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Medieval Translation and Postcolonial Theory

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The translated text has long occupied a relatively low status within academic culture, due to its seemingly derivative and secondary nature. Lacking the ‘originality’ still valued by many teachers and students of literature, translations generally only gain firm purchase in literary history when they somehow manage to surpass their source and to function as ‘autonomous’ expressions. And yet translation is ubiquitous in medieval writing practices, literary and non-literary alike. It underwrote not only cultural and ideological transfers from distant times and places, but also the practical transaction of daily life in much of the so-called Middle English period. Given these tensions between the mundane and the aesthetic, the desirable and the dismissed, I would like to consider here what ‘Middle English literature’ might look like if we adopt new approaches to and definitions of translation. Indeed, what might happen to the literary tradition if translated texts constituted an aesthetic grouping independent from authorial and generic categories? And if this grouping were granted the same critical value as the most prestigious authors and genres? Perhaps more importantly, how might our understanding of seemingly monolingual compositions change if we locate them in a cultural environment saturated with translating activities?

Translation theory, cultural studies, analyses of *translatio studii et imperii*, and source studies all contribute necessary and vital elements to the repositioning of translated literature that I would like to explore. Nevertheless, in keeping with the spirit of this volume, my purpose here is neither to survey this body of work nor to transcend it. Rather, I would like to propose a de-centered aesthetic order, one that would set aside the very notion that ‘originals’ are worth more than their translations, ‘originality’ more than repetition, ‘uniqueness’ more than similarity. This involves placing texts in relation to each other via strategic alliances that depend less on genre and language than on culture. It also means adopting the ‘cultural turn’ taken by translation studies in the 1990s, and treating translations less as linguistic events and more as manifestations

of culture. In this perspective, relations between sources and translations become more flexible and varied (not limited to hierarchies of relative value, aesthetic or otherwise). At the same time, translations themselves invite investigations into their relations to texts that are not in fact their sources (and written in any language).

From this cultural perspective, translated texts represent the monolingual product of specifically multilingual alliances. These relations emerge from various occasions and motivations, including class consciousness, political persuasion, theological dispute, cultural rivalry, and personal admiration. In each case, translation offers an opportunity to redefine audiences, social relations, historical inheritance, and ethnic identities. Finding value in the translated text does not therefore mean liberating it from its sources, but making their relations as concrete and complete as possible. This critical endeavor necessarily involves a broad range of issues, each potentially implicated in an even broader range of theoretical questions: domination and resistance, geographical and regional sites, ethnic and national identity, class and intercultural relations, gender and status constructions, linguistic and aesthetic values. Translation can become, then, one of the most theoretically rich topics of research, taking us far beyond the traditional notions 'accuracy' and 'slavishness.'

While the translated text can be seen as the monolingual product of a multilingual process, the un-translated text also operates in a multilingual environment. In other words, 'Middle English' functions as a language in contact, a language best understood as a 'translated' expression and whose literature does not make full sense unless studied within the dynamics that generally pertain to translated texts. Translation and (apparent) monolingualism meet most dramatically in the modern pedagogy of Middle English in English-language classrooms. This is in fact an encounter fraught with unspoken translations. I would like suggest, ultimately, that the silent presence of pedagogical translation demands attention as a research problem of equal importance to more properly 'medieval' topics.

Translation and the Amateur

The professionalization of writing via chancery and clerkship has been an important part of defining the content and value of the canon of Middle English literature. As a result, criticism has tended to treat translation as primarily a professional activity, the purview of individuals

highly trained in the forms and structures of (Latin) language. The epitome of the professionalization process is of course Chaucer, the textbook case of an ‘author-translator’ whose status as an ‘author’ seems to overcome the aesthetic pitfalls generally attributed to translation. The relative autonomy of Chaucer’s translations offers a lesson for approaching figures who have do not have the same iconic status in the Middle English tradition. First, translation is not, by definition, a secondary form of writing. Further, the value accorded to a translated text does not depend, by definition, on its relations with sources. Finally, implicit theories about translation (derived from analyses of technique, etc.) can be as richly ‘theoretical’ as explicit theorization. Chaucer, for example, not only talks about translation but practices it in such a way that *translatio* turns rhetorically into a new kind of *auctoritas*.¹

Paradoxically, vernacular *auctoritas* can diminish the primacy of professional training in the definition of literary value: the vernacular itself gradually becomes a self-sufficient authority. Professional translation thus leads us toward amateurs, especially when we also approach translation as cultural phenomenon. Cultural translation studies bring critical attention to incidental fragments of daily life, idiosyncratic personal commentary, and ‘derivative’ or stylistically unremarkable literary texts. Their status as ‘mere translations’ has perhaps discouraged investigation into their cultural significance. What Middle English texts might become newly compelling for scholars and students when approached with felicitous combinations of basic textual histories and open-minded theoretical and/or cultural questions?

