Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse

The Movement of Texts in England, France and Scandinavia

Sif Rikhardsdottir

D. S. BREWER

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Introduction

THE HISTORY OF EUROPEAN LITERATURE is one of transformation, refashioning and intertextual relations. Narrative modes and ideas spread across the continent, influencing and enriching existing native literary forms. As old poetic traditions either stagnated or died out, new literary modes were fashioned from pre-existing forms, which were combined with novel narrative structures and ideas from imported materials. The foreign literary conventions did not replace existing forms, but rather served as the impetus for the enrichment of the native literary language and of its poetic and thematic representation. While medieval literary heritage reflects the ideological and social structures from which it originated, it also transcends the moment in history through this intertextual exchange. It both preserves traces of ideologies of that culture and foretells changes that lie ahead. In the literary legacy of any given community a modern reader can thus discern patterns of cultural movement and transformation as they have been preserved in time.

The role that translations play in this cultural exchange is often neglected. While modern scholarship on translation recognises the impact of culture as fundamental to the translation process, medieval translations have frequently been judged by their capacity (or failure) to reflect and capture the essence of the source text.[1] Recent criticism is, however, turning its focus increasingly towards reconceptualising the relationship of source and target texts in the Middle Ages in a manner that reflects the circumstances of medieval textual production.[2] In the last two decades, critics, particularly within English literary history and to a certain extent in Old Norse studies,

[1] For scholarship on translation in general see for instance Marilyn Gaddis Rose, ed., *Translation Horizons. Beyond the Boundaries of Translation Spectrum* (Binghampton: State University of New York, 1996); Mary Snell-Hornby, *Translation Studies. An Integrated Approach* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1995); Susan Bassnet and André Lefevere, *Constructing Cultures* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1998); Dinda L. Gorlée, *On Translating Signs: Exploring Text and Semio-Translation* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004); Susan Petrilli, ed., *Translation Translation* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003); and Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[2] See for instance Michelle R. Warren, 'Translation', in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 51–67; Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages. Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Laura H. Hollengreen, ed. *Translatio or the Transmission of Culture in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Modes and Messages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008); several short deliberations by Jeanette Beer, Robert M. Stein, Michelle R. Warren, Sarah Kay, Marina Brownlee and David Townsend in *New Medieval Literatures* 9 (2007); and The Medieval Translator series.

have sought to reintroduce the social and cultural circumstances of textual creation and foreground the hermeneutic process involved in translation as an interpretative act. Marianne E. Kalinke's work with Icelandic romances, both indigenous and translated, has been instrumental in redirecting critical attention to the literary nuances of the texts themselves and their function within a larger European context.[3] Rita Copeland's volume on rhetoric has similarly sought to redefine translation as part of the system of rhetoric and hermenuetics in the Middle Ages. The recognition of vernacular translation as a 'primary vehicle for vernacular participation in, and ultimately appropriation of, the cultural privilege of Latin academic discourse' reconceptualises medieval translations as active agents in cultural formation, rather than passive transmitters of a perceived authority of an 'original' (in Copeland's case the classical *auctores*).[4] By reading vernacular translations in connection with and through the intellectual history that sustained them, they gain value as cultural and theoretical evidence of medieval reading practices. Translations not only provide evidence of the cultural conditions of their creators, but are the prime site for cultural encounter. They therefore reveal active engagement with the conceptualisation of linguistic and cultural identity, played out in the reconstruction of foreign or 'differing' literary material. The cross-cultural comparison presented in this study of vernacular translation, which takes into account both the relationship with the source text and the cultural conditions surrounding its refashioning, thus provides a model for the exploration of cultural formation and cohesion. This approach liberates the discussion of translations as secondary and hence inferior to native literary forms by considering their inherent dissimilarity as evidence of the impressions of the receiving culture, and hence as substantiation of the process of cultural transformation.

This book proposes a new way of considering medieval literary translations. It suggests a subtle modification in approach to the connections between translations and source texts on the one hand, and translations and native literary forms on the other that, however, alters the way they are perceived.

[3] *King Arthur North-by-Northwest. The 'matière de Bretagne' in Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*. Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana 37 (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels boghandel, 1981), and *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland*, Islandica 46 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990). See also Geraldine Barnes, 'Romance in Iceland', in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 266–86, whose focus is on Icelandic romance, but the point of active engagement with continental forms is relevant; Jürg Glauser, 'Romance (Translated *Riddarasögur*)', in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literatur and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Oxford, Blackwell: 2005), 372–87; Regina Psaki, 'Women's Counsel in the Riddarasögur: The Case of *Parcevals saga*', in *Cold Counsel: Women in Old Norse Literature and Mythology*, ed. Sarah M. Anderson and Karen Swenson (New York: Routledge, 2002), 201–24; Carolyne Larrington, 'Queens and Bodies: The Norwegian Translated *lais* and Hákon IV's Kinswomen', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 108 (2009), 506–27, and her article 'The Translated *Lais*', in *King Arthur of the North*, ed. Marianne Kalinke (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), 77–97.

[4] *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages*, 3. See also Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans, eds., *The Idea of the Vernacular. An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory 1280–1520* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), and Warren, 'Translation'.

By looking at the adaptations of the source text as evidence for the cultural predilection of reading communities that created and received those translations, one can discern patterns of literary, social and ideological preconceptions. In fact, translations are a unique medium for observing such cultural transformations as they capture in essence the encounter between the two distinct and separate cultural traditions and the subsequent effort at literary adaptation. This approach recognises that culture is in a state of continual transformation, and that any effort to encapsulate the ideological and ethical codes that constitute a society is thwarted by the fact that society itself is in a constant state of progress and reform. There are, nevertheless, definite and discernible differences between societies at any given time, and those differences can be observed and described, regardless of the inherent instability of the parts that make up the societal framework. Such divergences foreground the meaningful structures of those societies. These intrinsic structures then become perceptible through their incompatibility with those of the receiving society. This can often be best observed in translations as they must reconcile those differences in a manner that makes the text enjoyable and comprehensible to its new readers.

This work thus seeks to explore the cultural transformations that occur in the movement from one cultural context to another. These transformations in turn provide evidence of the inherent differences in cultural identity among members of separate linguistic and literary communities. They also draw attention to the correlations that exist between cultural identity and other aspects of community formation, such as linguistic expression, established codes of conduct and literary representation. This volume explores various texts transmitted from the Francophone domain to Middle English and Old Norse reading communities in order to foreground the manifold facets of such cultural transmission in the late Middle Ages.

The book encompasses a multitude of literatures composed at different times. They all, however, share a common origin in the French culture of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The period covered spans the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries and reaches across northern France, England and Scandinavia. Texts originating from different locations as well as from different historical and social contexts, are addressed. Moving from the pinnacle of the *chanson de geste* tradition, *La Chanson de Roland*, through the compilation of *Lais*, customarily attributed to the enigmatic Marie de France, and Chrétien de Troyes's narrative masterpiece, *Le Chevalier au Lion* (or *Yvain*), the book explores the cultural transformations wrought upon those texts in translation, ending with the romance of *Partonopeu de Blois*. The breadth of the subject matter allows for the investigation of the English and Nordic renditions of the French literary material in a broader and more comprehensive context than the traditional direct comparison of, say, the Middle English versions with their French originals. Similarly, by reading those texts together certain patterns of transformations and cultural influences become apparent that would otherwise have remained obscure. These patterns reveal noteworthy affinities and divergences between translation practices in Britain and Scandinavia, which reveal the complex underlying cultural, political and social motivations behind literary production.

