucer—can be categorized as such (as noted earlier, however, Caxton in particular had a somewhat dicey relationship with his sovereign). Other prominent medieval fable writers were clerics writing in Latin, such as the thirteenth-century writer Odo of Cheriton, who also used the fable as a platform for social criticism, particularly targeting the Church. All of these fabulists used the fable as a vehicle for socio-political commentary. Those four examined here, perhaps precisely *because* of their prominent social positions and closeness to the royal inner circles of their day, had to be even more circumspect in their discourse than would a writer or storyteller in a lower class or less public position and thus would have found in the fable their ideal, and safest, means through which to satirize. In an interesting twist, Chaucer makes one of his two fabulists a servile figure, as the Manciple is essentially a servant of the law courts; the *OED* defines a "manciple" as a "slave" ("servant" in the *MED*), and the Old French *mancipe* is also defined as "*esclave, serviteur*".[21]

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[21] Frederic Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue francaise et tous ses dialectes de IXe au XVe siecle*. 392.

Apart from the social criticism that the fable genre enabled, writing about talking animals also engenders a kind of literary liberty: it often gives authors more license to experiment with styles and registers than they would find in writing about human characters. Often writers of fable are wont to employ traits of the most "serious" literature, such as epic, and play them off against a plain-and-simple style, as Chaucer does so adroitly in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*. As the *Manciple's Tale* reveals, fabulists such as Chaucer have compellingly demonstrated that the power of speech corrupts, that no sooner can an animal talk than it yields to the impulse to talk too much or too brazenly.

In addition to providing this potential poetic cover for fabulists, an important function of beast fable is that it creates a need for interpretation, and it is this quality that is especially germane to my study. The fable necessarily raises questions of fiction versus truth—what are the truths embedded in these fabulous tales of talking animals? How should we interpret the allegorical content? What is the message of the tale? The chapters that follow will demonstrate how some of the most important writers of medieval Europe attempt to address these questions.

CHAPTER 2

THEORIZING VERNACULAR TRANSLATION

> There is no problem as consubstantial to literature and its modest mysteries as that posed by a translation.
>
> Borges, "*Las versiones homéricas*"

In Borges' story "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*," we are reminded that no translation can ever be identical to an original. In this tale, or essay (generically the text, as do many of Borges', problematizes neat categorization), the twentieth-century protagonist attempts to write his own version of *Don Quixote*, but he wants his version to be identical to Cervantes' text (the only stated difference being that Menard's *Quixote* will consist of a few specific chapters from the original)—not simply a mechanical copy, but a new writing that's nevertheless word-for-word identical to Cervantes' work. Because he wants to recreate the original text, he is required to live an identical life to that of the original author. Only by reliving Cervantes' life in every detail can Pierre Menard hope to succeed. Eventually he gives up the notion of reliving Cervantes' life, but the narrator of the story suggests that he does succeed in this "absurd" endeavor, writing a text exactly like the original, identical in every word. Moreover, according to the narrator, Menard's text is not only more subtle, but "infinitely richer" than Cervantes' original, due to its modern perspective and the obstacles Menard had to overcome to produce it.

Borges' story, of course, illustrates the absurdity of trying to identically recreate anything, particularly the concept of sameness between texts. Although Borges never

uses the word "translation," his story is nevertheless a story about translation (interestingly enough, in part 2 of *Don Quixote* we meet a character who is translating the novel itself, thus demonstrating that even the original work is, in a sense, a translation). Borges' fascinating story serves as an illustration of his views on translation itself: he ascribes as much validity, merit, and prestige to a translation as to the original text, and suggests that even the act of reading can stand as a translation and can transform a text, creating an original, discrete text. Along with Walter Benjamin, Borges was one of the first modern writers or theorists to challenge the long-held traditional view of the primacy and privileged status of the original text (Borges addresses translation directly in three essays from the 1920's and early 30's) and the premise of "lost in translation." Indeed he terms the notion of the inferiority of translations a "superstition."[1]

Much of contemporary translation theory has been occupied, over the last few decades, with trying to reclaim the status of the translation and, by extension, the translator. In the Middle Ages, the notion of the "translator's invisibility" was basically unknown, as it was commonplace for even the most prominent poets to take a tale from oral tradition or from an extant text and re-work it, creating a work that often surpassed the original in merit and renown and which was considered more an original literary work than as some sort of copy. In fact it was frequently the case that a translation was much more "visible," popular, and privileged than its source or analogue.

Considering the enormous scale of translation being carried out in the Middle Ages, it may seem somewhat surprising that we have relatively few extant texts in which medieval authors write *about* translation. Numerous writers address it, but they generally

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[1] Borges, "*Las versiones homéricas"* (1932) in *Obras Completas I*. Barcelona: Emecé Editores España, 1996. 239.

do so briefly, and their remarks are usually confined to a prologue or preface to one of their own translations. Moreover, these references to translation are often characterized by the stock "humble supplication" in which the writer addresses her audience (often a patron) and presents herself as an unworthy translator, unschooled in the Source Language, asking the reader to excuse her lack of subtlety or polish. In addition, these passages generally inform the reader that the translated version will be in the most *playn* and *entendible* terms, implying a common, popular audience when usually the audience is composed of nobility and clerics. Rather than examining translation theoretically, these authors have a pragmatic translation agenda.

One of the first writers to formulate a theory of translation was the early Renaissance French humanist Etienne Dolet (1509-46), who was tried and executed for heresy after "mistranslating" one of Plato's dialogues in such a way as to imply disbelief in immortality.[2] In 1540 Dolet published a short outline of translation principles, entitled *La manière de bien traduire d'une langue en aultre* and established five principles for the translator:

> 1. The translator must fully understand the sense and meaning of the original author, although he is at liberty to clarify obscurities.
> 2. The translator should have a perfect knowledge of both the original language and the "new" language.
> 3. The translator should avoid word-for-word renderings.
> 4. The translator should use forms of speech in common use.
> 5. The translator should choose and order words appropriately to produce the correct tone.[3]

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[2] Richard Copley Christie. *Etienne Dolet, the Martyr of the Renaissance, 1508-1546*. 2nd ed., 1899. 22.

[3] Christie, 25.

Dolet's principles, ranked as they are in a precise order, stress the importance of *understanding* the original (Source Language, or SL) text as a primary requisite. The translator is far more than a competent linguist, and translation involves both a scholarly and sensitive appraisal of the original text and an awareness of the place the translation is intended to occupy in the "target language" (TL) system.

Dolet's views were essentially reiterated by George Chapman, the renowned translator of Homer, in 1598. Both Dolet and Chapman believed that the Platonic doctrine of the divine inspiration of poetry clearly had repercussions for the translator, in that it was deemed possible for the 'spirit' or 'tone' of the original to be recreated in another cultural context.[4]

Although Dolet is credited with originating one of the first formal theories of translation, many writers examined the notion of translation and devised various translational precepts long before the Renaissance. One can look as far back as Latin antiquity to observe the earliest writings on translation, the most notable being the observations of Cicero. Probably the most familiar Ciceronian principle, which was appropriated by medieval authors and has since maintained its vitality up through the present, centers on the notion of translation being either literal (word for word) or loose (sense for sense), the latter of which was advocated by Cicero. Indeed this dualistic approach to translation flourished during the Middle Ages; throughout many medieval translators' prologues and epilogues we can see variations on this idea. For example, in John Lydgate's epilogue, or "envoy" to his *Daunce of Machabree* (or *Danse Macabre*), found in Part III of the *Fall of Princes*, the second (and final) stanza reads thus:

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[4] Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies*. Revised ed. London: Routledge, 1991. 68.

Out of the French I drough it of entent,
Not word by word but following in substaunce,
And from Paris to Engeland it sent,
Only of purpose you to do plesaunce.
Rude of langage, I was not borne in France,--
Haue me excused, my name is Iohn Lidgate;
Of ther tong I haue no suffisance,
Her curious miters in Englishe to translate. (665-72)

We must remind ourselves, however, that Cicero and his contemporary theorists (Horace and Quintilian) were not speaking to what we moderns conceive of as translation, but rather, as Rita Copeland so assiduously demonstrates in her study *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages*, to the classical academic disciplines of rhetoric and grammar: "In Latin antiquity, it was the framework of rhetoric and grammar, and of the relationship between these two disciplines, that gave meaning to ideas about translation. For the Middle Ages as well, it was through the tradition of academic discourse, inherited from the Romans, that ideas about translation took shape."[5] Copeland further clarifies the goal and function of Roman translation, stating, "The theories of translation contained in the writings of Cicero and Quintilian were formulated, not with the express aim of defining the practice of translation itself, but rather as a way of defining the status of rhetoric in relation to grammar. Translation theory was one way of clarifying the difference between the two disciplines."[6]

For the Roman theorists, translation was significant, of course, because of Rome's close but ambivalent relationship with Greek culture. Latin writers such as Cicero were occupied with translating rhetorical and grammatical principles from Greek texts, such as

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[5] *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991. p. 9.

[6] *Ibid*. pp. 9-10.

those by Aristotle, and thus translating from one language to another became a priority. Cicero, Horace, and Quintilian, in fashioning a Latin textual and literary tradition, borrowed from the Greek models, and were thus conscious of Greece's influence, yet at the same time a tension existed concerning this indebtedness and concerning the prestige of one language/culture vis-à-vis the other. Copeland suggests that Cicero best articulates this tension:

> In *De finibus*, Cicero expresses this ambivalence in terms of a deep contradiction: Latin must be made a fitting linguistic instrument for the transmission of Greek philosophical texts and thought, so that it can rival the suppleness of the Greek language; yet the purpose of such refinements is to render Latin adequate to serve the Greek texts which it will carry over to Roman literary culture. Even in this express aim of linguistic rivalry, the idea of service to a superior culture is implicit. But it is precisely this deep ambivalence that creates a place for translation in the Roman curriculum and also in the higher reaches of Latin rhetorical and literary theory.[7]

This marked ambivalence that one culture and its language harbors toward another can also aptly characterise the translational program in twelfth to fifteenth-century Europe, wherein Latin reigned as the long-established, unrivaled written language. During this period the vernacular tongues of Italian, French, and English and those who were writing in them experienced this same tension that Cicero had felt more than a millenium earlier. A number of vernacular texts express this humility vis-à-vis their Latin sources or analogues, yet at the same time claim that they wish to express the ideas of the Latin text in *pleyne speche* so that the text can be read, understood, and appreciated outside the cloistered world of the Church or the similarly insular realms of the universities or law courts.

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[7] *Ibid*. p. 11.

In addition to its voicing this tension and ambivalence that marked the classical translational program from Greek to Latin, Cicero's *De finibus* is a significant text in translation theory for additional reasons: it is where we see Cicero's argument, still a standard method of literary translation today, espousing a sense-for-sense technique, in philosophical translation, and eschewing a word-for-word approach, and, perhaps even more significantly, where he suggests that translation can be, and should be, more than mere replication of the words and meanings of the original:

> And supposing that for our part we do not fill the office of a mere translator, but, while preserving the doctrines of our chosen authorities, add thereto our own criticism and our own arrangement: what ground have these objectors for ranking the writings of Greece above compositions that are at once brilliant in style and not mere translations from Greek originals? . . . If Greek writers find Greek readers when presenting the same subjects in a differing setting, why should not Romans be read by Romans?[8]

The notion that translation should go beyond a reproduction in the Target Language of ideas and words from the Source Language and entail rearranging, interpretation, and criticism, marks a departure from traditional, conventional thinking about translation. Cicero's theory presages one of the fundamental precepts of modern and postmodern translation theory.

The importance of Cicero, and particularly of St. Jerome (a contemporary of Augustine), to medieval translation practice and theory, and thus to this study, is seminal. The conventions of translation theory in the western European tradition were first formulated within the discipline of rhetorical practice in classical Rome, and these initial precepts for translation were transmitted to the Christian Middle Ages largely through the writings of Jerome. Moreover, as Jerome was author of the *Vulgate*, his authority for the

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[8] *De finibus bonorum et malorum,* ed. and trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1914), 1.2.6.

Latin Middle Ages was unassailable. And just as Jerome was indebted to Cicero for his translational method, numerous medieval authors/translators were influenced by the writings of Jerome on translation, albeit perhaps in a less direct manner. An important mediary for this transmission of translation theory was the Christian philosopher Boethius, one of the most popular pre-medieval writers during the High Middle Ages whose work was translated into medieval vernaculars (particularly English and French) on a considerable scale, the most prominent examples being, of course, Chaucer's *Boece* and Jean de Meun's *Li livres de confort de philosophie*, the latter serving as an additional source for Chaucer. Much of what Chaucer and other medieval authors knew of classical writers, such as Plato, for example, was learned from the works of Boethius. To examine Boethius' influence in medieval translation theory, we first need to consider the policies and remarks of Jerome.

In the realm of translation theory, Jerome is generally labeled a Ciceronian, suggesting that he advocates a sense-for-sense approach to translation of non-scriptural texts. While this description may coincide with Jerome's own translational practice, and with *some* of his theoretical statements *about* translation, pinning down his position on translation can be a thorny endeavor. Jerome defies neat categorization in that he seems to contradict himself in his various writings on translation.

In Jerome's Epistle 57 to Pammachius, also known as *De Optimo Genere Interpretandi*, Jerome proclaims himself a disciple of Cicero and Horace and their sense-for-sense method:

> In fact I not only admit but openly declare that in translation from Greek texts (except in the case of sacred Scripture, where the very order of the words is a mystery) I render the text, not word for word, but sense for sense. For this I have the authority of Cicero, who translated Plato's *Protagoras* and Xenophon's

> *Oeconomicus* and the two most beautiful orations of Aeschines and Demosthenes . . . Cicero's authority will suffice for me; in the prologue to those orations he remarked: "I did not hold it necessary to render word for word, but I preserved the general style and force of the language. For I did not think I ought to count them out to the reader like coins, but to pay them by weight, as it were." . . . Moreover Horace, a shrewd and learned man, similarly advised the skilled translator: "Do not attempt to render word for word like a faithful interpreter." When I translated Eusebius' *Chronicle* into Latin, among other matters in the preface I said: "It is difficult, when following another's path, not to overstep somewhere."[9]

Implicit in Jerome's comment is the idea that he *does* espouse a word-for-word technique in translating Scriptural texts, "where the very order of the words is a mystery." For secular works, however, Jerome seems more open to a license that allows the translator to use his own judgment and critical apparatus in producing the most effective and accurate translation. He suggests elsewhere that it is the peculiar nature of the secular or philosophical text that compels a different tack to that taken for rendering Scripture, asserting that conveying the sense or meaning of the original can be problematic, as seen in his preface to Eusebius' *Chronicle*, wherein he intriguingly uses the metaphor of translation as a journey or pilgrimage, exploring translation and presenting it in spatialist/visualist terms. Citing his own preface to his translation of Eusebius, Jerome in this passage depicts translation as a journey back through the route already traveled by another. The road retaken is always longer: "When I try to accommodate the full sense, I take a long detour around a short course."[10] Along the way, progress is constantly hindered by rhetorical and linguistic detours and obstacles:

> There are other matters to consider: the prolixity of *hyperbaton*, difference in

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[9] Epistula 57, *Ad Pammachium de optimo genere interpretandi*, *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum* 54.

[10] *Eusibii Pamphili chronici canones latini vertit, adauxit, ad sua tempora produxit S. Eusebius Hieronymus,* ed. J. K. Fotheringham (London: Milford, 1923), p. 1, 12a.

> grammatical cases, the varieties of rhetorical figures, and finally what I might call the particular native character of the language. If I translate word for word it sounds silly; if by necessity I change some aspect of word order or diction, I will seem inadequate to the task of the translator . . . The point of all this is that it should not seem strange to you if our translation offends, if its hesitant speech is uneven with consonants and its vowels open with hiatus, or if it is constrained by the summary treatment of the subject.[11]

Jerome here demonstrates the inherent difficulties in preserving the force and figures of the original language and the source text's general *sententiae*. He not only argues against word-for-word translation, but suggests that a sense-for-sense approach is hardly the ideal.

Although less extensive than those of Jerome and other contemporaries, the remarks of St. Augustine on translation are nevertheless pointed. In *De doctrina Christiana*, within a section focusing on ambiguities in the Bible and whether to interpret them literally or figuratively, Augustine suggests that a translator, rather than translating in a vacuum, must take into account context and other considerations when rendering a sacred text into another language, and that clarity of meaning is more important than literalness. Examining a passage from Thessalonians that he sees as problematic when translated from Greek to Latin, Augustine writes:

> But if the translator had been willing to say, *Propterea, consolationem habuimus, fratres, in vobis* [instead of *consolati sumus*], the translation would have been less literal but also less doubtful as to meaning. Or, if he had added *nostri* [i.e., "our brethren"], almost no one would have doubted that *fratres* should be construed as a vocative. . . . Only rarely and with difficulty may we find ambiguities in the literal meanings of the scriptural vocabulary which may not be solved either by examining the context which reveals the author's intention, or by comparing translations, or by consulting a text in an earlier language.[12]

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[11] *Ibid*. p. 1, 12a-25b.

[12] *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. New York: Macmillan, 1958. p. 83.

To advocate, in translating the Bible and thus the divine word, a non-literal, essentially sense for sense method in which the translator is encouraged to boldly make changes and additions, especially on the part of a bishop of Augustine's status, may have struck some observers (and perhaps still may strike some) as a profane exercise, but it underscores Augustine's influence in shaping some contemporary theories of translation.

In his comments on translation, Boethius also grounds his method vis-à-vis Cicero and Jerome's dualistic formula, yet he, in a sense, inverts Jerome's revision and arrives back at a literal approach as the best for maintaining fidelity to the source text. He provides a glimpse into his translational principles through a statement in the prologue to his second version of Porphyry's *Isogoge*:

> This second work, a readily accessible exposition, will clarify the syntactic order of my translation, in which I fear that I have committed the fault of the "faithful translator," as I have rendered it word for word, plainly and equally. And here is the reason for this procedure: that in these writings in which we seek a knowledge of the matter, it is necessary to provide, not the charm of a sparkling style, but the uncorrupted truth. Wherefore I count myself very successful if, with philosophical texts rendered into the Latin language through sound and irreproachable translations, there be no further need of Greek texts.[13]

Boethius here valorizes the strategy of literal translation as the only means of certifying the "uncorrupted truth" of the original text and transposes Jerome's policy of literalism in translating Scripture to the project of translating philosophical texts. In a sense, then, Boethius reclaims secular translation, by taking the privileged *modus* of sacred translation—a literalistic approach stemming from the idea of divine speech as unalterable and not to be undermined or falsified by the linguistic liberties of a translator--and applying it to his program of translating philosophical texts. Interestingly, he

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[13] *Isagogen Porphyrii*, ed. Samuel Brandt, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 48 (Vienna and Leipzig, 1906), p. 135.

suggests that the "faithful translator"—the *fidus interpres*—who renders a text word for word is somehow at fault, or at least is perceived as being at fault, when he or she uses this method for secular translation. Indeed this air of inferiority seems evident by Boethius' need to justify his word-for-word technique. Boethius' remarks above indicate that it is in the very language of the text that the translator is to find its uncorrupted truth, and any departure from the linguistic properties of the source represents a departure from its substantive properties.

This characterization of the translational objectives and strategies of Jerome and Boethius begs the question, "What does it have to do with medieval translation?" W. Schwarz has suggested that Boethius draws his formulation from Jerome, and that John Scotus Eriugena, a ninth-century philosopher and translator, in turn draws his from Boethius, citing the parallel commentary on translation between the latter two. We can note in Eriugena's statement an almost identical sentence to that of Boethius above:

> If however the syntactic order of the aforementioned translation will have been judged to be obscure or less open, let me be seen as the translator, not the expositor of this work. Indeed I fear that I have committed the fault of the faithful translator.[14]

A number of Eriugena's works circulated widely through the Middle Ages and became closely linked with such writers as William of Malmesbury, Hugh of Saint Victor, and Alanus of Lille.[15] Moreover, one can hardly speak of medieval translation without speaking of Boethius, an extremely popular author throughout the Middle Ages

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[14] W. Schwarz, "The Meaning of *Fidus Interpres* in Medieval Translation," *Journal of Theological Studies* 45 (1944): 73-78.

[15] *Ibid*. 74.

who was perhaps translated in this period more than any other writer.[16] Both Eriugena and Boethius embrace literalism in translation and seem to reject the rhetorical eloquence favored by Cicero and, to an extent, Jerome. For most medieval authors, translating was, as Copeland describes it, a "hermeneutical performance," a term which suggests that translation in the Middle Ages, because of its contested status in the disciplinary competition between rhetoric and grammar that began in Roman culture, negotiates between hermeneutics and rhetoric, "modus interpretandi and modus inveniendi," exegesis and representation (Copeland 4). At one extreme of this spectrum would have been William Caxton, who could be viewed as closely aligning himself with the literalistic translational method of Boethius and Eriugena.

Caxton, as a commercial entrepreneur, had the more pragmatic goal of directly transmitting a French, Latin, or Dutch text into English, with little interest in a "hermeneutical performance." With Caxton's *Aesop*, in particular, we see more prominence given to representation, less to hermeneutics. Caxton, who seems to view the task of the translator as would many modern translators—as a matter of linguistic fidelity and accuracy--may be the classic late-medieval example of the "faithful translator." Rather than simply an exception to the rule for medieval translators, Caxton, writing near the end of the fifteenth century and thus on the cusp of the Early Modern period, represents a transition into the modern conception of the literary translator and his or her adherence to fidelity.

Likely one reason for this conception is that with the advent of modernity came an emphasis on commercialism, with which Caxton, as the originator of England's first

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[16] See A. J. Minnis, *Chaucer's Boece and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius*. London: D. S. Brewer, 1993.

printing press, is closely associated. One of Caxton's primary objectives was to sell books and make money, not only for himself but for the crown, which had a vested interest in his printing enterprise. In late fifteenth century Europe the percentage of people who could read, and who thus were interested in purchasing texts, was increasing dramatically. Commercial publishers such as Caxton were pressured to produce and then distribute texts at a rapid pace, and these time constraints no doubt led to "mechanical," literal, sometimes word-for-word translations. Moreover, unless the translator had already established himself or herself as a prominent, reputed writer, such as Lydgate a few decades before Caxton, he or she was likely to have little appeal to readers as an "original," poetic author: a "faithful" translation of an established canon such as Aesop's fables rather than one with poetic license that takes liberties with the original text would have been more popular and sold more copies. It is such concerns that contributed to a new kind of translation and translator with the waning of the Middle Ages, and Caxton and his successors, such as Wynkyn de Word, with their reputations firmly established as printers and, indeed, translators, stood as apt representatives of this new tradition. Medieval translators before Caxton were considered first, usually *only*, as artists—the idea of Chaucer, for example, being perceived as a translator, was (and still is, generally, today) simply not considered.

At the other end of the medieval spectrum stand translators such as King Alfred, writing, like Eriugena, in the ninth century. Surely the only translator known as "the Great" (although Chaucer, it must be pointed out, was called by his contemporary Eustace Deschamps "the great translator"), Alfred had altogether different objectives than Caxton for his translation program. He is notable in the field of translation in part for the

extant writings *about* translation we have, not only from the first, arguably, king of England (and one of the most famous English kings), but also because these commentaries represent some of the few extant statements on translation from the Anglo-Saxon period. Rather than commercial, and therefore to an extent self-seeking, motives, those for Alfred were decidedly educational, not for Alfred himself but for the people of England. In his Prose Preface to his translation of Gregory's *Cura pastoralis*, Alfred proposes a broad, ambitious translation program designed to impart knowledge and wisdom to the Anglo-Saxon community, whom he saw as effectively cut off from learning because most of the available writings were in Latin:

> Then I wondered very much at the good counsellors who were there before throughout England, and who had studied all those books completely, that they would not turn any portion of them into their own language. But then I immediately answered myself again, and said: "They did not think that men should ever be so careless and learning so fallen off: they left it undone on purpose, and intended that there would be the more wisdom here in the land, the more we would know languages."[17]

Alfred then sets down his main justification for undertaking the translation of Gregory's text, one he deems worthy of translating:

> Therefore it seems better to me . . . that we also translate certain books, those which are most needful for all people to know, that we turn those into that language which we can all understand, and bring it about, as we very easily may with God's help, if we have the peace, that all the youth of free men who now are in England, those who have the means that they may apply themselves to it, be set to learning, while they may not be set to any other use, until the time when they can well read English writings.[18]

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[17] From *Translation--Theory and Practice: A Historical Reader*, ed. Daniel Weissbort and Astradur Eysteinsson. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006. p. 37.

[18] *Ibid,* p. 37.

Alfred was also one of the first in a long line of medieval translators of Boethius'*De consolatione philosophiae*, another book that he must have considered "most needful for all people to know." Another important Old English author involved in translation was the cleric Ælfric, writing a century after, and still in the wake of, Alfred's translation initiative. In his Preface to his Grammar, a translation of excerpts of Priscian's *Institutiones grammaticae* which became the first Latin grammar in a medieval vernacular language,[19] Ælfric, interestingly, writes one section in Latin and one in English, a device meant to mollify a hostile audience skeptical of the practice of translation. The Latin statement, intended, of course, for a learned, sophisticated audience, seeks to justify the fact that he is engaging in this dubious activity by suggesting that it is merely a method of educating children:

> I, Ælfric, as one knowing little, have applied myself to translating into your language these excerpts from the lesser and greater Priscian for you tender little boys so that, having read through Donatus' eight parts of speech, you may in this book apply to your tenderness both languages, namely Latin and English, in the time until you reach more perfect studies. Now I know that many will blame me because I have desired to occupy my mind in such studies, namely turning the art of grammar into the English language, but I intend this text to be fitting for ignorant boys, not for their elders.[20]

This statement is a powerful illustration of not only the traditional debased reputation of translation itself, but also of the self-conscious inferiority felt by writers of English, or any medieval vernacular language, vis-à-vis Latin. Translation is such a blameworthy occupation that Ælfric is compelled to defend himself against detractors, sounding almost apologetic. And texts translated from Latin into English, he assures his English audience, in Latin, are fit not for adults but only for "ignorant boys."

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[19] *Ibid*, p. 39.

[20] From *Translation—Theory and Practice: A Historical Reader*. Trans. Jonathan Wilcox.

One of the most intriguing and original medieval apologies for translating Latin into English can be found in John of Trevisa's translation (c. 1400) of Ralph Higden's *Polychronicon* (1387), wherein Trevisa introduces into his prologue a dialogue between a clerk and a lord, the subject of which is translation. Trevisa's attempt to justify and validate his translation can be clearly seen through this technique. Throughout the dialogue, the clerk insists that translation of Latin works and of the *Polychronicon* itself is not only unwarranted, but somewhat blasphemous, while the lord finds himself having to continually counter the clerk's argument and defend his decision to have the book translated. At the end of the dialogue, the clerk, after finally having been convinced of the merits of the translation, beseeches God to "grant us . . . wit and wisdom wisely to work, might and mind of right meaning to make translation trusty and true."[21] The effect is surely potent: here the translator John of Trevisa has seized upon a classic, idealized, popular late antiquity/medieval generic form—the allegorical dialogue, occurring often in a spiritual context between man and divinity (for example, Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae*) or in the form of a debate between beasts, usually birds (*The Owl and the Nightingale* being the best-known example in English)—and cleverly turned it into an *apologia* for translation. This tension and self-consciousness on the part of the translator, which we shall see repeatedly among medieval translators into the vernaculars, will be explored in depth in this study.

The above statements by Ælfric and Trevisa, both of whom wrote for "patrons," suggest something about the relationship between the translator and patron, perhaps indicating that the tension results in part from the relationship. It is important to consider

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[21] From *Translation—Theory and Practice: A Historical Reader*, p. 50.

these and other translations in the light of relations of patronage. The system of literary patronage is closely aligned with translation, and should be looked at in broader terms than many recognize.

It may be axiomatic to state that literature and the culture in which it is produced are closely interconnected. According to some theorists, literature is one of the systems that constitute the "complex 'system of systems'" known as a culture (Steiner, Peter. *Russian Formalism*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984, p. 112). This concept is a distinguishing feature of systems theory, one of the fundamental theories in Translation Studies. Basing his ideas upon this theory originated by the Russian Formalists, Israeli scholar Itamar Even-Zohar developed what he termed Polysystem Theory (refined even further by his colleague Gideon Toury), a model denoting the aggregate of literary systems, from "high" forms or canonical works to "low" forms such as popular fiction or children's literature, in a given culture. The distinguishing, novel feature of Polysystem Theory not taken into account by earlier translation studies scholars, according to contemporary translation scholars such as Edwin Gentzler, is its diachronic component, examining literary translation in its historical context.[22] With its abandonment of the concept of "translation equivalence" and prescriptive, deep-structured grammar, and comprehensive description of the historical situation, Polysystem Theory and its adherents take a systemic approach, describing not the process of the transfer of a single text, but the process of translation production and change within the entire literary system.

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[22] *Contemporary Translation Theories*. Revised 2nd ed. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2001. p. 109.

In systems theory, the literary system and other systems belonging to the culture or social system are open to each other; they influence each other. According to the Formalists, they interact in an "interplay among subsystems determined by the logic of the culture to which they belong."[23] Translation theorist André Lefevere elaborates on this interplay of systems:

> There appears to be a double control factor that sees to it that the literary system does not fall too far out of step with the other subsystems society consists of. One control factor belongs squarely within the literary system; the other is to be found outside of that system. The first factor tries to control the literary system from the inside within the parameters set by the second factor. In concrete terms, the first factor is represented by the 'professional[s],' who . . . are the critics, reviewers, teachers, translators. They will occasionally repress certain works of literature that are all too blatantly opposed to the dominant concept of what literature should (be allowed to) be—its poetics—and of what society should (be allowed to) be—ideology. But they will much more frequently rewrite works of literature until they are deemed acceptable to the poetics and the ideology of a certain time and place.[24]

Lefevere then proceeds to his examination of the second factor, which he terms "patronage," an institution that operates mostly outside the literary system and is "understood to mean something like the powers (persons, institutions) that can further or hinder the reading, writing, and rewriting of literature" (15). It is the Foucauldian sense of "power" here that Lefevere is referencing, a force not primarily repressive but rather generative.

Patronage is usually more interested in the ideology of literature than in its poetics, which, of course, is the realm of the professional, who is generally acknowledged as the authority where poetics is concerned. Patronage, particularly in the late Middle

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[23] Peter Steiner, *Russian Formalism*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984. p. 112.

[24] *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. London: Routledge, 1992. 14.

Ages, was wielded not only by religious bodies, royal courts, and aristocratic families, but also by nascent publishers and, as we shall see below**,** guilds and local government officials (Regarding some of these latter groups, the case of William Caxton is an intriguing one—he may be the best late medieval example of one who straddled both spheres--ideology and poetics, patron and poet. As a publisher, Caxton, who, incidentally, printed Lydgate's *The Churl and the Bird*, was certainly a patron who exercised some authority in determining what works would be published and, to an extent, how they would be written. And as a prominent member of the London Mercer's guild he perhaps also wielded some influence as a patron, but it is important to note that in the fifteenth century the hierarchy of patronage would have required publishers/printers such as Caxton to be beholden to a higher "patronal power," the final arbiter of ideology, which in Caxton's case, with his Westminster publishing house, often meant the king, notably Edward IV and Richard III).

Perhaps no late-medieval English poet was more closely engaged with the system of patronage than John Lydgate, who manifestly wrote most of his poems for specific occasions and/or patrons. And most of these works were re-writings, adaptations, or translations, some, as Lydgate twice declaims in *The Churl and the Bird*, being deliberate, acknowledged translations of a text in a foreign tongue. As a "professional," then, Lydgate was expected to determine and maintain the literary system, but he was not free to write whatever he wanted in order to do so.

Patrons try to regulate the relationship between the literary system and the other systems, which, together, make up a society or culture, directing yet at the same time depending on the professionals to ensure this regulation. Patrons basically determine the

ideology and orthodoxy that "dominate that phase in the history of the social system in which the literary system is embedded. In fact, the patron(s) count on these professionals to bring the literary system in line with their own ideology" (Lefevere 15).

The Marginalization of Translation and of Translation Scholarship

> Translating, I would remind the reader, was, for a long time, regarded as a baneful pretension in certain regions of culture. Some do not want anyone to translate into their language, and others do not want anyone to translate their language; and war is needed in order for this treachery, in the literal sense, to be carried out: to hand over the true language of a people to a foreign land. . . . But the translator is guilty of greater impiety still. He, enemy of God, seeks to rebuild the Tower of Babel, to turn to good account and profit, ironically, the celestial punishment that separates men in the confusion of languages.[25]

Blanchot's provocative statement above suggests that translation's marginalized, ostracized status is a remnant of the past, that in today's enlightened world translation has acquired a mantle of respectability. Unfortunately, despite the efforts of a growing group of scholars devoted to reclaiming its status, translation is still generally considered an inferior, parasitic practice. The notion of betrayal (to which Blanchot alludes), of the translator as a traitor (consider the well-known Italian adage *traduttore, traditore*), one who is incapable of producing an original text, has proverbially accompanied translation throughout history yet continues even today. In a 2004 report of the *Guardian* newspaper, in response to the largest examination board in the UK's dropping of Latin and Greek, "a teacher of Classics, no less, is quoted as saying—quite casually one feels, and not fearing contradiction: 'And it is not enough to trust those who translate, for he who translates, not only explains but corrupts.'"[26] Recent scholarship in translation studies is replete with

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[25] Maurice Blanchot, "Translating." *L'Amitié* (Friendship), pp. 57-58.

[26] Introduction, *Translation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Daniel Weissbort and Astradur Eysteinsson. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006. p. 3.

examples of reviews and essays that describe translating in pejorative terms. The tradition of the secondary status of translations is so entrenched and pervasive that even translators themselves disparage their own profession, perhaps without realizing it. Noted (American) translator Willard Trask, one of the most important twentieth-century translators who translated, among other prominent works, Eric Auerbach's *Mimesis*, when asked in an interview whether the impulse to translate is the same as that to write a novel, replied:

> No, I wouldn't say so, because I once tried to write a novel. When you're writing a novel, you're obviously writing about people or places, something or other, but what you are essentially doing is expressing yourself. Whereas when you translate you're not expressing yourself. You're performing a technical stunt. . . . I realized that the translator and the actor had to have the same kind of talent. What they both do is to take something of somebody else's and put it over as if it were their own.[27]

This idea of the translator as an actor, a performer on stage who is portraying or trying to represent the "original" author, is a somewhat common self-perception among modern translators, who effectively repress their own identity or personality with this mindset.

A related, secondary issue which has, perhaps paradoxically, rarely been addressed is that of the status of *translation scholarship* and by extension the translation scholar. Despite the advances made in the field of Translation Studies over the last few decades, the discipline still struggles to find its niche in the academy and has yet to fully establish its legitimacy. Nevertheless, translation scholars today, particularly those who have evolved beyond the linguistic, descriptive, and synchronic approaches and now address translation in light of a whole new series of questions and considerations,

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[27] Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, p. 7.

generally enjoy more than a modicum of respect in the academy. Just three decades ago this was not the case. The headnote above by Blanchot describing the marginalization of the translator might aptly be applied as well to certain literary scholars in the 1970's who ventured into the largely uncharted territory of translation scholarship. A case in point would be the provocative one of George Steiner and his seminal but polemical monograph *After Babel*.

In exploring translation and medieval literature, which this dissertation takes as its focus, we usually go to the medieval author's preface in order to find any comments about the translation process. Indeed it is often the preface, seemingly ancillary to many and often ignored and passed over to quickly get to the "important" part—the text or the story itself--which yields much more than the main text in conveying any information or substance about translation. And in exploring the issue of the marginalization of the translation scholar, we can look at the 1991 Preface to the Second Edition of *After Babel* for an interesting model. The preface is essentially an *apologia* by Steiner defending his book after the First Edition came under attack shortly after its publication in 1975. Although Steiner in the preface acknowledges that critics of his work rightly argued that it contained errors and imprecisions, he seems to suggest that the attacks in part were motivated by the fact that he was undertaking a study of translation itself, that he was forging new ground, and, moreover, because a study of something as large and complex as translation inherently involved a comprehensive examination that, observes Steiner, had become anathema to an academy that had of late fragmented into minute specialization "to an extent almost defiant of common sense."[28] Steiner opens the book

[28] *After Babel*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992. p. x.