As a case in point, consider Henry Lovelich, one of the least-loved writers of Middle English literature—the polar-opposite, if you will, of all that Chaucer represents as an author-translator. Lovelich, a skinner of London, translated the *History of the Grail* and *Merlin* from thirteenth-century French prose into English verse in the 1420s.² Because of his amateur relation to literature, Lovelich’s project challenges some generally held assumptions about linguistic competence and the social roles of books in fifteenth-century London. Dismissal of Lovelich’s poems has typically rested on identifying him as a ‘hack translator.’³ Yet, critics have taxed Lovelich with incompetence without actually knowing what he was translating. The French prose sources exist in a number of different versions and, unless one knows Lovelich’s exact sources, one does not in fact know what he translated, how he translated, and what he ‘created.’ With a direct source, we can evince implicit theories of translation, even in the absence of an overt articulation of translation methods. Moreover, if we pose cultural as well as linguistic

questions, these theories have broad implications that do not depend on professional training in rhetoric and poetics. In Lovelich's case, comparative textual analysis reveals linguistic transfer as a profoundly social act.

As autonomous artifacts, the French and English texts already embed implicit translation theories within their general theories of narrative. Narrative itself in the French *Grail* and *Merlin* is conceived of as a process of translation. Every narrator acts a kind of translator, even as the romances thematize rewriting and translation in an infinite regression of ever receding sources. One figure, however, counteracts this narrative tendency--Merlin's personal scribe, Blaise. He displays the same desire for true knowledge that Lovelich will adopt as his defining mode: Blaise remarks, as he transcribes Merlin's stories, that he did so 'car aussi avoie ge grant desirrier de savoir en la verité' (because I had a great desire to know the truth about them).⁴ Lovelich will take this spirit further by revising the French romances' circular structure of translation (where the source can never be found in the endless chain of narrative substitutions) into a linear model that recognizes no source other than the narrator.

In this newly linear narrative, Lovelich uses a variety of terms for textual creation, which collectively reveal a sustained social theory. Most concretely, Lovelich refers to his work as a 'book' that has been made (*Grail*, XXXIII:542); he later prays that it come to a good end (*Grail*, LVI:537). A great deal could be said about the idea of the book in the late Middle Ages; suffice it here to recall some of its social attributes: books organize knowledge, preserve it in memory, and negotiate exchange values (monetary and symbolic).⁵ Lovelich emphasizes especially the 'making of memory' (*Grail*, XXVII:478-79), purveying a spirit of conservation in which readers acquire social status by possessing historical knowledge. The historical implication is made explicit when Lovelich uses the word 'cronycle' (*Merlin*, l. 23,433). All of these terms point to the text as an embodied object that travels through time, 'translating' the past for the present. This metaphorical translation implies an active communication beyond the object, and inserts the book into a social environment.

A second set of narrative terms articulates the text's engagement with the immediate environment, the community of the city of London. Lovelich periodically characterizes the narrative as a 'schewing' (e.g. *Merlin*, l. 1831), aligning it with the various processions that wended their way through the London streets throughout the year. Public 'schewing' is designed to present truth, to display the real (be it religious, political, etc.) for the benefit of the social

community.⁶ Processions often included particular props or dramatic scenes, called ‘pageants’-- yet another of Lovelich’s preferred terms for narrative scenes.⁷ In these references, the narrative itself becomes a landscape of social transactions. Lovelich inherits a spatial notion of narrative from the French romances, which frequently mark transitions with the phrase ‘ci endroit le conte dit...’ (here in this place the story says...). The French ‘ci’ focuses perspective inward, on the story itself. Lovelich, however, translates the French formula in a wide variety of ways, all of which turn the perspective outward to the audience, with frequent direct address that casts the audience as physical participants in narrative: ‘Now forth this Storye gynneth to procede, / and to Othere Materis it wyle vs lede (*Grail* LIII, l. 1-2); ‘But let vs now resten here a whyle’ (*Merlin*, l. 17261). In these and many other ways, Lovelich maps the narrative onto a civic landscape, where one moves from place to place, ‘pageant to pageant’ in a ‘processe’ towards true understanding. Indeed, ‘processe’ is perhaps the most used term. This is a linear, visual term linked both to procession and procedure in general.⁸ Lovelich thereby implies that by following the necessary steps one can arrive at a true narrative and a coherent social community.

Lovelich’s English terminology for textual creation says a great deal about his ideas of translation. We can learn even more through a detailed comparison with an appropriate source, for in this particular case the drama of translation unfolds largely on the micro-linguistic level. In the precise definition of translation techniques (abridgment, amplification, adaptation, etc.), the amateur emerges as author. For reasons that I will develop elsewhere, I have identified Lovelich’s source as a book of the same content and form as Bodleian Douce MS 178. In this context, Lovelich’s techniques for rendering French recognize clearly the urban social space: his text is socially inclusive where the French is hierarchical (‘menus peuples’ becomes ‘every manne’), urban where the French is rural (‘la terre la commencent a degaster & a essillier’ [f. 235] becomes ‘and maden there mochel destruction both of city, borough, and town’ [*Merlin*, ll. 17,318-26]). These are just a few examples among many. They reveal a sustained effort to bend the aristocratic source to the civic milieu. If translation often involves a tension between the creation of access and the achievement of status, Lovelich’s translation engages both sides: he provides access to elite, historical culture for his fellow guildsmen while simultaneously documenting that they have collectively acquired enough status to borrow from the aristocracy.