The linguistic qualifier 'English' generally refers to Middle English unless otherwise specified. French refers to any text written in a Francophone linguistic register, whether the French of the Île-de-France, or the numerous dialectical variants across the border regions. The complexities of terminology, particularly with respect to continental French and the French spoken in England in the Middle Ages (commonly referred to as Anglo-Norman) will be elaborated on where appropriate and to distinguish between cultural contingencies in linguistic conceptualisation, but will not be addressed beyond that.[5] Several recent volumes have appeared that consider the ramifications of the multilingual circumstances in medieval Britain for literary production, identity-formation and linguistic coherence, and these provide a critical framework for the discussion of French in England in this book.[6] The term 'Norse' similarly poses certain semantic problems. It is commonly used to designate the communal language spoken in Norway, Iceland and the Faroese islands in the medieval period and the common cultural heritage of those people, although at times the term incorporates the dialectical variants spoken in Denmark and Sweden as well.[7] Here it will be used to refer to the language and common cultural heritage of Norway and Iceland in the Middle Ages, while allowing for the fact that these begin diverging in the late-medieval period (as revealed in orthographic idiosyncrasies, for instance) and that there are distinct differences in the geographical, economical and societal structures of the respective communities that affect literary production despite the common origin and shared histories.[8]

The extent, both geographical and temporal, of the discussion necessarily

[5] The terminology used in this book, i.e. Anglo-Norman and Continental French, is intended to address the complexity of linguistic interaction in medieval England, rather than re-enforce notions of national divisions frequently associated with the terms. This approach recognises the inherent volatility of the terms, which draw arbitrary boundaries based on perceived national borders. Such distinctions are admittedly always problematic inasmuch as they contain within them a preconception of borders where there are none, or where such borders are inherently unstable. However, the use of 'Anglo-Norman' here is intended to denote the French being used in England in the thirteenth and fourteenth century, whereas the term 'French' is used to connote the vernacular 'romanz' and encompasses all its forms and variations (including Anglo-Norman). The intention is to accentuate the movement between the two languages, i.e. French (whether continental or any of its dialectic varieties) and English. Clearly neither French nor English were static and fixed entities at any given time, or within any given region, and moreover influenced each other through co-existence and exposure. Yet, despite inevitable influences the languages are, nevertheless, based on different grammatical, syntactical and phonetical structures and it is as such that they are addressed here.

[6] See for instance Jocelyn Wogan-Browne *et al.*, eds., *Language and Culture. The French of England c.1100–c.1500* (York: York Medieval Press, 2009), and Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[7] Old Norse has frequently been divided into West and East Norse to distinguish between the dialectical variation spoken in Norway, Iceland and the Faeroes on the one hand, and the form spoken in Denmark and Sweden on the other.

[8] Such differences may be noted in the discussion by referring to either 'Norwegian' or 'Icelandic' communities, or manuscript provenance, where it has been determined to be specifically one or the other.

makes it impossible to cover the details of all the intertextual relations existing between the French and the English texts on one hand, and the French and the Norse texts on the other. Such detailed comparative studies between translation and source text have been conducted by other critics and are cited where they are of relevance. The intention here is not to list such changes, but rather to interrogate the reasons behind them and what they may tell us about the translators and their audiences. The focus of the discussion will be on the reception of the French literary material and the possible reasons underlying the modifications evident in the Middle English and Old Norse works in an effort to understand what those texts may have meant to their medieval readers.

Medieval Textuality

By focusing on cultural exchange across multiple linguistic and temporal boundaries, some of the fallacies of a unilateral word-for-word comparison of a single source text and its translation can be avoided. The presumption of mistakes or misconceptions when the translated text deviates from the source precludes the recognition of the translator's creativity and active engagement with his material. E. F. Halvorsen's statement that the Norse version of *La Chanson de Roland* is clearly a translation (not an adaptation) – as it can be divided into lines corresponding to the verses of the French poem – underlies his assumption that failure to follow the source accurately reflects the translator's inability to correctly understand his source text.[9] The supposition that a translation, by virtue of its status as a translation (rather than an adaptation, for instance), requires a precise reconstruction of the source text in the target language negates the medieval conception of translation as well as the impact of cultural and historical context and linguistic differences in the creative process.[10] Many of the errors Halvorsen points out in fact reflect the translator's effort of adjusting his material to his new audience. This study proposes that those deviations do not denote the translator's lack of comprehension of his foreign material, but rather the recognition of and effort to bridge the cultural divide between the imported material and the literary tradition into which he is inserting his new text.

Similarly, negative judgements of the literary value of Middle English translations of French texts, based on their failure to transport the poetic quality of their sources, ignore the role played by the translator as active agent in the process of textual reconstruction. A. C. Spearing and Dieter Mehl base their criticism of the Middle English *Ywain and Gawain* and *Sir Launfal* on their authors' presumed inability to recapture the literary essence of their source

[9] *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland* (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1959), 103.

[10] Susan Bassnett in fact rejects the differentiation between 'translation' and 'adaptation' altogether, arguing that it refutes the inherent complexity of the text and is based on a misconception of the reader as 'the passive receiver of the text in which its Truth is enshrined' (*Translation Studies*, London: Routledge, 1994, 79).

texts.[11] By focusing on what is missing in the translation, however, one may fail to notice the potential reasons behind those omissions and what they can tell us about English literary communities. The comparative approach adopted here not only highlights the distinctiveness of each receiving culture by virtue of the diverse textual presentations of those works, but it furthermore attempts to reposition the texts within their cultural context and hence cancel such qualitative judgements based solely on the perceived failure to recapture an essentially different literary quality. Instead, the text's function within various cultural contexts can be examined through the comparative reading of these texts and their respective patterns of alteration. The focus is not so much on what was taken from where, but rather how and why. This necessitates the examination of these texts as cultural evidence as well as linguistic and poetic entities. Their preservation history and manuscript context is thus of the utmost importance in understanding the role these texts played in their reading communities.

With respect to England this is often complicated by the fact that in many cases only a single manuscript has been preserved containing the Middle English version of the texts. Given the precarious preservation history of English vernacular literature it can be problematic to contextualise these versions, as any conclusions must be based on the single existing manuscript copies, which are not necessarily indicators of either the popularity or the distribution patterns of these texts. Recent studies in codicology and the work being done in linguistic analysis of texts with a view to localising English literary works is of help here in determining the potential reading communities that instigated and preserved these translations.[12] We must therefore take the manuscripts as evidence of the existence and circulation of these texts in that

[11] A. C. Spearing, 'Marie de France and her Middle English Adapters', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 12 (1990), 117–57, at 127 and 148–9, and Dieter Mehl, *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), 180–5. For a discussion of *Sir Launfal* see also Spearing's chapter on 'The Lanval Story', in his *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 97–120.