(in the *Acknowledgements* section) by stating that "this book has, to a great extent, had to define and map its own field." He then opens the preface with the blunt statement, "This book was written under somewhat difficult circumstances. I was at the time increasingly marginalized and indeed isolated within the academic community."[29] He goes on to remind the reader that more often than not it is the best works that go against the grain. Steiner then writes:

> But there are dangers. *After Babel* attempts to map a new field, a new space for argument. . . . But there had been, before *After Babel*, no full-scale endeavour to relate, to bring into interactive focus, the diverse areas of rhetoric, of literary history and criticism, of linguistics, and of linguistic philosophy. There had been no ordered or detailed attempt to locate translation at the heart of human communication or to explore the ways in which the constraints on translatability and the potentialities of transfer between languages engage, at the most immediate and charged level, the philosophic enquiry into consciousness and into the meaning of meaning. Inevitably, such an attempt at innovative synthesis will be vulnerable. . . . The specialist holds the "generalist" or "polymath" in vengeful disdain. And his authority and technical grasp over a given inch of ground may, indeed, exhibit a confidence, an immaculate humility, denied to the comparatist, to one who (awkwardly or with a peremptory bound) crosses stiles between fields.[30]

Steiner continues his defense by alluding to some of his critics (among them Noam Chomsky), notably "Professor Edward Ullendorff in a review-essay of magisterial severity" and asserts:

> But the acerbities of the response to *After Babel* in academe did not stem from reproof over details. It betrayed a profound, worried dismay at the very concept of a larger perspective, of an alliance between philosophic concerns, poetic sensibility, and linguistics in the more formal and technical sense. . . . By the mid-1970s, the barriers ran high between specializations inebriate with a largely spurious claim to "scientific" status. Among stamp collectors letter-writers are not always welcome.[31]

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[29] *Ibid.* p. ix.

[30] *After Babel*, p. x.

Steiner then concludes his apology with a self-conscious statement suffused with defensiveness and the spirit of a martyr:

> Although it has been continuously in print, *After Babel* remains to academic linguists, to those who theorize about or claim to teach translation, an irritant and the anarchic act of an outsider. . . . Yet even in this corrected guise, *After Babel* will, I suspect, continue to be something of a scandal or *monstrum* which the guilds of linguistic scholarship and linguistic and analytic philosophy will prefer to neglect. Central tenets in this work remain almost deliberately misunderstood or threatening. Let me set them out summarily—and without repentance.[32]

It is the polemical terms such as "fidelity" and "faithful" that lie at the center of contemporary translation theory, which attempts to reclaim the literary translator and her work from the canonical margins to which they have been consigned for more than a century, particularly in Anglo-American culture. In the 1970's, the discipline of Translation Studies emerged as a significant field in the academy. With its roots in the 1930's and the work of theorists such as Walter Benjamin, Translation Studies has been occupied with, among other issues, de-mystifying the original (Source) text and language and their sublime status, and correspondingly conveying the significance that the translated text and Target language inherently possess. Modern translation theorists wish to debunk the ingrained notion of the "translator's invisibility" and impart an esteem to the translation (and translator?) itself. Essentially, and perhaps paradoxically, their goal in attempting to forge a new, even postmodern, conception of literary translation is to bestow upon the translation a status tantamount to that of the literary translation (and translator) in the Middle Ages. We have already noted that translators such as William Caxton manifestly strived for transparency in their versions. Rather than simply an

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[31] *Ibid*. p. xi.

[32] *Ibid*. p. xii.

exception to the rule for medieval translators, Caxton, writing at the end of the fifteenth century and thus on the cusp of the Early Modern period, represents a transition into the modern conception of the literary translator and his or her adherence to fidelity.

Drawing on the ideas Benjamin posited in "The Task of the Translator," Maurice Blanchot, in his provocative 1971 essay **"**Translating,**"** inverts conventional wisdom and argues for the primacy of the translation, in that it can influence and effect a significant change in the Target language:

> The translator is a writer of singular originality, precisely where he seems to claim none. He is the secret master of the difference of languages, not in order to abolish the difference but in order to use it to awaken in his own language, through the violent or subtle changes he brings to it, a presence of what is different, originally, in the original.[33]

Translation is, Blanchot suggests,

> the play of this difference: it alludes to it constantly; it dissimulates this difference, but occasionally in revealing it and often in accentuating it; translation is the very life of this difference; it finds in this difference its august duty, and also its fascination as it proudly brings the two languages closer by its own power of unification, a power similar to that of Hercules drawing together the banks of the sea.[34]

Rather than considering the "original" text, or foreign text, as some megalithic cultural monument that overshadows the translation, Blanchot, not unlike Benjamin, sees it as "never immobile," an organic, pliable entity whose essence can be captured by the translation in a unique way, reconstituted in the translator's language. The foreign text is a derivation of literary works, a work dependent not only on preexisting texts, but also on the translation itself:

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[33] From *L'Amitié* (Friendship), trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997. p. 59.

[34] *L'Amitié*, 60.

> A work has acquired the age and dignity to be translated only if it contains this difference in such a way as to make it available, either because it originally makes a gesture toward *another* language or because it assembles, in a manner that is privileged, the possibilities of being different from itself or foreign to itself, which any spoken language has.[35]

Blanchot's observations suggest something about culture—the difference that makes a source language text valuable to Blanchot is never "available" in some unmediated form. It is always an interpretation made by the translator, viewed from a particular ideological standpoint in the target-language culture. Every step in the translation process is mediated by the diverse cultural values that circulate in the target language, always in some hierarchical order. In explaining this negotiation of cultural values and practices required by the translator, Lawrence Venuti suggests that translators thus are faced with a dilemma that fixes them squarely in a political quagmire:

> The translator, who works with varying degrees of calculation, under continuous self-monitoring and often with active consultation of cultural rules and resources (from dictionaries and grammars to other texts, translation strategies, and translations, both canonical and marginal), may submit to or resist dominant values in the target language, with either course of action susceptible to ongoing redirection. Submission assumes an ideology of assimilation at work in the translation process, locating the same in a cultural other, pursuing a cultural narcissism that is imperialistic abroad and conservative, even reactionary, in maintaining canons at home. Resistance assumes an ideology of autonomy, locating the alien in a cultural other, pursuing cultural diversity, foregrounding the linguistic and cultural differences of the source-language text and transforming the hierarchy of cultural values in the target language. Resistance too can be imperialistic abroad, appropriating foreign texts to serve its own cultural political interests at home; but insofar as it resists values that exclude certain texts, it performs an act of cultural restoration which aims to question and possibly re-form, or simply smash the idea of, domestic canons.[36]

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[35] *Ibid*, p. 59.

[36] *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, London: Routledge, 1995. pp. 308-09.

Of course Venuti's language indicates that he espouses an approach to translation based on resistance, that he sees the translator not as a passive scribe who is simply "faithfully" recopying a foreign text into his or her own language, but rather an initiator, and moreover a subversive who challenges the prevailing cultural norms and hierarchy. Venuti, as do other contemporary observers, argues that modern Anglo-American culture rejects this approach to translation, close-mindedly holding fast to the conception of the invisible, transparent, faithful translator who strives for sameness between texts and is hostile to any element of foreignness. He illustrates this mindset that effectively constrains Anglo-American translators by providing an excerpt of a 1991 translation contract: "The translation should be a faithful rendition of the work into English; it shall neither omit anything from the original text nor add anything to it other than such verbal changes as are necessary in translating into English."[37] The notion of the translator as an agent for change and resistance also characterizes the translational theories of Benjamin and Blanchot, who suggest that this resistant behavior on the part of the translator has the effect of unifying the foreign and the translator's language and thereby unifying the two cultures as well, rendering them less alien to each other. Indeed this image of translator as one who transgresses or undermines the established order or system in order to effect a commonality between different languages is strikingly conveyed by Blanchot in the epigraph above which opens this section.

Translation is often defined as a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings reflect a certain ideology as well as poetics; they manipulate literature to function in a given culture or society in a given way. Perhaps one of the most significant, and earliest,

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[37] *Ibid*, p. 310.

examples of a statement on rewriting comes from St Augustine. When faced with the dilemma that a number of passages in the Bible clearly did not correspond to the teachings and expectations of the still relatively young Christian Church, he recommended that these sections be interpreted and then "rewritten" until they could be reconciled with the teachings of the Church. Augustine suggested that if a scriptural passage "seems to commend either vice or crime or to condemn either utility or beneficence," that passage should be taken as "figurative" and "subjected to diligent scrutiny until an interpretation contributing to the reign of charity is produced."[38] Augustine's comments exemplify this ideological function of rewriting. As bishop of Hippo and essentially the leader of the Christian Church in Africa, Augustine had attained an elevated position in an organization that embraced a distinct ideology and he therefore saw translation, and moreover a specific type of translation with a specific end, as a way to maintain that ideology. In a sense, then, Augustine could be seen as a conservative who does not espouse a "translation of resistance"; on the other hand, however, the fact that he, a bishop, no less, unabashedly advocates rewriting and changing divinely-inspired scripture, the "word of God," suggests he is even more than an initiator—in this sense he could be viewed as a radical.

One of the major figures in the field of Translation Studies today, Lawrence Venuti, cited above, continues the path forged by other theorists, translators, literary critics, and translation historians, particularly those of the past four decades, who have attempted to amalgamate the numerous and varied translation theories and commentaries/publications about translation into a discrete academic discipline. One of

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[38] *On Christian Doctrine*. 1958. p. 93.

the pioneers of Translation Studies is James S. Holmes, whose 1972 essay "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies" marked a significant development in the emergence of this field.[39] Holmes' main objective in writing the article was to identify and explain what he saw as the principal impediments to the "development of a disciplinary utopia" in regard to translation, one of these being the proper name for this new, emerging discipline. He suggested the term "Translation Studies," and it soon became the accepted designation in the international academy. An additional, and more important, obstacle to the development of translation studies, according to Holmes, was the lack of any general consensus as to the scope and structure of this new discipline. To many, the term, and thus the field itself, was (and still is) largely synonymous with translation theory, but Holmes makes clear that this empirical discipline encompassed more than theory. Breaking translation studies down into three main branches—Descriptive Translation Studies, Theoretical Translation Studies, and Applied Translation Studies—Holmes further delineates sub-categories under each branch.[40] One of these he labels "Function-oriented Descriptive Translation Studies," and it is this area on which I shall base my study below of medieval vernacular fables, attempting to place these particular translated tales and their authors within a specific socio-cultural context.

In defining "Function-oriented Descriptive Translation Studies," Holmes underscores the difference between it and "Product-oriented Descriptive Translation Studies," which is a text-focused description of individual translations; it also includes comparative translation description, wherein various translations of the same text, either

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[39] From IJOAL 13.2: 1987, pp. 31-47.

[40] James S. Holmes, "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies," pp. 36-43.

in a single language or in various languages, are closely analyzed. In contrast, writes Holmes, Function-oriented Descriptive Translation Studies

> is not interested in the description of translations in themselves, but in the description of their functions in the recipient socio-cultural situation: it is a study of contexts rather than texts. Pursuing such questions as which texts were (and, often as important, were not) translated at a certain time in a certain place, and what influences were exerted in consequence, this area of research is one that has attracted less concentrated attention than the area just mentioned. . . .[41]

Holmes adds that "Greater emphasis on it could lead to the development of a field of translation sociology (or—less felicitous but more accurate, since a legitimate area of translation studies as well as of sociology—socio-translation studies)."[42] Although no such field has emerged in the decades since Holmes' groundbreaking statement, there have nevertheless been a number of studies in recent years using Function-oriented Descriptive Translation Studies as a basis. Perhaps the most significant and prominent example would be the nexus of translation studies and postcolonial theory. Notable postcolonial theorists such as Gayatri Spivak and Tejaswini Niranjana have explored the role of translation in the colonial and postcolonial context. And translation studies scholars such as Douglas Robinson, Susan Bassnett, André Lefevere, Harish Trevidi, Maria Tymoczko, Edwin Gentzler, and Samia Mehrez are actively involved in similar work.[43]

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[41] *Ibid*, p. 37.

[42] *Ibid,* p. 37.

[43] See Edwin Gentzler's discussion of recent scholarship in this area in *Contemporary Translation Theories*.

CHAPTER 3

IDENTITY CRISIS: MARIE DE FRANCE AND THE TRANSLATOR'S INVISIBILITY

Nothing is more serious than a translation.

Jacques Derrida "*Des Tours de Babel*"

In Norman Cantor's *Medieval Lives*, Marie de France, introduced as the court poet of Eleanor of Aquitaine, is presented initially in quite inconspicuous terms. As Queen Eleanor and her advisor and prospective biographer John of Salisbury discuss the merits of his narrative account of Eleanor's life, the queen turns to Marie and asks her opinion of it:

> Marie had been sitting silently on the grass. John did not know what to expect. He had never read any of her poems and he was not even sure that he had previously been aware of her existence. It was a new experience for John to have his writing judged by a woman. He was not sure whether Queen Eleanor really put stock in Marie's opinion, or if this was just a joke the queen was playing on him.[1]

This depiction of Marie, one of the most important writers of the Middle Ages, as a silent, invisible figure, of no consequence to the literary patriarchs of the day, serves as an ideal introduction to my study of Marie as a translator and author attempting to forge this identity in late twelfth-century Europe. In these seemingly banal musings of John of Salisbury we see the megalithic cultural obstacles confronting Marie, and thus any

[1] Norman F. Cantor, *Medieval Lives*. New York: Harper Collins, 1994. 111.

woman poet of the Middle Ages, in her endeavor to establish herself as a serious, respectable writer.

My argument in this chapter is that Marie, perhaps more than any of her Middle English fabulist successors, manifestly exhibits an acute awareness of and anxiety over the notions of authorial identity, authorship, and translation. Indeed she seems almost preoccupied with these issues, which I clearly demonstrate. I will closely examine Marie's prologues and epilogues to her three major works that convey this anxiety, but Marie's fables themselves contain a wealth of material that attests to not only her originality as a translator, but also to her concern with the role and function of the translator/author during the twelfth century. Concomitantly, Marie's fables, I suggest, can be read as a commentary on the power of language. For in these tales of talking animals we see the myriad capacities and unbound potential of language, more often than not, Marie seems to suggest, to deceive, entrap, betray, and doom participants in the conversation. And this dubious, duplicitous image of language can be tied to Marie's anxiety over the public perception of the vernacular poet and translator writing in the wake of Latin hegemony. Finally, I suggest that Marie highlights the entertainment value of the fable and its potential to delight (pointing to its close ties with the fabliau) rather than playing up its instructive character.

Better-known today for her *lais*, Marie de France may be the most important writer of fables in the Middle Ages. The twenty-three extant manuscripts of Marie's *Fables* attest to their popularity in the Middle Ages; no other medieval fable collection

boasts as many.[2] She manifests her originality in several ways, not the least of which is that she was a woman writer during a period dominated, to say the least, by male authors. It is even more remarkable to find a woman *fable* writer in the Middle Ages, as the fable genre has been, since its inception, almost exclusively a masculine one (in fact there are no other known female fabulists from antiquity through the eighteenth century[3]). Indeed the fables, labeled by many "Aesop's Fables," have historically been seen as the creation and property of a man (Marie herself calls her collection *Isopet*). They have traditionally been seen as a means of transmitting patriarchal wisdom, tales important for the formation of moral character and leadership qualities, typically directed toward the proper behavior of those in power, or those who will soon be in power. Some scholars thus see even Marie's fables as a "mirror of princes."[4]

One of Marie's significant achievements as a fabulist was that she was the first writer of Aesopic fable collections to write in the vernacular—in this case Old French or Anglo-Norman. Up to the late twelfth century, all other medieval fable collections were written in Latin. Marie was thus influential in making the written fable accessible to the wider society. Her brisk, pithy verse style converted stories preserved largely for rhetorical exercises in schools into vehicles for entertainment, and she transformed the

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[2] Harriet Spiegel, ed. and trans., *Marie de France: Fables*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994. 5.

[3] Harriet Spiegel, "The Male Animal in the Fables of Marie de France." *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Clare A. Lees. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994. 111.

[4] See Karen K. Jambeck, "The *Fables* of Marie de France: A Mirror of Princes," *In Quest of Marie de France: A Twelfth-Century Poet*." Ed. Chantal Maréchal. Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992. 59.

fables themselves into tales that reflected twelfth-century society rather than the classical world that had produced them originally.[5] This contemporary consciousness marked one of the most significant changes that Marie introduced into the fable tradition she inherited. One of her innovations was to feature more human characters and interactions than her predecessors. Indeed, one-third of Marie's fables include human characters, a significant departure from the Aesopic tradition. It is in this "human" innovation where we see Marie at her most original—writing stories marked by baseness, coarseness, erotic physicality, and the grotesque— qualities heretofore absent from the fable.

From the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, we have only five extant manuscripts of Marie's *Lais*,[6] strongly suggesting that they were less popular than the fables with medieval audiences. One can make a strong case that it was simply the genre of beast fable itself that struck a chord with medieval audiences. Therefore, the numerous manuscripts of Marie's fables likely attests not to the popularity of *Marie's* fables per se and their surpassing merit but simply to the merit seen in fables themselves, particularly those of Aesopian lineage, as Aesop (or the myth of Aesop), as noted earlier, was extremely well-known throughout the Middle Ages. But is it possible that there is something in Marie's fables, in addition to their composition in a vernacular language, that set them apart from other medieval fable collections, made them not only more accessible to medieval readers but also rendered them attractive as translations worthy of emulation? Below I will explore the novelty of some of Marie's rhetorical choices in her *Fables* and the importance of her prologues and epilogues in constructing an authorial

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[5] See Spiegel, "The Male Animal in the Fables of Marie de France," 112.

[6] *The Lais of Marie de France*. 1986. 32.

voice for the medieval poet and translator. This chapter will also explore the implications of the arguments that contemporary translators of Marie's work make about their role and choices as translators. I will show how, similarly to Marie, contemporary translators reveal their own questions and anxiety over issues of perception, reception, and authorship.

There is a wealth of material in Marie's prologues and epilogues that address the notion of authorship, of the identity of the medieval author, and these framing sections, rarely examined in depth, demonstrate that notions of authorial identity can be effectively explored and articulated in the context of translation. These prefaces and epilogues become particularly useful in a study of Marie as translator as the sources for many of Marie's fables are unknown[7] and thus we cannot see her translation technique. Howard Bloch underscores the richness of these sections, suggesting that the prologue to the *Lais* is a poetic manifesto of sorts, asserting that it "is as close to a vernacular *art poétique* as the High Middle Ages produced."[8] In this prologue Marie reveals a keen awareness of the concept of authorial identity, of the individual author. And this concept in the twelfth century was by no means a tenuous or naïve one; rather, it was quite sophisticated. Alistair Minnis has shown that Latin works of the twelfth century exhibit an awareness of their rhetorical circumstances, such as the name and intention of the author, the subject matter or material from which the work had been composed, the method of didactic procedure, the order and usefulness of the book, the branch of learning or "philosophy" to which the work belonged, etc., and that Latin prologues of the twelfth century address

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[7] See below, pp. 89-92.

[8] *The Anonymous Marie de France*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003. 25.

notions of authorship centering not only on questions of exegesis of texts but on "the late-medieval concern for the integrity of the individual *auctor*."[9]

For Marie, this authorial identification is marked by an historical awareness and also an eye to the future, in which "original" writers have a circumspect duty to consider the potential life of their work and those who will transmit it, while the re-writers and translators should be conscious of their duty as well. In the Prologue to her *Lais*, she writes:

> It was customary for the ancients,
> Priscian testifies to this,
> In the books that they wrote
> To express themselves very obscurely
> So that those in generations to come,
> Who had to learn them,
> Could provide a gloss for the text
> And put the most sense to their meaning.[10]

Examined in the context of the "translator's invisibility," Marie's statement is fascinating: it inverts the notion of the visible "original" author and insignificant translator, suggesting that those who attempt to transmit the "ancient" texts to their respective cultures and pass along their messages (under the rubric of glossing), carry a weighty responsibility. The burden is placed upon these re-writers not to accurately replicate the texts, but to reveal and make manifest their meaning. Implicit in the passage is that Marie herself, as one who is rewriting the texts of Aesop and other fabulists of antiquity, not only has the responsibility to manifest and clarify the messages of her

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[9] *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*. London: Scolar Press, 1984. 19-117.

[10] *Lais*, ed. Alfred Ewert. Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1995. 1.

predecessors but that those who transmit and rewrite her tales face these same expectations.

Marie's statement is significant because it underscores the extent to which medieval writers in the vernacular, who were largely translating or rewriting existing written texts or transmitting tales from oral tradition, perceived their role in historical and philological terms. It says something about the relationship between past and present, implying that this relationship seems to involve a process of continual decay or obfuscation, but also that this sense of the loss of original meaning through time has a linguistic component as well. The life of a literary work is one of degeneration and regeneration; texts continually reconstitute and reinscribe themselves, all the while gradually losing a degree of sense that can only be restored by a careful reader and/or translator. The idea of a careful, and effective, translator being first a careful reader is elaborated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who speaks of translating a text in terms of being intimate with that text:

> But no amount of tough talk can get around the fact that translation is the most intimate act of reading. Unless the translator has earned the right to become the intimate reader, she cannot surrender to the text, cannot respond to the special call of the text.[11]

Marie's prologues and epilogues reveal that she is intensely concerned about her name (with her literary reputation), with how her work, synonymous with her name, will be received. It is remarkable that in these texts this twelfth-century poet manifests a concern over how others might read, and misread, her writing, a concern that accords with contemporary literary theory to the extent that it emphasizes the notion of reception

[11] "The Politics of Translation." *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. New York and London: Routledge, 1993. 183.

over that of production. This self-consciousness is reflected in the prologue to "Guigemar":

> Whoever has good material for a story is grieved if the tale is not well told. Hear, my lords, the words of Marie, who, when she has the chance, does not squander her talents. Those who gain a good reputation should be commended, but when there exists in a country a man or woman of great renown, people who are envious of their abilities frequently speak insultingly of them in order to damage this reputation. Thus they start acting like a vicious, cowardly, treacherous dog that will bite others out of malice. But just because spiteful tittle-tattlers attempt to find fault with me I do not intend to give up. They have a right to make slanderous remarks.[12]

In this passage Marie exhibits a palpable tension regarding the question of reception. This conscious anxiety over the public reception of her work visibly illustrates the concern over the agency and authority of the writer that characterizes medieval literature. Although the concept of a writer's "literary reputation" may be more a modern construct than a medieval fact, authors in the Middle Ages were nonetheless concerned about how their work, and thus how they themselves, would be received. Marie, writing in a period marked by a paradigmatic shift in European literature—from an oral to a written literature, and, correspondingly, from epic to romance--stands as an exemplar of this authorial consciousness and anxiety.

Marie's acute awareness of what readers may or may not think of her is reflected in her dedication to the king in the prologue to the *Lais*, where she expresses an anxiety about appearing too brazen to her patron: "Ne me tenez a surquidie / Si vos os faire icest present" ("Do not consider me presumptuous if I make so bold as to offer you this gift") (ll. 54-55). And in the prologue to the *Fables* she worries that readers may think her mean somehow, or unsophisticated or uncourtly**,** and thus peremptorily justifies herself by

[12] *Lais*, ed. Alfred Ewert. Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1995. 21.

reminding them that she is merely assenting to her patron's (Count William's) request: "Ki que m'en tienge pur vileine, / De fere mut pur sa preere" ("Though some may think that I am crude / In doing what he asked me for") (ll. 36-37).

Marie's preoccupation with her reputation is justified, for even at the time she was writing other poets were envious of her. Denis Piramus, a contemporary lyric poet who was (as Marie probably was) a court poet for Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine, writes in his prologue to the *Vie de seint Edmund le rei:*

> E dame Marie autresi,
> Ki en rime fist et basti
> E compassa les vers de lais
> Ke ne sunt pas del tut verais
> Et si en est ele mult loee
> E la rime par tut amee,
> Kar mult l'aiment, si l'unt mult cher
> Cunte, barun e chivaler.[13]
>
> And Lady Marie as well,
> Who put into rhyme and constructed
> And composed the verses of *lais*
> Which are not at all true
> And yet for this she is much praised
> And her rhymes loved by all
> For many love her, and hold her dear,
> Counts, barons and knights. (translation mine).

Marie's prologue above seems to be almost a direct response to attacks by critics such as Piramus, whose own prologue, through its jealous disparagement of Marie, sharply reflects this concern and insecurity manifested by medieval poets about (their) writing, which breeds envy and which by its very nature is open to interpretation, and thus misinterpretation, and thus censure. Marie's anxiety regarding her legacy, about leaving one's mark as an artist, is clearly reflected in her Epilogue to the *Fables*:

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[13] *Vie de seint Edmund le rei*, ed. Hilding Kjellman. Göteborg: Elanders, 1935. v.35.

Put cel estre que clerc plusur
Prendreient sur eus mun labur.
Ne voil que nul sur li le die!
E il fet que fol ki sei ublie! (ll. 5-8)

And it may hap that many a clerk
Will claim as his what is my work.
But such pronouncements I want not!
It's folly to become forgot![14]

These lines, following as they do immediately on the heels of Marie's declaration of her name—"Marie is my name, and I am from France"—clearly demonstrate something about the medieval writer's concept of individual authorship: Marie is fixated on asserting ownership over her work and being a visible writer. Her proprietary stance is unmistakable. Marie's penchant for asserting this identity continues in the Epilogue to her *Espurgatoire Seint Patriz*, where she states,

Jo, Marie, ai mis, en memoire,
le livre de l'Espurgatoire
en Romanz, qu'il seit entendables
a laie gent e covenables. (ll. 2297-2300)

I, Marie, have put, from memory,
The Book of Purgatory
Into French, that it might be intelligible
And suitable to lay people. (translation mine)

Here Marie also expresses a concern with her audience and the reception of her work. Moreover, this passage reflects Marie's interest in translation and the transmission of sources. Her proud self-declaration as translator of the *Espurgatoire* contrasts sharply with the self-effacements or excessive justifications by modern translators of her works.[15] Marie's statements in her prologues and epilogues clearly demonstrate that, to her, no

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[14] *Fables*. Ed. and trans. Harriet Spiegel. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994.

[15] See below, pp. 78-84.

distinction exists between the notions of "author" and "translator." A translator can unabashedly acknowledge taking a story from another source while at the same time manifesting pride in the merits of her original text. Indeed it is compelling to note that Marie in this epilogue inverts the very convention of the primary, glorified author and the invisible, insignificant translator: where Marie states "Jo, Marie" in her translation, Henry of Saltrey in the parallel passage of the "original" Latin text[16] refers to himself not by his name but by the humble, anonymous, self-deprecatory expression *ego peccator*[17] ("I, sinner").

Just as one can examine the prefaces and epilogues of medieval poets to glean their thoughts on translation, we can also turn to these sections of modern translators of medieval poetry to see their views on the translation process and by extension on the status of the translator. These thoughts often center on not only the status and respectability, or not, of translation itself but on what makes a good translation. At the risk of oversimplifying, because, indeed, that is one of the main arguments of this study—that translation is a multi-layered, complex, thorny concept and practice—an examination of these prologues reveals that the authors generally avow either a literal, "faithful" method or one which takes liberties in order to best convey the meaning and message of the original or source text. As I have shown, the prologues or prefaces of modern scholarly studies on translation can be quite revelatory in showing the critics'

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[16] Marie's *Espurgatoire* is probably based on the *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*, by the English Cistercian monk Henry of Saltrey. See Michael J. Curley, ed. and trans., *Espurgatoire Seint Patriz*. Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1993.

[17] See *Das Buch vom Espurgatoire S. Patrice der Marie de France und seine Quelle*. Ed. Karl Warnke. Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1938. 168.

awareness of the polemical nature of translation. The contemporary equivalent of the medieval prologue, is, of course, the "Translator's (or Translators') Note." Of varying lengths and degrees of interest, these notes, like their generic forebears, usually reflect the translator's philosophy of translation. As this study opens with an examination of the fables of Marie de France and her position and role as a medieval translator, it seems appropriate to look at one or two modern examples of Translator's Notes for the works of Marie.

In the Modern English translations of Marie's texts, the Translators' Note by Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby introducing their version of the *Lais* is worth noting. After beginning the note with a dismissive reference to the first English translation of Marie's *lais*, by Eugene Mason in 1911, which they characterize as "interesting as a piece of period prose" but "frequently little more than a paraphrase of passages he seems not to have properly understood," Burgess and Busby then address the 1978 verse translation by Joan Ferrante and Robert Hanning, stating "Although infinitely superior to Mason's," it "lacks the kind of literal accuracy that, short of a poetic miracle, can alone convey the content of the original as precisely as possible."[18] The term "literal accuracy" in the latter statement suggests the belief, of course, that a translation is either right or wrong, correct or incorrect, and thus not an original text in any sense. The word "content," moreover, carries interesting implications as well: its use by Burgess and Busby might be taken as a justification, of sorts, of their decision to make a prose translation of Marie's richly poetic tales in verse, and begs the question of whether rendering only the content of a literary

[18] *The Lais of Marie de France*. London: Penguin Books, 1986. 37.

work, without regard to its form, i.e., its style and poetics, can produce a "good" translation.

Indeed, ironically, Burgess and Busby seem so conscious of defending their prose translation that their apology comes at the expense of Marie's *lais* themselves, which Burgess and Busby have heretofore suggested should be rendered literally, accurately, and as "closely" and "precisely as possible." In the second paragraph of the Translators' Note (to their Second Edition), they write, "Stylistically our final version differs in one major respect from our own earlier efforts and from Marie: we have renounced trying to reproduce Marie's rather short staccato phrases, often no more than a line long, and have given a little more "flow" to the translation in order to make the *Lais* somewhat easier reading."[19] The implication here, one might argue, is that the style of Marie herself is somewhat choppy, that some of her short phrases are *too* short and thus somehow deficient, and that the translators, by enhancing the "flow" of the lines, have thereby improved the *lais*. An observer more sympathetic to Burgess and Busby (and perhaps less sympathetic to the modern Anglophone reader) might argue, however, that they, while claiming fidelity, are in actuality being justly conscious of their contemporary audience and reading culture. Generally terms such as *literal, accurate, close, precise,* and, moreover, similar words such as *faithful, fidelity,* and *equivalency* (all of which are common terms in discussions of translation), are used to describe a word-for-word translation, but what Burgess and Busby seem to suggest is that these terms can valorize a sense-for-sense translation as well, which is ultimately what their translation of Marie's *lais* turns out to be. This notion is implied in a comment in the latter part of their

[19] *The Lais of Marie de France*. 37.

Translators' Note: "We have, however, avoided adding to the sense, and have included 'ands', 'buts', etc., only where the context allowed.[20] Notwithstanding the apparent contradictions in their work, the translation (1986) by Burgess and Busby remains the standard English translation of the *Lais* in the academy (along with Hanning and Ferrante's 1978 free verse translation), and therefore any quotations below from the *Lais* will be taken from this edition.

In marked contrast to Burgess and Busby's work stands Harriet Spiegel's translation of Marie's *Fables*, appearing only a year later. Though in her Translator's Note Spiegel uses precisely some of the same specific terms to describe her translation, such as "closely," and claims, like Burgess and Busby, that her translation is "literally accurate," she also emphasizes the importance of replicating the form of an original text in addition to the content:

> The translation is intended to be read as a parallel text; it follows the original closely, generally line by line, occasionally couplet by couplet. Because the form of the fable may well be as much a part of the "meaning" as the literal text, the translation attempts to present Marie's verse in an equivalent English form.[21]

A common *topos*, as we have already seen, among translators is, of course, to justify and defend their work, not only the decision itself to translate an important literary work, but the manner and method of the translation. Some, such as Burgess and Busby, do so by simply comparing their translation with the original, while others validate their translation by citing or invoking authorities. In her Translator's Note Spiegel adopts the common practice of medieval authors of citing or invoking an authority to certify one's

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[20] *Ibid*. 37.

[21] *Marie de France. Fables.* Trans. Harriet Spiegel. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994. 15.

translation. The effect of this device is that her justification comes across as less self-conscious than that of Burgess and Busby, and, moreover, that her translation itself seems to be placed on less shaky ground. She does this specifically to explain her choice of *form* for her fables:

> Fortunately, such a verse form did not need to be "created" for this translation, as English verse fables since the seventeenth century have adopted a standard verse form—iambic tetrameter rhymed couplets. Translations, such as Bernard Mandeville's in 1704 of La Fontaine and Christopher Smart's in 1768 of Phaedrus, adopt this form as the appropriate one for English verse. John Gay, England's finest original fable writer, used this form, as did Cotton, Swift, Cowper, Wilkie, Langhorne, and others. The form remains a favourite for current versions of Aesop's fables, though most of them are intended for children. Even today the form is apt, for it conveys the lighthearted yet pithy wit and wisdom of the fable and invites reading aloud. Fortuitously, this is the closest English form to Marie's, as both are in fact rhymed octosyllabic couplets.[22]

Spiegel's statement fortifies her *ethos* as a writer and translator, as she firmly places her fables in the established tradition of prominent fabulists and translators, without the accompanying self-aggrandizement. Spiegel continues, for more than a page, to discuss the form of her fables, elaborating on items such as rhyme and meter, while also addressing accent, caesura, grammar, gender (including grammatical and biological in relation to animals), etc. Her detailed, technical, jargon-laden language (feminine rhyme, medial caesura, inverted feet, dactylic and anapestic rhythms, etc.) and explanation of the translation, altogether absent in Burgess and Busby, may suggest, interestingly enough, a different audience. Are we to infer that--perhaps somewhat paradoxically, in that beast fables are conventionally meant for children--"romance" tales (at the risk of over-simplifying, we can say that the genre probably closest to Marie's *lais* is the medieval verse romance, but should note that romances are comparatively longer

[22] *Ibid.* 15.

than the *lais*) such as Marie's *lais* are intended for a more general, "non-professional," and, by extension, perhaps less sophisticated, audience than are fables? Perhaps more precisely, and significantly, we should ask, "Are modern translations of Marie's *lais* intended, or should they be intended, for a general audience? Conversely, are modern translations of beast fables, once the domain of schoolchildren, now of interest only to scholars?

Conspicuous by its absence (and in marked contrast to the Translators' Note of Burgess and Busby) in Spiegel's Translator's Note is the first person point of view. In describing and explaining her translation, Spiegel puts herself in the background, and effectively effaces her identity, by noting not what *she* does, but what "this translation" or "the translation" does. Personal pronouns are altogether absent. In her 1984 English translation of the *Fables*, Mary Lou Martin in her Translator's Note seems to go even further in ensuring her invisibility as translator, not only taking pains to avoid the words "I", "me", "my", and "mine", but relying on the passive voice to such an extent that certain passages of the Note are vague and read quite awkwardly:

> While faithfulness to the original was a primary concern in translating, it was necessary to take certain liberties to produce a smooth English narrative; prose was chosen instead of verse, for example, to avoid the singsong effect of an English verse form comparable to the original. Paraphrase has been used with discretion . . . The many relative clauses that appear, quite logically, in the most convenient position in the Old French text have also been restructured, for the most part, in the English version. Idiomatic expressions have been replaced by their appropriate English counterparts . . . The paired synonyms which Marie uses so often have been retained . . . The stylized openings and closings found in almost every fable, such as *ci dit* and *altresi est*, have been changed to an equivalent English commonplace ("once upon a time") or, in some cases, omitted. Shifts in tense sequence from present to past, so common in Old French narratives, have been largely eliminated in this translation to avoid confusion in

> English. Contractions appear most often in the English text where they seem to coincide with the register of language used in the original.[23]

Indeed the effect of Martin's oblique, "shadowy" style upon the reader is to suggest that she is describing someone else's translation and not her own.

This is a point that may be worth pursuing further. Martin, like Spiegel, like Burgess and Busby, is a literary scholar, trained in the academy to objectively analyze literary texts. This type of analysis by its nature privileges the text as the object of study, as the locus of the rewriting, and thus the essay or article or monograph, the rewriting itself of the primary text, is always secondary. The scholar of literature is taught *in principio* that the text being studied and analyzed is of paramount importance, with its reception and interpretation by readers, although important, as somewhat less so, and with the author of the analysis, or rewriting, as even less significant. Can a reading of a text be a type of rewriting of the text? Literary scholars generally approach a text that they are translating the same way they approach a text they are analyzing. Burgess and Busby do, of course, employ the first-person point of view, but it is the convenient, evasive, plural "we", the long-accepted, conventionally-employed form used in literary scholarship by a singular author. "We" is inherently less risky than "I": it implies a safety in numbers, not attracting scrutiny to oneself as an individual writer. One wonders whether Burgess or Busby would have employed the first-person in the Translator's Note had the translation not been a collaboration.