Lovelich’s nuanced perception of urban politics and social status inspires his striking representation of the process by which Arthur takes the throne in *Merlin*. This more extended

passage highlights the social theory that shapes both translation and narration in Lovelich's poems. Just after the discovery of the sword in the stone, Lovelich portrays a two-tiered social order according to which the 'more and lasse' enter the church (l. 7042) and the archbishop cautions no one to envy God's choice, 'whethir to pore or to riche it happe, trewlye, / that non man ayens this elxioun ne be' (ll. 7054-55). Lovelich here defines social difference in terms of quantity (associated with mercantile values) not quality (associated with aristocratic values). When disagreement breaks out over who should have the right to try removing the sword, Lovelich offers a somewhat different portrayal of social categories: 'thanne began there ful gret discord / betwixen comunes, gentyles, and lord' (ll. 7071-72). While 'lord' seems clearly to refer to an aristocracy, 'gentyles' might refer to merchants as well as to noblemen. 'Comunes' also might include merchants, as well as poorer citizens and laborers. These overlapping distinctions represent the complex social and political life of fifteenth-century London, where wealth often meant more than status, but even the commons could successfully petition the king. Later in *Merlin*, for example, Lovelich refers to the 'riche men' (l. 7504) when he clearly means to designate the barons. This conflation of nobles and merchants (those who have 'more') brings together two groups who otherwise remain separated by qualitative social differences. The conflation does not so much imply social mobility as the contingency social categories and allegiances.

As the archbishop seeks to calm the boisterous crowd around the sword, he reminds everyone that no one is so worthy as to know God's will, and 'neither gentility or riches' (l. 7084) will determine the outcome. Describing the great responsibility of justice to be assumed with the sword, he enjoins the 'hygh, prowde, other Riche' to be humble and the 'pore men' to be patient:

For vnknoweng hit is to yow alle
yit on whom the lot schal falle,
whethir on Lord, knyht, or sqwyer,

On powr, comown, other on bacheler... (*Merlin*, ll. 7125-38)

While allowing the radical possibility of a king from any sector of society, the archbishop affirms clear social differentiation. In the interest of law and order, he argues for the acceptance of election in general, whatever one's personal feelings or social status relative to the elected. This kind of 'law and order' conservatism aligns him with merchant values: responsible for

peace in the city as a condition of their freedom to govern, city leaders supported social stratification. The specific social actors identified by the archbishop reflect the multifarious forces at work in civic politics. Lord, knight, and squire all pertain to the nobility, although not strictly; poor, common, and bachelor refer to those without landed status. Common, however, could include the wealthy 'gentle' who is not noble, while bachelor might refer to a poor young noble. The list may be arbitrary or partial, but it aims to designate comprehensively all those concerned with the election. In contrast to the earlier economic division of the public into 'rich and poor,' this list of six categories suggests the profound difficulty of defining clear social boundaries in the urban community.

According to the archbishop's plan, 250 of the 'worthiest' lords try the sword first (l. 7144), but all fail; then the 'comuners' and 'powre men' have their turn (l. 7150). Lovelich returns to three groups here, distinguishing commons and poor from lords. But that the common and poor try at all is a remarkable innovation from the French romance. Of course, just as in the French romance, the barons subsequently resist and finally revolt, complaining that they should not be ruled by a knave of low birth. Lovelich's narrative thus ultimately supports a conservative aristocratic ordering, but with a definite and powerful place for all citizens. In fact, during the barons' rebellion that follows Arthur's election, Lovelich privileges the role of the citizens: 'and the Barowns the contrarye helden anon / ayens Arthewr and the comuners echon.' (ll. 7427-28). Highlighting the loyalty of London citizens, Lovelich makes them the main supporters of legitimate royal succession. Indeed, the guard of the sword while the barons delay their acceptance is specifically divided among five clerks and five 'lower men of good lyve' (l. 7530). Throughout the ensuing battles, the citizens of London act as Arthur's most loyal and effective supporters.

Lovelich's emphasis on London citizenry derives in part from his use of the word 'Logres' to designate both London and the realm as a whole. This doubling also occurs in the French romance, but, when transferred to London English, the effect differs dramatically. Standing for both city and country, 'Logres' contains a specifically urbanized nationalism. To explain this name, Lovelich turns to the island's etymological history. The island was once called 'Bretaigne Londe' after Brutus and its capital 'New Troy.' 'Long after' an ambitious king named 'Logrius' renewed the city and re-named it 'Logres' after himself: this king 'Logrius' is a conflation of Lud and Brutus's son Locrinus (traditionally, the eponymous ruler of one section of

the island, not the city or the whole realm). So, each time Lovelich speaks of the 'rewm of logres' (eg. *Merlin*, l. 17,922), London accedes implicitly to dominion of the whole island. 'Logres' urbanizes the romance landscape, turning royal Arthurian history into a civic chronicle. Lovelich thus infuses the narrative with an urban ethos as he merchandizes the French romance, bending it to the urban social order as he draws it into English. Social and linguistic theory together determine the results of this translation process.

These results, however, are not only linguistic (the English language poem) but also visual and physical--the manuscript pages on which the poem survives. In fact, the book of Lovelich's poems, Cambridge Corpus Christi MS 80, is designed for illustrations that were never completed. The spaces for images, the chapter initials, and the double column layout mirror exactly the structure of Bodleian Douce MS 178, suggesting that Lovelich was involved in a project whose aspirations were far more than textual. Here, translation involves a physical transfer irrespective of the languages involved. Lovelich's project, in other words, performs multiple kinds of *translatio*--and the multiple dimensions of the poems' signification depend on both the language and form of the source. These processes reveal an intensely transformative dialogue between an inherited vision of noble chivalry and an emerging concept of urban citizenship, a concept documented both linguistically and materially on an illustrated paper manuscript designed for craftsmen.