[12] For dialect studies and linguistic data of Middle English texts and communities see Angus McIntosh, M. L. Samuels, Michael Benskin, eds. (with assistance from Margaret Laing and Keith Williamson), *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986). For critical work in manuscript studies see for instance Linda L. Brownrigg, ed., *Medieval Book Production. Assessing the Evidence* (Los Altos Hills: Anderson-Lovelace, 1990); M. B. Parkes, *Scribes, Scripts and Readers. Studies in the Communication, Presentation and Dissemination of Medieval Texts* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1991); Murray J. Evans, *Rereading Middle English Romance. Manuscript Layout, Decoration, and the Rhetoric of Composite Structure* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995); Ralph Hanna, *London Literature, 1300–1380* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Richard Beadle, 'Middle English Texts and their Transmission, 1350–1500: Some Geographical Criteria', in *Speaking in Our Tongues. Proceedings of a Colloquium on Medieval Dialectology and Related Disciplines*, ed. Margaret Laing and Keith Williamson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), 69–92, and his 'Prolegomena to a Literary Geography of Later Medieval Norfolk', in *Regionalism in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts*, ed. Felicity Riddy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), 89–108. There is also a useful overview of the field in Ralph Hanna's article 'Analytical Survey 4: Middle English Manuscripts and the Study of Literature', *New Medieval Literatures* 4 (2001), 242–64.

specific form, despite the fact that they may have existed in a different form at some point. This approach acknowledges the inherent instability of vernacular literature and the fact that the preserved text represents only an intermittent stage in the process of its own regeneration. The literary works discussed in the following chapters can be understood to epitomise a defined historical moment in the dynamic process of textual transformation by drawing on Paul Zumthor's conceptualisation of *mouvance*, or textual mobility.[13] Yet their very existence in a specific version, or in a particular manuscript copy, necessitates the acceptance of the text as it has come down as evidence of its deliberate fashioning and circulation in that form. Any assumptions about reading communities will therefore be based on the manuscript copies we have before us and any additional localising evidence available. The predicaments are of quite a different order when it comes to the Norse translations. Several of the texts discussed in this work in fact exist in multiple manuscript copies. Few, however, can be traced back to their original place or time of translation. Most of the translations exist only in Icelandic manuscripts, whereas the majority of them are believed to have been translated in Norway in the thirteenth century. Of the texts examined, only one has in fact been preserved in a thirteenth-century Norwegian manuscript. The remaining texts exist only in later Icelandic manuscripts, the earliest of which date back to the fourteenth century. This makes any discussion of the cultural context particularly difficult as it presumes such evidence reflects the text at the time of its composition. The complex manuscript transmission history of many of the Norse texts thus requires an awareness and recognition of multiple layers of cultural influence in the textual tradition. Yet these do not necessarily undermine such analysis. In fact, the existence of such discernible layers of culturally determined modifications foregrounds the impact the presumed public has had upon the formation of the text. Textual variants between the Nordic manuscripts thus provide evidence of cultural transformations that one can only assume with some of the Middle English translations.

This approach to the text as product as well as witness of the culture that created it originates in the recent declaration by the self-proclaimed New Medievalists of a 'return to the entire cultural circumstances of medieval

[13] Zumthor formulated the concept of *mouvance* in his *Essai de poétique médiévale*, published in 1972. He argued that any medieval work formed a complex unity that encompassed the original authorial conceptualisation of the text along with later rewritings or rearrangements by successive reciters or scribes. While his theory draws more on the epic conventions of the *chansons de geste* and the impact of oral performance on textual transmission than on the courtly tradition of the romances, it is nevertheless of relevance to the understanding of medieval textuality, particularly with respect to the notion of textual inviolability and manuscript preservation (*Toward a Medieval Poetics*, trans. Philip Bennett, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992, particularly 40–76). Bernard Cerquiglini applies this notion of textual multiplicity to manuscript studies by describing medieval texts as inherently variant, thereby rejecting the conception of textual stability. He proposes the term *variance* to describe medieval writing (*Éloge de la variante: histoire critique de la philologie*, Paris: Seuil, 1989, translated into English as *In Praise of the Variant: A Critical History of Philology*, trans. Betsy Wing, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

textuality'.[14] The notion here of 'medieval textuality', which encompasses both the historical context, in terms of the cultural circumstances that brought forth the text, and the actual physical context of the text itself, the manuscript in which it has been preserved, is relevant to the current study. This methodology rejects any isolation of the text from its literary context which hinders the recognition of the text as a cultural monument. Yet it recognises the necessity of close reading and attention to textual detail that is often absent in historical approaches. In fact, Ralph Hanna proclaims that what was lacking before the 1980s was 'an articulated vision of medieval books as cultural phenomenon'.[15] Rather than viewing the text as an isolated and self-contained body of words unrelated to and disconnected from its surroundings, the text is understood as a product and symbol of its cultural context.

This shift in attention is particularly pertinent to medieval literature. For medieval readers the text was a dynamic corpus that was not restricted to the form or shape in which it was received, but was in constant flux, being refashioned and reshaped.[16] Nor was it synonymous with books.[17] In fact, texts were commonly stored by memory before, or even rather than, being written down.[18] The manuscript itself moreover demanded time-consuming and tedious labour by scribes, and was costly to produce. The resulting combination of text, the physical properties of the manuscript volume itself and the occasional illustration or commentary thus provided the medieval reader with an object that had a significant cultural value. This perception of text is reflected in medieval translation practices where translation can be perceived simply as another form of writing. The *translatio* (carrying across) of material that reproduces the continual movement of texts, ideas and objects reflects an

[14] Sarah Kay is here referring to the critical doctrine of New Philology, which encompasses the analysis of the text both in its manuscript context (whtether it was preserved in a collection, with what texts etc.) and the actual visual representation of the text within that manuscript copy (such has scribal hand, illuminations, notes in margins etc.) ('Analytical Survey 3: The New Philology', *New Medieval Literatures* 3 (1999), 295–326, at 311). The theoretical model of New Philology underlies the New Medievalists' objective of a reconstruction of our very notion of the 'medieval'. The New Medievalists therefore incorporate and expand on the ideas set forth by the originating New Philologists of a return to the cultural context and medieval conceptualisation of text. For critical works that align themselves with this new approach see, for instance, Marina S. Brownlee, Kevin Brownlee and Stephen G. Nichols, eds., *The New Medievalism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), and Kevin Brownlee and Marina Scordilis Brownlee, eds., *Romance. Generic Transformation from Chrétien de Troyes to Cervantes* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1985).

[15] 'Analytical Survey 4: Middle English Manuscripts and the Study of Literature', 244.

[16] There is an apparent shift in late-medieval England, with some authors becoming more aware of, or more concerned with, the preservation of their texts' coherence and accuracy. Chaucer's concern with scribal errors in the reproduction of his works reveals his awareness of this textual fluidity and the sense of authorial intent and the potential for textual corruption.

[17] This comment pertains only to secular literature, as sacred works, such as the Bible, were characterised by the inviolability of their content, stemming from the sacred character of the words contained there. Most other texts were not, however, defined by such rigid delineations.