It is noteworthy to compare this self-effacing style of scholar translators with the style of their contemporary poet translators, whose Translator's Notes, in contrast, are

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[23] *The Fables of Marie de France*. Trans. Mary Lou Martin. Birmingham, Alabama: Summa Publications, 1984. 26.

typically characterized by a highly personalized description of their translations. One of the best-known and most highly-regarded Modern English translations of a medieval text is the 2000 translation of *Beowulf* by Seamus Heaney. In stark contrast to the academy-trained translators, and in terms that seem consonant with the ethos of a poet, Heaney in his Translator's Introduction recounts a narrative of the trials and tribulations he experienced in trying to render *Beowulf* into modern English, a Herculean task, he suggests, analogous to "trying to bring down a megalith with a toy hammer." Heaney goes on to reveal that there is something inherently Anglo-Saxon about his own poetry and thus about himself: "Part of me, in other words, had been writing Anglo-Saxon from the start. . . . I suppose all I am saying is that I consider *Beowulf* to be part of my voice-right. And yet to persuade myself that I was born into its language and that its language was born into me took a while."[24] In a more specific passage that in its subject matter parallels the remarks of scholar translators regarding method of translation, Heaney unequivocally calls attention to himself as translator:

> In one area, my own labors have been less than thorough-going. I have not followed the strict metrical rules that bound the Anglo-Saxon *scop*. I have been guided by the fundamental pattern of four stresses to the line, but I allow myself several transgressions. For example, I don't always employ alliteration, and sometimes I alliterate only in one half of the line. When these breaches occur, it is because I prefer to let the natural "sound of sense" prevail over the demands of the convention: I have been reluctant to force an artificial shape or an unusual word choice just for the sake of correctness.[25]

But Heaney's self-assertion as translator is marked by a humility and a reverence for not only the *Beowulf* poet and the text, but for the act of translating itself:

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[24] *Beowulf: A Verse Translation*. Trans. Seamus Heaney. Ed. Daniel Donoghue. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. 2000. xxxiii.

[25] *Ibid.* xxxvii.

> The erotics of composition are essential to the process, some prereflective excitation and orientation, some sense that your own little verse-craft can dock safe and sound at the big quay of the language. And this is as true for translators as it is for poets attempting original work. It is one thing to find lexical meanings for the words and to have some feel for how the meter might go, but it is quite another thing to find the tuning fork that will give you the note and pitch for the overall music of the work. Without some melody sensed or promised, it is simply impossible for a poet to establish the translator's right of way into and through a text. I was therefore lucky to hear this enabling note almost straight away, a familiar local voice, one that had belonged to relatives of my father, people whom I had once described (punning on their surname) as "big-voiced scullions."[26]

The translator, no less than the poet, is obligated to "find the tuning fork" and capture the music and spirit of the original text, thus rendering a poetic work, an art which compels her to impose herself onto the text and thus assume, as Marie suggests, the inherent risks confronting the poet but also reap the potential rewards.

The complexities of translation, of retelling or rewriting a text, and the risks that accompany such an activity, are reflected in Marie's *Fables* themselves, tales concerned with communication, language, and the ethics of such. Within this matrix Marie's *Fables* often say something about survival, and the importance of words, and discretion, in that struggle. One such fable is "The Wolf and the Boatman," in which a wolf who is desperately trying to traverse a river begs a peasant to ferry him across in his boat. The peasant initially refuses, but then states that he'll assent only if the wolf repays him by citing "treis paroles de saveir" (three wise sayings). The wolf readily agrees to the request, and, as they disembark, commences with the first "wise saying": "He does well who does well, you know." The wolf follows this banal phrase with a second platitude: "He does far worse, whoe'er does naught." Before reaching the opposite shore the

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[26] *Ibid*. xxxv-xxxvi.

boatman requests the third "truth," but the clever wolf demurs until he can be certain of his security:

> The wolf was very sly indeed.
> He thought he'd better speak no more
> Until he'd reached the other shore.
> Then when the wolf was safely there,
> He told the peasant man, "Now hear!—
> Both far and near you lose all when
> You minister to evil men!"
> The peasant said, "So God help me!
> You've told me three true things today.
> To say such things, why wait till now?"
> The wolf began to laugh aloud:
> "I did not dare! I was afraid
> You'd throw me off the boat!" he said. (ll. 26-38)

The wolf's first two sayings, while trite, are "wise" in the sense that they can be applied to both the boatman and the wolf in this situation. The third is more pointed, directed at the boatman and his suspect motives. One of Marie's more ambiguous, subtle fables, this tale merits further scrutiny.

"The Wolf and the Boatman" is an interesting exploration of the relationship between author or tale-teller and her audience. In this context the fable is noteworthy in that it addresses, among other issues, the notion of retelling or "rewriting" a text as an obligation, here specifically a form of payment. And it examines this obligation to create, or recreate, a text vis-à-vis the motives and expectations of one's audience, in this case the boatman, who, although clearly in a superior position as one who can help and guide his passenger to his desired place, nonetheless is depicted in negative terms. A number of Marie's fables feature characters highly attuned to the motives of their counterparts, who are often portrayed in pointedly adversarial terms. The wolf in this tale is no exception, prudently weighing the boatman's intentions against his own production or reproduction

of these three "truths." Interestingly, it is not so much the actions or statements that the boatman actually exhibits which arouse suspicion in the wolf, but rather the *potential* behavior, the potential for harm, that the ferryman embodies. This suggestion is reflected in the wolf's explanation to the boatman of why he delayed in uttering his third saw: "'I did not dare! I was afraid / You'd throw me off the boat!' he said. This focus on considering the motives of one's audience and its potential for manipulating or even destroying one's words may be Marie's way of commenting on the need for authors and translators to exercise caution and be circumspect in their storytelling and their messages.

Marie displays her originality as a fabulist in "The Wolf and the Boatman" by inverting the traditional bestiary representation of the wolf. This wolf, in stark contrast to the bloodthirsty wolf of "The Wolf and the Lamb," fable #2 in her collection, is very un-wolf-like: normally depicted as a villain, the wolf found in medieval bestiaries is a rapacious, duplicitous creature, dull-witted and naïve, who is almost always outwitted.[27] Here, however, the wolf is clever and moderate—restrained even. And rather than being the predator, he is the prey, or at least the would-be victim, almost duped not by the wily fox, as he repeatedly is in the *Renart* and *Ysengrimus* tales, but by a human character. Marie's originality as a translator in "The Wolf and the Lamb" manifests itself in the anxiety and fear professed by the wolf. In her principal source for this fable, the Romulus *Lupus vera dicens et nauta*, the wolf shows himself to be cleverer than the boatman but nowhere expresses any words similar to those of Marie's wolf in her fable's last two

[27] See Pierre de Beauvais, *A Medieval Book of Beasts*, trans. Guy R. Mermier. New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992.

lines, speculating on the victimization and even questionable survival of the wolf at the hands of his audience.

This inversion of the beast typology is also prominent in "The Fox and the Cat," Fable 99 in Marie's collection and thus quite possibly original to Marie. Here she changes the fox's character. In this fable the normally wily, clever fox, who always outwits his foe, becomes a helpless victim, savagely killed by two dogs despite his "pleine puche" (full pouch) of "cent engins" (a hundred tricks), while the cat with his one trick escapes harm. The significance of this typological inversion lies in what it says about human nature. If the beasts in fables are representative of human qualities, motivations, behaviors, etc., why, Marie seems to be asking, are the Aesopian fables so reductive? The beasts of these classical fables are generally reduced to a one-dimensional, never-varying type that represents humans as either this or that. Marie's innovation succeeds in underscoring the inherent complexities, diversities, and mutability of human nature—the fox is not always a fox, she suggests.

This fable's significance also lies in its analogousness to later medieval versions of the motif of the "three wise sayings," or "les trois savoirs." As we will see below in the chapter on John Lydgate, almost certainly one of the sources for Lydgate's poem "The Churl and the Bird" is the thirteenth-century French poem "*Les Trois Savoirs*," in which a peasant demands of a bird he has captured three truths in exchange for the bird's freedom. Like the wolf in Marie's fable, the bird proves wiser than the peasant. A number of other parallels between the two poems can be observed. Marie's "The Wolf and the Boatman" may well be a source for "*Les Trois* Savoirs," for which scholars have not established with certainty a source. **S**cholars have established that the first forty of

Marie's 103 fables correspond closely in sequence and in content with the *Romulus Nilantii*, a branch of the fourth-century prose fable collection called *Romulus*, a corpus based on the first-century Latin verse fables of Phaedrus, author of one of the two main branches of the Aesopic tradition (the other branch being the lesser-known second-century Greek verses of Babrius). It was generally via Phaedrus' fables that medieval Europe came to know Aesop.[28]

Identifying sources for the last sixty-three fables of Marie, of which "The Wolf and the Boatman" is one (No. 79), has proven much more problematic. To date still the most important and extensive source study for Marie's fables is that of Karl Warnke (1900), who cites as sources or analogues a diverse array of literary and fable traditions including (in addition to Latin and Greek) Sanskrit (specifically the third century B.C. *Panchatantra*), Arabic, and Hebrew mythology and folklore, but also folk traditions of Germany, Italy, Russia, Serbia, and Lesbos. Warnke also notes parallels to Marie's fables in *Le Roman de Renard*, written about the same time as the works of Marie. For some of these sixty-three fables, including "The Wolf and the Boatman," Warnke is more conjectural in positing sources than for others.[29] An Arabic analogue seems quite feasible in that one can see in this fable parallels to tales from the *Arabian Nights* featuring three wishes, such as *Alaeddin and the Wonderful Lamp*. Moreover, the number of fables in Marie's collection featuring human rather than animal characters[30] indicates a possible

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[28] See Introduction to Harriet Spiegel's translation of Marie's *Fables*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994. 6-7.

[29] Karl Warnke, *Die Quellen des Esope der Marie de France*. Halle: Niemeyer, 1900.

[30] See below, pp. 104-111 for my discussion of these fables.

Oriental influence, as scholars have noted that ancient Libyan or Libistican fables are populated by numerous human characters.[31]

In recent years scholars have finally begun to consider what Warnke proposed a century ago, specifically looking at an Eastern fable tradition as a possible source for many of Marie's fables (it should be noted that these scholars do not suggest that Marie read Arabic). The parallels between Marie's fables, particularly the last two-thirds of her collection, and tales from an eighth-century Arabic translation of the *Panchatantra* are the subject of Sahar Amer's 1999 study *Ésope au féminin: Marie de France et la politique de l'interculturalité*, wherein Amer examines, in addition to the Latin *Romulus* collection, the *Kalilah wa Dimnah* by Abdallah Ibn al-Mouqaffa. Amer's argument is that Marie's collection fuses the Western, Latin fable tradition and the Oriental tradition while at the same time underscoring their differences and, more pointedly, that Marie's vernacular fables challenge the univocal and patriarchal Christian discourse of the western tradition by rewriting and subverting the Latin fable "par le biais de l'autre, c'est-à-dire de la fable arabe, de l'interculturel."[32] Unlike a number of critics who generally see Marie's *Fables* as essentially conservative, viewing them in a Christian context and arguing that Marie's tales, adapted from ancient, Western fable collections

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[31] See Edward Wheatley's *Mastering Aesop: Medieval Education, Chaucer, and His Followers*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000. 11.

[32] Sahar Amer, *Ésope au féminin: Marie de France et la politique de l'interculturalité*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999. 18-19.

for a Christian audience, are meant to instill fundamental medieval Christian values,[33] Amer reads Marie's fables in a distinctly postcolonial milieu.

The various sources and analogues demonstrate that some of Marie's fables are drawn from a written tradition while others are associated with a folk and oral tradition. The broad range and diverse genres of Marie's sources underscores her originality and skill as a fabulist. It seems clear that Marie put into fable form oral narratives that were not originally fables. Moreover, the fact that she managed to shape a unified, cohesive collection out of such a diversity of sources attests to her talent and personality as an artist. Spiegel makes an argument for Marie's originality as a fabulist and thus for Marie's lofty status as one of the most important writers of the Middle Ages:

> Since only the first forty of Marie's fables derive from the *Romulus* collection, and since the remaining sixty-three appear together nowhere before Marie's collection (so far as is known), it is at least worth considering that Marie herself could have gathered and recorded these fables for the first time. Although no one has yet suggested this possibility, one of Marie's contributions may well have been that of compiling the earliest extant collection of fables in the vernacular of western Europe.[34]

Marie is an important figure in the realm of medieval translation not only as a fabulist and translator herself, but as a wellspring whose tales became the source text for some of the most important vernacular fabulists in the late Middle Ages, particularly John Lydgate. Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* is an adaptation of Marie's fable "The Cock and the Fox." As alluded to above, Marie's fables were extremely popular during the thirteenth-fifteenth centuries, attested to by not only the numerous manuscripts

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[33] See Hans Robert Jauss, *Untersuchungen zur mittelalterlichen Tierdichtung*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1959. 33-54, and Karen K. Jambeck, "The *Fables* of Marie de France: A Mirror of Princes," 91.

[34] *Marie de France. Fables*. Trans. Harriet Spiegel. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994. 7.

circulating during this time, but also by the number of writers who translated, directly or indirectly, these tales.

In examining Marie's fables, particularly the Prologue and Epilogue, we can see that Marie is acutely concerned with the process of translation, rewriting, and the transmission of sources. She demonstrates this preoccupation in both the Prologue and Epilogue to the *Fables*. In the Prologue she writes:

> Thus Aesop to his master wrote;
> He knew his manner and his thought;
> From Greek to Latin were transposed
> Those fables found and those composed. (ll. 17-20)

The frames also reveal Marie's awareness of the cultural considerations involved in translation, demonstrating how questions of authorial identity and the authority of the writer are closely connected with the contemporary cultural matrix, particularly the prevailing institutional powers. In the Epilogue to her *Fables*, Marie writes, "This book's called Aesop for this reason: / He translated and had it written / In Latin from the Greek, to wit." She then continues the translation history of her fables: "King Alfred, who was fond of it, / Translated it to English hence, / And I have rhymed it now in French." These few, brief lines, with their reference to four different languages, reflect the acute awareness of a translator, one who is working in a multilingual milieu such as late twelfth-century England, and one who recognizes the historical "life" of a text and who consciously considers that life while in the process of her own translation project. It is interesting to note that in the Epilogue Marie uses a word for her translation that carries multiple, polyvalent meanings--the verb *traire* (or *treire*), which means, *inter alia*, "to draw," "to extract," "to treat," "to translate," but also "to betray." The epilogue begins thus: "Al finement de cest escrit, / Que en romanz ai treité e dit" ("To end these tales I've

here narrated / And into Romance tongue translated”**)**. A few lines below Marie writes of her intention to “draw” the French from the English: “M’entremis de cest livre feire / E de l’engleis en romanz treire” (This book was by me done / And from English into Romance drawn). These terms are very similar to her description of her project of translation in the prologue to the *Lais*, wherein she writes, “De aukune bone estoire faire / Et de latin en romaunz traire” (“To make from some pleasing saw / And from Latin into Romance draw”) or (“From some pleasing story make / And from Latin to Romance translate”).

The perception of translation as betrayal, briefly addressed in my introductory chapter on translation, has historically been a common one. This idea carries even more significant implications when viewed in the context of the Middle Ages, when translating from Latin into a vernacular language was considered a dubious activity. Examined in this context, the verb *traire* is intriguing: Because Old French (like Old English), even though written, was intended for the ear (to be either recited or read aloud), there is, as Howard Bloch points out, effectively no difference between the words *traire* and *trahir*, [35] the latter meaning only “to betray” or “to deceive.” In this light Marie’s invocation, in the Epilogue, of Alfred as the source for her collection of fables, rather than the standard, conventional Latin tradition (or a specific Latin source), may be of some significance.

Citing a vernacular authority or source for one’s translation project entails fewer risks but at the same time causes the translation, and translator, to be dismissed for lacking *gravitas*. But paradoxically it may be a respectable activity as well. In one sense it invites less censure because the translator is not deigning to take the privileged

[35] *The Anonymous Marie de France*. 44.

language, the language of the Vulgate, the Church, the courts, and the schools, and turn it into the vulgar tongue of the masses, meant not for the written word but for speech. Conversely, however, it also induces more disapproval precisely because of the lowly status of the vernacular, particularly as the source language or the "original" text, suggesting some degree of authority. Moreover, to endeavor to translate into a vernacular tongue beast fables, the genre most closely associated with the schools and thus with a Latin tradition,[36] was probably viewed by many as a presumptuous, even profane, undertaking.

And Marie's citing of Alfred as an authority further compounds the situation. As a writer of English, and as a translator, one who would have translated his fables from Latin, Alfred as the source for Marie would have carried little importance on the larger stage of medieval Europe, but as a respected king who was known for unifying, to an extent, England and for his patronage of literature and ambitious educational program for his people, he enjoyed an elevated status and, particularly in England, where Marie almost certainly produced her texts, would have been considered an unassailable *auctor*.

Marie's claim that she *translated* these fables has been accepted by modern scholars quite literally, but not always to her credit. Indeed numerous scholars have used this claim to dismiss the *Fables*. An example is the 1982 study of the *Lais* by Paula Clifford where she identifies the *Fables* simply as "a translation" while imparting to the *Espurgatoire Seint Patriz* the more lofty status of "a moralizing poem . . . based on a Latin *Tractatus*."[37] Statements from earlier critics are even more telling: it is interesting

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[36] See Edward Wheatley's *Mastering Aesop*.

[37] Paula Clifford, *Marie de France: Lais*, 10.

that both M. Dominica Legge and U.T. Holmes use the elusive phrase "professed to be translating" in discussing Marie's fables, thus implying their doubts about her translation claim while withholding any positive judgment as to her originality.[38] In his monograph on the works of Marie de France, Emanuel J. Mickel devotes less than five pages to her *Fables*, essentially examining them vis-à-vis the *Lais*, his thesis being that the two works bear a strong resemblance to each other.[39] Legge's monograph reflects the slight esteem in which the *Fables* and *Espurgatoire Seint Patriz* of Marie were held by scholars until recently (in the case of the *Espurgatoire*; the *Fables* still suffer, relatively, from neglect or lack of respect). Titled *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background*, it makes only three very brief references to the *Fables*, the most substantial being an afterword (an afterthought?) closing one of the chapters. It begins thus: "Before leaving the study of the question whether there was not a reaction against the courtly trend of literature, a passing reference must be made to the *Fables* of Marie de France."[40] There follows a brief paragraph of four sentences addressing Marie's dedication. Legge's final comment on the *Fables* appears in a brief section on the *Espurgatoire* wherein she states, "As in the case of her Fables, this work is simple and straightforward."[41] French scholars are no less censorious of the *Fables*. Probably the most eminent French scholar of medieval

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[38] M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1963. p. 63; U.T. Holmes, *History of Old French Literature*. Chapel Hill: Robert Linker, 1937. 210.

[39] See *Marie de France*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974.

[40] M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background*. 107.

[41] *Ibid*, 240.

literature, Gaston Paris, who acclaims the literary merit of Marie's *lais*, sees no such quality in the fables:

> The fables, strictly speaking, in the Middle Ages, have no literary value. Most are only mediocre translations from the Latin. The collection that Marie composed around 1180 is interesting, it is true, but only because it is the adaptation of an English grouping.[42]

Marie's *Fables*, however, are far from simple and straightforward. And, *pace* Gaston Paris, as critics have shown in recent decades, the majority of Marie's fables are quite probably not translations from the Latin. Indeed in a number of ways Marie's fables can be viewed collectively as an original corpus and thus are interesting for far more compelling reasons than that asserted by Paris. Indeed even Paris' single claim of merit for Marie's fables should be viewed with a healthy dose of skepticism, since very little strong evidence exists suggesting that Marie's source was an English one. Implicit in all of the above comments from critics, of course, is that translation is not an original artistic activity and therefore Marie's fables are inherently inferior to her *lais*, but the fabulist's work is inherently that of adapting and transforming existing tales; therefore, modern assumptions about originality are inappropriate when applied to the fabulist. Moreover, as we have demonstrated throughout this chapter, Marie nevertheless *does* create something original in her fables.

One of the most significant features of the *Fables* that demonstrates their originality and complexity is what they have to say about the role and power, or lack thereof, of language, and, by extension, about the role and position of the purveyors of

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[42] See Bloch, *The Anonymous Marie de France*, 17-18, quoting and translating from Paris' *Esquisse historique de la literature française au moyen âge*. Paris: Armand Colin, 1926. 131.

language. Specifically, Marie's fables to a large extent focus on truth and lies, trust and distrust. They explore notions of "tale-telling" and "truth-telling", of expressing fictions versus truths, concepts inextricably linked with fable itself, whose first definition in the *OED* reads, "a fictitious narrative or statement; a story not founded on fact."[43] As suggested above, many of the fables explore issues of discretionary language and expression, and what seems to be Marie's message in these tales is one of rhetorical awareness: more often than not in her fables the burden of speech is put upon a creature--sometimes human and sometimes beast—who has less power than his or her adversary, the one requesting the utterance, a request usually couched as a request for the "truth" but often in reality a commandment to express the exact words the one in power wants to hear—typically words that will somehow praise and thus please the requester. One such tale is "The Monkey King," a fable that addresses discretion in speech and argues that honesty is not always prudent—in fact it can be self-destructive—and that lies and deceit are more powerful. This interesting fable features a monkey, raised by an emperor, who one day goes to the forest and has himself crowned king by the other monkeys. Adopting the same lifestyle and behavior of the emperor, the monkey rules his realm with authority. One day two men traveling through the woods stumble upon a convention in the monkey kingdom, and the king questions each of them about his court:

> Now did he find
> That it was lovely and refined.
> To this the honest man returned,
> That they were monkeys he discerned.
> "Of me and my wife, let's hear—
> And of my son, whom you see here—
> What do you think? Now nothing hide!"
> "Here's how it seems," the man replied.

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[43] *Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989.

> "You're monkey and she's monkeyess—
> Ugly, wicked, hideous.
> As for your son, all folks can see
> He's just a very small monkey."
> Then to the comrade who was base
> The monkey posed the selfsame case:
> The same inquiry word for word.
> It seemed to him, this one averred,
> A lovelier folk he'd never seen,
> Nor one on whom he was more keen.
> At this, they all said their seignior
> Was truly like an emperor.
> The monkeys paid him honour, and
> Everyone bowed throughout the land.
> The good man they did apprehend;
> They tore him up, a wretched end. (ll. 31-54).

Marie's concluding moral is a biting commentary on truth and lies and reinforces the idea of the purveyor of lies being rewarded by his or her audience, specifically here the royal court:

> They shamed the man for speaking true.
> This lesson is worth listening to:
> There's no respect for honesty
> Against a liar's treachery.
> Deceitfully he testifies;
> He wins false justice by his lies. (ll. 55-60)

A companion piece both materially and thematically, "The Wolf King" is at 122 lines the longest of the *Fables*. This fable deftly explores the politics of language and demonstrates the inherent complexities involved in attempting to balance conveying truths with pleasing one's specific audience and thereby protecting oneself. In this tale a lion king seeking a change of scenery departs his realm, whereby all the beasts convene to choose a worthy successor. They choose the wolf, who swears a solemn oath to not harm any of the beasts in his kingdom. But soon hunger overrides honor and he summons a roe deer, asking her "if for his love the truth she'd tell / About [his] breath: How did it

smell?" Telling the truth as she sees it, the deer "said it smelled so terrible / It was almost unbearable." The angered wolf then questions his courtiers, asking "what kind of sentence they'd give one / Who spoke such things to his lord's face." They all agree that the deer should die, whereupon the wolf has her arrested and then kills and eats her in front of "his men." The next day he summons another beast and poses the same question. Marie writes,

> The poor thing would much rather lie
> Than for truth's sake suffer and die.
> So she replied she knew no scent
> So fragrant and so excellent. (ll. 65-68)

The wolf gathers his barons again to demand of them what punishment should be doled out to "one who'd lied deceitfully." Again, of course, they recommend death and their king swiftly carries out the penalty. The following day the king espies a fat monkey and thus questions the beast about his breath. This time, the reader might think that the summoned creature will escape punishment: "The monkey was extremely sly: / He'd be no way condemned to die. / Thus he replied, he did not know." But in the end, the monkey's reply only buys him some time; Nonplussed by the wily response, the wolf ruminates for awhile and then, feigning illness, goes to bed and summons his barons, saying the only cure for his ills is monkey flesh but killing the monkey would violate his sworn oath. The lords decree that, despite his vow and admitted reluctance to kill the monkey, he should nevertheless do just that, whereupon the wolf seizes the monkey and devours him.

This fable reflects and comments on the utter inefficacy of language itself. Language is potentially chaos. Unlike its companion piece, this fable suggests that not only naive honesty can doom one, but that deceit, slyness, cunning, can be just as

powerless. Lies are just as ineffectual as the truth, and, moreover, a middle way—i.e., neutrality, restraint, checking one's tongue, even silence—is to no avail. This message, of course, is contextual: Marie seems to be saying something about audience, patrons, and courtiers and we should examine the fable vis-à-vis Marie's position as an author in the court, writing certainly for important figures in the late twelfth-century Anglo-Norman court and for members of the king's family, and quite likely for the king himself.[44] As a writer, rewriter, and translator in this situation, a position similar in many ways to that of later fabulists Lydgate, Caxton, and (albeit to a lesser extent) even Chaucer, Marie had to negotiate these complexities and subtleties of language in order to convey a message while at the same time being cognizant and wary of her position and courtly audience.

And, as we have thoroughly examined above, Marie's prologues and epilogues (specifically her dedications) clearly reveal a heightened awareness of the patronal system and a desire to please her patrons while simultaneously maintaining her individualism and integrity as an author. We have already seen the anxieties present in her relationship with fellow court poets, as demonstrated by the jealous comments of Denis Piramus. Indeed "The Wolf King" may be directed at courtiers themselves, whom Marie depicts as being just as corrupt as the king, and those contemporaries in Marie's circle whom she sees as "vicious, cowardly, treacherous dog[s] that will bite others out of malice."[45] Having to tread these murky, hazardous currents underscores Marie's position as much more than a "mere translator," one who is simply replicating previously-existing

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[44] There is voluminous scholarship attempting to identify Marie, her circle, and her sovereign. Most critics agree that Marie was closely connected with the court of Henry II, king of England from 1154-1189.

[45] See Marie's prologue to *Guigemar*, quoted above, p. 14.

texts. There is an inherent original, creative quality to texts that engage such issues. And it is deftly through the popularity of the beast fable, with its metaphorical power, that Marie and other medieval translators can best resolve these anxieties and tensions.

"The Monkey King" and "The Wolf King" are clearly analogous to Chaucer's two fables I will examine in the next chapter, *The Manciple's Tale* and *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, fables that investigate the intricacies of language and the importance of discretionary expression. Like Marie's fables, these two tales center not only on questions of honesty (or honor) and deceit, when to speak and when to hold one's tongue, verbosity versus taciturnity, and flattery/sycophancy, but also on the concepts of the *auctor* and *auctoritas*.

This idea of verbal expression being destructive, or self-destructive, is a recurring theme in Marie's fables. Indeed, as "The Peasant and His Contrary Wife" notably indicates, the notion of "silence as discretion" figures significantly in many of the fables. Death as a possible consequence of speaking out reappears in the fable "The Cock and the Fox," Marie's version of one of the most popular of all medieval beast fables, later adaptations which include Chaucer's "The Nun's Priest's Tale." In this tale, the rooster, having been duped into closing his eyes to sing, finds himself in the jaws of the fox, who runs off with his victim. The rooster, in turn, convinces the fox to open his mouth, to shout at and taunt the pursuing shepherds, at which point the rooster escapes. Both creatures open their mouths imprudently, with dramatic consequences. The fuming fox, chastising himself for opening his mouth at the wrong moment, "cumence a maudire, / Ke parole quant devereit taire" ("began to curse his mouth / For speaking when it ought to hush"), and the relieved rooster likewise curses himself, condemning his eyes:

"Maudire l'oil, ki volt cluiner, / Quant il deit guarder e guaiter" ("Curse the eye that thinks to shut / When it should safeguard and watch out"). The story's moral might simply be stated, "Keep your eyes open and your mouth shut!" but Marie is concerned only with the voice in her moral:

> And thus with fools, for they all will
> Speak out when they their tongues should check
> And check their tongues when they should speak.

Hence silence can be as powerful as speech. Indeed, in this story, it is more powerful. This commentary on the power of silence can also be associated with Chaucer's other beast fable, the *Manciple's Tale*, in which Phoebus Apollo's crow is stripped of his plumage, turned black, bereft of his beautiful voice, and cast into exile in consequence of his *jangling*. And the Manciple's repeated injunction to "Kepe wel thy tonge" in his concluding moral replicates Marie's moral in its warnings to use language judiciously.

A sort of companion piece to "The Cock and the Fox," "The Hawk and the Nightingale" features a hawk one day spying a nightingale and her nest of hatchlings in a tree. The hawk alights there and invites the nightingale to sing, but the shrewd nightingale refuses to open her mouth until there is a safe distance between them:

> "'Oh sir, I can't do that,' said she,
> 'When I see you're so close to me.
> Yet if to move, you would agree,
> And fly off to another tree,
> Most beautifully I'd sing for you—
> All other birds know this is true.'"

This tale smartly complements "The Cock and the Fox," in which a bird, known for his voice, gives in to his pride and the flattery of others, only to be violently seized and almost killed. In the case of the nightingale, however, we see a bird, also renowned for its beautiful singing, approached in precisely the same way by a predator, but

discreetly choosing to remain silent until the moment is right to open her mouth, thereby ensuring her safety and that of her babies. These fables reflect a conscious concern with language and its subtleties, including the "good" and "bad" uses of speech and likewise the positive and negative aspects of withholding speech. In all of the fables above, Marie reminds us that words are a form of action, and actions have consequences.

This concern with the judicious, manipulative use of language and the weighty consequences that can result from discreet, or indiscreet, expression manifests itself most strikingly in Marie's distinctly "unbeastly" fables, literally peopled by human characters rather than beasts and are marked by an eroticism and physicality. That Marie should write tales that are essentially *fabliaux* might come as no surprise to those familiar with Marie's *Lais*, entertaining tales often featuring trickery, seduction, adultery, etc. Indeed the *lai* "Equitan" bears all the characteristics of the *fabliau*, with the only departure being its tragic ending. The standard, and oft-cited, definition for the fabliau is still that of Joseph Bédier in 1893: the fabliaux, he asserted, are "contes à rire en vers" (*Les Fabliaux* 2). M. Ellwood Smith, a contemporary of Bedier's, in his *A Classification for Fables*, in which he pointedly distinguishes between the fable and the fabliau, defines fabliaux as "short realistic tales of human life with a tang to them" (103). Other essential terms or characteristics that scholars have progressively added include trickery and physicality. Marie's "*fables de folie,*" a phrase Marie herself uses in her prologue, unquestionably contain these qualities.

To categorize, therefore, all of the works in Marie's *Fables* as "fables" in the traditional, Aesopic sense is problematic. In fact, half a dozen of these poems could be labeled fabliaux. At the very least, these stories are "fabliaux-like." In the introduction to

her 1984 English translation of Marie's *Fables*, Mary Lou Martin refers to "The Peasant Who Saw Another with His Wife" (Fable 44) as a "fabliau-like story of a husband who finds his wife with another man" (6). Similarly, Per Nykrog, author of one of the most influential modern studies on the fabliau, titled, appropriately, *Les fabliaux*, refers to five of Marie's fables as "*fabliaux avant la letter*."[46] Nykrog justifies this classification by stating that "the only difference between these fables of Marie de France and the corresponding fabliaux is that the fable is much shorter than a fabliau, and that therefore the tale is more concise and lacking in details" (251). Nykrog adds the titles of these fables to his list of texts commonly accepted as fabliaux, yet he never endeavors to analyze the tales in question so as to validate their inclusion in his book. As yet no one who claims that these fables are *fabliaux* has analyzed them so as to support this view. As I am not undertaking a genre study, my focus here will center on the entertainment appeal and colloquial quality of these particular tales and on questions of language, and its power or impotence that these fables raise. Associated with these linguistic issues is Marie's concern with voice, specifically the feminine voice, and its silencing or marginalization at the hands of men, a concern strikingly illustrated in a couple of these fables.

Writing at approximately the same time as the emergence of the fabliau, Marie may have been influenced by the form in compiling her collection of fables, yet she may just as well have been the originator of the medieval French fabliau, influencing the

[46] Nykrog, Per. *Les fabliaux*. Genève: Droz, 1973. 251.

vernacular fabliau writers from the late-twelfth to the fourteenth centuries.[47] Let us now look at these "human" fables of Marie, for it is in these unusual fables that the ethics of language, of verbal expression, are most strikingly articulated. In these seemingly simple tales, which bear the marks of fabliaux, Marie explores the complexities inherent in the nexus of language, author, and audience. And all of these fables, it should be noted, do not have sources or analogues in the Romulus collection and thus could be original to Marie. In "The Peasant Who Saw Another with His Wife" and "The Peasant Who Saw His Wife with Her Lover" (all quotations and translations of fables are from Harriet Spiegel's 1994 *Fables*), an adulterous woman is caught in the act by her husband. In the former, the husband finds himself cuckolded in his own bed:

> A man in his own bed he sighted,
> Who there with his own wife delighted.

After confronting his wife with this discovery, she "tricks" him into believing that what he had seen was simply a mirage:

> She took him, led him by the hand
> Unto a vat of water and
> She made him peer into the vat.
> The woman next demanded that
> He tell her what he saw inside.
> He saw his image, he replied.
> 'Just so. And you are not,' she said,
> 'Inside that vat completely clad.
> What you see here is but semblance,
> And you ought not to give credence
> To eyes which often lies present.'

The ingenuous husband then repents, saying,

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[47] The first fabliau we can confidently date appeared in about 1155, which is the same year many scholars suggest marks the beginning of Marie's writing career. See John Hines, *The Fabliau in English*, London: Longman, 1993, and Harriet Spiegel, ed. and trans., *Marie de France: Fables*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994. 5.

> ‘Each one had best believe and know
> Whatever his wife says, is so!
> And not believe what false eyes see;
> Their vision can be trickery!’

These lines read like a proverb, like a moral. Appearing, as it does, immediately after, the epimythium appears to extend the proverb and elaborate on it, seemingly praising the wife’s imagination and cunning:

> From this example comes this lore:
> Good sense and shrewdness are worth more—
> And will, to many, more help give—
> Than wealth or any relative.

The irony of this moralization is evident when we read it alongside the moral of the companion tale (fable 45) to “The Peasant Who Saw Another with His Wife” (fable 44). In this fable, “The Peasant Who Saw His Wife with Her Lover,” a man sees his wife venturing into the forest, hand-in-hand with her lover. This wife, no less a master of artifice than her counterpart in the preceding piece, convinces her spouse that what he saw simply didn’t happen. Marie’s closing moral states:

> And so, forewarned all men should be
> That women know good strategy.
> They’ve more art in their craft and lies
> Than all the devil can devise.

This simple, explicit moral underscores the subtleties of Marie’s previous moral, where it is not only the wife’s ingenuity that Marie is praising, but also the husband’s blatant lack of it and his gullibility that she is condemning. She mocks such weak, artless, husbands and urges them to use their “sense and shrewdness” in their marital relationships, to assert themselves and assume their proper place in the home. Some observers may see these particular fables, which have no known source, as the heirs of the convention of woman as man’s ruin (as Chaucer has Chauntecleer recite to Pertelote

in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, "*in principio, mulier est hominis confusion"*), but a strict antifeminist interpretation oversimplifies these tales. More than straightforward fabliaux with shrewd women cuckolding and hoodwinking their gullible husbands, these two fables are marked by characters, speech acts, and human reactions that all function symbolically in suggesting the power of language, specifically words, and by extension the power of the "author" of those words in negotiating between his or her intentions and the expectations of the audience. In assessing the role of language in Marie's *Fables* vis-à-vis its function in the *Lais*, Howard Bloch asserts, "In contrast to the linguistic fatalism that hovers over the *Lais*, the *Fables* constantly proffer the notion that words are powerful not so much because they kill (which they can), but because words are the instruments of relations between animals, and, of course, between men."[48] (One might add, especially in light of the examples above, "and women.").