Translation and the Monolingual Text

Medievalists know well that *translatio* is a multivalent concept meaning 'translation' and a number of other things (transfer, travel, etc.). Yet the latter should probably take precedence over the former more often: *translatio* per se does not require interlingual translation. Indeed, in a certain vein it excludes translation. In the logic of *translatio studii*, the transfer of learning from Greece to Rome involved both a geographical movement and a linguistic translation. Yet the transfer from Rome to northern Europe was essentially monolingual: Latin learning moved geographically, but remained expressed in Latin. Monolingualism, as Rita Copeland has shown, was in fact central to the medieval ideology of continuity with ancient authorities. Only belatedly did multilingualism become part of the enterprise and interlingual linguistic translation a relatively common dimension of knowledge transfer (e.g. Copeland 97-107, 127-50).

Taking a cue from the idea of monolingual *translatio*, I would like to look at the potential role of translation in analyzing monolingual Middle English texts--that is, texts conceived and written originally in English, whose significance depends at least partly on their relationship to translation. This approach combines the multilingualism of late medieval *translatio* with the monolingual undercurrent that continued to shape historical perceptions. In the context of Middle English, monolingual *translatio* involves at least two broad areas, the one philological and the other theoretical. Philologically, the inherent multilingualism of seemingly monolingual situations suggests research opportunities in linguistic, rhetorical, and literary histories. Theoretically, connections between Middle English and actual other languages may not even be necessary for a form of translation to have occurred.

In relation to the history of language, Middle English could be fruitfully approached as a translated and actively translating language. This concerns not only the obvious multilingual history of the language (Germanic and Romance, along with regional variations of both), or etymology, but something like the socio-historical linguistics proposed recently by Tim Machan, which addresses phenomena such as language in contact, bilingual speakers, language and conquest, code-switching and self-translation.⁹ Traces of multilingual histories at the lexical level unsettle the cultural homogeneity of the language: how many translations are needed to render sense to a word like 'sentence,' which is formally identical to French 'sentence' and a translation of Latin 'sententia'? This and other English words modeled on Latin forms alter the hermeneutic significance of the monolingual text by creating multiple layers of linguistic and cultural signification.¹⁰ In these ways, 'monolingual' texts become networks of multilingual transactions.

The diversity of 'Middle English' itself makes even monolingual communication a translation process. Transfers between dialects and social registers invite translation into the heart of monolingual culture.¹¹ The oft-cited lines from the conclusion of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* articulate just one explicit example of the potential challenge of monolingual translation:

And for ther is so gret divertsite
In Englissh and in writing of oure tonge,
So prey I God that non miswrite the,
Ne the mysymetre for defaute of tonge;

And red wherso thow be, or elles songe,
That thow be understonde, God I beseche! (ll. 1793-98)

The technicalities of dialect, sociolinguistic register, and regional pronunciation (to name just a few of the linguistic variables) impinge directly on literary expression and reception (medieval and modern). Whether viewed diachronically or synchronically, the cultural dimension of multilingual English opens a number of new paths for investigations of Middle English texts.

Translation also enters monolingual English whenever texts, translated or not, rhetorically assert their linguistic identity as ‘English.’ By drawing attention to the language of expression as English, these kinds of assertions subtly remind us that a different choice could have been made—that translation in one form or another could be taking place. Monolingual identity, in other words, depends deeply on the option to translate. Here, I am thinking of exclamations such as Chaucer’s in the prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, ‘Allas, that I ne had Englyssh, ryme or prose, / Suffisant this flour to preyse aryght!’ (F, ll. 66-67). As Copeland has pointed out, the passage references Chaucer’s relation to French Marguerite poetry (191). This relation, however, is not one of literal translation; instead, Chaucer proclaims the theoretical difficulty of translation, or even of adequate monolingual creation.¹² In this sense, the difficulty of translation corresponds precisely to the difficulty of expression per se (a leitmotif of this and other Chaucerian works). The thematization of monolingual creation as a translation problem contributes directly to the conflation of source and target, of monolingualism and multilingualism, of literal and metaphorical translation. For the *Legend of Good Women* includes both literal linguistic translation and ‘original’ poetry--along with a fairly sufficient praise of the flower in question.

Finally, monolingual texts that engage translations intertextually thematize the cultural significance of translation itself. These engagements, of course, may not always be immediately apparent. By simply adopting the habit of wondering about translation and linguistic identity as often as possible, whenever words or books arise as narrative objects, we may further enrich the significance of well known texts and render those less well known newly compelling. My first example, appropriately enough, comes not from a Middle English text but from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Latin *Historia regum Britanniae*. In the conclusion, as Geoffrey considers the etymology of the Welsh, *Guallenses*, he proffers the possibility that it might derive from *barbarie*. In Latin, the connection is obscure, but in English it makes perfect sense: as T. F.

Crawford demonstrated, the translation of ‘barbarian’ as ‘Welsh’ depends on the silent mediation of English translation, from *wylisc* meaning ‘foreign.’¹³ The shadow presence of translation here renders sense into Latin etymology, and affords an example of latent translation, of the presence of English even where it is not immediately visible. This example also shows that research in Middle English cannot be confined to English-language texts. Any number of texts written in contact with English could turn out to engage in multilingual conversation.