[18] For information on the role of memory in the Middle Ages and the medieval perception of memory and the written words see Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory. A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

aesthetic of literary production that is profoundly foreign to the modern conception of authorship and copyrights. Such an approach therefore perceives the translated text as a part of a whole, which is the textual process, rather than as a secondary derivative of a unique and fixed original.

Stephen G. Nichols notes that the critical effort of New Medievalism lies not so much in 'predicating a specific methodology', as in 'designating instead a predisposition to interrogate and reformulate assumptions about the discipline of medieval studies'.[19] It is therefore not a rejection of previous critical directions, but rather a questioning of the basic assumptions one has when approaching a text, particularly perhaps a medieval text. This is relevant here as the objective is to illuminate the process of textual adaptation by refuting the common dismissal of the English and Norse translations as secondary or inferior replicas of their source texts. By redirecting the focus away from the basic assumption of literary inferiority, these texts can be examined as evidence of the literary predilections, ideological values and behavioural preconceptions of their authors and audiences.

The discussion of the texts in the following chapters draws on a wide variety of critical discourses, ranging from post-colonial criticism to gender theories that serve, however, only as guides to provide a critical framework for the discussion of a particular concept. Theories traditionally applied to post-colonial studies are used to explore pre-colonial patterns of cultural dominance and subversion.[20] By analysing the ambivalent interconnections of Anglo-Norman, English and Norwegian literary communities in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, questions of linguistic integrity and cultural authority can be explored. Such a discussion proposes a new way of looking at the concept of imperialism, not on the level of national aggression, but rather in terms of *cultural* hegemony, where such intercultural relations can be examined.[21]

This understanding of imperialist tendencies is of particular relevance to the medieval period, and, more importantly, to medieval translations. In

[19] 'The New Medievalism: Tradition and Discontinuity in Medieval Culture', in *The New Medievalism*, ed. Marina S. Brownlee, Kevin Brownlee and Stephen G. Nichols, 1–26, at 1.

[20] For general information on post-colonial criticism see for instance Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995). For works that argue for the application of post-colonial theories to the medieval period see Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams, eds., *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages. Translating Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Patricia Clare Ingham and Michelle R. Warren, eds., *Postcolonial Moves: Medieval through Modern* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000).

[21] The classical interpretation of imperialism is political rather than cultural. The term evokes the (usually) forceful national and political expansion of the sovereignty of a powerful ruler to include marginal or 'foreign' territories (see for instance Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Theories of Imperialism*, trans. P. S. Falla, New York: Random House, 1980, and Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993). This notion of power politics serves here as a metaphor for cultural expansionism that reflects the idea of national expansion inherent in the conception of imperialism. Post-colonial theory has incorporated this understanding of the interplay of politics and culture in analyses of post-colonial encounters of dominant and marginal discursive traditions, which is elaborated in Chapter 1 within a medieval historical context.

fact, Rita Copeland reminds us that 'the essential paradox of the enterprise of translation' lies in its effort to replicate its source 'through difference, through displacement [and] substitution.'[22] While Copeland is here referring to canonical appropriation, that is, translations from Latin into the vernacular, the fundamental idea behind her sense of the paradoxical quality of translations can be applied just as much to other literary relations of linguistic or cultural inequality. The apparently laudatory effort of reproducing foreign material in a native tongue is undermined by the fact that, by virtue of being refashioned in a different language, the translated text not only reshapes its source, but furthermore appropriates its intrinsic literary authority by replacing the source with its own linguistic version. While French is in this case also a vernacular, the relationship between a culturally or politically dominant language with that of a less politically potent native tongue re-enacts those binary relations of authority and subjugation, which are then played out in subtle forms of literary appropriation.

Narrative theories serve in a similar manner to highlight the formal alterations that occur in the transmission of literary material and what such changes in narrative structure mean in terms of literary reception.[23] The theories form the basis for the analysis of structural modifications that in turn highlight a shift in the thematic orientation of translated texts. Analyses of behavioural structures and gender delineation similarly assist in drawing out such patterns of cultural transformation.[24] Ultimately, the discussion is determined by the preconceived notion that the texts were translated for a targeted readership and hence adjusted to fit or apply to their tastes and expectations. Such a

[22] *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages*, 36.

[23] Models of narrative grammar developed by critics such as A. J. Greimas derive from the narratological studies that followed in the wake of structuralism in the 1960s and 1970s. My use of the conceptualisation of narrative structure in this discussion is only indirectly indebted to such theories of narrative grammar, as it does not try to dissect the text's underlying narrative structure, but rather to draw attention to the formal aspects of the work's narrative unity and development. For information on narrative grammar see for instance A. J. Greimas, 'Narrative Grammar: Units and Levels', *Modern Language Notes* 86 (1971), 793–806, and Peter Haidu, 'The Episode as Semiotic Module in Twelfth-Century Romance', *Poetics Today* 4 (1983), 655–81. For narratological theories see for instance Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), and *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988). A good overview of the theories of structuralism can be found in Jonathan Culler's *Structuralist Poetics. Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

[24] Very little work has been done within medieval studies on the portrayal of behaviour in literature. The most prominent critical approaches to the representation of emotion in the Middle Ages are Barbara H. Rosenwein, ed., *Anger's Past. The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), and her *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007). The discussion of gender constructions in this work is based not so much on feminist or queer theories, but rather makes use of the conception of gender as a socially constructed category derived from historically and culturally determined attributes. The recognition of these attributes is vital to the conceptualisations of appropriate gendered behaviour. The deviations from these pre-existing structures of masculine and feminine behaviour patterns thus obfuscate such gendered distinctions.

notion of the built-in reader draws on theories of readership stemming from the 1960s and 1970s.[25] My approach rests, however, more on the current ideas developed by critics such as Suzanne Reynolds and A. J. Minnis. Reynolds approaches 'the reader' from a textual and historical perspective by drawing attention to actual reading practices in the medieval period. Her analysis of interpretative glossing highlights the existence of both a presumed authorial intent and, more importantly, the underlying readerly goal that informs the reading itself.[26] Minnis, on the other hand, looks at the medieval conception of authorship as significant in establishing a contemporary shift in authority from Divinity to the writer himself.[27] Such a reorientation in authorial control is important with respect to vernacular writers as it indicates the conflicting conception of literary and linguistic authority and textual innovation by readers and writers in the medieval period. Underlying both those approaches is the notion that the inscription of the authors and their audiences can be found in the texts themselves and that the recognition of those literary and historical figures is fundamental to the understanding of medieval literary productivity.[28]

The editors of *The Idea of the Vernacular* note that 'audiences are born (and reborn) somewhere between authorial desire, the desires of actual historical audiences, and the cultural and linguistic possibilities that shape acts of reading.'[29] The intended reader of the translated text can thus provide some insight into the expected target audience of the translator. The manuscript copies themselves, which often date from considerably later periods than the 'original' translations, indicate on the other hand the literary predilections of their actual historical audiences, which have left their mark on those texts through their own scribal adjustments. These intended and actual readers thus form the 'reading community' of any given text. This term, as it is used

[25] Theories set forth by the North-American Reader-Response Criticism (see as above Culler's *Structuralist Poetics*) and the German advocates of the *Rezeptionsästhetik* (Reception Aesthetics) (see for instance Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982) sought to reintroduce the reader as an active agent both in the creation and in the interpretation of the text.