One can clearly see all of the features of the fabliau in fables 44 and 45, above. Apart from their obvious brevity and the fact that they are "in verse," these fables provoke laughter, they feature tricks, they are physical—indeed erotic—and they are realistic tales of human life. Of course one could argue that the credulity of the hoodwinked husbands strains the bounds of the rational, but that seems to be precisely Marie's point in her warning to husbands: that women can be so adept in their craftiness that they may have their men not trusting their own instincts. Even in the decidedly "realistic" fabliaux can we see men rendered fools for listening to their wives. Moreover, we can also see that fabliaux are not always realistic. Indeed, they are often marked by the grotesque, absurd, and sometimes even supernatural and religious. These fabliaux, of

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[48] *The Anonymous Marie de France*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003. 137.

course, prefigure some of the stories of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and, more significantly for this dissertation, Chaucer's beast fables *The Nun's Priest's Tale* and *The Manciple's Tale*, the latter featuring a cuckolded husband.

One might argue that a differentiating feature between the two genres is the element of the grotesque so common to the fabliau, and generally absent in the fable. An examination of Marie's "The Peasant and His Contrary Wife," however, reveals that some fables can compete with their generic counterpart in this sense. In this tale, a farmer and his wife go to a meadow one day for a stroll, and the man remarks to his wife that he has never seen any field cut so evenly with a scythe. This observation initiates a dramatic quarrel, with the irascible farmer at one point calling his wife a "foolish ass" and "nasty." Her reply to the initial remark is that the field was cut with shears, and not a scythe. The farmer retorts with "Scythe!" She shouts "Shears!" and ultimately the farmer flings his wife to the ground and cuts out her tongue (presumably with a scythe, I'm guessing; Marie doesn't tell us). He then taunts her and demands that she now tell him whether it was shears or a scythe that had so beautifully cut the meadow, and

> The woman could not talk, and so
> She used her fingers now to show
> The meadow had been clipped by shears;
> No scythe had cut the grasses here!

Thus ends the narrative. In the companion poem, "The Peasant and His Cantankerous Wife," we see a man chasing his wife in a field after an argument. She falls into a swiftly-flowing river, and the peasant's field hands try to find her and rescue her. The peasant shouts to his men that they are looking in the wrong place, that they are sure to find her upstream:

> So there they looked, with great success.

For she'd so much contrariness
That down the stream she would not go,
But went against the water's flow—
Behaving in her death, this wife,
Exactly as she'd wished in life.

These two fables clearly "go against the flow" in their physicality, grotesque exaggeration, and graphic human violence, qualities more inherent in the fabliau than in the fable. In *Rabelais and His World* Bakhtin notes that "in the literary sphere the entire medieval parody is based on the grotesque concept of the body. We also discover some of these elements in animal epics, fabliaux, and *Schwanke*"[49]. With its cognate and other connections to the *fabliau* and obvious association with the animal epics, the medieval fable could also be said to contain some of these elements, and nowhere are they more evident than in the fables of Marie. Moreover, Bakhtin stresses that an important feature of the grotesque is abusive language,[50] which so characterizes the last two fables above.

These components of physicality are reflected not only in the actions of the fables' characters, but often through their words, in the language that they use, such as the querulous, colloquial, coarse speech that characterizes "The Peasant and His Contrary Wife." These actions and dialogues reflect a base quality that uproots the fable from its traditional position as a fanciful, allegorical tale with a didactic purpose. Indeed one of the significant aspects of Marie's human fables is that they effectively deconstruct the allegory so essential to fable. Marie seems to be questioning why beasts are necessary to represent human desires and behavior, usually unsavory, mean desires and actions, when people themselves can so strikingly exhibit these moral lapses and transgressions. The

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[49] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*. Tr. Helene Iswolsky. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1968. 27.

[50] *Ibid*, 15.

effect on the reader is jarring—no longer does he or she have the comfort of the allegorical cushion separating animal and beast. Humans act beastly, Marie suggests, and conversely she also shows in some of her fables—such as "The Wolf and the Boatman"--that beasts can behave more morally, and more intelligently, than humans.

I opened this chapter with Cantor's account of the obstacles facing Marie the poet/translator as she attempted to voice her views and legitimize herself as a serious writer in twelfth-century England and France. "The Peasant and His Contrary Wife" and "The Peasant and His Cantankerous Wife" (Fables 95 and 96) are significant for what they say about this question of woman's voice and its suppression, in this case violent suppression. The men in these tales brutally play out the consequences of feminine discourse challenging patriarchal discourse, one of them angrily chasing his wife to her death, and then mockingly scoffing at her "contrariness," and the other literally severing, silencing the woman's voice. As with the Bakhtinian theory of the grotesque, these fables brilliantly reflect Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic voice that challenges the monologic patriarchal voice. A Bakhtinian analysis of Marie's fables is an area of Marie scholarship that remains to be explored.

"The Peasant and His Cantankerous Wife and "The Peasant and His Contrary Wife" serve as stark, vivid illustrations of these obstacles and challenges for the woman author in the Middle Ages, striving to have her voice taken seriously. Marie's *Fables*, along with her prologues and epilogues to the *Lais* and *Espurgatoire Seint Patriz*, function as a way to promote herself as an individual artist, author, and translator, especially a *woman* artist, author, and translator writing in the Middle Ages. Marie adroitly and assertively rejects any notion of invisibility, whether for the woman poet or

the translator, and her innovative work as a fabulist helped to establish the vernacular fable as a legitimate, serious form which English fable writers in her wake, such as Chaucer, would use and expand in their own search for self-legitimacy as poets and translators.

CHAPTER 4

THE CHILDREN'S TALE AND THE *AUCTOR*: THE FABULIST AS TRUTH-TELLER IN CHAUCER'S *MANCIPLE'S TALE*

The Nun's Priest's Tale has been analyzed more thoroughly than practically any of the *Canterbury Tales* (perhaps the only piece more examined is *The Wife of Bath's Tale* and *Prologue*), but Chaucer's "other" beast fable--the lesser-known and under-appreciated *Manciple's Tale*—has, until very recently, received relatively scant attention from scholars, who have only just become interested in its status as the last poetic tale in the *Canterbury Tales*. Some critics regard the *Manciple's Tale* as a fabliau,[1] with its erotic elements and cuckolding scene, but the tale is far from funny (it is, rather, tragic) and therefore difficult to posit as fabliau. One can make a much more compelling argument for the tale as a beast fable, with the talking crow and explicit moral at the end, and instructive motif of "Why the Crow Is Black."

This is the tale of Phebus Apollo and his crow, whose chummy relationship is riven one day when the crow witnesses Phebus' wife cuckolding her husband and informs his master of the misdeed. Enraged, Phebus kills his wife and casts the crow into exile, stripping the bird of his white feathers and his voice. Although bearing some Aesopic elements, the tale is an Ovidian fable, principally drawn from the *Metamorphoses*, the early fourteenth-century French *Ovide moralisé*, and Machaut's mid

[1] See, for example, David Raybin, "The Death of a Silent Woman: Voice and Power in Chaucer's *Manciple's Tale*," *JEGP* 95.1 (1996): 20, in which Raybin considers the tale "in the context of Chaucer's other fabliaux."

fourteenth-century *Voir dit* (and, to a lesser extent, *The Seven Sages of Rome,* most likely a French version)**.**[2] Gower's *Confessio amantis* also contains a version of the "tell-tale crow" or raven, which can serve as a useful analogue. With the *Manciple's Tale* Chaucer takes an Ovidian fable and molds it into an Aesopian-like moralizing beast fable. Whether or not modern critics recognize the tale as a fable, there is some suggestion that Chaucer himself does, as he indicates in the words of the Parson immediately following the *Manciple's Tale*. When the Host turns to the Parson and demands, "Telle us a fable anon, for cokkes bones! The Parson replies:

> "Thou getest fable noon ytoold for me;
> For Paul, that writeth unto Thymothee,
> Repreveth hem that weyven soothfastnesse,
> And tellen fables and swich wrecchednesse . . ." X (I) 31-34

The Parson is alluding to the just-told tale of the Manciple, and conflating fable with falsity, a crux that lies at the heart of my study. For the Parson, a fable is a lie and thus linked with sin. Indeed the word "fable" itself would seem to correlate with this notion of falsehood, as one of its principal definitions, according to the *Middle English Dictionary*, is "a false statement intended to deceive; a fiction, untruth, falsehood, lie."[3] My argument here is that Chaucer is able to most freely express the quandary in which medieval poets found themselves regarding truth versus fiction and thus their status as original, serious poets, through translation or rewriting, and that he seized upon the beast fable as the ideal form through which to express the condition of the fourteenth-century English poet. The *Manciple's Tale* (as is the *Nun's Priest's Tale*) is a commentary on the

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[2] William Calin, *The French Tradition and the Literature of Medieval England*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994. 280.

[3] Middle English Compendium online. University of Michigan.

fiction/truth dialectic, and it comments on the power and judicious use of language. In this tale Chaucer is reacting against contemporary literary conventions, such as those of *fin amor* and attempting to legitimize himself as a writer in an artistic milieu that privileges *fin amor*. The *Manciple's Tale's* significance lies in its not only being read as a beast fable, but also in the fact that it is one of Chaucer's most distinctive, original translations, a point that scholars have generally not pursued. The tale becomes in the hands of Chaucer a moralistic beast fable which Chaucer shapes from decidedly non-fabular sources.

Chaucer conveys his message in the *Manciple's Tale* through a brief tale that is seemingly straightforward but in fact decidedly complex. It is generally agreed among critics that "the subject of the tale is language"[4] but also that the tale deconstructs any affirmative, established, confident view of discourse and "finally leaves the poet no function at all."[5] As Michaela Paasche Grudin succinctly characterizes the critical consensus, "We are to believe that Chaucer concludes the *Canterbury Tales* by negating the assumptions about discourse and poetry that shaped it".[6] This deconstructive reading of the *Manciple's Tale*, however, overlooks the subtle ways in which Chaucer uses language to affirm the importance and necessity of expression and not silence. Grudin concludes, "To read any one part of the tale, especially its moral counseling silence, as Chaucer's final statement on human discourse is to miss his artfulness. Chaucer is

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[4] Britton J. Harwood, "Language and the Real: Chaucer's Manciple," *Chaucer Review* 6 (1972): 268.

[5] Helen Cooper, *The Structure of the Canterbury Tales* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984) 199.

[6] *Chaucer and the Politics of Discourse*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996. 150.

doubling, or looping, around discourse to give us a philosophical understanding of words themselves."[7]

In the *Manciple's Tale* Chaucer explores the judicious use of language and the idea of having and losing the power of speech. This suggestion is embodied in the crow, whom Phebus taught to speak so well that he could "countrefete the speche of every man" (134). When the crow announces the adultery of Phebus' wife, he does it in what sounds like bird-talk: "Cokkow! Cokkow!" Cokkow!" (243). The wise crow in his excitement and temptation to *jangle* (gossip, tattletell)[8] has been transformed into a foolish, lewd cuckoo.[9] Or has he? Perhaps not quite yet. This seemingly bestial tweeting can be understood, of course, as a punning "Cuckold! Cuckold! Cuckold!" Larry D. Benson writes, "That the cuckoo/cuckold pun was known at this time is clear from Jean de Condé's *Messe des oiseaus*, 310-12, or Clanvowe's *Boke of Cupide*, ed. Scattergood, 1975, 183-85."[10] Phebus does not understand the utterance, however, and calls for a translation:

> "What, bryd? What song syngestow?
> Ne were thow wont so myrily to synge
> That to myn herte it was a rejoysynge
> To heere thy voys? Allas, what song is this?" (244-47)

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[7] Ibid, 153.

[8] It is noteworthy that the *Middle English Dictionary* definitions for *jangling* include "tale-telling" and "calumny"; a *janglere* is a "calumniator" and "raconteur"; and the verb *janglen* means "Of a bird: to chatter, twitter. See Middle English Compendium online, University of Michigan.

[9] In *The Parliament of Fowls*, the narrator describes the raven or crow as "wys," and the "unkynde" (unnatural) cuckoo is called a "fol" and "lewed" (ll. 363, 505, 616).

[10]*The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987. See "Notes," p. 954.

To this request the crow replies bluntly: "On thy bed thy wyf I saugh hym swyve" (256). Perhaps it is this direct, frank, common language which contributes to Phebus' violent reaction. This retelling in candid speech that his audience can understand proves to be the crow's undoing. The irony here is that this short, simple, "bestial tweeting" of the crow is laden with import; it conveys everything Phebus needs to know. Conversely, the translation into "human language," spelled out in more transparent, understandable terms, has catastrophic results, grave consequences for the translator as well as the subject of his tale and even his audience. The idea of the crow transforming into a cuckoo takes on added interest when we consider the crow's forced exile and loss of community: in the marriage debate in *The Parliament of Fowls*, the outspoken cuckoo argues that all birds should remain single.[11]

The crow's counterfeiting here is, paradoxically, manifestly honest, and it fails catastrophically. For having revealed the "truth" of Phebus' wife, the crow is stripped of his lovely white feathers and becomes black, and he loses his power of speech and song, left only to squawk gratingly, or sadly, like Chaucer's crow "with vois of care" in *The Parliament of Fowls*.[12] And all crows, in perpetuity, must pay this penalty, which seems an onerous one for the "indiscretions" of one loyal, honest creature.

The crow's clever wordplay illustrates one of Chaucer's principal theories of language: the idea of hiding truths in order to convey them, and playing with diction in order to accomplish this rhetorical feat. It is to Plato that Chaucer, through the voice of the Manciple, appeals in order to express this concept. This allusion comes early in the

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[11] See line 607.

[12] See line 363.

Manciple's digression in his account of Phebus, his wife, and his crow, and introduces an important passage:

> The wise Plato seith, as ye may rede,
> The word moot nede accorde with the dede.
> If men shal telle proprely a thyng,
> The word moot cosyn be to the werkyng. (207-10)

The Manciple's appeal to Plato as an *auctor*, while adding "as ye may rede," is, of course, ironic. His audience is composed of several individuals who likely cannot read and who would not be familiar with a classical philosopher. Even fewer of the pilgrims would be able to read Latin, the language in which Plato's works would have come down to them, probably through the writings of Boethius. Another possible source would be the fourth-century translation of the *Timaeus* by Chalcidius.[13] Likewise, to conclude his digression the Manciple asserts that because "I am a man noght textueel,/ I wol noght telle of texts never a deel" (235-36), yet, he does obviously "telle of texts," and these allusions to Plato and "Alisaundre" suggest that he is a man "textueel." Some who see the Manciple as illiterate (or unable to read Latin) base their assumption on Chaucer's description of him in the General Prologue:

> Now is nat that of God a ful fair grace
> That swich a lewed mannes wit shal pace
> The wisdom of an heep of lerned men? (573-75)

Despite one of the definitions of "lewed" in Middle English being "unable to read Latin,"[14] the word carries multiple meanings, and evidence from the tale itself, noted above, indicates no such case for the Manciple. Moreover, as a representative of the legal

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[13] Paul Beekman Taylor, *Chaucer Translator*, 74.

[14] See *Middle English Dictionary*. Middle English Compendium online. University of Michigan.

estate, the Manciple, who, according to scholars is a resident of the inns of court in fourteenth-century England,[15] would issue all his official communication in French and/or Latin, as it was not until after the usurpation of the throne in 1399 by Henry IV that legal and governmental business began to be recorded in English.[16]

So what is Chaucer's point here when he describes the Manciple as "lewed"? He is certainly playing on the "lewed versus lerned" dichotomy, particularly how it relates to class issues. A member of the third estate, the Manciple makes it clear that he enjoys outsmarting those supposedly "lerned" folks he is obligated to serve. The lerned can be lewed, the lewed lerned, Chaucer satirically suggests.

The Manciple's Tale bears some striking parallels to Lydgate's *The Churl and the Bird*, particularly in regard to principal themes. One of these centers on the caged bird motif, addressing the notions of freedom vs. constraint discussed below in the Lydgate chapter. Lydgate uses Chaucer's motif but changes the fable's thematic message, advocating freedom of expression (after all, it is the bird's clever, persuasive speech that saves its life) and thus inverting what seems to be Chaucer's argument against this freedom, and for holding one's tongue. The Manciple's lengthy concluding moral repeats again and again the importance of silence, invoking his mother's injunction:

> My sone, be war, and be noon auctour newe
> Of tidynges, wheither they been false or trewe.
> Whereso thou come, amonges hye or lowe,
> Kepe wel thy tonge and thenk upon the crowe. (359-62)

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[15] See *Chaucer's Pilgrims: An Historical Guide to the Pilgrims in The Canterbury Tales*, ed. Laura C. Lambdin (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996) 282.

[16] *Ibid*, 284.

To “thenk upon the crowe” means to recognize the potential dire consequences of expressing oneself. In the *Manciple’s Tale*, we are told that one day Phebus Apollo’s wife “sent for hir lemman, / Anon they wroghten al hire lust volage” (238-39). A white crow, beloved of Phebus, sees the adulterous act and informs his master, who, in a rage, kills his wife, destroys all of his musical instruments, and then fleeces the crow, replacing its feathers with black quills. To complete the crow’s misery, Phebus “refte hym al his song. / And eek his speche, and out at dore hym slong / Unto the devel” (305-07). Like Lydgate’s *Churl and the Bird*, Chaucer uses the beast fable to make an argument about artistic expression, scrutinizing fable itself and its capacity for not only teaching, but also for resistance. Although on the surface Lydgate’s fable and Chaucer’s tale convey opposing meanings, they actually both espouse the same notion: concealment (and not silence) is the key to survival and success.

In Lydgate, lying saves the bird, and in Chaucer, telling the truth dooms the bird. What are we to make of this disjuncture? Are both writers trying to say that lying is better than telling the truth? A less facile interpretation might take into account the paradox of the Manciple’s praising silence and condemning discourse expressed through a torrent of discourse and repetition. Straightforward speech here disrupts and deconstructs; it leads to chaos. Is Chaucer thus suggesting that ironic, latent speech would, paradoxically, maintain order? Better, as Chaucer the narrator says, to “ nat maken ernest of game.”

Lydgate’s beast fables may be more engaged with the *political* actualities of his day, but those of Chaucer are no less engaged with contemporary intellectual, artistic, moral, and social questions. One of these questions centers on notions of truth-telling and faithful reproduction of behavior and language. R. W. V. Elliott explains the Manciple’s

apology in lines 207-210, quoted above, as Chaucer's having "taken this *sentence* to heart and made it something of a touchstone in his rehearsing of other people's words. . . . The immediate concern is to prepare a way to the 'cherles termes' that are to come,"[17] terms such as "lemman," "wenche," and "swyve."[18] Another critic sees Chaucer as "a reporter dedicated to truth even at the expense of morality. . . . In other words, if the reader should choose to read the ensuing tale he should not be offended even if it does turn out to be bawdy because none of it is meant to be taken seriously, it is all part of a game."[19] On the surface the Manciple's apology is a conventional *topos,* yet it contains nuances or ambiguities that pose deeper questions. The importance to Chaucer of some of the ideas voiced in the Manciple's digression can be seen when we compare it to a strikingly similar passage in the General Prologue:

> For this ye knowen al so wel as I,
> Whoso shal telle a tale after a man,
> He moot reherce as ny as evere he kan
> Everich a word, if it be in his charge,
> Al speke he never so rudeliche and large,
> Or elles he moot telle his tale untrewe,
> Or feyne thyng, or fynde wordes newe.
> He may nat spare, although he were his brother;
> He moot as wel seye o word as another.
> Crist spak hymself ful brode in hooly writ,
> And wel ye woot no vileynye is it.
> Ek Plato seith, whoso that kan hym rede,
> The wordes moote be cosyn to the dede. (730-42)

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[17] "When Chaucer Swears." Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association: Proceedings and Papers of the Twelfth Congress Held at the University of Western Australia, 5-11 February 1969. Ed. A. P. Treweek. Sydney: AULLA. 417-34.

[18] See below, pp. 132-34 for my discussion of these terms.

[19] G. D. Josipovici, "Fiction and Game in *The Canterbury Tales*." *Critical Quarterly* 7 (1965): 187-89.

The second line, "Whoso shal telle a tale after a man," carries a double meaning: it can refer to a translation, a retelling or "rewriting" a text, and the weighty responsibilities of the translator. Moreover, the line suggests a recounting in keeping with a person's (the teller's) true nature, a tale that befits the teller and accurately renders his or her style or personality or experience. This idea can be juxtaposed with that of "words moote be cosyn to the dede": both underscore the importance of the words' according with some fact or state or matter. And to tell a tale "untrewe" (l. 735), likewise, also suggests multiple levels of meaning: the rhetorical, in which stylistic elements do not accord with the matter; the metaphysical, in which the telling does not serve truth; and the artistic, in which the telling can indicate an infidelity to or a corruption of a conception of art. In a sense one can claim that the Manciple in the *Manciple's Tale* tells a tale "untrewe," for, although on the surface his words do correspond with the "deed," i.e., Phebus' cuckolding and his subsequent killing of his wife and blackening and banishment of the crow, they undermine its import in the verbose manner of report. The Manciple ironically violates his own injunction due to his rhetorically flawed performance, and given the context, due to a betrayal of art and the artist.

The context, of course, is a myth-fable centering on Phebus Apollo, the Greek god of poetry and music, and god of "truth"; his crow (or raven), which, much more than simply a "house pet,"[20] is a figure typically identified with Phebus and therefore associated with these domains; and his wife "Which that he lovede moore than his lyf, / And nyght and day dide evere his diligence / Hir for to plese, and doon hire reverence" (140-42). Upon witnessing her tryst with "oon of litel reputacioun," the crow becomes

[20] Jean E. Jost, "Chaucer's Vows and How They Break: Transgression in *The Manciple's Tale,*" 270.

truth-teller, and is rewarded for his fidelity to Phebus, and, seemingly, to truth, with the tag of traitor and then cast into exile. By revealing an unwelcome truth, the crow has told, in Phebus' words, a "false tale" (293). There are numerous possible levels on which to examine this notion of the crow's "false tale." Through the larger, deceptively nuanced tale of the Manciple, Chaucer is exploring the role of art and artist, poetry and poet, and the translator. The tale raises a host of compelling questions: Can truth-telling destroy art? Are aesthetics incompatible with ethics? Is "telling tales" indeed the opposite of "telling the truth"? Is the poet or story-teller bound to some conception of art that dictates covertness and duplicity in order to, paradoxically, seek and reveal truths? And to avoid possible recrimination, censure, or reprisals from the institutional patrons of the day? To these last two questions, at least, Chaucer, through the *Manciple's Tale*, seems to be saying "yes" and thus fostering a subversive quality to his work.

The *Manciple's Tale* has a great deal to say about language and art. The word "tongue" appears ten times, numerous for such a short tale. And the Parson in the succeeding tale makes numerous references to the "synnes" and "humilitee" of the tongue and mouth, echoing the Manciple's theme that "whan [one] speketh moore than it nedeth, it is synne" (373). So what is Chaucer's point here, with these commentaries on the dangers of discourse? In addressing this question, it would be useful to examine the Manciple's somewhat lengthy digression in the middle of the tale, wherein he holds forth on rhetoric. This aside helps to illuminate Chaucer's views on the complex relations among thought, word, deed, and intent, between particular words and their social contexts.

In the General Prologue passage cited above, Chaucer the narrator appeals not only to Plato as an authority, but also to Christ, which complicates matters further. Citing Christ in this particular manner—"Crist spak hymself ful brode in hooly writ"--is problematic in that one could argue Christ did not speak "ful brode," depending on how we interpret that phrase. For instance, the Parson, in his extensive and detailed description of the sins of the flesh, seems to be speaking "ful brode," but Christ spoke differently—in parables, using "fiction" to forge truths in terms suitable to his audience's experience and understanding, in order to help people understand these verities.[21] Chaucer uses the word "parable" himself, through the voice of the Wife of Bath, to refer to stories of wicked wives (369, 679). If we look at Christ as a tale-teller, the narrator's citing him as an *auctor* takes on some intrigue, and validity, whether he spoke "ful brode" or not. The notion of Christ recounting parables, of his telling stories to attain and reveal some kind of truth, evokes one of St. Augustine's principal ideas concerning Biblical exegesis, which can be applied particularly to medieval literature and authors, significantly influenced as they were by Augustine. In *De doctrina Christiana* Augustine describes and endorses a literary aesthetic utilizing obscure and subtle, rather than straightforward language:

> But many and varied obscurities and ambiguities deceive those who read casually, understanding one thing instead of another; indeed, in certain places they do not find anything to interpret erroneously, so obscurely are certain sayings covered with a most dense mist. I do not doubt that this situation was provided by God to conquer pride by work and to combat disdain in our minds, to which those things which are easily discovered seem frequently to become worthless.[22]

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[21] See Matthew 13:13: "I speak in parables to them because seeing, they do not see, hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand."

[22] *On Christian Doctrine*. Trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958. 37.

Augustine's argument is an early example of rhetorical awareness, ascribing as much importance to the audience as to the author and text, and it places high demands on readers, suggesting that some are too lazy or even obtuse to grasp the meaning of metaphors or narratives. Augustine reinforces his claim by asserting "No one doubts that things are perceived more readily through similitudes and that what is sought with difficulty is discovered with more pleasure."[23]

Chaucer likewise manifests an acute awareness of audience in the *Manciple's Tale*, demonstrated through the Manciple's homiletic discourse at the end of the tale, and he seems to be conveying a similar idea to that of Augustine regarding similitudes, ironically expressed in the Manciple's treatise on language, when he writes, "If men shal telle proprely a thyng, / The word moot cosyn be to the werkyng" (ll. 209-10), which the Manciple expressly states twice within three lines. This repetition produces an expectation of irony on the part of the reader, questioning not only the harmony of the Manciple's words and his story but also whether the words of Phebus' crow, an "auctour newe / Of tidynges" (359-60), do "accorde with the dede" (208). If indeed they do, which particular "words" of the crow accord with the deed?

Like the crow, the Manciple takes on the role of truth-teller, and, also like his counterpart, he seems to eventually relish this role and gets carried away in his tale. His repeated injunction to "kepe wel thy tongue" seems to comport nicely with the event he has just recounted. In other words, the Manciple too appears to heed his own earlier advice and use words that " moot nede accorde with the dede," but, paradoxically, his verbosity in giving this advice effectually negates his fidelity to not only his final counsel

[23] *Ibid*, 38.

but to his earlier argument as well. But is holding one's tongue (or one's pen) the ideal solution?

The best approach to convey truths, Chaucer implies, is through ironic and latent language. To justify this idea Chaucer assumes the authority of Plato in both the General Prologue passage and the corresponding section of the Manciple's apology, thus meriting a closer examination of the appeal of this philosopher to late medieval writers. As noted above, Chaucer knew Plato not through the original Greek, but mostly through Boethius. In the Manciple's apology, the line "The wise Plato seith, as ye may rede," and the remark "whoso that kan hym rede" from the *General Prologue* both subtly suggest a general ignorance of the Greek language and the difficulty of understanding Plato's philosophy and inaccessibility of his works. The most significant idea found in both passages, that "The word moot nede accorde with the dede" derives from Chaucer's own translation of Boethius' *De consolatione*. Paul Beekman Taylor notes, "The epigrammatic 'wordes moote be cosyn to the dede' seems to be lifted directly from Chaucer's own *Boece*, after Lady Philosophy speaks of the truth in old myths which figure divine governance over the cosmos. She explains: 'Thou hast lernyd by the sentence of Plato that nedes the wordis moot be cosynes to the thingis of whiche thei speken.'"[24]

Intriguingly, this notion of words according, or not, with deeds may be more attributable to Chaucer himself than to Plato, but Chaucer, through the voice of the Manciple, justifies his "fictions" by suggesting an apparently straight, equivalent line of translation from the classical philosophers to his own tale. Chaucer casts himself as

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[24] *Chaucer Translator*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1998. 74.

simply a replicator in (Middle) English of the ideas and words of Plato, but an examination of the phrase in the context of its translation record, according to Taylor, reveals that Chaucer's versions, both in the *Canterbury Tales* and *Boece*, correspond more closely to that of Jean de Meun's Old French than to Boethius' Latin. Taylor notes that Chaucer likely has taken the translation "from Jean de Meun who translated Boethius a century earlier under the title *Li livres de confort de philosophie*, in which the passage in question is rendered: 'Tu aies apris par la sentence de Platon qu'il couvient que les paroles soient cousinez aus chosez dont il parlent.' Jean uses the same metaphor later in his portion of the *Roman de la rose*."[25]

Chaucer was esteemed by his contemporaries as a translator. Indeed the late fourteenth-century French poet Eustace Deschamps famously wrote of his English counterpart in a *balade*: "Chaucer, le grant translateur."[26] In *The Manciple's Tale* one can see Chaucer's formidable abilities as a translator distinctly manifest themselves. The tale is original and differs from its sources in the following respects: the concluding moral from the Manciple, the digression/*apologia* from the Manciple in the middle of the tale, the emphasis on Phebus as a musician, as an artist, and his destruction of his musical instruments, of art, and the cuckoo/cuckold utterance.

Although he was probably familiar with the story of the raven in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the principal sources for Chaucer's *The Manciple's Tale* were likely two Old French poems, the massive *Ovide moralisé*, written early in the fourteenth century, and the mid-fourteenth-century *Voir Dit* by Guillaume Machaut. Upon examination of

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[25] *Ibid*, 74.

[26] See Tim William Machan, *Techniques of Translation*, 1985.

these two works, we can clearly note the differences between their tell-tale crow (or raven) stories and that of Chaucer, differences that are significant and demonstrate Chaucer's originality as a translator. The anonymous *Ovide moralisé* is a faithful yet greatly expanded translation of the *Metamorphoses* that adds allegorical commentary of, as the title suggests, a highly moral, and Christian, nature. The poem thus presents Phebus as a figure for God and the raven for the devil, and Coronis, Phebus' wife, for humankind. In his translation Chaucer avoids the Christian allegorizing altogether, and although he does include a "secular" moral—the danger of jangling and the corresponding prudence of silence—his tale is not a moral one (in the sense of a *moralitas* typology). One of Chaucer's specific touches that makes his tale original is his villainizing, in a sense, Phebus, ascribing some culpability to this deity, and victimizing the crow, portraying him as, if not guilt-free, at least significantly more innocent than his master. Machaut also modifies the characters of Phebus and the crow in a similar fashion, but less markedly than does Chaucer.

Chaucer does closely follow the *Ovide moralisé* in his moral, as the French poem clearly denounces, with harsh invective, "jenglerie," "jengles," "jenglerres," and "jengleours," and concludes:

> Mieux doit mentir,
> Ou taire soi, pour pais avoir,
> Que mal souffrir pour dire voir. (2546-48)
>
> It is better to lie
> Or to keep quiet in order to have peace
> Than to suffer harm for telling the truth (translation mine).

The most notable difference in the respective morals is that in the *Ovide moralisé* it is the poet himself, or a vague narrational voice that comments throughout the entirety of the

work, moralizing on the narrative tales, yet in Chaucer, of course, the moral lesson and diatribe are taken over fully by the "gentil" Manciple. The Manciple's voice embodies the spirit and, to some extent, the wording of the French text. The main difference is one of simplification: Chaucer simplifies the narrative dramatically, omitting episodes that in the French poem are clearly important considering their length and how they logically and seamlessly fit into the narrative. The French poem in its narrative structure and content closely follows the *Metamorphoses*. The poet evidently wanted to render the tales exactly as they appear in Ovid; no element of the stories themselves is missing. In the *Manciple's Tale*, however, entire scenes and episodes from the earlier tales are omitted. For example, in the *Metamorphoses*, the *Ovide moralisé*, and Machaut's version, Phebus' raven, on his way to inform Phebus of his cuckolding, meets a crow who warns the raven against janglerie, attempting to dissuade him by recounting her own similar experience, in which she witnessed one of Pallas' servant girls betraying her mistress and promptly told Pallas of what she had seen.

Pallas' crow, who already had been transformed once by the goddess from a beautiful princess into a bird to escape being ravished by Neptune, now endures a second transformation at the hands of Pallas, this time having her feathers changed from white to black and being banished as a consequence of her "janglerie." The insouciant raven, however, dismisses the crow's warnings and hurries off to inform his master. In his tale Chaucer completely removes the entire narrative of Pallas and the crow, the story within a story, which naturally leaves us wondering why. The *Manciple's Tale* is one of Chaucer's more dramatic alterations of his sources to be found in the *Canterbury Tales*. The classical myth in his hands becomes a simpler and more stark tale, perhaps

appropriate to the voice and character of the "lewed" Manciple (who, like the raven from the Ovidian tales, was warned about the perils of janglerie and the virtues of silence, by his mother), but there must be something more we can point to. The chief effect of Chaucer's elision is to make Phebus' crow (raven) appear less guilty, and to make Phebus, and particularly his wife, appear more guilty. Chaucer's crow, although turning somewhat verbose after initially being a little coy in telling his master of his wife's adultery, informs Phebus, we sense, out of a sense of loyalty or idealism, in innocence, without having been warned in advance against tattle-telling.

Another change in Chaucer's tale that serves to mitigate the crow's guilt is the excessive punishment he suffers in relation to his "crime," particularly when compared to his punishment in the French sources (and in Ovid). This harsh punishment that Phebus metes out to his loyal servant, for simply telling the truth, evokes a sense of pathos in the reader for the crow. In the Latin and French sources, the crow (raven) is punished chiefly by being changed from white to black. In none of the sources de we see Phebus castigating the crow for his actions or directly blaming him. Chaucer goes much further, having Phebus heap multiple punishments, both physical and psychological, upon the creature:

> And to the crowe, "O false theef!" seyde he,
> "I wol thee quite anon thy false tale.
> Thou songe whilom lyk a nyghtyngale;
> Now shaltow, false theef, thy song forgon,
> And eek thy white fetheres everichon,
> Ne nevere in al thy lif ne shaltou speke.
> Thus shal men on a traytour been awreke;
> Thou and thyn ofspryng evere shul be blake,
> Ne nevere sweete noyse shul ye make,
> But evere crie agayn tempest and rayn,
> In tokenynge that thurgh thee my wyf is slayn."
> And to the crowe he stirte, and that anon,

And pulled his white fetheres everychon,
And made hym blak, and refte hym al his song,
And eek his speche, and out at dore hym slong
Unto the devel, which I hym bitake;
And for this caas been alle crowes blake. (292-308)

Even the Manciple himself can't resist getting in on the act and "bitake[s]" the crow unto the devil. Phebus, after rashly and angrily killing his wife, even goes so far as to claim that the crow is responsible for his wife's death (302). Earlier in the narrative Chaucer uses only two lines to describe Phebus' killing of his unfaithful wife, and then he writes seventeen lines to detail the indignities suffered and penalties paid by the faithful, truth-telling bird. The effect of all this unbalanced treatment, ostensibly, and on its surface, may be to induce in the audience more antipathy for the crow and sympathy for Phebus, and his wife, but what Chaucer effectively does here is to render the crow a pathetic creature, while not fully exonerating him, and to ascribe more culpability to Phebus. And, while Phebus' wife, in the narrative, comes across as a somewhat innocent victim of both Phebus and the crow, through the Manciple's digression and apology for his choice of words to describe Phebus' wife, Chaucer indirectly assigns blame to her and underscores her sullied role in the affair. This censorious stance toward and demystification of the wife of Apollo are wholly absent in the Latin and French sources.

So why would Chaucer make these significant changes and deletions of a story he is translating? One possible answer is that Chaucer is trying to make a veiled statement about certain contemporary social issues that concern him, as well as about traditional literary and cultural institutions that he questions. For example, through his victimization of the crow and corresponding villainization of Phebus, Chaucer seems to be exposing and criticizing the inequitable, oppressive relationships between institutional powers and

those groups or individuals subservient to them. If we examine the relationship between the crow and Phebus in this context, we can see that the *Manciple's Tale* illustrates this problematic association.

It is curious to note that, as John J. McGavin points out, "With very few exceptions, critics have inclined to agree with the Manciple and consign Phoebus' crow to the devil."[27] These critics have seemingly unquestioningly accepted the Manciple's moral on the virtues of silence as Chaucer's moral. As I have already suggested, however, Chaucer's text challenges this traditional precept, and the Apollonian myth which embodies it. Other critics have commented on the servitude or "slave morality" of the Manciple,[28] but few have examined the crow in this light. In the Latin and French source texts, Apollo's crow is inscribed as a sordid creature (perhaps not only because of the lewd, dishonorable scene he has witnessed but also because he unabashedly recounts the scene?) who deserves the indignities he suffers as a result of his jangling. In the *Manciple's Tale*, however, the crow engenders more pathos: Chaucer departs from his sources in that he explicitly puts the crow in a cage (131) (anticipating Lydgate's use of the caged bird motif), which evokes an image of servitude from the beginning of the narrative. And the crow's subsequent fleecing, blackening, and banishment at the hands of his lord, in addition to the maledictions Phebus heaps upon him, for being faithful, loyal, and telling the truth, clearly reflect a gross imbalance and unjust power relation, and this fable can thus be seen as Chaucer's way of critiquing oppressive relations

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[27] See "How Nasty Is Phoebus's Crow?" *The Chaucer Review* 21.4 (1987): 444.