English-language texts themselves, even when not translated, often encode references to translations and non-English texts. These references imply a reader-translator, whose informed apprehension of the English text includes previous or concurrent experiences of textual translation. Seemingly English-only expressions, in other words, may be anything but. Returning again to the authorial translator, Chaucer, we find in the ‘Nun’s Priest’s Tale,’ for example, a story partly translated from one or more French fables. The tale includes, further, a wide array of references to non-English books--from the Biblical to the classical to the medieval, primarily in Latin and French.¹⁴ These allusions set the context for the tale’s direct naming of the ‘book of Launcelot’ at the end of Chauntecleer’s joyful speech to Pertelote:

But sodeynly hym fil a sorweful cas,
For evere the latter ende of joye is wo.
God woot that wordly joye is soone ago;
And if a rethor [rhetorician] koude faire endite,
He in a cronycle saufly might it write
As for a sovereyn notabilitee.
Now every wys man, lat him herkne me;
This storie is also trewe, I undertake,
As is the book of Launcelot de Lake,
That women holde in ful greet reverence.

Now wol I torne again to my sentence. (ll. 3205-14)

The book of Lancelot is of course a French book, reputedly held in great esteem by women (the book itself or else its hero, or both). The passage thematizes truth--how it can be translated into chronicle by a ‘rethor,’ into a tale such as ‘this storie,’ or into a historic book such as Lancelot’s. Of course, the passage also implies the utter absence of truth--in a chronicle of joy, an animal fable, and a romance of a famously adulterous lover. The only ‘truth’ of the book of Lancelot is

its prose form. The women readers, moreover, are readers of French, and therefore potential translators (literal and metaphorical) who are enmeshed in ‘double dealing.’ At the end of the passage, the narrator disavows these dubious complexities with a return to the ‘sentence’—a return to the story that signals a return to ‘meaning.’ But this claim provides no hermeneutic certainty since it follows closely upon a mistranslated ‘sentence’ of Latin, quoted a few lines earlier as part of Chauntecleer’s meditation on joy:

‘Now let us speke of myrthe, and stynte al this.
Madame Pertelote, so have I blis,
Of o thing God hath sent me large grace;
For whan I se the beautee of youre face,
Ye been so scarlet reed aboute youre yen,
It maketh al my drede for to dyen;
For al so siker as *In principio*,
Mulier est hominis confusio—
Madame, the sentence of this Latyn is,
‘Womman is mannes joye and al his blis.’’ (ll. 3157-66)

This performance of mistranslation suggests the extent to which the tale is largely about translation, a process shown here to engage a number of other central issues in the tale--from gender relations to classical authority to persuasive speech.

A more direct appeal to the reader-translator can be drawn from Hoccleve’s address to Oldcastle, where latent translation operates on several different levels at once. Here, in the aftermath of the failed uprising of 1414, Hoccleve admonishes Oldcastle to reform his heterodox ways. Among his recommendations he includes a reading list, a list whose surface impression of monolingualism disintegrates almost immediately upon closer investigation:

Bewar Oldcastel & for Crystes sake
Clymbe no more in holy writ so hie!
Rede the storie of Lancelot de lake,
Or Vegece the aart of Chivalrie
The seege of Troie or Thebes. thee applie
To ething that to thordre of knight longe
To thy correccioun now haaste and hie,

For thow haast been out of ioynt al to longe.
If thee list thing rede of auctoritee,
To these stories sit it thee [it is fitting for you] to goon:
To Iudicum Regum, and Iosue,
To Iudith & to Paralipomenon,
And Machabe & as siker as stoon [as sure as stone],
If that thee list in hem bayte [feast] thyn ye,
More autentike thing shalt thow fynde noon,
Ne more pertinent to Chiualrie. (ll. 193-208)

This list of readings seems quite disparate, if one thinks of the texts themselves as genres, but finds its unity in the knightly reader seeking models of knighthood.¹⁵ From this perspective, Hoccleve offers a fairly straightforward catalogue of righteous chivalry: if heterodox religion has made Oldcastle a bad knight, attention to proper knightly conduct can make him a proper Christian once again. The content of these books, however, suggests something more complicated. Indeed, for all of Hoccleve's apparent faith in the reformative power of reading, one wonders if he could have read these books very deeply. Lancelot, for example, pales sinfully in comparison to his pure son Galahad in the very first pages of the romance that bears his name. And his story is more commonly associated with 'women's reading,' not the manly conduct of battle (as Chaucer's allusion suggests). Thebes and Troy fare no better upon any close scrutiny: they are filled with valorous, flawed knights who fail all reasonable tests of 'correction' other than strong battlefield performance. Vegetius might seem a safer source, but successful reading of this practical guide to war would seem only to aid Oldcastle further in evading the champions of orthodoxy. The biblical books offer more clear models of proper and improper conduct, although their status as 'holy writ' suggests a latent danger, for they are found in association with the biblical readings that led Oldcastle astray in the first place.