[26] *Medieval Reading. Grammar, Rhetoric and the Classical Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[27] *Medieval Theory of Authorship. Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988). Theories of vernacular self-consciousness and the positioning of the audience are further developed in Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson, eds., *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: The Middle Ages*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). See especially Kevin Brownlee, Tony Hunt, Ian Johnson, Alastair Minnis and Nigel F. Palmer, 'Vernacular Literary Consciousness *c*.1100–*c*.1500: French, German and English Evidence', 422–71.

[28] This notion of the text as object, and moreover as cultural object, can be found in Cannon's work on English literary history, which conceives, however, of texts as existing in isolation from each other in a Marxist reading of early Middle English vernacular writing (Christopher Cannon, *The Grounds of English Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). While arriving at the value of the text through its singularity, rather than its connectivity to a broader cultural context, Cannon foregrounds the cultural material deposited within any given work through the act of creative articulation.

[29] Wogan-Browne *et al.*, *The Idea of the Vernacular*, 111.

here, can best be defined as a community of readers that is made up of the patrons who commissioned the writings of those texts, the scribes who copied them and, ultimately, the audiences that received them. These as a group have in common the shared knowledge and interest (although those might of course differ considerably between each member) that shaped their reading and understanding of the text.[30]

My notion of reading communities draws on theories of readership developed by Brian Stock. He proposes the idiom 'textual community' to describe a group composed of one or more persons able to read a text to a group of possibly 'unlettered or semilettered members'.[31] His notion is thus limited to the literal reader and audience, that is, the group that received the text (either visually or aurally) at a specific moment. My use of the term 'reading community' here goes beyond Stock's model in incorporating a somewhat more extended notion of the readership, which would have included the person (or persons) instigating the translation and subsequent copying of the text as well as those for whom the text was translated (or copied) and ultimately the groups of audiences who actually read and preserved those texts. It similarly comprises the translators and scribes (as they also form the readership of the texts) and hence their imagined as well as actual audiences. Anne Middleton's distinction between 'audience' and 'public' is useful in this context.[32] She proposes the term 'audience' for the actual historical audience of a work, which in turn is determined by such factors as ownership, dating and location of manuscript copies. The 'public', on the other hand, is the 'readership imagined and posited by the composer as a necessary postulate in the practical process of bringing the work into being'.[33] The public of any given work can be discerned in the rhetorical and formal characteristics of a text. It is therefore possible that the figures behind those two concepts differ significantly, both theoretically and in actuality.

Many of the texts discussed here have been preserved in manuscripts of considerably later date than their original compositions. This discrepancy between the date of composition and the date of the manuscripts is particularly notable in the case of the Norse translations. Moreover, the question of public and audience is complicated by the fact that the translations contain within them multiple levels of conceived public as well as actual audiences by virtue of their nature as *translations*. The translated text encompasses both

[30] Jocelyn Wogan-Browne's criticism of the word 'community' to describe medieval society is noted here in recognition of the inherent instability of the medieval and the modern tendency of imposing structures and boundaries upon what can best be defined as an organic and fluid cultural body ('Analytical Survey 5: "Reading is Good Prayer": Recent Research on Female Reading Communities', *New Medieval Literatures* 5 (2002), 229–97, at 231). For a lack of a better way of describing such collections of writers and their readers the designation 'reading community' will be used to incorporate the conception of such audience groups, which assumes a degree of inherent lack of constancy and permanence in its construction.

[31] *Listening for the Text. On the Uses of the Past* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 23.

[32] 'The Audience and Public of *Piers Plowman*', in *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and its Literary Background*, ed. David Lawton (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, [illegible]2), 101–23.

[33] Ibid. 102.

traces of the readership the French author envisaged as well as that of the English or Norse translator (and later scribes). The aim here is to differentiate between the original and the target public of a text as evidence of the shift in authorial objective between source text and translation. Such evidence is of value in detecting the potential reading communities for which the texts were intended. Similarly, recognising the disparity between the envisioned public and the actual audience is valuable for mapping the possible interests and cultural preferences of the communities in which the texts circled. The discussion in the following chapters will thus make use of the texts as they have come down to us as the evidence of the literary desires of the reading communities that created these texts and preserved them, while making allowance for the fact that the texts themselves represent simply a moment in their textual progression that has been captured in a manuscript copy and thus preserved in that form for future generations. They embody the spirit of a specific time and culture and can therefore bear witness to the traditions that formed them.

Cultural Discourse

The underlying assumption behind the entire discussion here is that culture as such can be defined as a semiotic system that in turn can be described, deciphered and portrayed by examining and interpreting the cultural and linguistic artefacts it produces. While this approach acknowledges David Lawton's warnings of the inherent danger of 'cultural construction', where we, as modern readers, necessarily bring 'our modernity into dialogue with our understanding of the medieval', it seeks to approach the medieval from the perspective of the texts that both produced and depicted the cultural environment that sustained them.[34] By looking at behavioural codes, gender conventions and socially prescribed actions as the articulation of the ideological system of a given culture, one can discern the basic semiotic components that govern those ideological structures.[35] These in turn find their expression in literary works, which preserve the semiotic codes that dictated their ideological construction and the moral and ethical values presented there within. None are of course intrinsically representative, or inherently subjected to the semiotic systems that informed their writings, but they do nevertheless reveal those systems by virtue of their acceptance (or rejection) by the reading communities.

Inherent to this conceptualisation of texts is the perception of literary genres and works as discourse, and moreover as cultural discourse. Eugene

[34] 'Analytical Survey 1: Literary History and Cultural Study', *New Medieval Literatures* 1 (1997), 237–69, at 240.

[35] For information on the notion of culture as a semiotic system that is expressed through behaviour or linguistic act see for instance Robin P. Fawcett, M. A. K. Halliday, Sydney M. Lamb and Adam Makkai, eds., *The Semiotics of Culture and Language*, 2 vols (London: Frances Pinter, 1984), and Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

Vance claims that the essence of the French courtly romance lies not so much in its formal attributes as in the semiotic signification of its language.[36] The understanding of romance genre as discourse is of relevance here, both with respect to notions of imperial tendencies, discussed in the first chapter, and to the analysis of the reception and modifications of those intrinsic semiotic patterns by the English and Norse translators of the French romance. By looking at the translated texts as cultural discourse – not only as diverse linguistic constructions, but also as a matrix of semiotic codes whose signification and connotations differ from that of the original audience – one can discern the defining values that guided the reconstruction of those texts within the new semiotic system. Simon Gaunt notes that not only texts are ideological constructions, but so are genres: 'The formal and structural features of a text do not produce aesthetic effects that can be divorced from content and thereby from ideology, but on the contrary they signal participation in a discursive framework that implies a world-view with a heavy ideological investment.'[37] This is of course particularly applicable to courtly romance, which heralded the introduction of courtly ethics in France and later in England and Norway. It is, however, also relevant to other genres, such as the *lais*, or the *chansons de geste*, which intimate a particular cultural motivation and inference.