[28] Ann W. Astell, "Nietzsche, Chaucer, and the Sacrifice of Art," *Chaucer Review* 39 (2005): 323-40; Louise Fradenburg, "The Manciple's Servant Tongue: Politics and Poetry in the Canterbury Tales," *ELH* 52 (1985): 85-118.

between nobility and the lower classes. More significantly, Chaucer through the *Manciple's Tale* is challenging another contemporary relationship fraught with tension and one more relevant to himself as an artist: that between the writer and the prevailing system of patronage in fourteenth-century England. Chaucer also is subverting the prevailing medieval Apollonian mythos that idealizes the god, and, as well, the courtly romance conception of woman in this mythos.

One of Chaucer's significant departures from his source texts that underscores his translational objectives in the *Manciple's Tale* is his treatment of Phebus' wife. Indeed readers of Chaucer know her as "Phebus' wife" and nothing else, but in the *Metamorphoses* as well as the French texts she is named Coronis of Larissa. Thus through suppressing her name and therefore her identity and turning her into an anonymous wife, Chaucer begins his demystification and humbling of this deified figure who, notwithstanding her cuckolding of Apollo, is generally depicted in idealized terms in the French poems, a depiction not unlike that of the regal lady in courtly romance. As another leveling device, Chaucer then lowers the level of discourse in the form of the Manciple, particularly in reference to Phebus' wife, to reflect greater offense on her part. Acknowledging his "knavyssh speche," the Manciple emphatically concludes his report to Phebus of his wife's philandering by bluntly stating "For on thy bed thy wyf I saugh hym swyve" (256). He then uses the colloquial word "lemman" to refer to Phebus' cuckolder and also indirectly in reference to Phebus' wife (220). The Manciple also twice uses the word "wenche" in his *apologia*, another possibly lewd and offensive word, in suggesting that the only difference between Phebus' wife and a poor woman who has also "werke[d] amys" is a socially-constructed linguistic one: the former is called a

"lady" and the latter labeled a wenche or lemman. "Wenche" usually denotes a lower-class woman, often a servant, and is, according to E. Talbot Donaldson, "not a respectable word in Chaucer's eyes."[29] In this digression the Manciple, somewhat incongruously, appeals to the authority of Plato in order to vindicate his use of "lemman" and "wenche" in reference to Phebus' wife where "lady" or "lovere" might be thought more polite and appropriate. These words merit a closer examination in this context, wherein The Manciple interrupts his narrative and begins his digression thusly:

> His wyf anon hath for hir lemman sent.
> Hir lemman? Certes, this is a knavyssh speche!
> Foryeveth it me, and that I yow biseche. (204-06)

He thus implores his audience to forgive him his use of "lemman," which some might find offensive, particularly in reference to the wife of Apollo. With Chaucer the term "lemman" usually carries connotations of "adultery, lust, treacherous love, and rape . . . But the word was not held to be coarse, and the Manciple is the only pilgrim to apologize for it. . . . Perhaps Chaucer felt that the word had lower-class connotations and was somewhat old-fashioned (Benson 954). Other scholars contend that the word "has connotations of moral disapproval," one citing a fifteenth-century Latin glossary where "lemman" is translated as *concubina*.[30] Intriguingly, the meanings of "lemman" in the *Middle English Dictionary* vary from "concubine" to "the Virgin Mary; God, Christ."[31] One wonders whether Benson et al. interpret the word in a pejorative sense because of its

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[29] *Speaking of Chaucer*, 1970, 25n., quoted in Benson, 954.

[30] J. David Burnley, *English Studies*, 1984, 195-204, quoted in Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer*, 954.

[31] *Middle English Dictionary*. Middle English Compendium online. University of Michigan.

use in the fabliau *The Miller's Tale*, where both Nicholas and Absolon repeatedly apply the term to the "likerous" Alisoun. "Lemman" thus seems more appropriate for a "knavyssh" tale like the Miller's and its use in not only a morally didactic beast fable but one which features gods such as Apollo carries more ironic connotations.

One of the significant points of this passage is its antifeminism: the Manciple is plainly expressing a series of misogynistic remarks directed against Phebus' wife but also against women in general. In addition to the words above, he also considers woman in animalistic terms, comparing her to a bird, a cat, and, more pointedly, a "she-wolf ." Moreover, the "lemman" with whom Phebus' wife cuckolds her husband is not another god, or king, or, as in the courtly romance, a princely hero, but an underling, as the Manciple emphasizes:

> "For under hym another hadde shee,
> A man of litel reputacioun,
> Nat worth to Phebus in comparisoun. (198-200).

With the choice of her lover Phebus' wife is adding insult to injury, the Manciple makes clear. This unflattering portrayal of the lover is an addition to the story on the part of Chaucer, and reflects a parodic strain vis-à-vis the ideals of *fin' amor* wholly absent in the *Ovide moralisé*. In Chaucer's tale the myth has been reworked to ascribe more baseness to the event and more guilt to Coronis and to Phebus, while reclaiming the crow.

One of Chaucer's more intriguing ironic strokes in the *Manciple's Tale* can be seen when we contrast this antifeminist discourse regarding Phebus' wife with the end of the tale, in which the Manciple repeatedly invokes his mother during his verbose moralisation, and (paradoxically) relies upon saws taught to him by his mother to drive

home his final assertions to his fellow pilgrims. What are we to make of this story-teller who follows his digressions wherein he insults women with invoking another woman as an *auctore*?

The subversiveness of the *Manciple's Tale* can also lie in its comment on artistic expression and the tensions associated with it during late fourteenth-century England. Chaucer was concerned with conveying the truth in the most effective way possible. This task, of course, was not always an easy one especially in the turbulent 1380's and '90's. As a poet writing in the court of Richard II, Chaucer was attuned to the contemporary political crises and Richard's increasingly tyrannical rule. That the *Manciple's Tale* reflects Chaucer's preoccupation with corruption in the court and the reality that it "can be dangerous to lecture a king" is suggested by Nevill Coghill, who senses the poem's political dimension and describes it as a "little masterpiece" which ventures "on the criticism of his hearers." Coghill concentrates on the poem's explicit advice, even though offered "obliquely" through the "carefully constructed dummy" of the Manciple, whose proffered advice has its cynical side, in that it concludes with a heavy warning against "exposing oneself to the 'losengeours' and 'totelere accusours,' who, as we know from the BF version of the *Prologue to The Legend of Good Women* (D352-4) infested the court."[32] The poem's pertinence to fourteenth-century London is sensed, as well, by Carl Lindahl, who comments that here "a manciple channels dangerous thoughts into a

[32] See Nevill Coghill, "Chaucer's Narrative Art in the *Canterbury Tales*," in *Chaucer and Chaucerians: Critical Essays in Middle English Literature*, ed. Derek Brewer. (University: University of Alabama Press, 1966) 136-39.

socially commendable tale which simultaneously describes and deplores the limitations of speech that his creator knew first hand."[33]

A number of critics have commented on Chaucer's poetry reflecting an awareness of and engagement with contemporary society. Perhaps Michaela Paasche Grudin perhaps best elaborates how this awareness is manifested in the *Manciple's Tale*:

> It is in the amplifications of the *Manciple's Tale* that we find the most compelling evidence of Chaucer's concern with that contemporary world. Superficially awkward, even backtracking, the amplifications seem not to fit the Ovidian fable in which they are found. . . . The amplifications describe a reality both within the poem and within the audience to whom the tale is addressed, the society of the poet. . . . The amplifications may well constitute Chaucer's attempt to demonstrate the necessity of a poetic that combines elements of prologue and tale and thus eludes the unpleasant alternatives presented in the poem to the dilemma of truth-telling. Tonally of a piece, the amplifications describe a world of appetite and prejudice, where to lack caution and guile is not to survive. They throw us off track. Narrative intrusions more than once demand that the reader refocus attention from the specific material of the fable to broader and more troublesome human issues.[34]

In this broader social context it is tempting to think that Phebus, who represents not simply the the ruling elite but also patronage and the supreme artistic authority, may also be unaware of the dissembling nature of the poet. Falling as they do immediately upon the heels of the Manciple's discussion of "men / That been untrewe" (187-88), the lines depicting the naivete of Phebus take on, perhaps, additional meaning: "This Phebus, which that thoghte upon no gile, / Deceyved was, for al his jolitee" (196-97).

As suggested above, one of the principal translational changes that Chaucer makes in his myth of Phebus and the crow is his inversion of courtly ideals and *fin' amor*

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[33] Carl Lindahl, *Earnest Games: Folkloric Patterns in the "Canterbury Tales"* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) 13.

[34] Michaela Paasche Grudin, *Chaucer and the Politics of Discourse* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996) 156-57.

that the *Ovide moralisé* upholds and that Machaut's *Le Voir Dit* ostensibly upholds but in actuality questions as well. This inversion reveals some of Chaucer's objectives as a translator, i.e. satirizing the popular poetics of the late Middle Ages. In addition to Chaucer's reworkings demonstrated above, another significant element of Chaucer's poem that departs from the French texts, particularly from the *Ovide moralisé*, is its commentary on art and the artist. Like the account in the M*etamorphoses*, the narrative in the *Ovide moralisé* practically ignores the fact that Apollo is a musician. The only reference comes when the crow informs Apollo of his wife's philandering, whereupon Apollo drops his lyre. Chaucer's account, is a however, is an exploration of the complexities of art and of the power yet also the vulnerabilities and failings of the artist. Chaucer fills his brief tale with numerous references to music and song and, of course, story-telling itself. Of all the various qualities associated with Phebus, it is that as an artist that Chaucer privileges, as we can see near the beginning of the tale when Phebus is praised for his music and song:

> Pleyen he koude on every mynstralcie,
> And syngen that it was a melodie
> To heeren of his cleere voys the soun.
> Certes the kyng of Thebes, Amphioun,
> That with his syngyng walled that citee,
> Koude nevere syngen half so wel as hee.
> Therto he was the semelieste man
> That is or was sith that the world began. (113-20)

And as Phebus' artistic counterpart, the crow is also described as having a voice nonpareil:

> Therwith in al this world no nyghtyngale
> Ne koude, by an hondred thousand deel,
> Syngen so wonder myrily and weel. (136-38)

Chaucer valorizes the crow's representation of the artist by adding, "And countrefete the speche of every man / He koude, whan he sholde telle a tale" (134-35), and it is this specific description of the crow as tale-teller that is most significant. The operative word here, of course, is "countrefete," which carried the same meaning in the fourteenth century as "counterfeit" does today-- denoting something deceptive and false—as well as meaning "to imitate, emulate, or represent something" (*MED: Middle English Compendium).* This notion of emulating or representing the speech of every man while at the same time using covert or duplicitous language underscores the challenge for Chaucer and others writing in English in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, one that attained its resolution in the fable genre.

In Chaucer's case, this challenge lay in the realm of language itself. Simply the choice of the vernacular tongue as his literary medium—his attempt to **"**countrefete the speche of every man"--had a transgressive quality to it. Chaucer's use of English, particularly in the *Canterbury Tales* and in *Troilus and Criseyde*, challenges the authority of the hierarchy of medieval languages. These two texts gave English the weight and esteem it needed (and had hitherto been missing) to stand on its own as a literary language, comparable with classical, French, and Italian authors. His novel choice of English for these two works, and its significant and lasting influence on the English language and literature, can be compared in some respects to Dante's decision earlier in the century to write the *Divine Comedy* in Italian. Nicholas Watson states that during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries "Middle English writing was and went on being much preoccupied with its own legitimacy and status, while the use of written English, both in England itself and in Scotland, was highly politically charged throughout the period . . .

Writing in English raised large questions about national/cultural identity and about the consequences of the spread of literacy and learning both down the social scale and across the gender divide." Watson further adds that the "general literary history of Middle English [is] one whose focus is sociopolitical and linguistic, rather than formal or aesthetic."[35] Adding to this subversive character is Chaucer's choice of the Manciple to narrate this tale featuring the speech of every man.

While English was making inroads at the turn of the century as the language for a variety of written texts, it nevertheless had to wait almost a century after Chaucer wrote the *Canterbury Tales* before Caxton made it the standard literary language with his first printing press in English. As a London poet and diplomat for Richard II, Chaucer must have faced a degree of hostility to his choice of English verse, in that the main language of Richard II's court, a significant part of his audience, was Parisian French.[36] And Latin and Anglo-Norman continued to be widely used, not only in schools, monasteries, churches, law courts, and municipal and guild records, but in literature as well. Numerous fourteenth-century tracts, poems, and hagiographies were composed in Latin, and one of the most important writers of the early fourteenth century was Nicole Bozon, a Franciscan writing in Anglo-Norman, who wrote, among other works, a number of Aesopic fables. Writing at the same time as Chaucer, John Gower wrote two of his three principal works, the *Mirour de l'omme* and the *Vox clamantis*, in Anglo-Norman and Latin, respectively. Watson suggests that Gower chose to write the former, his first long

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[35] See "The Politics of Middle English Writing," *The Idea of the Vernacular*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999) 331.

[36]See William Rothwell, "The Trilingual England of Geoffrey Chaucer," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 16 (1994): 45-67.

poem, in Anglo-Norman "perhaps as the most appropriate language for a member of the gentry such as himself to address his peers."[37] Chaucer's decision to write a collection of tales in Middle English recounted by a diverse group of individuals that span the various classes, estates, and professions of late medieval England provided him with the framework to represent the array of voices and dialects that peopled fourteenth-century England.

Although closer to Machaut's *Le Voir Dit* than to the *Ovide moralisé*, particularly in its anticourtly elements, the *Manciple's Tale* departs from Machaut's poem, its most immediate source, in a couple of significant ways. One such change is Chaucer's deletion of one of the key features of *Le Voir Dit* (as well as of Ovid's tale): Phebus' "*amie*" (Coronis) was pregnant with his child, whom Phebus saves and who would become Aesculapius, the god of healing and medicine. Chaucer's suppression of this element also serves to enhance the guilt of Phebus and his wife, and by extension mitigate that of the crow, by obviating the pathos that certainly would have adhered to Phebus and his wife had Chaucer included the pregnancy. Perhaps an even more significant change associated with this element is Chaucer's creation of a literal cuckolding and adultery in that he transforms Coronis, Phebus' "*belle amie*," to Phebus' wife, thus, again, increasing the culpability of both the god and his wife. And the crow's jangling in this context, a report of a literal cuckolding, takes on a less blameworthy note. Chaucer's crow's shout of "Cokkow!" is an original touch; nowhere in either of the French sources do we see the bird crowing "Cocu!" or "Cucuault!", the Old French corresponding terms. Chaucer also displays his originality through his choice of the Manciple as his narrator, and this choice

[37] "The Politics of Middle English Writing," 333.

underscores Chaucer's subtle challenge to the prevailing contemporary institutions as well as his safeguarding of the position of the poet while still managing to convey his message about art and the artist.

In Machaut's *Le Voir Dit*, the Coronis of Larissa myth (which is the tale of the crow or raven) is actually told by an "image" (a portrait or sculpture) of Toute-belle, the lover of *Le Voir Dit's* Narrator, who, appearing to the Narrator in a dream, recounts the story. Metaphorically, Phoebus represents the lover/narrator, who is a great poet, the persona of Guillaume Machaut himself. This contrasts sharply with Chaucer's later version, whose narrator is obviously not confused with a great poet or the god of arts. In addition to satirizing the law courts through his "lewed," verbose, blustery Manciple, Chaucer avoids drawing attention to himself as an artist or "auctour." He takes this ambiguous stance, of course, for all of his tales, and thus in a sense absolves himself of the responsibility yoked to the medieval artist or author. In the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer presents himself as a compilator of tales told by others, and Chaucer the poet therefore disassociates himself from his Manciple narrator, just as the Manciple disassociates himself from the characters in his tale—when Phebus slings the crow out the door and "unto the devel," the Manciple interjects, "which I hym bitake."

In line 359, Chaucer writes the word "*auctour*"; it may be Chaucer's only use of this word in the *Canterbury Tales*, and, for that matter, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, that doesn't apply to a prominent historical figure/writer/authority (usually classical, except for Jesus/the Bible), to my knowledge. Here, it means simply a bearer of tidings, a tale-teller, a jangleor (a babbler, gossip). This is an interesting line which merits further scrutiny. The Manciple, in his concluding moralization, quotes his mother: "My sone, be

war, and be noon auctour newe / Of tidynges, wheither they been false or trewe" (359-60). Here Chaucer may be playing with the word "auctour," perhaps subverting notions of authority, specifically the idea of an a*uctour.* Barry Windeatt elaborates on this notion: "Chaucer is restless in his employment of innovative and novel literary and poetic forms, and uses these . . . to undermine a particular authority such as that of the Christian Church or of 'chivalry'. . . . The effect of Chaucer's poetic experimentation, taking existing characters from Boccaccio or Dante for example and re-working those characters with his own insights, is to subvert or subtly alter the moral and social beliefs of those characters, giving their voices hints of dissent against the ruling authority."[38] The medieval conception of an "author" was very different from the modern one. An "auctour", to a Middle English reader, was not someone living now, but (usually) a dead classical writer, whose works had already had massive influence on the literary landscape of the day. Very often medieval poems come down to us anonymous – and not simply because of lost information or incomplete manuscripts. Some medieval authors felt that their name was unimportant, because they were only re-telling an "auctour's" work. But Chaucer, although to a lesser extent than his contemporary William Langland, seems concerned with the concept and identity of the author, a concern that appears as well in *The Nun's Priest's Tale*.

In *Truth and Textuality in Chaucer's Poetry*, Lisa Kiser states that *The Manciple's Tale* highlights the folly and cruelty of Phebus and shows to what extent "the fate of truth-teller hinges . . . on the self-serving whims of a powerful audience" (148). This observation in regard to the truth-teller can be extrapolated from the crow to the

[38] *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: Troilus and Criseyde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 215.

Manciple to Chaucer himself, who, it can be argued, occupied an analogous position in his milieu to that of the crow. Certainly Chaucer never had to worry about being exiled because of his words (unlike his forebear Ovid, the original source of the story), but in a sense his professional survival as writer depended a great deal on the "self-serving whims of a powerful audience" and likewise his "voice" as a poet. Chaucer's audience, not unlike the crow's, wielded ultimate power in determining what sort of literature was fit for publication and consumption, and thus Chaucer had to choose his subject matter, narratives, characters, sentences, phrases, and words carefully to comport with the fashion and expectations of late fourteenth-century England.

Without the crow's forced explanation to Phebus, disaster could have been averted. Human discourse is rife with danger, this story of beasts seems to suggest; the privilege of using words carries with it a great risk.[39] Perhaps more significant, however, is the notion of the crow's abuse of language—his excessive and repetitive discourse—leading to the ensuing tragedy. In commenting on the function and significance of beast fables as a literary medium, Jan Ziolkowski writes,

> Although in the hands of a propagandist animals can be used to inculcate the values of an existing regime, they can also help the literary subversive to attack the status quo. . . . Animals permit authors to take risks that they cannot take in stories explicitly about human beings. In particular, beast fables and beast folktales provide underdogs (the pun is purposeful)—whether oppressed classes or endangered individuals—with the means to express their viewpoint and to pass on advice to enable those like them to survive. Through beasts they can comment upon the powerful, express their resentments and frustrations, and fulfill in fantasy dreams that they could not realize in life.[40]

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[39] In his introduction to *Mastering Aesop*, Edward Wheatley demonstrates the seriousness of fable when he relates the gruesome account of the thirteenth-century Paduan tyrant-king Ezelino, who executes and decapitates several men for telling, and writing, Aesopic fables that he deems were a veiled attempt to criticize him.

[40] *Talking Animals: Medieval Latin Beast Poetry, 750-1150*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993. 6-7.

How does beast fable make all this possible? Ziolkowski adds, "To caricature enemies or oppressors as animals is a relatively safe form of humor, since often the targets of such mockery will refuse to make themselves ridiculous by acknowledging that any resemblance exists. . . . The related practices of humanizing animals and animalizing human beings have long been the mainstay of many adult insults and jokes, especially ones concerned with class and ethnic struggles."[41]

Phaedrus, a freedman (former slave) and the author of the earliest extant collection of fables, dating to the early first century A.D., summed up the close relationship between beast tales and class oppression in explaining the origins of fable:

> Nunc, fabularum cur sit inventum genus,
> brevi docebo. servitus obnoxia,
> quia quae volebat non audebat dicere,
> affectus proprios in fabellas transtulit,
> calumniamque fictis elusit iocis.
>
> Now I will explain briefly why the type of thing called fable was invented. The slave, being liable to punishment for any offence, since he dared not say outright what he wished to say, projected his personal sentiments into fables and eluded censure under the guise of jesting with made-up stories. (Book 3, Prologue 33-37, trans. Perry).[42]

As a former slave, Phaedrus knows whereof he speaks. It is interesting to note that, along with Aesop, one of the earliest and most important progenitors of the fable was a slave (as was Uncle Remus, the fictitious storyteller of the Brer Rabbit tales from the late nineteenth-century American South). Many of Phaedrus' fables have social implications,

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[41] *Talking Animals*, 7.

[42] Ben Edwin Perry, ed. and trans. *Babrius and Phaedrus*. Loeb ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965. 254-55.

such as “The Frogs Asked for a King” (Book 1, no. 2, trans. Perry 193-95), which comments on the dangers of tyranny, and “The Meeting of the Wolf and the Dog” (Book 3, no. 7, trans. Perry 266-69), whose moral states, “How sweet liberty is.” The fable also appealed to those of other classes and stations during the classical Greco-Roman period. In the fifth century B.C. Socrates “was reputed to have busied himself while in prison with the versification of Aesop’s fables (Plato, *Phaedo* 61b, trans. Tredennick 44). The philosopher’s choice of activity fits well with the theory that ancient fable was a weapon of the small and weak against the mighty” (Ziolkowski 8).

Many medieval fabulists, however, were in fact courtiers or somehow closely associated with the king or royal family. Indeed every fabulist under consideration in this study—Marie de France, William Caxton, John Lydgate, and Geoffrey Chaucer—can be categorized as such (as noted below, however, Caxton in particular had a somewhat dicey relationship with his sovereign). Other prominent medieval fable writers were clerics writing in Latin, such as the thirteenth-century writer Odo of Cheriton, who also used the fable as a platform for social criticism, particularly targeting the Church. All of these fabulists used the fable as a vehicle for socio-political commentary. Those four examined here, perhaps precisely *because* of their prominent social positions and closeness to the royal inner circles of their day, had to be even more circumspect in their discourse than would a writer or storyteller in a lower class or less public position and thus would have found in the fable their ideal, and safest, means through which to satirize. The *Manciple’s Tale* contains an interesting twist on the convention of fabulists as slaves: as teller of this beast fable, the Manciple dons the mantel of fabulist, and, according to the *OED*, the word “manciple” derives from the Latin *mancipium*, meaning an “acquisition by

purchase, absolute ownership, hence a slave. . . . a bondslave, servant" (298). Correspondingly, in Old French the term *mancipe* (with a citation reading *manciple*) is defined as "*esclave, serviteur*".[43] Thus the "gentil maunciple" (a pointedly ironic epithet given this definition), whom Chaucer presents as a dishonest, corrupt legal officer who cheated his more than thirty learned masters, has joined the likes of Aesop and Phaedrus as a fable-teller. Louise Fradenburg is one scholar who has noted the ramified political implications of the Manciple's "servant tongue."[44]

Apart from the social criticism that the fable genre enabled, writing about talking animals also engenders a kind of literary liberty: it often gives authors more license to experiment with styles and registers than they would find in writing about human characters. Often writers of fable are wont to employ traits of the most "serious" literature, such as epic, and play them off against a plain-and-simple style, as Chaucer does so adroitly in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*. As a fabulist and translator, Chaucer in both the *Manciple's Tale* and the *Nun's Priest's Tale* seems to be subtly drawing a connection between the notion of translation and birds and beasts having and losing the power of speech. This conception of translation, however, is a nuanced, complex one and not simply a matter of re-telling a story or re-writing a poem in a different tongue; it is more a matter of a material transformation, and also a reinterpretation. In the dream visions, such as the *Parliament of Fowls* and the *House of Fame*, we need no explanation why birds speak, and Chaucer therefore does not deign to proffer one. Elsewhere in his poetry, however, Chaucer takes pains to explain such translation procedures. In the *Nun's*

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[43] Frederic Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue francaise et tous ses dialectes de IXe au XVe siecle*. 392.

[44] "The Manciple's Servant Tongue: Politics and Poetry in *The Canterbury Tales*."

Priest's Tale, as soon as Chauntecleer sings, "My lief is faren in londe," the Priest interrupts to explain to his audience: "For thilke tyme, as I have understonde, / Beestes and briddes koude speke and synge" (2878-80). This is part of the game, of course—if we play along, we are to assume that some time later, birds and beasts lost the power of speech, now the exclusive privilege of human beings. This seemingly trivial and even absurd aside uttered by the Priest is, however, significant and is a passage that represents an ideal intersection of Chaucer's two beast fables. Like Chaunticleer exhibiting his pride of voice, Phebus' crow conveys his words a little too flauntingly, the result being the exile of crows from a paradisiacal home. Both birds express themselves, their voices, imprudently, and there seems a heavy price to pay—the permanent loss of language. But, as with so much of the *Manciple's Tale* that we have observed, there is more than one way to read this situation. What appears to be a loss of language may instead be a rebirth, offering a unique, multifaceted perspective of the notion of "lost in translation." The experience of Chaunticleer and of Phebus' crow suggests not only a loss of voice, language and the meaning of words, but also of home and community (with the obvious potential- or near-loss of life itself). Yet since their stories are retold, their stories—and thus their language—live on in the words of their translators, in this case the Nun's Priest and the Manciple, and of course Chaucer himself.

Much of the appeal of beast fable for children, of course, is its fabulous, fictive, "false" quality that makes it entertaining: to see a talking animal is strange and therefore funny. If animals can actually speak and sing, that entertainment value is lost. In this light the Nun's Priest's parenthetical reference and its function as a fulcrum for both tales carry some interesting implications. Coming as it does before the *Manciple's Tale* in the

journey of the Canterbury pilgrims, the Nun's Priest's comment subtly and succinctly adumbrates the tale of Phebus and his crow which is to follow and provides in advance a frame of reference and a historical explanation that helps to legitimize the Manciple's narrative. Moreover, in the context of translation, the passage is significant in connection with the concept of language loss. The *Manciple's Tale* cleverly expresses not only the hostility confronting translators but indeed the serious risks they face. A number of observers have commented on the idea of translation as a loss of language. Theorist Maurice Blanchot considers the question of equating translation with cultural betrayal:

> Some do not want anyone to translate into their language, and others do not want anyone to translate their language; and war is needed in order for this treachery, in the literal sense, to be carried out: to hand over the true language of a people to a foreign land. . . . But the translator is guilty of greater impiety still. He, enemy of God, seeks to rebuild the Tower of Babel, to turn to good account and profit, ironically, the celestial punishment that separates men in the confusion of languages.[45]

This idea of translation as betrayal is reflected in the verbal exchange between Phebus and his crow, particularly in the angry response of Phebus. The question of language loss underscores the aptness, and the singular power, of the beast fable for Chaucer to convey his message that severe consequences can result from injudicious use of language, from "jangling." Beasts and birds, the Nun's Priest informs us, could communicate in human terms at one time, and Chaucer seems to be suggesting that as a consequence of their verbal indiscretions they became aphasic. For the medieval poet, torn between an idealistic conception of fidelity to his or her art and the fixed, powerful literary conventions of the day, the stakes are high, Chaucer suggests. Looking at both

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[45] Maurice Blanchot, "Translating." *L'Amitié* (Friendship), 57-58.

tales in the context of the Nun's Priest's aside and its implications, the question of language and its reception/interpretation is a conspicuous one. The artist, represented by not only Phebus' crow but of course the musical Chaunticleer—indicated by his name itself--is in one instance exiled by his audience and stripped of any aesthetic qualities he possesses, including his voice itself, and in the other violently attacked by his listener who is bent on annihilation. In these tales Chaucer augments and complicates the formulaic metaphorical character of beast fable; it is not simply, or perhaps not at all, a tale for children.

CHAPTER 5

THE POLITICS OF BEASTLY LANGUAGE: JOHN LYDGATE'S *ISOPES FABULES*

In a copy of John Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*, there is a woodcut of the author with the Canterbury pilgrims.[1] This picture visually supports the poem itself, in which Lydgate has placed himself alongside the pilgrims on their journey to Canterbury. This portrait showing the author as character in his or her own text, conflating the author with the text, reflects the growing concern with the figure of the author in the fifteenth century. In England this concern centered on John Lydgate, the most important English poet of the century. Indeed Lydgate himself was preoccupied with the "image" of the author, often presenting himself as a follower in the traces of his "master" Chaucer.[2]

Critics in recent years have generally characterized fifteenth-century English poetry as "public" poetry, among other, more critical adjectives.[3] David Lawton asserts that "a major interest of fifteenth-century writing is its lack of individualism, and the

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[1] See Anthony Bale's *From Translator to Laureate: Imagining the Medieval Author*, London: Blackwell, 2008, 1. Bale points out that this picture is used for the cover of the *Riverside Chaucer* paperback.

[2] Lydgate refers to Chaucer as "master" on several occasions. He first describes Chaucer as "master" in *The Life of Our Lady*, l. 1628.

[3] See David Lawton's "Dullness and the Fifteenth Century," *English Literary History* 54 (1987), 761, in which Lawton cites numerous negative scholarly comments on the poetry of the period, stating, "The fifteenth century becomes a literary prolepsis of the Slough of Despond occupying, to quote E. P. Hammond, 'the years between Chaucer's death and the Elizabethan fluorescence, before the middle class had taken form or received education,' a time when 'English literature was in the hands of the conservatives.'" It should be noted here that Lawton takes issue with the common perception that fifteenth-century English poetry was "dull" or necessarily "conservative."

dedication with which 'spirit' subordinates itself to 'group,' both serving it and shaping it; historically, that the fifteenth century authoritatively consolidates the public voice and role of English poetry."[4] Surely the poet who most embodies this concept of public poetry in fifteenth-century England is John Lydgate, writing, for most of his career, not only politically-themed works at the behest of noble and royal patrons[5] but also texts expressly for a civic audience, such as his *Mumming for the Mercers of London* and *Mumming for the Goldsmiths of London.*[6] Maura Nolan's *John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture*, as its title suggests, examines Lydgate and his work in the context of the public sphere. Nolan writes in her introduction that Lydgate's poetry serves as a self-promotion for the state, for the English polity in the fifteenth century, particularly in the years following Henry V's death:

> Already known as an able promoter of English and regnal interests from his work for Henry V, especially the massive *Troy Book*, Lydgate produced during the years of the minority—what Derek Pearsall has called his "laureate" period—a whole series of texts designed to bolster and support the authority of the child on the throne. These texts have typically been read as expressions of the Lancastrian penchant for self-promotion: the regime during the minority experimented with a wide variety of forms of propaganda, including coins, pictorial images, royal spectacles, and written texts. Indeed, some of them are quite straightforward advertisements for Henrican kingship.[7]

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[4] Ibid, 762.

[5] For example, Walter F. Schirmer tells us that Lydgate's *Troy Book* was commissioned by King Henry V in 1412 and his *Fall of Princes* was commissioned by Duke Humfrey in 1431. See *John Lydgate: A Study in the Culture of the Fifteenth Century*, trans. Ann E. Keep, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961, 42, 209.

[6] See Claire Sponsler's "Alien Nation: London's Aliens and Lydgate's Mummings for the Mercers and Goldsmiths," in *The Post-Colonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey J. Cohen, New York: St. Martin's, 2000. 229-42.

[7] *John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 1-2.

Writing in the fifteenth century and occupying different socio-cultural positions from those of Marie and Chaucer, Lydgate and William Caxton, rather than calling attention to themselves as individual artists and translators, instead examine their role as writers in the public sphere, with its attendant obligations and risks. In their fable translations they attempt to reconcile the artistic voice with the expectations and demands of the public, the latter perhaps exerting more pressure, thus producing fables essentially more conservative than those of their predecessors yet also more reflective of contemporary culture.

My position in this chapter is that Lydgate's fables reflect a conscious concern with contemporary social conditions and with his proper position in fifteenth-century English society. Yet these concerns are not the same as those demonstrated and examined by most scholars of Lydgate in recent years. In his later works Lydgate addresses his multiple and conflicting roles as a writer, translator, and court poet intimately connected with the royal family, particularly Henry, Prince of Wales (soon to become King Henry V), yet also a provincial monk with loyalties incongruous with his other obligations; yet in his fables, written very early in his career and thus probably before he became so closely associated with the court, Lydgate demonstrates less an interest in, and sympathy for, the elite classes and the London nobility and manifests concerns that correspond more with his position as a provincial cleric. Although at least obliquely associated with regnal interests in that he was a monk at one of the larger, more important monasteries of late-medieval England, Lydgate was not yet a "court poet" when he wrote his fables. In his fables Lydgate conveys a more independent streak than in his later, more prominent work.

Although reflecting a self-consciousness in his use of his name, Lydgate in his fable translations is less anxious about his identity as an author than is Marie. In his fables he attempts to reconcile the artistic voice with the expectations and demands of the public. In this chapter I examine this notion and also address the perception of Lydgate as a rewriter following in the formidable footsteps of Chaucer. I demonstrate that one of Lydgate's strategies for self-advertisement is, perhaps ironically, his manifest representation of himself and his writing vis-à-vis Chaucer and the other *auctors* who preceded him. Moreover, he also associates himself with, or at least conveys a sympathy for, another, unexpected group—the peasant classes. An additional method of self-promotion Lydgate employs is, also ironically, his exploitation, to an extreme degree, of the modesty *topos* regarding not only his merit as a poet but also his use of the English language in the face of French and Latin literary hegemony.

Although not known for his fables, John Lydgate is nevertheless, along with Marie de France, Chaucer, and Caxton, one of the most important vernacular fabulists, and translators, of the Middle Ages. Lydgate's nine fables, despite their inordinate length when compared to other medieval fables, account for a small fraction of his voluminous total output. Best-known for writing *The Fall of Princes, The Siege of Thebes*, and *The Troy Book,* all of which are translations (the first two from French, the latter from Latin), Lydgate also wrote the *Isopes Fabules*, a collection of seven Aesopian fables, and the two "moral" fables *The Churl and the Bird* and *The Horse, the Sheep, and the Goose*, both of which were published by Caxton. All of these fables in the hands of Lydgate, writing in the early fifteenth century, reflect a conscious awareness of and interest in contemporary political and cultural issues. It is generally agreed that Lydgate probably composed the

fables while still virtually unknown as a writer, very early in his career, likely before 1410, during his clerical tenure at Oxford.[8] As a number of critics have noted, these poems markedly differ from Lydgate's later, more "mature" works considered his masterworks--the thematic content and the moralizing of Lydgate's fables reflect a consciousness of and empathy not for the aristocracy and royal circles and patrons so commonly associated with *The Fall of Princes, The Siege of Thebes,* and *The Troy Book*, but rather for the common farmer and other peasant classes. These fables, written as they were while Lydgate was still a young man, underscore his own non-aristocratic background and manifest his own socio-political interests before he became a prominent author and confidant of King Henry V.

Modern critical opinion of Lydgate's fables, as of his poetry in general, has varied dramatically, with *The Churl and the Bird* and *The Horse, the Sheep and the Goose* often receiving approbation and the *Isopes Fabules* generally ignored or dismissed. A statement from one of the editors of the early twentieth-century *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature* exemplifies this inconsistency:

> The beast-fable had something in it peculiarly suitable to Lydgate's kind of genius (as, indeed, to medieval genius generally), and this fact is in favour of his *Aesop* and of the two poems (among his best) which are called *The Churl and the Bird* and *The Horse, the Sheep and the Goose.* Of these two pieces, both very favourite examples of the moral tale of eastern origin which was disseminated through Europe widely by various collections as well as in individual specimens. *The Churl* is couched in rime royal and *The Horse* in the same metre, with an envoy or *moralitas* in octaves. . . . The actual *Aesop*—a small collection of Aesopic fables which is sometimes assigned to Lydgate's earliest period,

[8] Walter F. Schirmer, in *John Lydgate: A Study in the Culture of the XVth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), 22, states that Lydgate's Aesop was written during his years at Oxford and that it "must be regarded as his first work."