But what if Hoccleve means to recommend a particular *form* of reading, rather than just a particular content? While embracing the powerful effects of books (a view of reading that made people fear Lollardy), Hoccleve subtly turns the question away from reading per se to the issue of choosing one's books wisely. And the choice here may be for particular translations-- specifically, translations into French. For while some of the sources suggested were available in English in 1414-15, *all* of them were available in French. The opening reference to Lancelot

orients us immediately toward French, the extensive thirteenth-century prose romance cycle that did not reach English until the later fifteenth century with Malory's translations. *Lancelot*, then, invites us to think next of a French *Art de Chevalerie* translated from Vegetius's Latin treatise. These translations, including one by Jean de Mean, were numerous in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. By contrast, a single English translation had been made in 1408 for Thomas of Berkeley.¹⁶ In this line of thought, the 'seege of Troie' evokes the twelfth-century verse *Roman de Troie* or even a French prose version of the kind that Lydgate would later use for his own English translation. Of course, two English versions already existed in 1414-15, along with Chaucer's *Troilus* (not primarily a 'seege' story) and the Latin account by Guido delle Colonne.¹⁷ A French *Troie* leads most directly to a French *Thèbes*, in either verse (twelfth century) or prose (thirteenth century). Despite Chaucer's various references, Thebes did not come fully into English until Lydgate's translation from French prose completed in 1422; the Latin account by Statius would of course also have been available.¹⁸

In the context of heretical 'correccioun,' English is certainly not the first option that comes to mind for reading the Bible, even if Hoccleve emphasizes that the goal is to apprehend historical chivalry, not to contemplate theological subtleties or spiritual truths.¹⁹ And while Latin, as in several of the other references, could also be an option, the Old French Bible may be the most appropriate form for orthodox biblical reading by a knight. The Old French Bible (c. 1260), also used as a basis for the *Bible historiale* (c. 1300), would be an especially appropriate source: widely available by Hoccleve's time, the Old French Bible offers a quite orthodox rendering of the Latin Vulgate, including glosses that focus on literal interpretations for a lay audience.²⁰ So, when Hoccleve opens the reading list passage with the exhortation 'Clymbe no more in holy writ so hie' (l. 194), he does not in fact enjoin Oldcastle against biblical reading per se but rather against a certain kind of reading—an overly interpretive reading that seeks 'higher' meanings, spiritual interpretations that should be left to experts. Instead, Oldcastle should mine the Old Testament for literal, historical examples of noble service and chivalric feats of arms. Hoccleve may even be suggesting that certain translations serve this purpose better than others: in French, biblical chivalry looks all the more like that depicted in French historical romances like *Troie*, *Thebes*, and *Lancelot*. Or, as Ruth Nissé has put it, 'In [Hoccleve's] knightly idea of translation, so different from the Lollards', the military virtues of *Maccabees* lend biblical "auctoritee" to those in *Lancelot* and other works of chivalry' (296). The common authority that

links these sources of disparate tone, genre, and period is ultimately French prose translation. Prose, associated with truth-telling, resists in its very form the dangers of interpretation (poetic or spiritual) that Hoccleve has identified as the source of Oldcastle's heterodoxy.

In all events, none of the stories Hoccleve mentions was originally written in English, and so, if he envisioned English as a language for Oldcastle's reading, he also envisioned translations. If Hoccleve thus uses French chivalry to oppose Lollards and to redefine English literature as an antidote to heresy,²¹ that literature is in fact only rarely expressed in the English language, and then only in recent translation. Whether the reading list was intended or received as multilingual (French, English, and/or Latin) or monolingual (French), the necessary absence of English is a matter of theological import in the context of arguments against heresy. The heresy that Hoccleve enjoins Oldcastle to abandon is of course strongly associated with unauthorized English translation of sacred texts. Linguistic transfers underwrote knowledge transfers that disrupted established institutional and social hierarchies. In this context, the necessary presence of translation in Hoccleve's reading list problematizes the very idea of 'right' reading that he proposes.

Nor can Hoccleve's poem itself be apprehended without translation. The autograph manuscript, Huntington MS 111, opens and closes each work with French tags; in the Oldcastle poem, side notes reference Latin sources for several key points. There are seven of these notes, of varying lengths, in the first half of the poem; there are no notes in the second half, which begins with the narrator's direct address to the heretics who have induced Oldcastle's fall. This is in fact the only densely commented section of the entire manuscript (a handful of notes appear later, in Latin and French [ff. 25v, 26r, 28r, 41r]). The marginal notes to the Oldcastle poem actually reveal the accompanying English passages to be translations.²² In the poem's larger poetic design, the aesthetic value of these passages equals that of the 'original' poetry, for no formal or semantic differences distinguish the two Englishes. This seamlessness destabilizes a supposed hierarchy of original creation over translations. At the same time, the presence of the 'original' Latin sources enhances the value of the translated passages, demonstrating visually and linguistically that English operates as a functional equivalent to Latin. The passage outlining Oldcastle's reading list comes between the last two Latin notes. At this point, readers of this manuscript have learned to see the poem itself as a partial translation—but also to engage

sources directly. The reading list, in other words, now looks certain to include both translations and ‘originals,’ perhaps without significant distinction.

These several brief examples suggest some of the pressures that translation exerts on seemingly monolingual expressions. In each case, other languages intervene unexpectedly to broaden the linguistic and cultural references of texts that appear committed to narrower terms of signification. At this point, it seems that monolingualism does not exist, for even monolingual texts engage multilingual histories. Conversely, translation operates even in the absence of multiple languages. For any text, even one that is not, philologically speaking, a translation, implies antecedents and precedents. This approach reverses the traditional relation between source text and target, suggesting that every text creates its own original. The translated text, in other words, is as much an original as the source.²³ Ultimately, to say that every text is an original, or that every text is a translation, amounts to the same thing. As such, all kinds of methods adapted from translation studies proper may be pertinent to Middle English and offer prospects for new approaches to well traveled ground.