The complex history of the relations between the English and French languages and culture in England in the late Middle Ages makes the reading of the Middle English translations and their French counterparts particularly intriguing. The seemingly peaceful co-existence of the two vernaculars in England in the centuries following the Conquest raises questions on the function of the English translations within the reading communities. While the descendants of the earlier Norman invaders were being assimilated into English culture in the first half of the twelfth century, the marriage of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine in 1152 led to a renewed immigration of Norman courtiers to the English court.[38] Eleanor's patronage of the French courtly romance and lyrical poetry of the troubadours similarly reinforced the dominance of French (or Anglo-Norman) as a literary language.[39] The marriage therefore both consolidated Norman influence and encouraged the use of Anglo-Norman as a literary language. The prestige of French continued throughout the thirteenth century and its most extensive spread and use

[36] *Mervelous Signals. Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 120.

[37] 'Romance and Other Genres', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 45–59, at 46.

[38] The court of Henry II was decisively international and there was a current of intellectual and artistic exchange between England and the continent. The patronage of French literature was, however, particularly prevalent due to the cultural dominance of the courtly romance and troubadour poetry. For information on literary practices and the relations between England and the continent during the reign of Henry II, see Elizabeth Salter, *English and International: Studies in the Literature, Art and Patronage of Medieval England*, ed. Derek Pearsall and Nicolette Zeeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1–74.

[39] Douglas A. Kibbee, *For to Speke Frenche Trewely. The French Language in England, 1000–1600: Its Status, Description and Instruction* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991), particularly 14–26.

coincides surprisingly with the advent of anti-French sentiment in England.[40]

There is, however, a discernable shift in the literary culture in fourteenth-century England. Around the turn of the fourteenth century French was still 'the accepted medium of high literary expression'.[41] In the 1360s this seems, however, to alter, with English taking an increasingly dominating role, both politically and in secular literature. By the end of the century English had all but replaced French as the literary medium. The decline in the use of Anglo-Norman in the fourteenth century, both in literature and in the legal system, was hastened by the social and political consequences of the Hundred Years War (1337–1453), resulting in English almost completely replacing French in the literary (and public) realm by the end of the century.[42] None of the Middle English texts discussed here dates from further back than the fourteenth century, indicating the prior dominance of Anglo-Norman both in political and literary circles. While texts were being written in Middle English in the thirteenth century, the escalation in Middle English translations of Anglo-Norman and French texts early in the fourteenth century points to a shift in balance between the two vernaculars and the growing need for English translations for readers unable or unwilling to read French any more.

While French courtly literature was intimately linked with the civilising movement of the courtly ideology, it seems to have served a different purpose in England. Both English translations of French romances and original native works were written significantly later than their French counterparts – indicating both a temporal and cultural disparity between the reading communities of the French and English romances. It is often suggested that the English translations were intended for a lower-class audience, which would explain the alterations in form and matter of the texts as well as the need for the rendition into the English language.[43] The problem with this assumption

[40] Ibid. 4, 27–57. While it is difficult to ascertain how many were indeed capable of speaking or writing French (or Anglo-Norman) in the centuries following the Conquest, the royal court remained very significantly French-oriented. Serge Lusignan notes that 'every king from Henry III until Henry VI had a wife in their first or second marriage whose first language was French'. ('French Language in Contact with English: Social Context and Linguistic Change (mid-13th–14th centuries)', in *Language and Culture. The French of England c.1100–c.1500*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne *et al.*, York: York Medieval Press, 2009, 19–30, at 20.) The court thus remained a centre with a significant French presence from the Conquest until the end of the fourteenth century at the least.

[41] Michael Bennett, 'France in England: Anglo-French Culture in the Reign of Edward III', in Wogan-Browne *et al.*, *Language and Culture*, 320–33, at 320.

[42] Kibbee, *For to Speke Frenche Trewely*, 58–62. Michael Bennett suggests that the political conditions of the Hundred Years War may initially have increased the literary contact between England and France through campaigns and diplomatic interaction. The habit of taking nobles as prisoners to obtain ransom for their release may have lead to increased interchange, particularly in the middle of the century (Bennett, 'France in England'). For an in-depth analysis of how the Hundred Year War affected literary production in England see Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy*.

[43] The preservation of the Middle English romances in manuscripts of lesser quality and with less decoration and illumination than, for instance, contemporary manuscripts containing religious texts would seem to support this shift in social hierarchy of the audience (Karl Brunner, 'Middle English Metrical Romances and their Audience', in *Studies in Medieval Literature. In*

is that the evidence of the social status of the audiences of these texts is commonly based on the texts themselves. The perceived inferiority of the texts in comparison with their more distinctly courtly originals is rationalised by the slide in social status of its readership. The presumption of a lower-class audience is then subsequently used to explain the modifications in the texts. This circular argument is a hermeneutic blunder that can happen all too easily. Of necessity, any scholar approaching the medieval period must make certain assumptions based on the scarce evidence available to him. We can presume, for instance, that the extant manuscript copies do not necessarily give an accurate view of the number and circulation patterns of those manuscripts. They do, nevertheless, indicate that the texts existed in that specific form, in a particular region, and within a certain reading community. The text can thus provide information about the reading habits and scribal practices of that community, whereas its spread and origination can only be inferred, with greater or lesser conviction, from the available material.

Referring to the Middle English courtly translations, Dieter Mehl notes that 'most of the social occasions on which minstrels performed and, possibly, romances were read, appear to have differed considerably from the exclusive aristocratic festivities on the continent'.[44] While this shift in interest is not necessarily indicative of social status, there appears nevertheless to have been a difference in the makeup of the audience groups of the courtly material in twelfth-century France and in England in the later centuries. While courtly compositions seem to have been limited to the aristocratic courts on the continent, later Middle English texts were being translated and copied independently of the courtly centres and frequently in the more rural areas of the north. Evidence of manuscript copying and translation activity substantiates the formation of certain reading communities. The presumption of a particular reading community must, however, often merely be surmised from the available evidence of manuscript production and the likely historical locations for preservation.

Rather than simply proclaiming the Middle English texts to be the result of ignorance and incompetence arising from the social status of their creators and recipients, the following chapters will explore other possibilities to

Honor of Professor Albert Croll Baugh, ed. MacEdward Leach, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961, 219–27, at 220. For a discussion of manuscripts containing Middle English romances see also Murray J. Evans, *Rereading Middle English Romance. Manuscript Layout, Decoration, and the Rhetoric of Composite Structure*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995). The religious manuscripts served, however, additionally as visual symbolic artefacts that required the elaborate and ornamental representation of the text. Moreover, they contained sacred words that would have demanded appropriate execution of the outward form. The romances and the courtly literature, on the other hand, served the purpose of secular entertainment that would as such not have required any elaborate presentation. Rather, the focus would have been on preserving the cost of illumination, or expensive vellum, by focusing on the material contained within and thereby, perhaps, make the acquisition of multiple texts possible instead. If they were intended to be read to an audience, such elaborate visual depiction would additionally have been less relevant than with a sacred text intended for display, whether in church or in a home.