> perhaps to his residence at Oxford—is pointless enough, and contrasts very unfavourably with Henderson's.[9]

The self-contradiction in the above comment is obvious (as is the sentence fragment), and, particularly when it comes to the *Aesopian* fables, the editors clearly tilt the scales in favor of Henryson, or "Henderson," and his *Morall Fabillis*. Moreover, Derek Pearsall, who in 1970 published one of the pioneering monographs on Lydgate's work, still considered an influential study, is dismissive of *Isopes Fabules*, devoting only six pages to the collection, in which he devotes more space to praising, and examining, the fables of Henryson and remarking at every turn their exceeding superiority to those of Lydgate, the subject of his study, than to examining Lydgate's fables themselves.[10] In his monograph Schirmer barely mentions the fables and asserts, "There is little that is praiseworthy in these 959 lines; they lack the engaging quality, the vigour and rigid compression that characterize the treatment of Aesop 100 years later by Henryson. . . ."[11] The closest Schirmer comes to approbation in assessing Lydgate's fables is the following: "But Lydgate, who may have valued these fables, with their moral emphasis and assumptions, as illustrations suitable for inclusion in sermons, produced in these seven fables from Aesop the first book of fables written in Middle English."[12]

Lydgate's *Isopes Fabules*, almost a century after *The Cambridge History* was published, still have received scant praise or attention, but they merit a close examination, particularly

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[9] George Saintsbury. "The English Chaucerians." *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature*. Ed. A. W. Ward, et al. Vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908.

[10] Derek Pearsall. *John Lydgate*. London: Routledge, 1970.

[11] *John Lydgate: A Study in the Culture of the XVth Century*, 23.

[12] Ibid, 23.

within a context of cultural study and of medieval translation viewed from a Translation Studies perspective.

For any scholar interested in medieval translation, Lydgate's extant works provide a wealth of material, for not only did Lydgate translate on a massive scale, he also wrote occasionally *about* translation. One can find a few passages from his various books of poetry in which he comments on his translations, statements often self-deprecatory about his abilities as a translator (the conventional modesty *topos* employed by many medieval writers, including Chaucer). One such text that reveals this humble attitude while also serving as a dedication and request for patronage for his translations, is Lydgate's epilogue, or "envoy" to his *Daunce of Machabree* (or *Danse Macabre*), found in Part III of the *Fall of Princes*. The second (and final) stanza reads thus:

> Out of the French I drough it of entent,
> Not word by word but following in substaunce,
> And from Paris to Engeland it sent,
> Only of purpose you to do plesaunce.
> Rude of langage, I was not borne in France,--
> Haue me excused, my name is Iohn Lidgate;
> Of ther tong I haue no suffisance,
> Her curious miters in Englishe to translate. (665-72)

To conclude the *Daunce of Machabree*, and Book III of the *Fall*, with this commentary on translation suggests the significance of translation for Lydgate; indeed the last word of the book is "translate." In the preceding stanza of the *Lenuoye*, Lydgate also writes,

> Lowely I pray with all myne heart entere
> To correcte where-as ye se need;
> For nought elles I aske for my mede
> But goodly support of this translacion. (659-62)

Lydgate here puts himself in the position of the traditional literary translator: he takes on the role of subordinate, suggesting that his text is not an original creation and, moreover, that it

may indeed even be incorrect or inaccurate and in need of his patron "to correcte" any mistakes or inaccuracies. This notion of a translation's being "correct" or not merits examining, and it is all the more interesting voiced here in Lydgate's concluding envoy to his version of the *Danse Macabre* because it seems to contradict his claim made in the envoy's second stanza that he has translated, not "word by word" but in "substaunce" only. If a translator's goal is to convey or transfer the substance, or perhaps "sense" of a text and not to produce precise synonyms or reproduce proximate syntax, then why would he show obvious concern over the "correctness" of his translation? Was Lydgate's knowledge of French so "rude" that he felt reticent even about a "sense for sense" translation? Or is his humble entreaty to his patron simply the conventional dedication for a medieval writer/translator? We can assume that Lydgate, educated in one of the leading monasteries of England at the turn of the fifteenth century, was schooled in Latin and French. Schirmer states that Lydgate "had a sound knowledge of Latin, and mastered French; it was by means of French translations that he became acquainted with works in Italian."[13] Although the linguistic modesty *topos* expressed by medieval English writers is indeed a convention, it nevertheless expresses a real anxiety on the part of these translators about their use of English. For not only was English in the fifteenth century still seen as an unpoetic or "unliterary" language, lacking the prestige of Latin or French, but it was an unstable, evolving language with distinctly different dialects in different regions of England. Awareness of these shortcomings, or perceived shortcomings, induced a linguistic tension amongst English authors of the period.

An appropriate starting point for a study of Lydgate's beast fables would be "The Cock and the Jacinth," Fable I of Lydgate's collection and the counterpart to Caxton's opening fable "The

[13] *John Lydgate: A Study in the Culture of the XVth Century*, 22.

Cock and the Jewel." The most immediate and obvious difference between Lydgate's and Caxton's fables is that Lydgate's are written in verse. Notwithstanding this significant stylistic distinction that bears much consideration in determining the respective literary merits of Caxton's versus Lydgate's collections, for the purposes of this study we will focus on the content and language of the fables. Unlike Caxton's brief version of this fable (see chapter six), Lydgate's prolix text elaborates a detailed description of the cock, in which the cock is manifestly presented from the beginning as a hero, in contrast to Caxton's fable that derides the cock as a "fool." Lydgate's mock epic laboriously catalogues the manifold virtues of the cock, praising him at every turn. The first stanza reads thus:

> "The Cok of kynde haþe a crest rede
> Shape lyke a crowne, token of gret noblesse,
> By whyche he haþe, whyle hit stont on hys hede,
> As clerkis seyn, corage & hardynes,
> And of hys berde melancolyk felnes :
> Aboute hys nek by mercyall apparayll
> Nature haþe yeue hym a stately auentayll."

Elsewhere in Lydgate's fable the cock is a "champion," a "proud capten," "hardy as a lyon," "stable as a geaunt, opon a grounde of trouþe." The epic imagery runs through practically every stanza. A typical example is the following:

> Beteþ hys wyngis, aforn or he do syng
> Bit sluggy hertis out of þeyr slepe to wake,
> When Lucyfer toward þe dawning
> Lawgheth in þe orient & haþe þe west forsake
> To chase awey þe mighty clowdys blake :
> Towarde Aurora þys foule, who takeþ kepe,
> Byddyþ folk ayene awake out of þeyr slepe. (ll. 71-77)

To further enhance the stature of this "morall champion" who is "ayene all vyces" (l. 95), Lydgate invokes Chaucer's fable, "The Nun's Priest's Tale":

> "And, for because hys brest ys strong & cleere

> And on hys tipto dysposeþ for to syng,
> He ys of poettis callyd Chaunceleer.
> And, as myn auctour remembreþ by wrytyng, . . .” (ll. 99-102)

This patent allusion to Chaucer’s rooster and to “myn auctor” reflects Lydgate’s concern with ideas of authorship and where he stands, in relation to the father of English fiction, in the late-medieval conception of the author. Although a poet’s attempt to articulate his or her role and status as a writer in the late Middle Ages was a complex undertaking in a time when notions of authorship were fluid and unstable, the effect of Lydgate’s patrilineal strategy according to some critics was to demean himself in the eyes of his fifteenth-century readership. As Andrew Higl states,

> He had not helped his own cause through his personal characterization in relationship to Chaucer. He refers to Chaucer as “Father Chaucer.” . . . Lydgate elevates Chaucer to a position of authority and infantilizes himself. In addition to his infantilization, title pages often name Lydgate as translator—not author. Many of the titles for works such as *The Fall of Princes* refer to Boccaccio as the poet and Lydgate only as monk and translator. He lacks *auctoritas*.[14]

Higl’s view of Lydgate as “noon auctor” at all is problematic; the notion of “only a translator” and translators lacking *auctoritas* is negated when one recognizes that Chaucer himself was a translator, his *Nun’s Priest’s Tale* before which Lydgate “infantilizes himself” a clear and verifiable example of a translation.

As a translator Lydgate certainly demonstrates originality in his version of the tale, manifestly departing from his sources. In his principal source, “*Del cok e de la gemme*” from the *Fables* of Marie de France, the cock is presented in ascetic terms as a mean creature who, rather than wearing a crown and ascending a dais, instead “*munta / Sur un femer e si grata; /*

[14] “Printing Power: Selling Lydgate, Gower, and Chaucer.” *Essays in Medieval Studies* 23 (2006): 65.

Sulum nature se purchacot" (climbed a dungheap, scratched around / In nature's way, as he best could" (ll.1-3). Moreover, Marie's cock is a stark, solitary figure while Lydgate's rooster, tellingly, is "With hys wyues about hym euerychone" (l. 107). Not only does Lydgate's opening portrait of the cock recall Chaucer's Chaunticleer, who, as the *Nun's Priest's Tale* opens, is surrounded by his many wives, one of which, Pertelote, remains a central character throughout the tale, it also presents the cock in a public sphere, as part of a group yet nonetheless the central figure in that group. This portrait of the cock, seen in light of Lydgate's position as more of a public poet than Marie, or Chaucer, bears some significance: whereas Marie's cock is diligent in order to simply survive, Lydgate's cock, not worrying about survival, seems to be working for others, in a sense. What he discovers is a commercial object that others may be interested in—the fruits of his labor, like the fruits of Lydgate's work as an author. For Lydgate the provincial monk, an object of strictly commercial, monetary value holds little value for him.

Lydgate's version of "The Cock and the Jacinth" differs from the other vernacular adaptations of major medieval fabulists in other ways. One of these original features is Lydgate's affinity for moralizing and offering commentary within the narrative itself rather than waiting for the conclusion to comment on the action, motives, or character of the figures in his fables. For example, about halfway through the narrative of "The Cock and the Jacinth," Lydgate writes of the cock,

> "He yaue ensample, whyche gretly may auayle,
> As he was oonly taught by nature,
> To auoyde slouþe by dylygent trauayle,
> By honest labour hys lyuelood to procure.
> For, who woll þryue, labour must endure ;
> For idylnes & froward negligence
> Makeþ sturdy beggars for lak of þeyr dyspence. (ll. 113-119)

This stanza, like many in Lydgate's Aesopian fable narratives, is marked not by action but by extolling the virtues of the principal animal character, who stands as a symbol for these virtues. Lydgate then reinforces his moral "The virtuous man is one who avoids idleness and labors not for wordly riches but for his own sustenance" in the concluding "Lennuoy" or "Envoy." This motif of "suffisaunce" runs through the entire seven-fable *Isopes Fabules* collection**.**

Interestingly, Lydgate's cock, like Marie's, has no use for the precious stone and thus leaves it where he has found it:

> "For me þou shalt in þys place abyde,
> With the I haue lyght or nought to donne.
> . . . . . .
> To take þys stone to me hit were but veyn :
> Set more store (I haue hit of nature)
> Among rude chaffe to shrape for my pasture. (ll. 162-175)

Unlike Marie, however, who as moralizing narrator at the conclusion of the fable admonishes the cock for devaluing the gem, Lydgate lauds the rooster, praising him for "eschewing vyce," which for him the jewel represents.

And Caxton and Lydgate, two writers who in some respects have much in common—both are writing in the fifteenth century; both have associations with the court (Schirmer points out that even before Lydgate became a court poet, as a monk at Bury St. Edmunds, he would have had not infrequent contact with royal circles, as members of which often visited the monastery, one of the largest and most important in England at the turn of the century[15]); Caxton publishes and translates some of Lydgate's texts and praises Lydgate as an author/translator and implies that Lydgate was an influence on his work--nevertheless diverge sharply in their moralizing, often expressing disparate views on the notion of worldliness and

[15] *John Lydgate: A Study in the Culture of the XVth Century*, 59.

materiality. Given that one was a commercial entrepreneur and the other a monk, this should come as no surprise. Caxton imbues the jacinth with both moral and, ultimately, pecuniary value, asserting that it symbolizes wisdom, and, concomitantly, his book of fables that he is publishing, but for Lydgate the jewel has no value whatsoever, material or moral. Indeed he ascribes an inherently immoral quality to the jasp and uses it as a spur to homilize on the vice of idleness. Whereas Caxton associates himself, as author of his book of fables, with the jewel, Lydgate, in contrast, identifies closely with the cock, having already identified himself as the author/narrator and having asked God and grace for "suffysaunce" in producing his book. This motif is a recurrent, major pattern running through *Isopes Fabules*; as a group the tales espouse the economic state of "suffisaunce" for the lowest levels of society while railing against the more powerful who oppress the lower classes either through juridical miscarriage or through tyranny.

The question of Lydgate's exact source for his fables has been a common one: unlike Caxton's corpus, there is less certainty about which specific collection on which Lydgate based his *Isopes Fabules* or *The Churl and the Bird* and *The Horse, the Sheep and the Goose*. In his monograph of Lydgate's work Derek Pearsall traces the probable lineage of Lydgate's Aesopic fables while at the same time depreciating it:

> Romulus was the source of all medieval knowledge of the Aesopic fables; he was turned back into verse by an unknown "Walter" in the twelfth century, and Walter's version was the basis for the *Esopus Moralisatus* of the thirteenth century, which added much extra moralisation, and proved the most popular of all the collections. It is difficult, and not important, to know what was Lydgate's precise source, but it was probably some French or Latin version of this last descendant of Romulus.[16]

For those interested in medieval translation or in tracing the influence of a medieval genre,

[16] *John Lydgate*. London: Routledge, 1970. 193.

body, or work of literature upon a later work or group of works, Pearsall's ascription of no importance to Lydgate's source sounds disingenuous.

The "French version" to which Pearsall refers is likely the collection of Marie de France, a position taken by numerous scholars. In his study of the medieval English fabulists, Edward Wheatley indicates that "Lydgate used at least three texts other than the verse Romulus: Marie de France's *Fables* (which was evidently his primary source), Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*, and the verse Romulus with a scholastic commentary. The verbal parallels with Marie's collection are so close that Lydgate could have had a copy of the work before him as he wrote."[17] Wheatley then goes on to point out some of the similarities between Marie's collection and that of Lydgate, particularly examining the prologues, which exemplify the "projects of appropriation and translation" of each author. To support the view that Marie was Lydgate's principal source, Wheatley specifically looks at Lydgate's use in his collection's opening stanza of several English cognates of Marie's diction found in her first ten verses while also noting both authors' express self-identification in their prologues by stating their names.[18]

Although Aesopic fables enjoyed immense popularity in medieval Europe (note the numerous manuscripts of Marie's fables circulating in France and England from the thirteenth-fifteenth centuries), those of Lydgate were not, evidently, extremely popular—only one fifteenth-century manuscript contains all seven of his *Isopes Fabules* (MS Harley 2251), with just one other manuscript containing any of them (MS Trinity College Cambridge, with five and a half fables).[19] Even today, with the upsurge of scholarly interest in Lydgate, his fables

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[17] *Mastering Aesop: Medieval Education, Chaucer, and His Followers*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000. 125.

[18] *Ibid*, 126-27.

[19] Wheatley, 128.

have received scant critical attention, particularly as a group. What little scholarship is out there usually examines *The Churl and the Bird* or *The Horse, the Sheep and the Goose* while generally ignoring the *Isopes Fabules*.

Of the *Isopes Fabules*, perhaps the fable that most clearly demonstrates Lydgate's originality and, correspondingly, his social agenda, is "The Wolfe and the Lambe." Although there are obvious parallels with Marie's version, including her moral, Lydgate's tale stands as an exemplar of his major themes conveyed in his fables An examination of Lydgate's fable vis-à-vis Marie's will shed some light on Lydgate's translational goals.

Whereas many of Marie's fables follow the Latin Romulus fables in structure, with emphasis given to the narrative itself and its plot, a form marked by great attention to the detail of the narrative, including dialogue, Lydgate, in contrast, uses the narrative almost in an ancillary way, as a means to illustrate his larger, didactic purpose in writing fables. Marie typically appends her brief moral to the narrative as a vehicle to comment on the action of the tale, central to her purpose, but Lydgate, conversely, seems to drop the narrative action into his fable as one ingredient to spice up the grand banquet that is his moralizing.

In "The Wolfe and the Lambe," Lydgate emphasizes the motifs of nature and of contraries, ideas that run throughout the fable. The opening stanza of the narrative succinctly adumbrates this pattern:

> The lambe, þe wolfe, contrary of nature,
> Euer diuerse & noþyng oon þey þynke.
> Boþe at onys of soden auenture
> To a fresshe ryuer þey came downe to drynke:
> At þe hede spryng hy opon þe brynke
> Stondeþ þe wolfe, a forward beste of kynde;
> The sely lambe stood fer abak behynde. (246-52)

Unlike his introductory stanzas to the *Isopes Fabules*, where Lydgate purposefully employs

diction that cognately follows that of Marie de France's prologue, this fable's diction seems to consciously depart from that of Marie's. Whereas Lydgate writes some form of the word "nature" or "natural" numerous times in the tale, Marie not once uses either word (*nature* or *naturel* in Old French). In "The Wolfe and the Lambe," we have an early example of Lydgate's manifesting his interest in the law, a *topos* that recurs regularly throughout his later work. This interest is reflected in the legalistic language that pervades the tale. Through its narrative structure of a debate between the two adversaries, the fundamental, fixed structure of this fable's narrative from Romulus, to Marie de France, to the fifteenth century, Lydgate deftly introduces the social construct of the law into this natural conflict. The wolf paradoxically invokes the law just before devouring the lamb, while voicing the common medieval question of "might versus right," or, more pointedly, "might makes right." Although the wolf attempts to justify his impending destruction of the lamb by linking the two concepts together and claiming both, Lydgate clearly shows them to be contrary notions and exposes the wolf's fallacious argument and patently *illegal* standing:

> "To vex me wrongfully, yef þou haddyst myght.
> The lawe shall part vs, whyche of vs haþ ryght."
> But he no lenger on þe lawe abood,
> Deuouryd þe lambe & aftyr soke hys blood.

These disturbing incongruities are wholly absent in Marie de France, whose narrative makes no reference to the law whatsoever; only in her epimythium does she raise the issue of unjust legal proceedings in which the poor are often stripped bare by "*li vescunte e li jugeür*" (the viscounts and the judges). Lydgate's attention to law at at this precise point in the fable seems inconsistent with the narrative action,

unless we view it as some kind of commentary on natural law, which has given the

ıwolf physical supremacy. Lydgate's "The Wolf and the Lamb" is unique among all of the nmedieval vernacular versions of this fable in the wolf's invocation of the law; even Henryson, who uses his fables as a platform to expound on legal issues, among others, does not have his wolf make this reference.

Lydgate, as narrator, then writes what could be taken as a commentary on the contemporary English legal system:

> The lambe was sleyn, for he seyd soþ,
> Thus was law tornyd to rauyne,
> Dome execute by þe wolfis tothe; (295-97)

He continues with his legal commentary:

> By whyche lawe Naboth lost hys vyne,
> Whylom commaundyd by law, whyche ys dyuyne,
> No rauenous beste (þe Byble doþ deuyse)
> Shuld be offred to God in sacryfyse. (298-301)

The allusion to Naboth's vineyard, a story from the book of *1 Kings* about the abuse of power, serves as a transition into Lydgate's conflation of social law with Biblical law, in which he champions the lamb, representing the weaker yet more worthy citizens who are often victims of the depredations carried out by the corrupt and powerful upper classes. In the next stanza Lydgate continues with his appeal to canonical law:

> Herdys be rekles þe lambe for to defende,
> Take noon hede on theyr flock to tary;
> Ther hounde ys muett, whyche þat shuld attende
> To kepe þe wache fro wolues most contrary;
> Fewe sheperdys & many mercynary,
> That falsly entre, as Iohns gospel tolde,
> By þe window into Crystis folde. (302-08)

One of the most marked differences between Lydgate's version of this fable and Marie's version is, of course, the religious undertones and Biblical allusions so prevalent in Lydgate's tale, which come as no surprise given Lydgate's training as a monk. Marie's fables, in contrast, are manifestly secular in content and focus exclusively on the social implications of her narratives. In "Del lu e de l'aignel," Marie comments on the contemporary legal practices of the late twelfth century. Lydgate, too, reflects on the corruption of the court system, a system that seems to have evolved little, if at all, in the more than two hundred years since Marie wrote her *Esope*. Like Marie, Lydgate is socially conscious and, in his fables, at least (which is decidedly not the case in his later, more celebrated works), he consistently manifests a sympathy for the lower and peasant classes, a pattern one cannot ascribe to the fables of Marie. As noted in the previous chapter, Marie's socio-cultural awareness reflected in her fables can take both a conservative approach as well as a more progressive position when it comes to socio-economic class; this disparity stems in part from audience considerations—whereas Marie was likely writing for a more aristocratic audience, Lydgate, particularly the younger Lydgate, before becoming so closely associated with Henry V, was writing for a broader audience that traversed class boundaries due to increased literacy among the laity, particularly in London.

It may be axiomatic to point out that Lydgate, in addition to regularly alluding to the Bible in his works, also makes numerous references to Greek and Roman mythology. In "The Wolfe and the Lambe," he follows the reference to "John's gospel" with one to the story of Jason and the golden fleece, which, naturally, comes on the heels of a stanza wherein Lydgate rhapsodizes on the usefulness of the lamb's wool. In

the mythical tale of Jason, as Lydgate points out, the ram is "dyspoylyd" by Jason, but only of his golden fleece, while his body is not harmed. Thus, according to Lydgate, this sheep of legend fares much better than its contemporary counterparts:

> The body left hoole, lyke as hit ys tolde.
> But shepe þese dayes be spoylyd to þe bon;
> For þer be wolfes many mo þen oon,
> That clyp lamborn at sessions & at shyres
> Bare to þe bone, & yet þey haue no sheres. (318-22)

The fable's extended metaphor functions to underscore the plight of the ordinary citizen when seeking redress against a powerful adversary, such as a landlord, in the law courts of Lydgate's England, which often, as Lydgate indicates, make a grotesquerie of justice. Even in the official, legally-sanctioned sessions at court, the innocent are fleeced without shears. Lydgate sees the courts and judges themselves as ravenous wolves:

> The sely lambe ys spoylyd to þe bones,
> The wolf goþ fre, wheþer hit be right or wrong.
> When a iorrour haþe caught sauour ones
> To be forsworn, custom makeþ hym strong.
> *Si dedero* ys now so mery a song,
> Haþ founde a practyk by lawe to make a preef
> To hang a trew man & saue an errant theef. (323-29)

Lydgate's emphasis in this stanza on the corruption of the court system parallels that of Marie in her concluding moral, but nonetheless Lydgate departs notably from his source, not just elsewhere in his fable but indeed within this passage. An additional allusion is the line "*Si dedero* ys now so mery a song,"an intriguing line appearing only in Lydgate's version of "The Wolfe and the Lambe." On its face it appears to be a reference to a Latin song, which begins

with the phrase *Si dedero*. This is likely an anachronism, however, as the song apparently dates only to the sixteenth century.[20] Other observers ascribe a provincial, more colloquial lineage to the Latin expression.[21]

The notion of "singing *si dedero*," as the *Notes and Queries* article referenced in the above footnote suggests, is an expression connoting punishment, chastisement, or retribution, but it also "is a popular expression for bribery or buying of favors of any sort" (W. K. Smart, "Some Notes on *Mankind*," *Modern Philology* 14 (1916), 296-97). Lydgate's use of the expression is of course ironic, but, more significantly, a legal commentary. As suggested above, the Latin phrase has a legal signification. From the same *Notes and Queries* article we learn that the words *si dedero* were likely the commencement of a legal form, and that "*Dedi* is a word of some importance in legal documents, as it amounts in law to a warranty. . . . Janus Gulielmus, in attempting to explain an obscure passage in Cicero's *Orations*, says that covenants occasionally commenced with the word *si*. It is possible, then, that *si dedero* may have been known in ancient days as the initial phrase of a legal contract."[22]

Lydgate may be alluding to an anonymous, untitled, early fourteenth-century English poem

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[20] See Thomas Wright and James Orchard Halliwell, eds., *Reliquiae Antiquae*. Vol. 2. London, 1841.

[21] An interesting mid-nineteenth century observation from an anonymous brief in *Notes and Queries* states the following: "With regard to the threat which angry mothers address in Yorkshire to a naughty child, 'I'll make you sing *si diderum,'* we apprehend that their great-great-grandmothers did not use it exactly in the same form, but kept close to a legal sense. They said, interposing a comma, 'I'll make you sing, *si dederim*:--that is, 'Si dederim'—if I give it you, oh! wont I?—I'll make you sing.' But in process of time the two parts of the sentence were run into one; and 'si dederim,' no longer significant of the threatened castigation, came at length to stand for the outcry which that castigation would not fail to elicit,--'I'll make you sing *si diderum*'" 1859. 171.

[22] *Notes and Queries*, 1859. 171.

from MS Harley 2316, which ends with the couplet, "Now no man may comen ȝer to, / But yef he singge *si dedero*."[23] The classical origin of *si dedero*, then, is an oath or pledge of some sort: "We take this stipulating or binding force of *si dedero* to be the true explanation of the last line of the passage . . . from an old poem. At Rome, be the clerk never so learned, either he must say 'I will give so much' (*si dedero*), or all his learning profits him nothing."[24]

Lydgate's use of the phrase is part of a more expanded and scrutinizing legal commentary in the fable, and it is this elaboration of contemporary legal practices in the narrative, rather than simply a brief comment in the concluding moral, which conveys an original quality to Lydgate's translation. In addition to the legal references and notions we have already examined in "The Wolfe and the Lambe," the opening of the final stanza of the poem's narrative makes one final legalistic argument:

> With empty hande men may noon hawkis lewre
> Nor cache a iorrour, but yef he yeue hym mede.
> The pore pleteþ : what ys hys auenture? (330-32)

The word "iorrour," which also appears in the preceding stanza, denotes a perjurer. The MED also defines "iorrour" as "a talebearer, slanderer; whisperer."[25] The idea Lydgate presents here equates the poor and powerless with the empty-handed falconer: in order to successfully plead one's case, he or she must have something with which to bait the adversarial party, or the court, which is an additional adversary the lower-class must overcome. The fable expresses the hopeless position of the poor, victimized citizen who stands by helplessly with no

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[23] *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500*. 121

[24] *Notes and Queries*, 1859. 171.

[25] *Middle English Dictionary*. Middle English Compendium online. University of Michigan.

chance of the slanderer or tale-teller being "caught" in the corrupt judicial system. Lydgate employs a final legalistic reference and drives home his point about the helpless position of the commoner in court with the line "The pore pleteþ : what ys hys auenture?" Lydgate is the first vernacular fabulist to employ this extended legalistic, courtroom metaphor to describe and comment on the narrative action of "The Wolfe and the Lambe"—Henryson builds on this device in his later, Scots translation--and it is a technique that he returns to repeatedly in his *Isopes Fabules*, particularly in "The Hownde and the Shepe."

In the end, "The Wolfe and the Lambe" is a fable about power, the abuse of power, and the seeming inferiority of law vis-à-vis force. But what Lydgate seems to be arguing is not simply that law is inferior to or weaker than brute force, but that law itself is brutish. These questions concerning the nature of law undoubtedly concerned Lydgate as he wrote his fables. The tale of the Wolf and the Lamb so adroitly exemplifies these notions of power that Jacques Derrida presents the fable in its entirety as the epigraph for his work *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, written less than a year before his death in 2004. The first essay, titled "The Reason of the Strongest," in which he explores the notion of "rogue states" and their relationship to democracy, opens on the page facing La Fontaine's version of the fable, which, given that Derrida is French, comes as no surprise for his epigraphic choice. The essay (translated into English by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas) begins thus:

> What political narrative, in the same tradition, might today illustrate this fabulous morality? Does this morality teach us, as is often believed, that force "trumps" law? Or else, something quite different, that the very concept of law, that juridical reason itself, includes a priori a possible recourse to constraint or coercion and, thus, to a certain violence? This second interpretation was, for example, Kant's, and it did not necessarily represent the point of view of the wolf. Nor, for that matter, that of the lamb.[26] (xi)

[26] *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005. xi.

Derrida then traces the origins and lineage of this institutional pairing, observing that law and justice are not synonymous, and that the concept of justice is more complex:

> With regard to the couple *force* and *law*, from where do we get this formidable tradition that long preceded and long followed La Fontaine, along with Bodin, Hobbes, Grotius, Pascal, Rousseau, and so many others, a tradition that runs, say, from Plato to Carl Schmitt? Do we still belong to this ever-changing yet imperturbable genealogy? Before even speaking of force, would justice be reducible to law?[27]

To apply Derrida's questions to Lydgate's "Wolf and Lamb" fable, one can make a valid claim that Lydgate does not just question the merits of law and suggest that it does not equally protect the rich and the poor, but rather he subtly argues that law, or at least the prevailing law(s) of his time, does more harm than good, that it is brutish rather than civilized. In the fable's narrative, it is the lamb who compellingly makes an argument founded on reason and logic, but it is the grossly unreasonable, predatorial wolf who is associated with law; it is he who invokes the law, while the lamb never makes reference to it. Lydgate does not question the theoretical, or original, "goodness" of law; instead he argues that law has become lawless and violent: "Thus was law tornyd to rauyne, / Dome execute by þe wolfis tothe."

Like *Isopes Fabules*, Lydgate's *The Churl and the Bird* was composed early in Lydgate's writing career. Schirmer writes that "*The Complaint of the Black Knight* and *The Flour of Curtesye* are thought to have been written in the years 1400-2. . . . From the same period dates *The Churl and the Bird*, a fable that may well be regarded as a parergon, and which carried on the tradition of Chaucer."[28] Lydgate's main sources for *The Churl and the*

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[27] *Ibid*, xi.
[28] *John Lydgate: A Study in the Culture of the XVth Century*, 37.

Bird are "Donnei des Amants," a thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman debate poem, and "Les Trois Savoirs," an Anglo-Norman version of the fable of the Churl and the Bird. These two texts effectively constitute a single version of the story, overlapping to a great degree. Neil Cartlidge convincingly argues for the two poems as Lydgate's source by cataloguing a number of close parallels between the French texts and Lydgate's fable, and then concluding, "This demonstration of similarities could be extended, but it should be sufficiently clear that the resemblances are detailed enough to establish that Lydgate's work is effectively a translation and development of the story as it is told in the *Donnei* and the *Trois Savoirs*. No other analogue bears such close comparison." Cartlidge finalizes his claim by stating, "The conclusion must be that Lydgate was working directly from the version contained in the *Donnei* and *Trois* Savoirs."[29] An additional source is *Le Lai de L'Oiselet*,[30] an analogue of the two poems above, also from the thirteenth century. All three texts are strikingly similar, and some lines, passages, and elements of *The Churl and the Bird* parallel those of *Le Lai de L'Oiselet* quite closely (and no less closely than with the *Donnei* or the *Trois Savoirs*). Moreover, various Latin versions of *Le Lai de L'Oiselet* were circulating throughout Europe in the late Middle Ages in the *Disciplina clericalis* and Aesopic fable collections (Caxton's *Aesop*, which contains a *Oiselet* fable, and his immediate source Julien Macho's *Esope*, and Macho's source Steinhowel's *Aesop* are all *Disciplina*-type collections) and thus it is likely that Lydgate, whose primary source was, of course, a "Frenssh" version of the story, was quite familiar with the *Oiselet* tale.

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[29] "The Source of John Lydgate's *The Churl and the Bird*." *Notes and Queries* 44 (1997): 23-24.

[30] See Lenora D. Wolfgang's "Caxton's *Aesop*: The Origin and Evolution of a Fable." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 135.1. Philadelphia, 1991. 73-79.

Although not one of *Isopes Fabules*, Lydgate's *The Churl and the Bird* is nonetheless a beast fable and morally instructive exemplar, and a tale that merits study, particularly in terms of translation. This is a poem, in some ways, *about* fable and its nature and function. In the opening stanzas Lydgate reflects on the role of stories and examples, writing in the poem's opening lines,

> Problemys, liknessis & figures
> Which previd been fructuous of sentence.
> And han auctoritees groundid on scriptures
> Bi resemblaunces of notable apparence,
> With moralites concludying in prudence,-- (1-5)

He then remarks upon the beast fable itself:

> And semblably poetes laureate,
> Bi dirk parables ful convenyent,
> Feyne that briddis & bestis of estat—
> As roial eglis & leones—bi assent
> Sent out writtis to hold a parlement,
> And maade decrees breffly for to sey,
> Som to haue lordship, & som to obey (15-21).

The patent allusion to Chaucer's *Parlement of Foules* lends an air of *gravitas* to the introduction, suggesting the moral lesson to follow. Lydgate here, and, more significantly, in the poem's fifth stanza, aligns himself with his poetic forebears who wrote fables, suggesting that fabulists like himself use a variety of figurative devices to furtively convey their meanings:

> Poetes write wondirful liknessis,
> And vndir covert kepte hem silf ful cloos ;
> Bestis thei take, & fowlis, to witnessis,
> Of whoos feynyng fables first arroos ;--
> And heere I cast vnto my purpoos
> Out of Frenssh a tale to translate,
> Which in a paunflet I radde & sauh but late (29-35).

Inter alia, Lydgate in these lines describes what he sees as the distinctive techniques of the

fabulist: "covert" manipulation and similitude, notions that reflect a principal theme of *The Churl and the Bird.* The passage above is similar to the opening of *Isopes Fabules*, wherein Lydgate mentions fables by name and reflects on their nature.

The Churl and the Bird serves as an excellent example of Lydgate's socio-political awareness, and the second and third stanzas above exemplify this point. The poem is essentially a conflation of various versions of the churl and the bird tale with other traditional stories and parables, such as "How the Trees Elected a King," found, among other sources, in the Biblical book of Judges (9: 8-15). Lydgate uses as exposition this parable in the poem's second stanza, immediately preceding the passage, quoted above (lines 15-21), wherein he introduces the idea of contemporary monarchy, noting how it now must take into consideration parliament and work with this body, but, more significantly, suggesting that poets, specifically fabulists, must "feyne" their stories and hide their political statements under cover of allegory, specifically in the form of the beast fable. In a discourse on the fable, Augustine's contemporary Macrobius writes,

> Fables—the very word betrays their confession of falsity—serve two purposes: either merely to gratify the ear or to encourage the reader to good works. . . . The [latter] group, those that draw the reader's attention to certain kinds of virtue, are divided into two types. As for the first, its content is grounded in fiction and the very telling of the story cloaked in lies.[31]

As I have argued above, Lydgate was concerned with unequal power relations and, at least early in his career, empathized more with the rural, peasant classes, and the fable becomes for him an ideal vehicle for safely voicing his dissent. This notion points to an additional sense of the concept of freedom, conveyed as a major theme of the poem (I discuss this further

[31] John C. Jacobs, ed. & trans. *The Fables of Odo of Cheriton*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985. 1.

below).

The fifth stanza merits close scrutiny as well because of its reference to translation, which certainly has a principal place in the poem, in that Lydgate essentially frames the poem with the subject of translation, devoting the final stanza of the poem's *Lenvoie* to a commentary on translation in addition to the remarks of the early passage. These passages, although brief, are pointed because they comprise two of just three instances in the nine fables of Lydgate in which he actually uses the word "translation" or "translate." In the poem's concluding stanza we see Lydgate discussing translation, ostensibly in association with patronage, a common and important trope in medieval literature (see chapter 2, page 51 of this dissertation, wherein I discuss John of Trevisa's translation of Ralph Higden's late fourteenth-century *Polychronicon*, wherein Trevisa introduces into his prologue a dialogue between a clerk and a lord, the subject of which is translation. The dialogue is Trevisa's attempt to justify and validate his translation.):

: Go, litel quaier, & recomaunde me
Vn-to my maistir with humble affeccioun ;
Beseche hym lowly, of mercy & pite,
Of thi rude makyng to have compassioun ;
And as touchyng thi translacioun
Out of the Frenssh, how-euyr the Englysh be,
All thyng is seide vndir correccioun
With supportacioun of your benyngnyte.[32] (379-86).