Translation and Teaching

A theoretically engaged approach to monolingual translation poses some fresh research questions for the pedagogy of Middle English. Courses in Middle English literature include both medieval texts that derive from other medieval (or earlier) texts and medieval texts that have been themselves translated into modern languages. If we accept the former as critically compelling, why not the latter? How can we then legitimate both moments of translation as locations for analytic research? What kinds of questions can they support, such that students work on genuine literary and cultural problems even if they do not read ‘original’ texts? What distinguishes a reading of Chaucer in Modern English from one in Turkish or Korean?

Beginning again with philological issues, direct comparative study of translations provides an obvious starting point for querying the diversity of ‘English.’ Indeed, Peter Biedler proposed some time ago that medievalists (especially Chaucerians) try to ‘teach the problem’ rather than ignoring modern versions of medieval texts.²⁴ Invigorated by the theoretical resources of translation studies, this diachronic approach to the literary ‘variant’ legitimizes each version as an authentic source of literary analysis, while provoking critics (students and

professionals) to define clearly and carefully the historical and cultural locations of their conclusions. Classroom translations thus become yet one more location for studying the long history of reception and rewriting that characterizes medieval literature itself. Sustained, theorized approaches to modern versions bring into the open the silent, hidden translations (literal and metaphorical) already taking place both in and outside of the classroom.

A pedagogy of translation also focuses attention on the role of mediation in the reading experience. In translation theory, mediation pertains to the collection of processes, centered on the figure of the translator, that together enable some level of communication between source culture or language and the ‘target’ culture or language. In a simple version, mediation theory makes of the teacher a translator—a provider of equivalences (literal translation) and explanatory context (metaphorical translation). In a more theoretically complex way, mediation involves interpretation of historical and contemporary contexts; it touches both the teacher and the material text itself as a site of and product of multiple translating operations. Ultimately, essay-writing students also take on the identity of mediators in their translations of the past. By marking, and then theorizing, these various modes of mediation, a pedagogy of translation can transform theory into analytic critical practice and ultimately produce new forms of criticism (amateur and professional).

Finally, in broader theoretical terms, I would like to de-legitimize the very idea of the ‘un-translated’ text. No one of the twenty-first century has a ‘native’ knowledge of any medieval language, and so even the ‘original’ text is apprehended through various literal and metaphoric translations (cultural, editorial, linguistic, etc.). Our status as migrant readers in the field of the past conditions everything we think, write, and teach about literature. The encounter with the medieval text is a multilingual encounter, even when one appears to be reading ‘English’ texts in ‘English’ in an ‘English’ classroom. In other words, one of the primary conditions of reading Middle English is translating it (linguistically, culturally, historically, etc.). In a very real sense, the way we translate the past (for students, for ourselves) creates knowledge of the past. As such, it may be one of the most powerful and least examined procedures of Middle English pedagogy--and by extension, of Middle English research.

A pedagogy of translation, then, would dismantle the putative monolingualism of English literature. The effects of this procedure represent much more than a ‘mere’ teaching issue or question of pedagogical strategy. In a very real sense, they represent a research opportunity for

the twenty-first century. What methods and theories of translation are at work in the English classroom? How do these shape the kinds of interpretations considered convincing, or even considered possible? What would it mean to consider the reader a multilingual subject? If talking about Middle English literature is always a form of talking about translation, then how can we bring the dynamics of translation theory and practice to bear upon the task of vivifying Middle English literature for new generations of students and future scholars? These generations might be native speakers of one of the Englishes wrought by anglophone globalization. Or they might come to English as non-native speakers. Perhaps, on the multilingual side of globalization, they will have more than one 'native' language. Whatever the case may be, the place of translation in modern daily life, in academic life, and in the historic life of Middle English writers can all provide fruitful points of comparison.

Further Reading

Research on translation coming out of medieval studies offers opportunities to broaden dialogues across language areas and regions. Some particularly inspiring recent works include: Christopher Cannon, *The Making of Chaucer's English: A Study of Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998); Maria Tymoczko, *Translation in a Postcolonial Context: Early Irish Literature in English Translation* (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1999); Anne Appel, 'Extremes of "Remembering:" Translation as "Figura,"' *Forum Italicum* 36 (2002): 447-56; Claude Buridant, 'La "traduction intralinguale" en moyen français,' *Moyen Français* 51-53 (2002-03): 113-57; *The Vulgar Tongue: Medieval and Postmedieval Vernacularity*, eds. Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2003); Anne E. B Coldiron, *Canon, Period, and the Poetry of Charles of Orleans* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2000). Coldiron also shows some of the possibilities for redefining literary corpora through translation in 'Translation's Challenge to Critical Categories: Verses from French in the Early English Renaissance,' *Yale Journal of Criticism* 16 (2003): 315-44 (this issue contains a number of other thought-provoking essays).

One of the greatest opportunities for new insights comes from the exploration of translation through theories and methods that appear to have little to do with the medieval context. This kind of 'achronic' (not to say anachronistic) thinking might propel research in unexpected directions. Some recent publications that have attracted my attention include: Sherry Simon, *Changing the Terms: Translating in the Postcolonial Era* (Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 2000); Antonio Sousa Ribeiro, 'Translation as a Metaphor for our Times: Postcolonialism, Borders and Identities,' *Portuguese Studies* 20 (2004): 186-94; Sergio Waisman, *Borges and Translation: The Irreverence of the Periphery* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2005); *India's Shakespeare: Translation, Interpretation, and Performance* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2005); Susan Bassnett, 'Translating

Terror,' *Third World Quarterly* 26 (2005):393-403; Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006) (and everything else published in the *Translation/Transnation* series Apter edits at Princeton UP).