[44] *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, 4.

explain the shift in language and the apparent pattern of alterations as reflections of a cultural agenda. The increased frequency and number of textual modifications apparent in the translations from the latter part of the fourteenth century seem to allude to the social consequences of the political friction with the French court and the emergence of Middle English as a viable literary language at the expense of Anglo-Norman. They similarly point to a more direct engagement with the French material in an apparent effort to reorient the political or social subtext of their originals.

Historical circumstances were radically different in Norway. Since the eighth century, the story of Anglo-Saxons, Danes, and Norsemen had been intertwined through conquest and territorial battles. English rule was, however, lost to the descendants of Canute (Knútr) (994/5–1035) with the defeat of the Norwegian Haraldr harðráði (r. 1047–66) at Stamford Bridge and the Norman invasion – although given the Norse origin of the Normans themselves, this in fact completed a covert dominion begun several centuries earlier.[45] Previously King Magnús the Good (r. 1035–47) had claimed the throne of Norway and later succeeded to Denmark as well at the death of Harðacnut in 1042.[46] What followed were intermittent periods of civil discord with efforts at reclaiming lost territories and uniting the kingdom.[47] It was not until the late twelfth century, when the Norwegian throne was claimed by Sverrir Sigurðsson (1145/51–1202), that the previous civil strife was brought to an end, preparing the way for the reign of his grandson, King Hákon Hákonarson (1204–63), who united the kingdom of Norway.

The relationship that was established by the Norwegians with the new Norman rule in England was one of peaceful diplomatic and mercantile exchange. The tradition of diplomatic correspondence and trading with England that had begun during the rule of Sverrir was strengthened by the

[45] Knútr, or Canute, ruled over England from 1016 to his death, over Denmark from 1018 and Norway from 1028. He was succeeded by his illegitimate son, Harold Harefoot, and later by Harðacnut. For information on royal history in Norway see for instance Knut Helle, ed., *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, vol. 1, *Prehistory to 1520* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). For information on the battle at Stamford Bridge see Kelly DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion of England in 1066* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003).

[46] The royal history of Scandinavia in the late Middle Ages is one of changing territorial boundaries and intermittent conquests and disputes. While Knútr held England, Denmark and Norway under his rule, his sons were unable to maintain control. With Harðacnut's death the English returned to their own royal bloodline and the throne of Denmark passed to Magnús, later to be claimed by Sweyn II. Haraldr harðráði (the Ruthless) shared the throne with his nephew, Magnús, and became sole ruler of Norway at his death in 1047. He was defeated in 1066 at Stamford Bridge in the last Norse attempt to reconquer England, only days before William's landing in Sussex and the Battle of Hastings, which practically guaranteed the Norman victory.

[47] King Óláfr the Peaceful (r. 1066/7–93) was on friendly terms with William the Conqueror (r. 1066–87). His successor, Magnús berfœti (Barelegs) (r. 1093–1103), was more aggressive and brought the Orkneys, Hebrides and Western Isles under his control. The joint rule of his sons, Eysteinn, Sigurðr and Óláfr (1103–30), re-established and reinforced the friendships with England. At the death of Sigurðr the country was torn by rival fractions and civil strife for over a century (Henry Goddard Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921, 45–7).

friendly relationship that developed between King Hákon and the young ruler of England, King Henry III (r. 1216–72).[48] It was during this time that much of the French courtly material was introduced to Norway. Given the close and affable connections between the two monarchs, it is not unlikely that the manuscripts containing the French and Anglo-Norman materials came to Norway via England as part of royal exchange of gifts.[49] This conjecture is supported by the fact that French courtly literature was patronised by the Angevin king and queen and would hence have been readily available and, more importantly, representative of the splendour of the English court at the time. Many of the translated romances contain inscriptions indicating that they were seemingly translated at the request of King Hákon. Similarly, Norwegian manuscript fragments of several of the texts exist, which otherwise survive only in Icelandic manuscripts, indicating their Norse origin. This is moreover supported by philological evidence in other extant manuscript copies. Several of these Norse translations were later converted into Swedish at the behest of Eufemia, the queen of King Hákon V of Norway (r. 1299–1319), which confirms their existence in Norway at the time.[50]

Textual Transmission

The Norse texts analysed here all belong (except perhaps the Norse version of *Partonopeu de Blois*, whose origin remains uncertain) to the reign of King Hákon and hence bear witness to the massive flow of literary material from northern France through England and ultimately to Iceland via Norway. They form a coherent group as literary works executed at a specific time and place and encompassing a specific intent, the deliberate import of foreign material by the Norwegian court.[51] They were also, as a group, translated significantly

[48] For information on King Hákon's reign and the relations between the English and the Norwegian court during the rule of Hákon and King Henry III see Knut Helle, 'Anglo-Norwegian Relations in the Reign of Håkon Håkonsson (1217–63)', *Medieval Scandinavia* 1 (1968), 101–14; Knut Helle, ed. *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, particularly 369–91; and Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*. Despite its age, Leach's massive volume, describing the historical connections between Britain and Scandinavia during the reign of the Angevin kings, continues to be a comprehensive and by and large an accurate source for the period and the relations between the countries.

[49] It is known that Henry took pleasure in hunting birds, such as hawks and falcons, and that they frequently served as royal gifts to the English monarch from King Hákon (Helle, 'Anglo-Norwegian Relations', 105–6).

[50] Some of the French material translated in Norway in the thirteenth century has in fact only been preserved in Norse. The Norse *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, for instance, is frequently used as guide in the editing of the Anglo-Norman *Tristan* by Thomas of Brittany. The immense Nordic collection of *chansons de geste*, *Karlamagnús saga*, similarly contains episodes now lost, indicating that there may have been entire branches of the epic genre that are no longer extant except in a Norse version.

[51] I agree here with the arguments presented in a remarkable article by Jody Enders, which proposes the reintroduction of 'intentionality' into literary discussion ('Medieval Death, Modern Morality, and the Fallacies of Intention', *New Medieval Literatures* 5 (2002), 87–[illegible]4). The presumption in this study is that there is with any given literary work an underlying intent that influences the shape of the work. While such 'authorial intent' is obviously both elusive

earlier than their respective Middle English counterparts, bringing to the fore some interesting questions about authorial intent and the impact it might have had upon the reconfigurations of the material. The earliest English text discussed here, *Ywain and Gawain*, has been dated to the first half of the fourteenth century, at least half a century later than its Norse equivalent, *Ívens saga*. The latest, *Sir Launfal*, from the late fourteenth century, was composed over a century later than the corresponding Norse translation of Marie de France's *Lais*. Given the complex preservation history of these Norse texts, however, the time lapse is diminished by the fact that the texts discussed below – apart from *Strengleikar*, which is preserved in a thirteenth-century Norwegian manuscript – have all come down to us in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Icelandic manuscripts, putting them much closer in terms of actual identifiable reading communities to their English counterparts.