These lines sound remarkably like Lydgate's conclusion to the *Daunce of Machabree*, noted above, but, more intriguingly, they also adumbrate Caxton's almost identical concluding lines in his Prologue to *Eneydos*. Moreover, and perhaps most significantly, they echo Chaucer's

[32] Weissbort, Daniel, and Astradur Eysteinsson, eds. *Translation--Theory and Practice: A Historical Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

"Go, litel bok" stanza near the conclusion of *Troilus and Criseyde*. Viewed in this context, the line "Vn-to my maistir with humble affeccioun" takes on new import: although no name is given to identify Lydgate's "maistir," it is reasonable to assume that this may be a reference to Chaucer. Lydgate does describe Chaucer as his "master" on several occasions throughout his poetry.[33]

A close reading of the fable will help illuminate its subleties. In the tale, set in a small village garden, a churl one day decides to trap a beautiful songbird who daily sings "a verray heuenly melodie" from the branches of a laurel tree. The churl, pleased with himself for capturing the bird whose song he can now enjoy at home, thrusts her into a small cage, whereby the bird tells the churl that she can no longer sing now that she is out of her natural habitat and confined to a cage, and that if he releases her, she will be sure to repair to the laurel every morning and "fresshly syng with lusty notis cleer" for the churl's enjoyment. The churl retorts that she can either sing merrily in the cage, or else be fleeced and roasted or baked for dinner. The resourceful bird then proposes that she will exchange three "greete wisdames" for her liberty, but insists the churl must free her before learning these profound truths. Finally assenting, the churl releases the bird, who promptly flies high up into the tree and then pronounces her three wisdoms: "First, do not be too credulous and believe every tale that you hear, for many tales are untrue; second, do not desire that which is impossible; and third, don't sorrow over lost treasure, which "in no wise may recured be." The bird then calls the churl a fool, mocking him for letting her go, stating that within her body lies a precious stone, lost forever to him. The churl reacts to this information dramatically, dolorously grieving over this lost "tresour late in [his] kepyng," whereupon the bird chastises him further for completely

[33] Lydgate first refers to Chaucer as "master" in *The Life of Our Lady*, l. 1628.

forgetting the three wise saws she had just taught him. She concludes her "lesson" with a final insult:

> I hold hym mad that bryngith foorth an harpe,
> Ther-on to teche a rude, for-dullid asse ;
> And mad is he that syngith a fool a masse ;
> And he most mad that dooth his besynesse
> To teche a cherl termys of gentilnesse (339-43).

Thus the narrative, for all practical purposes, ends.

In Lydgate's concluding "Lenvoie," he essentially reiterates, to the reader, the bird's maxims and reasserts the theme of *suffisaunce* vs. wordly *richesse* so prominent throughout his *Isopes Fabules*. He also elaborates the idea of freedom, upon which the bird discourses throughout the narrative, not only during her captivity but also in her concluding homily addressed to the churl. Early in the tale, just after being seized and caged, the bird asserts,

> "And though my cage forged were of gold,
> And the pynaclis of berel & cristall,
> I remembre a prouerbe seid of old,
> 'Who lesith his fredam, in soth, he lesith all ;
> For I haue leuer vpon a braunche small
> Meryly to syng among the woodis grene,
> Than in a cage of siluer briht and shene (92-98).

And in the "Lenvoie" Lydgate also writes:

> Whoo hath freedam, hath al suffisaunce,
> Better is freedam with litel in gladnesse,
> Than to be thral in al wordly richesse (376-78).

This brief discourse on freedom is marked by Lydgate's common critique of wordly riches and those who become enthralled to such. The bird makes numerous references to *prisoun* and other similar aspects of entrapment, a prominent theme running through *Isopes Fabules*. The *Isopes Fabules* depict this notion in a rather straightforward manner, but *The Churl and the Bird* examines the idea of entrapment in a much more nuanced, ironic way.

Related to this theme is that of covert meaning, probably the principal, and certainly most intriguing, theme of the poem.

More significant for our purposes, however, is that *The Churl and the Bird*, like *Isopes Fabules*, can be seen as a social commentary in which Lydgate reveals a consciousness of contemporary class issues, exhibiting antipathy for materialistic possessions and respect for the poorer, peasant classes and their way of life. Granted, the churl is certainly churlish and a dupe of the first order, but nonetheless Lydgate shows an affinity for those of the churl's station, perhaps trying to draw a distinction between the covetous, insensitive churl and the industrious peasant labourer who is satisfied with merely having "suffisaunce" and not interested in wordly possessions, understanding, and valuing, instead a liberty from possessions:

> "The labourer is gladder at his plow,
> Erly on morwe to feede hym on bacoun,
> Than som man is, that hath tresour inow
> Of all deyntes, plente & foisoun,
> And hath no fredam, with his pocessioun,
> To gon at large, but as a bere at stake,
> To passe his boundis, but if he leve take (127-33).

The idea of freedom that Lydgate expresses here, through the didactic bird, is paradoxical—it is not the rich who are free and their labourers plowing their fields who are in bondage, but rather the contrary; possessions and treasure are a form of tyranny, and those who have them are chained to these possessions as a bear to a stake. The bird seems to be telling the churl, "You have everything that you could possibly need, but you don't recognize this because you are enslaved to the idea of material wealth." This ironic notion of society's being imprisoned by material success and ambition is cleverly conveyed by Lydgate. The bird makes numerous references to *prisoun* and other similar aspects of entrapment, a prominent theme running through *Isopes Fabules*. The *Isopes Fabules* depict this notion in a rather straightforward

manner, but *The Churl and the Bird* examines the idea of entrapment in a much more nuanced, ironic way. And this idea is wholly original to Lydgate's translation; nowhere in the three source poems do we see this sense of freedom and bondage expressed.

The bird eventually reduces the churl to tears with her invective, disdainfully saying,

> To heeryn a wisdam thyn eris ben half deeff,
> Lik an asse that liseth on a harpe,
> Thou maist go pypen in a ivy leeff;
> Bett is to me to syngyn on thornes sharpe,
> Than in a cage, with a cherl to karpe. (ll. 274-78)

The bird's insulting language, along with Lydgate's characterization of the churl as dull-witted yet proud, greedy, and domineering, impart an aspect of comic realism to the poem, underscoring its ability to delight, a quality so characteristic of the beast fable along with its instructive character.

The Churl and the Bird more subtly even than *Isopes Fabules* conveys the suitability of the beast tale for not only expressing social critique but for exploring more prosodic issues--issues of ironic language and interpretation—which, through the beasts' quickness of wit, make these tales ideal models of edifying yet entertaining stories. And, like Lydgate's Aesopian fables, *The Churl and the Bird* examines questions of authorship and translation or rewriting, and the tenuous position of the "truth-teller." Lydgate's fables, which may be the earliest extant poems by Lydgate, show that even early in his career he was concerned about making a name for himself as a poet, but in a derivative way. In his prologue to *Isopes Fabules*, Lydgate modestly and inconspicuously subordinates himself as a follower of his source, yet at the same time unabashedly calls attention to himself as a translator:

> For whyche I cast to follow þys poete
> And hys fables in Englyssh to translate,
> And, þough I haue no rethoryk swete,

> Haue me excusyd: I was born in Lydgate. (29-32)

Within the same stanza Lydgate is both adhering to the conventional modesty *topos* yet also identifying himself by name; the effect of this passage is a sort of inverse self-advertisement. Lydgate's beast fables thus adumbrate his more prominent works that would foreground his name as one of the most important and celebrated English poets for late-medieval audiences. Writing in the sixteenth century, John Bale translated a Latin epitaph for Lydgate that he attributed to Nicolas Brigham, which reads:

> Dead to the world, living above,
> Lydgate lies here entombed in an urn,
> He who was in former times famed,
> Throughout Britain, for poetry.[34]

[34] See Alexandra Gillespie, *Print Culture and the Medieval Author*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. 229.

MODERN TRANSLATOR OR MEDIEVAL MORALIST?:

WILLIAM CAXTON AND *AESOP*

There is a fascinating scene from the *Life of Aesop* in which King Xantus of Babylon requests his servant Aesop to go to the market and buy the best meat he can find for the evening meal Xantus is hosting for a group of scholars. Aesop returns soon after with a basket of pork tongues. Upon seeing the tongues, Xantus insults Aesop and he and the scholars angrily question him as to why he bought tongues when requested to purchase the best meat. Justifying his choice of meats, Aesop replies:[1]

> "Quelle viande est milleure que la langue? Car certainement tout art et toute doctrine et philozophie sont notifies par la langue. Item, donner et prendre, sauluer et marchander et faire cités, toutes ces choses sont par la langue; car par la langue les homes sont louez, car la vie des homes mortelz, la plus grant partie, est en la langue, et ainsi n'est meilleur que la bonne langue ne chose plus doulce ne sauoreuse ne plus prouffitable es hommes mortelz."[2]

The next day King Xantus again sends Aesop to the butcher, but this time, perhaps testing him, he requests that Aesop buy the worst (*pire*), most rotten (*puante*) meat. Again Aesop returns with the tongues, and when Xantus and the scholars, indignant, demand why he has bought tongues again, Aesop states:

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[1] I have chosen to quote here from Julien Macho's late fifteenth century French *Esope* because not only is it the immediate and principal source for Caxton's *Aesop*, but precisely because it is in French, which, of course, uses the word "langue" for both the "tongue" and "language." This double signification in the context of the story underscores the tale's metaphorical content.

[2] *Esope*. Ed. Beate Hecker. Hamburg: Romanisches Seminar der Universität Hamburg, 1982. 21-22.

> "Quelle chose est ce qui est pire ne plus puante que la mauluaise langue? Pour la langue les hommes sont perilz. Par la langue viennent en pourriture. Par la langue les cités sont destruictes, et de la mauluaise langue viennent tous maulx."[3]

This account depicting the contrastive, versatile power of the tongue serves as an ideal epigraph for an examination of the fable in the context of vernacular translation, particularly in a study of the fables of William Caxton, who, more than any other medieval fabulist, found himself at the center of a dynamic multilingual, multicultural ethos in late fifteenth century London after spending most of his career in the multilingual commercial center of Bruges, in Flanders. Caxton's decision to translate and print a book of Aesop's fables was informed likely by a number of considerations. The fable was an extremely popular literary form in Europe during the Middle Ages, and the popular and traditional status of Aesopic fables during the fifteenth century made them a natural choice for printers. Caxton's reasons for compiling and printing the fables, then, likely had more to do with this popularity than with artistic concerns. But this "commercial" versus "poetic" dichotomy in characterizing Caxton and his work, particularly in the dynamic, complex socio-political milieu at the end of the fifteenth century, which temporally marks in England the divide between the medieval and early modern period, is overly simplistic. Caxton's role in the literary and commercial nexus of this liminal period is rather a complex, multi-faceted one shaped by not only the political climate in late fifteenth-century England but also its linguistic and associated emergent nationalistic environment.

As a printer Caxton was obligated to privilege productivity and efficiency over poetic merit. Yet his translations, rather than being mere transparent, "faithful" copies of the original, reflect a mindful awareness of the cultural context in which he is working. Not simply an "invisible" translator whose only concern is fidelity to his sources, Caxton instead exhibits

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[3] *Esope*. Ed. Beate Hecker. Hamburg: Romanisches Seminar der Universität Hamburg, 1982. 22.

through his translations a tension and an anxiety about his authorial self-representation, an identity more complicated, multi-dimensional, and elusive than that of earlier vernacular fabulists/translators. My argument in this essay is that, despite the criticisms leveled at Caxton suggesting his translations are facile and overly-simplistic, he, working—translating, printing, publishing, bookselling—in a decidedly complex and rapidly-changing linguistic, literary, economic, and political period, carried out a translation program that reflected, and indeed helped shape, this contemporary atmosphere.

Moreover, as I shall argue, Caxton's decision to translate, publish, and print a collection of Aesop resulted in part from the turbulent political exigencies of his time. One can draw a connection between Caxton's *Life* of Aesop and many of Caxton's individual fables, and the contemporary political climate in England. As a translator, Caxton was not interested simply in linguistic replication; his translation program entails a translation of culture—as a translator, printer, and publisher in a newly literate market culture, Caxton was obligated to choose books that he knew would sell, and that would appeal to both noble patrons and the emergent middle-class readership of printed books. These readers, whose literary tastes ran from saints' lives to guides to good manners to manuals of chivalry and war to romances,[4] expected purveyors of literature such as Caxton to produce texts that reflected the "popular culture" of the time, which during the late fifteenth century, a period marked by nationalistic impulses, included, paradoxically, a mode for other, non-English languages and cultures. And, as the genres listed above indicate, Caxton was also attempting to produce texts recommended for their moral value, and thus a book of fables is a prudent choice for him.

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[4] See Barbara Belyea, "Caxton's Reading Public," *English Language Notes*, September 1981. 14.

Caxton is deeply entrenched in the linguistic/literary sphere of late fifteenth-century England and thus more involved with the idea of language itself and the vernacular, than perhaps any other medieval fabulist and, moreover, he problematizes the emergent and contemporary idea of the nation at that time with his polyvalent translational program. Caxton is not only fixed in the nexus of language, literature, and nation that characterized late fifteenth century England; he effectively has helped shape this web. As a translator, Caxton may be, in some ways, more in line with some of the innovative, contemporary ideas of Translation Studies than scholars would concede to him.

Scholars such as William Kuskin and Patricia Clare Ingham have shown the importance of Caxton's work in conceptualizing or "imagining" the late-medieval/early modern English nation, particularly through his vernacularizing largely non-literary print culture (such as his printing of legal statutes) in England.[5] But this vernacularization program of Caxton's seems to have resulted, in part, from a linguistic tension, an insecurity on the part of Caxton himself. Near the beginning of his prologue to his first translation, *The Recuyell of the Histories of Troye* (1471), Caxton expresses this anxiety:

> And afterward whan I remembryd my self of my symplenes and vnperfightnes that I had in bothe languages / that is to wete in frenshe & in englissh for in france was I neuer / and was born & lerned myn englissh in kente in the weeld where I doubte not is spoken as brode and rude englissh as in ony place of englond & haue contynued by the space of .xxx. yere for the most parte in the contres of Braband.flandres holand and zeland.[6]

Caxton here presents himself as a marginalized practitioner of not only French, from which he translated on a massive scale, but of his native tongue as well. Certainly the text printed by

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[5] See Kuskin's "'Onely Imagined': Vernacular Community and the English Press," 199-240, and Ingham's "Losing French: Vernacularity, Nation, and Caxton's English Statutes," 275-98, in *Caxton's Trace: Studies in the History of English Printing*, ed. William Kuskin. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006.

[6] Ed. H. Oskar Sommer, 1894; repr. New York: AMS, 1973. 4-5.

Caxton most associated with the concept of the English nation, and the most prominent of any of Caxton's publications, is Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* (1485). Numerous studies have rightly explored the importance of King Arthur and Malory's rendering of the legend in the emergence of the idea of the English nation.[7] But what problematizes this notion is the fact that, as Malory explicitly states in the *Morte*, he drew many of the tales from *French* romances**.** For example, Malory's lengthy book of *Tristram*, which comprises about a third of the entire *Morte*, derives from the thirteenth-century French prose *Tristan*. Caxton thus used French sources to serve an English national project. Given that the principal source for Malory's monumental work is not simply a group of tales from a different language and country but notably a group of tales from France, not only England's principal adversary throughout the Middle Ages but (and England's principal adversary precisely *because of* this) in many ways the country that engendered the England of the High Middle Ages, Caxton's printing of *Le Morte D'Arthur* (with the title naturally in French) complicates the idea of an English nation.

One of Caxton's translational techniques for which he is well-known, and often criticized, is his inclusions of gallicisms in his translations. Although his fables contain relatively fewer French loan words than do some of his other texts, these foreign words are nonetheless present. As a number of critics have observed, Caxton was not alone in this inclusion of French words in his English translations. Norman F. Blake, in referring to Caxton's use of doublets, suggests that "they allow Caxton to use French loanwords and thus to give his work a more

[7] Indeed it is this particular work that intriguingly makes the case for Caxton as an instrumental figure in producing Malory's "book," what some might consider the first "novel" in English, as scholars such as Eugene Vinaver have, to Caxton's discredit, argued that Caxton basically packaged the *Morte* as one unified story, which Malory did not intend, as evidenced by the Winchester manuscript, discovered in 1934.

fashionable appearance."[8] One can find typically one or two gallicisms in each of Caxton's fables, ranging from cognates such as *sauf* to more "foreign" terms such as *partage*. Given the multilingual (Caxton also translated texts from the Dutch), multidialectical situation in which Caxton was working, and the continuing influence of the French language upon English, his interest in preserving these French (and Flemish) words and phrases while at the same time inserting a few original words of his own that were not mere linguistic equivalents may have amounted to more than simply a "fashionable appearance." Indeed Caxton in his translations attempts to achieve what Walter Benjamin identifies as one of the central tasks of the translator.

If one were to apply Benjamin's concept of *Überleben,* the survival of language, to Caxton's translations, the merit of Caxton's work becomes more evident. In his classic essay "The Task of the Translator," Benjamin suggests that the the primary task of a literary translator is nothing less than to ensure the survival of language and, by extension, the survival of culture. He argues that translation should have a "foreignizing" effect on the target language and culture—that some sense of the source language should be transmitted to the translator's language and somehow even enrich, advance, and transform that language:

> We may call this connection [between the translation and the original] a vital connection. . . . Translation thus ultimately serves the purpose of expressing the central reciprocal relationship between languages. . . . For just as the tenor and significance of the great works of literature undergo a complete transformation over the centuries, the mother tongue of the translator is transformed as well. While a poet's words endure in his own language, even the greatest translation is destined to become part of the growth of its own language and eventually to be absorbed by its renewal. Translation is so far removed from being the sterile equation of two dead languages that of all literary forms it is the one charged with the special mission of watching over the maturity process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own.[9]

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[8] *William Caxton and English Literary Culture*. London: Hambledon, 1991. 126.

[9] "The Task of the Translator." Trans. Harry Zohn. *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*. Ed. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. 73-75.

Benjamin goes on to state, "The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original."[10] When examining medieval translations, however, particularly those of *Aesop's Fables*, we are faced with a task much more complex and problematic, and must pose the question "What is the original?" In the case of Caxton's fables, what is the source language or culture that is/should be carried over to late fifteenth-century English readers—the late fifteenth-century French of Julien Macho that is Caxton's primary source? Or Macho's source, the late-fifteenth-century Latin-German edition of Steinhowel? Or should we go further back and focus on Steinhowel's numerous and varied sources, the contemporary, late-medieval collections of Rinuccio de Castiglione and Poggio Bracciolini, or the early medieval collection of Petrus Alphonsus, who compiled and translated fables from Arabic and Indian (Sanskrit) collections, or the classical Latin collections of Avianus, Romulus, Babrius, and Phaedrus? Given the eastern sources of Alphonsus, thirteen of whose fables appear in a distinct section of Caxton's *Aesop*, should we look for an oriental "echo" in Caxton's translations, some trace of ancient Arabic or Sanskrit, or some feature of ancient Indian or Arabic culture? Or should we step back to classical Greece and examine how that culture and its language have been translated to Caxton's milieu? Caxton's title, after all, is *Esope*, carrying with it, ostensibly, all of the ancient Greek values, beliefs, customs, etc., that that name entails.

One of the paradoxes, it seems, of modern Caxton scholarship is that critics are almost unanimous in their praise of Caxton as a central figure (arguably *the* central figure) in establishing English, through his translations, as the principal, common, standard language in

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[10] "The Task of the Translator," 77.

print culture in England, yet scholars are nearly as vociferous in their disparagement of the translations themselves, asserting that they lack any literary merit. One might find it curious that even scholars who have eminently devoted their careers to Caxton generally dismiss him as an artist. Somewhat paradoxically, Blake, whose premise in his monograph *William Caxton and English Literary Culture* (1991) is that Caxton is of extreme importance in the history of English letters, also disparages Caxton on occasion as a literary hack who produced weak translations:

> There is no attempt to improve the style or language of *Reynard the Fox* and those scholars who think of Caxton as a man of letters would have to explain why he failed to improve his work. The explanation may well be that Caxton was more of a businessman than a scholar and that he was more interested in producing a great number of printed works than in their merit as works of art. Certainly everything he translated seems to have been completed at great speed.[11]

Elsewhere Blake is even more trenchant in his observations, asserting that Caxton's texts are marked by an "unashamed transference of French words and idioms into English and frequent misunderstanding of the French."[12] And it is not just modern critics who question Caxton's abilities as a writer/translator; in his own day Caxton was attacked for the inferior quality of his work. His contemporary (early sixteenth century) Gavin Douglas, a Scottish poet, is particularly vicious in his criticism of Caxton's *Eneydos,* a translation of a (French) translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*. In the prologue to his own translation of Virgil's epic, Douglas, employing a particularly incisive metaphor, writes:

> Endyte by Virgil, and heir by me translate,
> Quhilk William Caxton knew nevir al hys days,
> For, as I sayd tofor, that mann forvays:
> Hys febil proyss beynn mank and mutilate,
> Bot my propyne comm fromm the press fute hait,
> Onforlatit, not iawyn fra tunn to tunn,

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[11] *William Caxton and English Literary Culture*. London: Hambledon, 1991. 272.

[12] *Caxton and His World*. London: Deutsch, 1969. 126.

In fresch sapour new from the berry runn.[13]

Composed by Virgil, and here by me translated,
Which William Caxton knew never all his days,
For, as I said before, that man goes astray:
His feeble prose being weak and mutilated,
But my verse comes from the press hotfoot,
Undecanted, not splashed from vessel to vessel,
In fresh taste new from the berry run.

In the last three lines Douglas, in addition to punning on the word "press" as both winepress and printing press (the latter of course a pointed barb at Caxton), also pejoratively alludes to Caxton's common practice of translating from intermediary sources.

Although Caxton does often translate from an intermediary, this fact should not necessitate a view that he does not merit serious consideration as a translator, and perhaps therefore as a writer. Rhetorically, of course, Caxton had altogether different objectives in mind than did a more "poetic" writer and translator such as Chaucer (or Douglas). His principal purpose was to make accessible, in English, to a large, diverse English audience the "great books" of European literature from the preceding centuries. However, lest one see Caxton as some kind of late medieval/early modern Alfredian, ascribing the same motives to him as one would to King Alfred six hundred years earlier, it should be pointed out that Caxton's objective was certainly not to educate the people of England, but rather to create a market--to appeal to an already educated yet linguistically diverse class of English readers.[14] And efficiency was paramount for Caxton: he needed to produce numerous lengthy works for an ever-growing body

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[13] *Eneados*, ed. D. F. C. Coldwell (1957-64), Book V, Prologue. ll. 48-54.

[14] Critics such as James A. Knapp assert that Caxton's audience was composed of those who were not even readers. In "Translating for Print: Continuity and Change in Caxton's *Mirrour of the World*," Knapp states, "Caxton's intended audience is so wide, in fact, that literacy is not even a requirement: his translation is 'so playn' that one only need to 'here' it to understand. This is not an audience comprised of medieval scholars; it is, instead, a 'popular' audience, and one that is specifically English." 70.

of readers in a short period of time. Given that Caxton translates significantly more from French texts than directly from Latin, one can presume that his knowledge of French surpassed his grasp of Latin and thus it was reasonable for Caxton to utilize French translations.

As suggested above, even a century after Chaucer the English language was unstable and heterogenous, marked by a variety of dialects, as Caxton himself indicates in a poetic passage from his prologue to *Eneydos*:

> And certaynly our langage now vsed varyeth ferre from that whiche was vsed and spoken whan I was borne. For we englysshe men ben borne vnder the domynacyon of the mone, whiche is neuer stedfaste but euer wauerynge, wexynge one season and waneth and dyscreaseth another season. And that comyn englysshe that is spoken in one shyre varyeth from a nother.[15]

Caxton then follows this metaphor with his famous illustration of this diversity of the English tongue, wherein he tells the story of some merchants who sailed from one port of England and, because of lack of wind, were forced to go aground at an obscure, unknown English coast. After tarrying there for some time, the merchants disembarked and went into the neighboring village to "refreshe" themselves:

> And one of theym named sheffelde a mercer cam in to an hows and axed for mete, and specyally he axyd after eggys. And the good wyf answerede that she coude speke no frenshe. And the marchaunt was angry, for he also coude speke no frenshe but wold haue hadde egges and she vnderstode hym not. And thenne at laste a nother sayd that he wolde haue eyren, then the good wyf sayd that she vnderstod hym wel. Loo what sholde a man in thyse days now wryte, egges or eyren, certaynly it is harde to playse every man bycause of dyversite and chaunge of langage.[16]

Near the end of the prologue, Caxton adds a final comment revealing his linguistic anxiety:

> And thus bytwene playn, rude and curyous I stande abasshed. But in my judgemente, the comyn termes that be dayli used ben lyghter to be understonde than the olde and auncyent Englysshe. And for as moche as this present booke is not for a rude uplondyssh man to laboure therin ne rede it, but onely for a clerke and a noble gentylman, that feleth

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[15] *Eneydos*, from *The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton*. Ed. W. J. B. Crotch. London: Oxford University Press, 1928. 108.

[16] *Ibid*, 108.

> and understondeth in faytes of armes, in love, and in noble chyvalrye, therfor in a meane bytwene bothe I have reduced and translated this sayd booke in to our Englysshe, not over rude ne curyous, but in suche termes as shall be understanden by Goddys grace, accordynge to my copye.[17]

Writing in the fifteenth century and occupying a different socio-cultural position from those of Marie and Chaucer, Caxton, rather than calling attention to himself as an individual artist and translator, instead, like Lydgate, examines his role as writer in the public sphere, with its attendant obligations and risks. In his fable translations he attempts to reconcile the artistic voice with the expectations and demands of the public, the latter perhaps exerting more pressure, thus producing fables even more reflective of contemporary culture than those of the other vernacular fabulists examined in this dissertation. Although in a similar position to that of Lydgate in that both, for most of their writing careers, were expressly writing for royal patrons, it must be noted that that Lydgate and Caxton in many ways occupied markedly different positions in their respective societies—Lydgate, particularly early in his career when he likely composed his fables, was a cleric, a monk, often called a "monastic poet" who was beholden to the Church, and he was also a "court poet" who was close to King Henry V and who wrote, often specifically *for* Henry and other members of Henry's court; Caxton's position was even more complicated in that he was essentially a court poet and considered a court translator, yet he was also a businessman, entrepreneur, and commercial merchant who operated, by virtue of his printing press, a commercial enterprise not only for his own monetary benefit but for the financial, artistic, and/intellectual benefit of the crown (during Caxton's career, Edward IV and Richard III).

Both Caxton and Lydgate explore in their prologues and epilogues the implications inherent in writing and translating in the vernacular, and in this sense Caxton perhaps has even

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[17] *Eneydos*, 109.

closer parallels with Marie de France than with his fifteenth-century countryman. For the prologues and epilogues of these two writers in particular are some of the best examples we have of "theorizing the vernacular." In the case of Caxton, in fact, it is these frames moreso than Caxton's texts themselves that merit critical approbation in the eyes of some observers:

> To many of his editions Caxton added a prologue and/or epilogue. These often provide his reasons for printing a particular text and his remarks have been accepted as accurate accounts of what happened. They have also been admired as writings in their own right, and therefore he has come to be accepted by some as a literary figure rather than as just a printer.[18]

Even more so than Lydgate, Caxton is concerned with the public sphere and its reception of his work. His fables are less of an artistic endeavor than a pragmatic, entrepreneurial one, and his translations, more literal or "faithful" to his sources than are the translations of Marie, Chaucer, and Lydgate, are more representative of the modern conception of what a literary translation should be.

One of my contentions in this paper is that Caxton is *faithful* to his French source without being *literal,* that there is a distinction between the two concepts, and that this fidelity to his source, in some ways valorises Caxton's translation of Macho's *Esope*. The words "accurate" and "faithful," so vital to the field of Translation Studies/Theory, are not interchangeable and not even synonymous. Indeed the word "accurate" should not be used in any discourse concerned with literary translation, carrying the assumption that a translation is either "correct" or "incorrect," somehow measurable or quantifiable, a matter of black or white. Some Caxton critics who disparage his work assert that his translations are weak in part because of the gallicisms evident. For modern scholars this characteristic is generally seen as an inferior one, but in the late Middle Ages, gallicisms in English translations were looked at less severely, as

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[18] Blake, *William Caxton and English Literary Culture*, 4.

French was still an ongoing, significant influence on the English language, continuing to carry a cachet with readers. English was still integrating into its linguistic system French loan words and other gallicisms. Moreover, many of the likely readers of literature, such as the audience for Caxton's works, knew French. Indeed the French language and literature were still in vogue in late fifteenth-century London among noble families; we do know that Edward IV's children, who as I remarked above were a likely specific audience for Caxton's *Aesop*, were well-educated in French.[19]

The fact that Caxton was a translator who was also an entrepreneur suggests why he might have been drawn to the fable genre. Fables were extremely popular during the late Middle Ages, as the numerous manuscripts, in Latin and various European vernacular languages, attest.[20] Caxton was also a translator, indeed one of the most prolific translators of the Middle Ages, adapting into English works from Latin and medieval French and Dutch. Part of the appeal of Aesop for Caxton was simply economics—in Europe Aesop's Fables are generally regarded as the most widely-circulated book in history after the Bible.[21] During Caxton's printing career in the late fifteenth century, there were numerous manuscripts of Aesop, in various languages, circulating throughout Europe.

Caxton, of course, made his name as the first and most important printer/publisher of literature in England. Beginning his career as a merchant, Caxton, a literary enthusiast, became

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[19] Blake, *Caxton and His World*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1969. 102.

[20] Jan M. Ziolkowski informs us that there are more than a hundred extant manuscripts of Latin fables alone dating from the late-twelfth to the thirteenth centuries. See *Talking Animals: Medieval Latin Beast Poetry, 750-1150*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993. 20.

[21] See Willis G. Regier, "No Children's Tale," *The Chronicle of Higher Education, Chronicle Review,* February 15, 2008.

involved in the printing industry and is recognized, of course, as the first English printer and the one who introduced the printing press into England. Perhaps best-known as the original printer of Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Caxton also published Gower's *Confessio Amantis* and the *Canterbury Tales*. He was also the printer for a number of Lydgate's works, including his "moral" fables *The Churl and the Bird* and *The Horse, the Sheep, and the Goose*.

Caxton's interest in fables is reflected in one of his major undertakings, a translation not only of the Romulus collection of Aesop's fables, but also a translation of the ancient *Life* of Aesop, the quasi-biographical account of the life of the legendary fabulist. Unlike other medieval translators of Aesop, such as Lydgate, Caxton is not considered by most a "creative writer." In the Middle Ages, those who wrote translations, unlike today, were generally regarded as original, creative writers, such as the fabulists Marie de France, Chaucer, and Lydgate; more importantly, the notion of literary translation in the Middle Ages differed from that of today, which recognizes works published overtly and distinctly as "translations." Medieval society held a more nebulous view of the translated work, often regarding these texts as adaptations rather than translations, pieces often extremely popular that merited esteem for their entertainment and didactic value. Caxton, moreover, was known more for commercial enterprise than for artistic endeavors; he was esteemed as a printer and publisher of literature, and not only his contemporaries, but many modern scholars, see his translations simply as a concomitant commercial activity.

One of the few fables common to Marie de France, Lydgate, and Caxton and thus of great interest in a study of vernacular fables is "The Cock and the Jewel." This fable, appearing as it does in the collections of all of the major medieval fabulists writing in the vernacular (as does "The Wolf and the Lamb"), must have held some significance for medieval audiences. Its

importance can perhaps be attested by the fact that it is the opening fable in all of these collections, appearing immediately after the respective prologues. As Caxton's renderings of Aesop are relatively brief, it may be useful to provide the entire text of each fable under consideration here:

"The first fable is of the cok and of the precious stone"

> As a Cok ones sought his pasture in the donghylle/ he fond a precious stone/ to whome the Cok sayd/ Ha a fayre stone and precious thow arte here in the fylth And yf he that desyreth the had found the/ as I haue he shold haue take the vp/ and sette the ageyne in thy fyrst estate/ but in vayne I haue found the/ For no thynge I haue to do with the/ ne no good I may doo to the/ ne thou to me/ And thys fable sayd Esope to them that rede this book/ For by the cok is to vnderstond the fool whiche retcheth not of sapience ne of wysedome/ as the Cok retcheth and setteth not by the precious stone/ And by the stone is to vnderstond this fayre and playsaunt book.

In interpreting Caxton's very brief, simple version of this beast fable, we would be wise to examine it within the context of Caxton's milieu—late fifteenth-century England. Caxton, although, as we noted above, less original and more adherent to his source text than other medieval translators of fables, nonetheless had particular motives in retelling Aesop's tales. Caxton unabashedly praises the gem and lambasts the cock in his tale, in contrast to Lydgate, who, in his version, portrays the cock in heroic terms. As is often the case with Caxton, the moral of the fable and the narrative do not overtly correspond. Upon reaching the end of the tale itself, we might justifiably incline to approve of the cock's dismissal of this bright jewel he has discovered. As the cock reflects, the gem may be a beautiful stone, appropriate for those who wish to possess or display riches, but it ill fits his own way of life, centered on his daily search for basic sustenance. Rather than granting the cock his approbation, however, Caxton, in his concluding moral, rebukes the cock, calling him a "fool" for his lack of interest in the jasper. The cock, to Caxton, represents a person who does not recognize the value of precious stones. The next line of Caxton's moral explicitly expands the fable into an allegory, wherein Caxton imparts

a symbolic significance to the stone, asserting that it stands for "this fair and pleasant book." Caxton's moral is that the stone symbolizes the book of fables, and, by extension, wisdom which the fables attempt to promulgate, and that the cock, therefore, stands for those who reject wisdom. This moral, particularly when examined in the context of Caxton's commercial milieu, however, begs the question, "Is the jewel necessarily a symbol of wisdom or knowledge, or could it represent something less rarefied, noble and profound yet nonetheless of marked material significance in Caxton's time—the emergence and establishment, through the "book," of print culture in England, and along with it, the modern conception of the author? This idea of the book, particularly, is significant here, given the importance of Caxton in introducing print culture, i.e. the book, to England. It is of course appropriate that this particular fable is the opening tale of Caxton's *Aesop*. Moreover, and perhaps even more significantly for this study, Caxton's *Aesop*, with its "literal" renderings of its principal and immediate source, ushers in the modern, now conventional, conception of what a translation should be.

An additional intriguing reading here would follow not just from Caxton's commercial milieu, but from his polemical status as an artist, or not, at the end of the fifteenth century. With his claim that the gem represents the book of fables, more significantly his own translation of Aesop's fables, Caxton may be attacking those critics who dismiss his writing by asserting that they, like the cock, are ignorant fools who do not recognize the value of something, well, *valuable*. If the stone symbolizes the book of fables, then perhaps the "hero" of Caxton's tale is the stone. The moral separates itself, doesn't follow from the story—are we simply to take Caxton's word that the gem represents wisdom and that therefore the cock is a fool for rejecting it?

The popular, conventional notion of Aesop's fables as simple, basic children's tales does injustice to the subtle complexities that in fact characterize these tales, which a number of author/translators have used to comment on the political and cultural ethos of their times. And many of these fables convey themes and ideas not facile and which children would obviously miss. The idea of interpretation is one such theme in "The Cock and the Jewel," in which the real prize may be the ability to interpret the fables. Phaedrus tells us in the Latin version: "Hoc illis narro qui me non intellegunt,"[22] which can be translated as "This is a story I tell for those who do not understand me." Indeed, if we examine other versions of this fable, we see quite different presentations and subsequent morals by the respective authors/translators. An examination of the other medieval English versions of this fable, particularly of the role of the jewel in these various tales, may illuminate to what extent we should view fables metaphorically. In his own translation of this fable, John Lydgate switches the roles of the cock and the jasper, presenting the rooster as an unabashed hero from the onset. His red crest signifies courage and hardiness; every morning he praises the Trinity with a triple crow; he is the "prophete of all ioy and all gladnes"; his early morning digging for food provides a model example of diligence and honest labor as a means of procuring a livelihood; and he does not allow himself to be sidetracked from his straight path by the glitter of useless baubles that are not fit for his station in life.