Further thought and research attention could certainly be given to pedagogical translation, perhaps drawing on some of the following: *Beowulf in Our Time: Teaching Beowulf in Translation*, ed. Mary Ramsey (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute, Western Michigan U, 2002); Tereas Bargetto-Andrés, 'Teaching Medieval Translation Culture of Fifteenth-Century Spain,' *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Teaching* 8 (2000): 5-20; William D. Paden, 'Why Translate?' *TENSO* 15 (2000): 85-96; Lene Petersen, 'Literary Translations between Philology and Aesthetics,' *Changing Philologies: Contributions to the Redefinition of Foreign Language Studies in the Age of Globalisation*, ed. Hans Hansen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2002), 137-40; Carol Maier, 'Gender, Pedagogy, and Literary Translation,' *Rethinking Translation Pedagogy*, eds. Brian Baer and Geoffrey Koby (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2003), 157-27; Kristen Prevallet, 'Risking It: Scandals, Teaching, Translation,' *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 25 (2004): 148-58.

Notes

¹ Cf. Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 193-202.

² *History of the Holy Grail*, ed. Frederick Furnivall (Early English Text Society, 1874-1905); *Merlin*, ed. Ernst Kock (Early English Text Society, 1904-32).

³ Dalrymple surveys the more salient deprecations in ‘Evele knowen 3e Merlyne, jn certeyn’: Henry Lovelich’s *Merlin*,’ *Medieval Insular Romance: Translation and Innovation*, ed. Judith Weiss, Jennifer Fellows, and Morgan Dickson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000): 155-67.

⁴ Marc-René Jung, *La légende de Troie en France au moyen âge* (Tübingen: Francke, 1996), 504; see also my *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000), 204.

⁵ Eg. Jesse Gellrich, *Discourse and Dominion in the Fourteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995); Lesley Lawton, Lesley. ‘The Illustration of Late Medieval Secular Texts, with Special Reference to Lydgate’s *Troy Book*.’ *Manuscripts and Readers in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1983). 41-69.

⁶ Mary-Rose McLaren, *The London Chronicles of the Fifteenth Century: A Revolution in English Writing* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002), 61.

⁷ Dalrymple 158.

⁸ Dalrymple 158.

⁹ Tim William Machan, *English in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003).

¹⁰ E.g. Andrew Cole, ‘Chaucer’s English Lesson,’ *Speculum* 77 (2002): 1128-67, at 1157-58.

¹¹ E.g. Christopher Baswell, ‘Troy, Arthur, and the Languages of ‘Brutis Albyoun,.’ *Reading Medieval Culture: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Hanning*, ed. Robert Stein and Sandra Pierson Prior (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2005), 170-97.

¹² Cole discusses other Chaucerian examples in a similar vein (1148).

¹³ Geoffrey 303; T. D. Crawford, ‘On the Linguistic Competence of Geoffrey of Monmouth.’ *Medium Aevum* 51 (1982): 152-62. In Warren, *History on the Edge*, 50.

¹⁴ E.g. Macrobius, Cicero, Dares Phrygius, *Chanson de Roland*, *Aeneid* (or *Enéas*), Geoffrey of Vinsauf, Cato, Augustine, Boethius (ll. 2940, 3122-56, 3227, 3241-42, 3347, 3357-59)

¹⁵ Ruth Nissé, ‘“Oure Fadres Olde and Modres’: Gender, Heresy, and Hoccleve’s Literary Politics,’ *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 21 (1999): 275-99, at 294-98; John M. Bowers, ‘Thomas Hoccleve and the Politics of Tradition,’ *The Chaucer Review* 36 (2002): 352-69, at 354-55.

¹⁶ Geoffrey Lester, *The Earliest English Translation of Vegetius’ De Re Militari* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1988).

¹⁷ David C. Benson, *The History of Troy in Middle English Literature: Guido delle Colonne’s Historia Destructionis Troiae in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1980), especially 156-58.

¹⁸ Dominique Battles, *The Medieval Tradition of Thebes: History and Narrative in the OF Roman de Thèbes, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Lydgate* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁹ Nissé 297-98.

²⁰ Clive R. Sneddon, ‘On the Creation of the *Old French Bible*,’ *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 46 (2002): 25-44. On the specifics of technique in the *Old French Bible*, Sneddon, ‘Translation Technique and the *Old French Bible*,’ *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 35 (1999): 339-49.

²¹ Nissé 278-80; Bowers 354-55.

²² Ff. 1v (ll. 33-44), 2r (ll. 51-56), 2v (ll. 81-88, 89-96), 8v (ll. 139-44), 9v (ll. 185-92), 10v (ll. 217-32).

²³ Edwin Gentzler, *Contemporary Translation Theories* (London: Routledge, 1993), 149-53 (on post-structural translation theory).

²⁴ Peter Beidler, ‘Chaucer and the Trots: What To Do About Those Modern English Translations,’ *The Chaucer Review* 19 (1985): 290-301.