As we all know, fables are intended to be read as allegories, instructive stories often featuring talking animals that represent some human vice or virtue, or who represent some socio-cultural institution, practice, belief, idea, etc. The closing moral of the fable generally follows from the narrative, often even stating the obvious. But in Caxton's "The Cock and the Jewel," we

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[22] Perry, Ben Edwin, ed. and trans. *Babrius and Phaedrus*. Loeb ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965. 278.

are presented with a more problematic fable. If one reads the cock as representing a sensible, pragmatic person who is not greedy, then Caxton's moral is at best a non-sequitur. The above interpretation is no less metaphorical than Caxton's reading. To argue, without context, that a bright jewel represents not riches or material wealth but wisdom and knowledge is difficult to support. For Caxton, it may be a convenient and self-serving argument: above all, he was a businessman, and his primary objective was to make money. Thus he needed to print and sell numerous copies of his translated works, and what better way to advertise his *Aesop* than, in the first fable, the one that opens the collection, to claim that the precious gem represents "this fair and pleasant book" itself! And, of course, a book of Aesop's fables is replete with those pearls of wisdom that every reader desires. It might seem paradoxical for a prominent entrepreneur to ascribe no material value to a jewel, but ultimately the jasper does indeed represent wealth for Caxton, in that the book, for him, means money—translating, printing, and publishing Aesop's fables was a commercial enterprise. Blake suggests, "The question naturally arises as to why [Caxton] should have started translating. The most acceptable hypothesis is that he did so with a view to publishing, presumably through printing, the finished translation. . . . Caxton foresaw [printing's] possibilities and has already made plans to capitalise upon them."[23]

In addition to his self-seeking pecuniary motives, Caxton had to be cognizant of the current fashion and tastes of the reading public, including the interests of his patrons, and translate accordingly. With Caxton, unlike his contemporary late medieval writers and translators, the motives for writing seem to have much less to do with art, or intellectual or philosophical inquiry, than with the economic and political exigencies in which he was caught up. Blake comments on this notion:

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[23] *William Caxton and English Literary Culture*. London: Hambledon, 1991. 3.

> He lived off and on in Bruges for well over twenty years and Bruges was in the dominions of the Dukes of Burgundy. He translated works written for the dukes and dedicated his first printed book to the then duchess. Scholarship has naturally focussed on the influence exerted on him by Burgundian literary taste and to what extent he was trying to capitalise on the fashion for things Burgundian in England. The problem with this view has been to fit his publication of English works, such as the poems by Chaucer, into such a theory. When he includes a prologue and/or epilogue he often introduces the name of a patron who is made to seem responsible for the volume in question. The many patrons mentioned have provoked dispute as to how far Caxton was responsible for the choice of the works he printed or whether he was following the whims of individual patrons. In other words, did he lead or follow public taste? Finally, there is the question of the sort of man he was: printer, merchant, scholar, diplomat and politician have all been put forward. They are not necessarily mutually incompatible, though individual scholars have emphasized one aspect to the exclusion of others.[24]

Quite well-connected, Caxton had some of the most prominent and powerful patrons in England, many of whom were courtiers and very close to the King Edward IV and his household. Known as "the king's printer," Caxton obtained patronage from Edward's family and inner circle. His decision to translate and print a collection of Aesop's fables, along with the *Life of Aesop*, may have been inspired by the tumultuous political events of 1483-84, leading to the end of the Wars of the Roses. In April 1483 Edward unexpectedly died, throwing the monarchy into a maelstrom. Richard III forcefully seized the throne, imprisoning and executing numerous nobles who had been close to Edward, among them Earl Rivers, a confidant and supporter of Caxton. As Louise Gill demonstrates, Caxton was likely involved in the failed "Rebellion of 1483," an attempt to unseat the usurpative Richard III as king. She writes,

> It is not generally known that William Caxton sued for pardon following the abortive gentry rebellion against the Crown in October 1483. The pardon, which he obtained in May 1484, shows that . . . after the 1483 rebellion William Caxton, like many other servants of the deceased Edward IV, sued for pardon to indemnify himself as a perceived threat to the new regime.[25]

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[24] *William Caxton and English Literary Culture*. London: Hambledon, 1991. 4-5.

[25] Louise Gill. "William Caxton and the Rebellion of 1483." *The English Historical Review* 112.445 (1997): 105.

Gill goes on to note that the common characteristic for all of the 1100 petitioners for pardon in early 1484 was "service to Edward IV."[26]

Caxton writes that he completed his *Aesop* in March 1484, between his request for pardon and Richard's subsequent granting of it. Considering this date, it is likely that Caxton did most of the translating and printing of *Aesop* in 1483. It may be significant that Caxton, in his epilogue for *Aesop*, deliberately mentions Richard by name as the sovereign: "And here with I fynysshe this book/ translated & emprynted by me William Caxton at westmynstre in thabbey/ And fynysshed the xxvj daye of Marche the yere of oure lord M CCCC lxxxiiij/ And the fyrst yere of the regne of kyng Rychard the thyrdde."[27] By March 1484 Richard had already crushed the rebellion and was in the process of executing its leaders and other high-ranking aristocrats whom he perceived as Edward's closest allies. Before the rebellion, Caxton's circle, comprising the Woodville family and other prominent supporters of Edward IV and Prince Edward, "would not acknowledge the legitimacy of his kingship."[28] It therefore seems unlikely that Caxton would have acknowledged Richard as king in a published work before the rebellion. Coming as it did while his pardon was pending, the epilogue referencing Richard as king was no doubt a matter of expedience for Caxton. It may also be notable that Caxton did not dedicate his *Aesop* to anyone (or at least publish the name of a dedicatee), an omission rare for him. For most of his works, there is an identifiable sponsor, usually a member of Edward IV's court until his death, and then someone in the Tudor court after Richard's death in 1485. Perhaps Caxton's omission of a

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[26] "William Caxton and the Rebellion of 1483," 112.

[27] *Aesop's Fables*. *Caxton's Aesop*. Ed. R.T. Lenaghan. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967. 4.

[28] Gill, 111.

dedicatee was a means of protection by avoiding aligning himself with any noble whom Richard might have viewed suspiciously.

Although these facts and suppositions indicate that Caxton was reticent to challenge the new monarch and his court, the choice to include the *Life of Aesop* along with the *Fables* may have been Caxton's subtle way of satirizing the new king, who conventionally is portrayed as physically deformed and hunchbacked. Stephen Orgel and A. R. Braunmuller, general editors of *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, open their introduction to *Richard III* resolutely with the assumption, "There are only two famous hunchbacks in Western literature: Shakespeare's Richard and Victor Hugo's Quasimodo."[29] Like many others, Orgel and Braunmuller are apparently unaware that, long before Shakespeare, one of the seminal figures of Western literature, Aesop, was a hunchback. The historical figure Aesop, according to the ancient *Life of Aesop*, was born physically deformed; we are told, in fact, that he was a "hunchback."[30] Caxton's *Life of Aesop* opens with a large woodcut of the misshapen Aesop, and on the facing page a physical description of this "corbe backed" figure.[31] Also noteworthy in this regard is Caxton's fable "The Rethorycian and the Crowkbacked," in his book *The Fables of Alfonce*, taken not from the Phaedrus/Romulus collection, but from a Latinized version of the *Panchatantra* and Arabic fables titled the *Disciplina Clericalis* of Petrus Alphonsus, an early twelfth-century Spanish physician and cleric. Interestingly, a feature of Caxton's translation that is not in his source is the phrase "as crouked or counterfayted" used by the rhetorician to

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[29] Stephen Orgel and A. R. Braunmuller, eds. *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*. New York: Penguin, 2002. 904.

[30] See *Life of Aesop*, trans. Lloyd Daly, in *Anthology of Greek Popular Literature*, ed. William Hansen, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998. 107.

[31] *Aesop's Fables*. *Caxton's Aesop*. Ed. R.T. Lenaghan. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967. 26-27.

describe those entering the city, appended by Caxton to the line "hauynge somme faulte of kynde on theyr bodyes."[32]

Concomitant with his preoccupations with Richard during the tumult of 1483-84, Caxton may have had in mind the still-possible succession of one of the princes or their sister when he chose to translate Aesop's Fables. The fables, of course, have been seen, throughout their history, as instructive tales, designed as elementary pedagogical tools that would teach moralistic lessons. As Karen Jambeck, in examining the fables of Marie de France, reminds us, medieval audiences viewed Aesop's fables as "a mirror of princes," vitally important tales meant to teach moral responsibility to leaders and future leaders. Such a view, moreover, is not confined to the West: the ancient Indian Sanskrit *Panchatantra* is a collection of fables told for the edification of princes, particularly those who may succeed to the throne, a primer in the art of survival. As one with close ties to the Yorkist family, Caxton may have chosen Aesop's Fables as counsel to the young Edward V and his brother and sister, advice which would have been ever more compelling upon the death of their father. The young princes and their sister may have exemplified for Caxton the important roles young people could play in a political context, especially if properly advised. More broadly, with his translation of Aesop Caxton may have made use of the prevailing political situation to enhance the moral appeal of his work--Aesop was a way to comment on the political events of the day.

A fable by Caxton that bears some significance in the context of the Wars of the Roses but more specifically of Richard's usurpation and the subsequent rebellion is "The bochers and the whethers" (The Butcher and the Sheep). Caxton's fable reads as follows:

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[32] *Aesop's Fables*. *Caxton's Aesop*. Ed. R.T. Lenaghan. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967. 203.

> Whanne a lygnage or kynred is indifferent or indyuysyon/ not lyghtly they shalle doo ony thynge to theyr salute/ as reherceth to vs this fable/ Of a bocher whiche entryd within a stable full of whethers/ And after as the whethers sawe hym/ none of them sayd one word/ And the bocher toke the fyrst that he fonde/ Thenne the whethers spake al to gyder and sayd/ lete hym doo what he wylle/ And thus the bocher tooke hem all one after another sauf one onely/ And as he wold haue taken the last/ the poure whether sayd to hym/ Iustly I am worthy to be take/ by cause I haue not holpen my felawes/ For he that wylle not helpe ne comforte other/ ought not to demaunde or aske helpe ne comforte/ For virtue whiche is vnyed is better than virtue separate.

Caxton's language in this fable merits a close examination. The fable is a commentary on the importance of group solidarity, of standing united against a dangerous interloper. In the concluding moral, the word "vnyed"—"united"—confirms this notion. Caxton's sympathy for the sheep is clear. The ennobling, self-effacing speech of the last surviving sheep in the face of the brutal slayings by the "bocher" might induce sympathy for his plight, notwithstanding the sheep's confession that he justly deserved his fate for his passivity during the butcher's predations and for not defending his "felawes." Given the political events occurring at the time Caxton compiled and translated the fables, Caxton's identification with the whethers as victims of a brutal "butcher" seems natural.

Caxton's inclusion of this fable in his collection is also noteworthy in that it is accompanied by a woodcut depicting the butcher cutting the throat of one whether, with blood pouring out, while the rest of the flock look on. This image, certainly one of the most violent woodcuts in Caxton's fable collection, is evocatively remindful of the savagery of Richard's usurpation and subsequent beheadings of prominent members of Edward's court, and likely murder of the two young princes. The moral of this fable, that personal safety depends on group solidarity, can be applied to Richard's purge of Edward's court. Caxton, as one with a personal and professional stake (as suggested above, the dissolution of Edward's court meant a loss of commissions and patronage for him) in the current political events, would have been keenly

interested in them, and the inclusion of "The Butcher and the Sheep" might have been his way to encourage people, particularly nobles and courtiers who would have likely been his readers, to unite themselves against Richard. It is perhaps noteworthy that in Caxton's rendering of this fable it is unquestionably the butcher, and not the whethers, to whom any violence is ascribed. In the Latin Romulus version of the fable and in the more direct Latin source for Caxton, Steinhowel's 1479 adaptation, the sheep too are associated with violence; the lone surviving sheep states to the butcher at the conclusion of the narrative, "As soon as we saw you here in our midst, back when we were all together, we should have killed you at once by smashing you between our horns."[33] Caxton, as does Macho, depicts the would-be violent sheep as innocent, meek victims, thereby emphasizing the differences between the militant, rapacious Richard and his docile victims. This portrayal of Edward's circle is not, however, altogether positive—with this tale, and its moral, Caxton seems to be censuring that passivity of the Edwardian loyalists vis-à-vis Richard's reign of terror and advocating a resistance, if even a non-violent one. In 1484, with the summary executions of Earl Rivers and Lord Hastings, two of Edward's most loyal supporters, this particular fable would have borne great significance.

Caxton scholars, in discussing his translations, regularly point to his "fidelity" to his source texts (which often, for them, is synonymous with either a poor translation or a lack of literary merit on his part). In "The Butcher and the Sheep" Caxton does closely follow his immediate source, Macho's French fable, but this fidelity may have more to do with the contemporary political climate than with simply replicating the French words into their English equivalents. Caxton makes some linguistic changes from the Latin sources of the fable and from Marie's French version that reflect this notion. In addition to that noted above, he employs some

[33] Ben Edwin Perry, ed. and trans., *Babrius and Phaedrus*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965. xxv.

specific words that alter the sense of the Latin fable. In the first line, he writes, "lygnage or kynred" in place of the Latin "parentes vel amici" (parents or friends), thus underscoring the divisions of loyalties based on lineage that so characterized the Wars of the Roses, and thereby appealing to this culture wherein honor and loyalty to one's line were privileged, a culture that during late fifteenth century England was eroding due to the internecine wars and the strengthening centralized state and monarchy. And this question of unity versus division, of banding together to actively help one's clan, is reinforced in Caxton's concluding moral, an idea absent in Marie's epimythium, which reads,

> Pur ceo dit hum en repruver:
> Plusurs se leissent damager
> Que cuntr'ester n'osent lur enemis
> Que ne facent a eus le pis (25-28).
>
> Therefore the author's admonition:
> Many get hurt by their submission;
> They dare not enemies defy
> Lest they'd fare even worse thereby.

Whereas Marie's message underscores, ironically, the broader concept of false expectations and their potentially grave consequences, Caxton's moralisation comments on individual hypocrisy, and, more significantly, on standing united and loyalty to kindred or one's circle in the face of an interloper or enemy.

The important implications of lineage is also a theme of Caxton's fable "The Wulf and the Lambe," a fascinating fable which, like "The Butcher and the Sheep" examines unequal power relations and the often darkly absurd consequences that can follow from them. This fable particularly examines the role of language in these relations, confirming the futility of even the most powerful language in many of these relationships and also the invincibility of might in battle with right. The fable reads as follows:

> Of the Innocent and of the shrewe Esope reherceth to vs suche a fable/ how it was so/ that the lambe and the wulf had bothe thurst/ and went bothe to a Ryuer for to drynke/ It happed that the wulf dranke aboue & the lambe dranke bynethe/ And as the wulf sawe and perceyued the lambe/ he sayd with a hyghe voys/ Ha knaue why hast thou troubled and fowled my water/ whiche I shold now drynke/ Allas my lordsauf your grece/ For the water cometh fro yow toward me/ Thenne sayd the wulf to the lambe/ Hast thow no shame ne drede to curse me/ And the lambe sayd My lord with your leue/ And the wulf sayd ageyne/ Hit is not syxe monethes passyd that thy fader dyd to me as moche/ And the lambe ansuerd yet was I not at that tyme born/ And the wulf said ageyne to hym/ Thou hast ete my fader/ And the lambe ansuerd/ I haue no teeth/ Thenne said the wulf/ thou arte wel lyke thy fader/ and for his synne & mysdede thow shalt deye/ The wulf thenne toke the lambe and ete hym/ This fable sheweth that the euylle man retcheth not by what maner he may robbe & destroye the good & innocent man.

Several issues in this fable merit examination. First, there is the crux in the tenth line, which very few scholars have noted, much less addressed, when the wolf states to the lamb, "Thou hast ete my fader." This curious claim seems wholly extraneous and at odds with the rest of the narrative, and, interestingly, does not appear in some of the other versions of this fable. In Marie de France's account, which much more closely parallels Caxton's fable than Lydgate's or Henryson's version, the wolf does not make this odd claim; in response to the lamb's statement that he was not yet born six months ago when the wolf had a similar encounter with the lamb's father, the wolf retorts, "E ke pur ceo?/ Ja me fez tu ore cuntrere—/ E chose que ne deussez fere." ("And what of that? You are really being contrary to me right now—And these things you shouldn't say"). Likewise, in Lydgate and Henryson we see the wolf asserting only that the lamb's father six months earlier had "troubled" the water (Lydgate) or even "poysouned" the water (Henryson), but there is nothing suggesting that the lamb "ete" the wolf's father.

"The Wolf and the Lamb" is notable for its commentary on language. More complex than many Aesopian fables, it bears some of the features of the medieval debate poem, with its dichotomy between the "big bad wolf" and the "meek little lamb" and its centering on an argument featuring sound logic and rhetorical flourishes. But as we look closely at this tale, we

see that, unlike most medieval debate poems, such as *The Owl and the Nightingale*, these two debaters are hardly evenly-matched. The unassailable logic and skilled rhetoric belong only to the lamb, whereas the blustery wolf makes his case by insulting and threatening his adversary. Like "The Butcher and the Sheep," this fable expresses the theme of the strong preying on the weak, but in this tale the "weak" are represented by one individual as opposed to the group in the former, who could have prevented their destruction if they had only banded together and resisted. In "The Wolf and the Lamb," the young whether, contrary to his brethren in the companion piece, not only takes a stand against his more powerful antagonist, albeit using a humble, deferential tone, but he clearly wins the battle of wits, adroitly refuting all of the wolf's assertions. So what are we to make, therefore, of the narrative's conclusion, wherein the intellectually-defeated wolf seizes and devours the lamb? The wolf loses the argument, but wins the day. The lamb, despite his actions markedly in contrast with the passive whethers in "The Butcher and the Whethers," loses his life for his assertiveness, and notwithstanding, or perhaps because of, his superior rhetorical skills.

"The Wolf and the Lamb" is intriguing for what it says about the power of language, or, more precisely, the limitations of language. The lamb unequivocally masters his adversary in this sphere, noting the fallacious reasoning in the wolf's argument, yet all of his intelligence and rhetorical dexterity is useless in the face of the dominant physical force of his foe. One could thus interpret this fable as commenting on the futility of the skillful use of language, but as this reading seems wholly at odds with the overall purpose of the fables as stories to educate princes and other nobles, a more valid interpretation might be that one should use language discreetly or risk destruction. This notion of the self-destructive power of language suggests that in some situations the use of a highly-developed rhetorical display can be turned on its head and imperil

the rhetorician. The lamb in this fable represents the intelligent yet naïve young person who is not yet aware of the importance of prudent, discretionary use of language. Rhetorical restraint can be even more powerful than rhetorical eloquence.

Caxton's concluding moral, "This fable sheweth that the euylle man retcheth not by what maner he may robbe & destroye the good & innocent man," is significant in its choice of words. In comparing Caxton's moral with that of Macho in his French rendering, we can note that the French fable has the phrase "poures gens" (poor people) where Caxton writes "good & innocent man." The "poures gens" denoting the lamb would, of course, correspond to Caxton's phrase "poure whether" in "The Butcher and the Sheep," evoking pathos for these innocents. With his insertion of the phrase "good and innocent man," Caxton seems to moralize these already moralistic fables even further.

"The Wolf and the Lamb," the second fable in Caxton's collection and appearing on the facing page with his prologue, seems all the more curious when looked at in conjunction with the prologue, underscoring as it does the pedagogical aspect of the fables: "Esope man of grece/ subtyle and Ingenyous/ techeth in his fables how men ought to kepe and rewle them well/ . . . He techeth also to be humble and for to vse words/ . . . the whiche yf thou rede them/ they shalle aguyse and sharpe thy wytte and shal gyue to the cause of Ioye" (Caxton 74). The character who possesses the "subtle and ingenious" words, and who is "humble" and demonstrates a "sharpened wit" is nevertheless devoured in the end. What, then, is the kernel of wisdom that readers should take from this tale, which clearly fails as an exemplar vis-à-vis the claims in the prologue? Caxton writes in his closing moral that "This fable sheweth that the euylle man retcheth not by what maner he may robbe & destroye the good & innocent man." This simple statement pointing out that evil people often feel no compunction about destroying good people perhaps carries

more trenchant implications—it may be that Caxton included this fable in his collection as a means of underscoring the current political situation in England, clouded by decades of internecine wars and culminating with Richard III's bloody coup and ultimate defeat and death at Bosworth Field two years later. Allegorically, one could, of course, look at "The Wolf and the Lamb" as pitting, titularly, Richard against the young princes and other members of Edward IV's household. Thus the fable serves as a vehicle for Caxton to comment on the events from his perspective, portraying the brutishly powerful Richard as destroyer of Edward's family and others in the royal household whom Caxton saw as Richard's innocent victims but also likely perceived as more cultured, sophisticated, and intellectually as well as morally superior to the militaristic new king. Both the ending of the fable's narrative and its concluding moral convey a mood of desperate hopelessness and a vain struggle in a situation that must have paralleled that which Caxton and the other Edwardian loyalists were faced with during Richard's powerful and militant reign. Both this fable and its companion "The Butcher and the Whethers" provocatively call to mind Shakespeare's striking description of the beastly, ravenous Richard:

> A hellhound that doth hunt us all to death:
> That dog, that had his teeth before his eyes,
> To worry lambs and lap their gentle blood. (IV.4.48-50).

Moreover, the motif of lineage in this fable is exemplified by the wolf's reference to the lamb's father: "Hit is not syxe monethes passyd that thy fader dyd to me as moche." After the lamb's response, perceived by the wolf as a "curse," the wolf asserts, "Thou arte wel lyke thy fader/ and for his synne & mysdede thow shalt deye." Looked at in the context of Edward's recent death and the subsequent seizure, imprisoning, and likely murder of his young sons by Richard, the fable takes on profound implications and makes a serious charge.

This fading patrilineal culture and the martial conflicts that erupted in attempts to perpetuate it, are reflected not only in Caxton's *Aesop* but, even more prominently, in *Le Morte D'Arthur*, of all Caxton's works the text modern readers most closely associate with Caxton, a text, of course, *printed* by Caxton but not translated by him. The fact that Caxton was primarily an entrepreneur should not necessitate a view that he does not merit serious consideration as a translator, and perhaps therefore as an author. In fact, it is precisely in his *métier* as entrepreneur where his significance as a translator lies. Enamored of the great medieval texts and writers, Caxton printed and translated these texts on a large scale but did so with an eye to the changing cultural and economic landscape and emergent economic opportunities in the field of literature. His fables therefore represent a bridge between medieval and modern ideas about literature and translation.

CONCLUSION

> "Combien de choses nous servoyent hier d'articles de foy, qui nous sont fables aujourd'huy?"
>
> "How many things served us yesterday as articles of faith, which today are fables for us?"
>
> Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*

Fables, as suggested by Montaigne, are inherently dualistic. I opened this dissertation with the statement "It might be said that it is the fable which expresses truth more simply and yet more intricately than perhaps any other literary form." This assertion on its face might seem to be counter-intuitive: after all, the word "fable" itself means fictional, false. Various dictionaries provide innumerable adjectives with corresponding connotations of falsehood. Yet as I have shown, the medieval vernacular fable, paradoxically, is an ideal genre for conveying truths. In the hands of the French and English fabulists, the medieval fable becomes a device for not only questioning and exploring the nature of truth-telling and fiction, but also for legitimizing oneself as an author and translator.

As I have demonstrated, fables provide for each of the poets under consideration here an effective means of exploring questions of authorship, a nascent, nebulous concept in the Middle Ages and one inextricably linked with translation. Marie, Chaucer, Lydgate, and Caxton use a conventional genre in distinct ways to assert their importance as original writers in a culture which privileges traditional forms and *auctors*. One innovation seen in the fables of these writers is that even works that are deliberate, manifest translations reflect an anxiety over contemporary conditions peculiar to the

translator, a concern particularly evident, for example, in the political undertones of Caxton's fables.

An additional significant feature of these vernacular fables is their preoccupation with and manipulation of language, as evidenced in the tales of Marie, Chaucer, and Lydgate. I have explored how these fabulists comment on the power of language in their tales, particularly on language's destructive potential. This concern is one of the principal themes of their fables, with Lydgate playing it off against language's potential to liberate. But all four writers demonstrate that language is much more complex than this binary would suggest; it is malleable and arbitrary, and its potential for irony is its greatest potential.

In Chapter 1, I explored the history of fable and the Aesopian tradition, examining the causes underlying the beast fable's extraordinary longevity and popularity, yet also noting, paradoxically, its neglect and disparagement at the hands of many observers. The beast fable's capacity to instruct and delight made it an ideal schoolroom resource from classical times through the Middle Ages, and it is perhaps this association with schoolchildren which has in part given beast fables their non-canonical reputation. In this chapter I investigated the appeal of beast fable for poets, who historically were drawn to the genre for its protective function—enabling writers to critique and challenge societal institutions through the voices of animals—and its prosodic potential, giving poets more license to experiment with form, style, register, etc. But the potential cover that the beast fable provides for the socially-conscious fabulist is not assured, as I noted in Chapter

Four with the story of the medieval Paduan tyrant-king Ezelino who executed several men for telling and writing beast fables he deemed were a veiled attempt to criticize him.[1]

As the dissertation is a study of a genre characterized by massive translation and explores the translational objectives and techniques of medieval vernacular fabulists, Chapter 2 appropriately is a survey of Western literary translation and translation theory. In this chapter I traced a historical outline of translation, exploring various aspects of translation from the perspective of classical and medieval writers/translators such as Cicero, Augustine, Boethius, and King Alfred, and modern theorists such as Lawrence Venuti, André Lefevere, Maurice Blanchot, and Walter Benjamin. First formally articulated by Benjamin, the concept of the translation's being an original text in its own right, canonical or potentially so, has been echoed by contemporary writers and translators such as Jorge Luis Borges, who equates fidelity with slavish literalism. Indeed most of the writers—poets, statesmen, kings, philosophers, theologians, theorists—cited in this chapter in one way or another maintain the primary, originative, even poetic nature of translation. Theorists such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak speak of the serious nature of translation, asserting that it requires an "intimate" knowledge of and relationship with the source text itself but also the source language. Other contemporary authors such as Salman Rushdie also describe the intimate nature of translation.

But for Rushdie in particular, translation is far more serious than most would imagine. Like fable-telling, vernacular translation in the medieval and early modern periods was a risky enterprise. Assassinations of translators did not end with the death of

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[1] See Edward Wheatley's *Mastering Aesop: Medieval Education, Chaucer, and His Followers* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 2.

Etienne Dolet at the hands of the Inquisition in the sixteenth century: translation can be just as dangerous an endeavor today as it was five hundred years ago. In his essay collection *Step Across This Line*, Rushdie responded to the 1991 murder of Hitoshi Igarashi, the Japanese translator of *The Satanic Verses*, by writing of the intimate nature of translation while at the same time conveying its danger:

> One year has passed since the vicious murder of Professor Igarashi, but I have still not become accustomed to the fact. . . . I did not know Professor Igarashi, but he knew me, because he translated my work. Translation is a kind of intimacy, a kind of friendship, and so I mourn his death as I would that of a friend.[2]

The idea of translation as betrayal—*traduttore, traditore*—can be borne out in manifold ways; there are different kinds of betrayal, and they are not all linguistic. Igarashi, in a sense, was "hand[ing] over the true language of a people to a foreign land,"[3] yet it was not the English of Rushdie that he was seen as betraying but rather, like Rushdie himself, the "true language" of Islamic culture. It is this kind of betrayal—translation of a text that blasphemes a culture--that Chaucer has in mind in *The Legend of Good Women*, wherein the God of Love condemns Chaucer for translating the *Romance of the Rose*:

> And thow my foo, and al my folk werreyest,
> And of myn olde servauntes thow mysseyest,
> And hynderest hem with thy translacioun,
> And lettest folk from hire devocioun
> To serve me, and holdest it folye
> To serve Love. Thou maist yt nat denye,
> For in pleyn text, withouten nede of glose,
> Thou hast translated the Romaunce of the Rose,
> That is an heresye ayeins my lawe,
> And makest wise folk fro me withdrawe. (Prologue, *The Legend of Good Women*, F 322-331)

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[2] *Step Across This Line*, New York: Modern Library, 2002, 216.

[3] See my quotation of Maurice Blanchot in Chapter 4, p. 141.

Translation brings us naturally to Marie de France, whose *Fables* are the first vernacular fable collection in Europe. In Chapter 3, I closely examined Marie's *Fables* but also looked at her two other texts, the *Lais* and the *Espurgatoire Seint Patriz*, particularly the prologues and epilogues, in order to convey Marie's anxiety about her status as an author and translator in the High Middle Ages. I attempted to demonstrate that Marie consciously asserted proprietorship over her texts to a greater degree than the English fabulists who succeeded her, and for good reason—not the least of which is that she was a woman writing in a patriarchal literary culture. As a translator Marie occupies a somewhat different space than Chaucer, Lydgate, and Caxton in that there is no known source for the majority of her fables. To regard her fables as translations and therefore necessarily inferior to her *Lais* (most of which have no extant source), as medievalists since the nineteenth century have overwhelmingly done, is problematic for a number of reasons. My scholarship has shown that Marie's fables, whether or not we can point to likely sources, merit more attention from scholars, particularly for what they say about language, the abuse of language, and its destructive potential.

The destructive power of language is also a prominent theme of Chaucer's *Manciple's Tale*, the subject of Chapter 4. This chapter investigated how Chaucer plays with language in order to reveal its complexities and its capacity for irony. In this tale of the talking crow who loses his power of speech, Chaucer presents an argument about the relationship between language and meaning, subtly suggesting that language is arbitrary, that specific words are applied according to class and status. And it is not just the author who manipulates language and arbitrarily assigns words and meanings, but the audience as well, an idea reflected in the reaction of Phebus to his crow's *janglerie*. Chaucer

conveys an awareness of the potential for words to be exploited and re-cast, of the writer's loss of control over his or her words once they are expressed, through the Manciple's warning: "Thyng that is seyd is seyd, and forth it gooth, / . . . He is his thral to whom that he hath sayd / A tale . . ." (355-58). In this chapter I also closely looked at Chaucer as translator and demonstrated his distinct, innovative translation techniques that make *The Manciple's Tale* one of Chaucer's exemplary translations.

In Chapter 5, I investigated the *Isopes Fabules* and *The Churl and the Bird* of John Lydgate, attempting to show Lydgate's concern over the image and status of the author in the fifteenth century. Like the two beast fables of his "master" Chaucer, Lydgate's fables reflect a concern with truth versus fiction and his animal characters correspondingly employ covert language to express this concern. Despite his invocation of and transparent allusions to Chaucer, however, Lydgate, as I demonstrated, is an original fabulist in a number of ways, one of which is his expansive legal commentary, particularly on the abuses of the law perpetrated by those in power. One of the qualities of Lydgate's fables which not only distinguish them from those of earlier fabulists but indeed from the bulk of his own corpus is their sympathy evidenced for the peasant classes.

Contrasting with Lydgate is the figure of William Caxton, whose *Aesop* was the subject of Chapter 6, where I examined Caxton's fables as translations, demonstrating that even manifest translations which espouse and attempt to adhere to "fidelity" to the source text can reflect an anxiety over contemporary political and social issues. Caxton reveals this concern, for example, in "The bochers and the whethers" (The Butcher and the Sheep), a fable mindful of Richard III's brutal usurpation of the throne in 1483. Caxton's

Life of Aesop also features some interesting parallels with Richard. In this chapter I also addressed Caxton's concern with the status of the vernacular writer, particularly the vernacular English translator, during the late-fifteenth century, an issue clearly evident in his prologues and epilogues. Like those of Marie, these framing sections serve as literary manifestos, effective illustrations of the challenges of writing in the vernacular. Despite writing three centuries after Marie and well after English had supplanted French and Latin as the language of letters in England, Caxton evinces an acute awareness of the still-lingering obstacles facing the English poet or translator. For English at this time was still an unstable language, its flux due in part to the diversity of dialects throughout England. And Caxton was particularly conscious of the status of the written text as he oversaw the innovative move from manuscript to print.

Like Marie, Chaucer, and Lydgate, Caxton raises questions of language, power, identity, and authority, and through their fables each writer effectively explores these serious issues. The beast fable in particular raises the question of the function of animals in these tales. Why beasts? The pat response might be that the worlds of animals and humans overlap, that people can, and do, act beastly, and that we can anthropomorphize beasts. But that is the function of the bestiaries, isn't it?

The form of the beast fable, as suggested above, is an ideal one for its capacity to delight. Talking animals are funny. But as Henri Bergson says in his classic study *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, "You may laugh at an animal, but only because you have detected in it some human attitude or expression."[4] To read or hear of animals displaying the follies and foibles of people, all of these ignoble thoughts and

[4] Trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell. New York: Macmillan, 1911. 3.

deeds that are characteristic of humans, somehow makes these follies not only less severe and distasteful but also induces in us a sort of comic impulse: safely ensconced behind the barrier of the animal realm, we can more easily laugh at ourselves and what are surely serious things.

For the fabulist herself, beasts also provide potential cover, enabling her to critique institutions ranging from established poetic conventions to powerful monarchs, and I have attempted to demonstrate how each fabulist under consideration here voices this critique. The beast fable also creates a certain need for interpretation, and this is where language becomes central. One of the principal motifs of these medieval vernacular fables is the efficacy, or not, of language to effectively communicate the simplest of truths. A truth may be simple but certainly not the language requisite to reveal it, these fabulists seem to say.

This need for interpretation points to the fundamental difference between a bestiary and a beast fable: the fable narrative is a story. Whereas in a bestiary the wolf is simply a wolf, in fable the wolf is a character and undertakes action, and that agency is what provokes us to think and interpret. When a wolf doesn't act like a wolf, the reader is obligated to ask why. The concluding moral might ostensibly answer the question, but it cannot. The moral, so characteristic of and integral to the fable, appears to provide simplicity and closure, but it never does. Since the moral follows from a story, the moral can never contain the message, since the story is a fiction, and often, as in the case of *The Manciple's Tale*, for example, a complex fiction suffused with irony. Instead, the moral invites interpretation. This richness and complexity is what makes the form particularly

suitable for translators wishing to explore the limits of language and the power of their own voice.

What my dissertation has accomplished is to show the medieval vernacular fable in this light, underscoring its substantial capacity for irony and parody and thus an ideal form for medieval translation. Fables edify and delight. I hope that this dissertation may contribute to a new and sustained scholarly interest in the medieval French and English fables, texts which, as I have indicated, have suffered from a general scholarly neglect,[5] especially the fables of Lydgate and Caxton. A renewed critical engagement with fables will help to affirm what not only Marie, Chaucer, Lydgate, and Caxton believed, but what others such as Socrates, Martin Luther, and John Locke knew: fables, in the hands of talented writers, can be delightful tales that appeal to children yet also serious texts that appeal to our intellectual sense.

I have moreover in this dissertation attempted to examine medieval translation from a fresh perspective, attempting to apply to Marie's, Chaucer's, Lydgate's, and Caxton's texts certain theoretical observations about literary translation, theories that hold translations as original rather than derivative texts. Along this trajectory I engaged the relatively new discipline of Translation Studies, one of whose fundamental tenets is the primary status of the translated text—the target text as opposed to the source text—and the target language. I showed that even texts with such a palimpsest character as beast fables can be strikingly original when rewritten. Chaucer's *Manciple's Tale* serves as an illustration of this point, and indeed I think one of my strongest and most original

[5] It may bear repeating here that *The Manciple's Tale*, while certainly not ignored by critics, has been relatively unscrutinized as a beast fable *per se*, and much less so as a translation.

contributions to scholarship in this dissertation is my study of the *Manciple's Tale* as a translation, ultimately from Ovid but more directly from two medieval French texts. This chapter shows Chaucer, *le grant translateur* at his peak, exhibiting a mastery of language in order to question notions of authorship.

The dissertation raises further questions concerning the function of the morals in these fables. Why do the closing morals lack closure? Why are they so inadequate and indeed often divergent from their narratives? What may appear at first glance to be a bromide, an incongruous and thus disappointing moral, in fact renders the entire fable more nuanced because what the moral gives us is the spirited potential for irony. Perhaps it is this quality which most pointedly sets the fable apart from a typical children's tale. These concluding morals and their relationship with the narrative tales would be fruitful ground for further research.

Moreover, this dissertation calls for further investigation of the role of laughter and humor in medieval vernacular fables. These stories make clear their desire to entertain as well as instruct, and, although I addressed the entertainment value of some of Marie's fables, my intention in this dissertation was to highlight the serious nature of these fables and how they help convey certain anxieties and concerns of medieval vernacular writers and translators. More research needs to focus on the significance of humor in medieval French and English fables, both beast fables and those which feature humans.

More broadly, this dissertation calls for further studies of medieval literature in Translation Studies. Medievalists, and/or Translation Studies scholars, need to produce more studies that address medieval texts from the perspective of Translation Studies. Most of the scholarship in this emergent field examines literature from the early modern

period to the present, which is somewhat surprising given how characteristic translation is in the Middle Ages. Medieval literature is fundamentally translated literature. Yet the general absence of scholarship applying Translation Studies to medieval literature[6] leaves the impression that only modern literature is an appropriate subject for those interested in applying new, innovative, translation theories to texts. In the final analysis, my dissertation has been an attempt to show how both translation and fables in the Middle Ages were rich, complex art forms, charged with import and ripe for study.

[6] A notable exception would be the work of Rita Copeland.

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