The discussion thus encompasses not only the move from northern France through England to Norway, but the ensuing transmission of those texts to Iceland, where they were copied and preserved. Iceland lost its independence to the Norwegian throne during the rule of King Hákon. The first half of the thirteenth century had been beset with civil discord between the principal families battling over control over the country. In 1262–4 the Althing recognised the Norwegian king as ruler, ending the Icelandic commonwealth, but bringing peace to a country torn apart by the bloodshed of feud and discord. A cultural correlation that had always existed as a result of the common heritage of the Icelandic and Norwegian people was thus reinforced by their union under one monarch. It is therefore quite likely that the French material translated in Norway passed not long afterwards to Iceland and it is even conceivable that Icelanders took part in the translation activity itself in Norway, given their propensity for historical writing and their established reputation in Scandinavia as historians and royal biographers.[52]

The Norse texts thus contain within them the complex pattern of cultural transmission from Anglo-Norman, or French, into the Norse tongue in the thirteenth century, only to be rewritten and possibly reshaped as they continued their journey further north. The copying of the French translated material in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Iceland forms a part of a greater interest in literary activity and textual preservation evident in the copying and gathering of texts, both native and foreign, in massive manuscript collections. The Icelandic scribes did not seem to make a distinction between translated and native texts, putting together both translated romances with native ones in collections of romances. The distinction seems to be based not on the origination of the material, but rather on the language in which it has been preserved, that is, Norse. There are relatively few texts preserved in Latin

and limited, its existence and the bearing it has had on the work is of value in deciphering the cultural conceptualisations that have impacted its creation.

[52] It is known that Snorri Sturluson (1178/9–1241) visited the Norwegian court at least twice and his nephew, Sturla Þórðarson (1214–84), wrote Hákon's biography, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (see Guðrún Nordal, Sverrir Tómasson and Vésteinn Ólason, eds., *Íslensk bókmenntasaga*, vol. 1, Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1992, 309–401, for information on Snorri Sturluson, in particular 366–83).

in Iceland, in comparison to England, and almost none of these collections contain works in multiple languages, as is apparent in English manuscripts.[53] This discrepancy indicates a difference in approach to notions of linguistic and national coherence between thirteenth- and fourteenth-century England and Iceland. Neither seems to make much of a distinction between adapted and native material, yet the Icelandic manuscripts are noticeably monolingual, whereas many of the English manuscripts evince the facility with which English readers apparently moved between Middle English, French and Latin.

The discussion in the following chapters begins with the exploration of the interconnections between the Angevin dynasty in England and the Norwegian court, and of questions of literary and cultural incursion. The analysis of the Middle English and Old Norse versions of Marie de France's *Lais*, presumably written in England in the twelfth century and preserved in Anglo-Norman, probes questions of cultural dominance by drawing on the critical discourses of imperialism and post-colonial theory. The political implications of the interrelation between Anglo-Norman and Middle English in the fourteenth century, when both *Lay le Freine* and *Sir Launfal* were written, are explored in the analysis of the reconstruction of the French text in Middle English. The question of whether political authority comes into play in textual transmission and how that affects the possible reshaping of philosophical or political subtext through dissident representation is thus probed. The chapter plays on the conceptualisations of cultural autonomy and identity, linguistic and literary authority and the implication of textual refashioning for literary integration and assimilation, or conversely, for cultural and linguistic defiance.

The following chapter moves geographically further south as the attention shifts from the Angevin empire to northern France and the tradition of the *chanson de geste*. *La Chanson de Roland* was written some time around the turn of the eleventh and the twelfth centuries, and thus reflects a different and earlier historical and cultural context than the *Lais*. Both formed, however, part of the same import of French literary material into Norway in the thirteenth century. This is the only chapter depicting a two-way comparison as there is no comparable version of *La Chanson de Roland* in English.[54] The text of the *Chanson* is, nonetheless, important in the context of this discussion as it contains ethics of the heroic mentality that accords with the Germanic tradition of warrior ideals evident in Scandinavian literature. This epic mode of representation is absent from the romances, as they depict a fundamentally new stage of literary concerns and moral ideals. The comparative analysis of the reception of the epic text as opposed to the more lyric poetry of Marie de France, or the later courtly romances, thus

[53] The few instances where the amalgamation of Latin and Norse can be found occur in religious manuscripts, where a Norse translation might follow a Latin sermon, for instance.

[54] The extant fragment of 1,049 lines of the Middle English *Song of Roland*, preserved in the Lansdowne MS 388, is not based on the extant French text of *La Chanson de Roland*, or at least not exclusively, and is to a great extent indebted to Turpin's *Vita Caroli Magni*, often referred to as the Pseudo-Turpin (*The Sege off Melayne, The Romance of Duke Rowland and Sir Otuell of Spayne, The Song of Roland*, ed. Sidney J. Herrtage, Early English Text Society Extra Series 35, New York: Kraus Reprint, 1981, xviii–xxv).

provides a contrast that foregrounds the mode of reception, the nature of modifications, and the function the texts may have had within their reading communities. The emphasis in the analysis of the Norse version of the *Chanson* is on the transmission of behavioural patterns. These serve as evidence of the conceptualisation of culture as a semiotic system that is inherently destabilised in the process of translation owing to the different significations attached to the semiotic concepts within each linguistically defined community. It thus portrays translation essentially as the transfer of signs from one system to another, necessitating cultural adaptation of unfamiliar signs, or signs with a different (and sometimes opposite) meaning.

The third chapter returns to the time period of the formation of the courtly romance and the introduction of courtly literature in the examination of the Norse and English translations of Chrétien de Troyes's *Le Chevalier au Lion*, or *Yvain*. While the French text was written at approximately the same time as Marie de France's *Lais*, and the Norse text translated about a century later, the English text belongs to the same period as *Lay le Freine* and shows some signs of modifications similar to those in that text. Both show deceptive fidelity to their original, quite unlike the later *Sir Launfal*, for instance, that nonetheless conceal systematic modifications of the source texts, indicating a different authorial intent and purpose. The chapter focuses on narratological transformations evident in both the English and Norse texts as evidence of the narrative predilections of the English and the Norse audiences. The interconnections between the cultural traditions of those reading communities, versus that of the French courtly milieu that promoted the perfection of the romance form in the hands of Chrétien de Troyes, are similarly explored. Again, the disparity in modification agenda between the Norse and English translators highlights the cultural and social implications of the translation activity.

The final chapter addresses the longest and most complex text of all the works analysed here. *Partonopeu de Blois* pulls together many of the threads discussed in the previous chapters, while simultaneously throwing into relief the complexities and ambiguities of cultural and textual transmission. *Partonopeu* epitomises the multiplicity of medieval textuality, yet it has been curiously neglected by critics. The existence of two separate and defined versions of the story makes the comparative analysis particularly challenging. Yet at the same time it highlights some of the main arguments that have been put forth in the preceding chapters, which have dealt with the direct transmission of a single text from one language to another. The complexity is amplified by the existence of both versions in English, thereby interlinking the English translations to both the Norse and the French text. Here there is evidence of intricate and fascinating transmission patterns, of sophistication in literary adaptation that surpasses the other translations, of elaborate and perhaps surprising cultural and social interrelations. The discussion is complicated by the fact that it is unclear whether the text was translated in thirteenth-century Norway or not, which shifts the focus to the Icelandic manuscript copies. Evidence of romance translation activity in Iceland in the fourteenth century would have dramatic effects on the understanding of

literary activity and audience interests in Iceland at that time. It has generally been assumed that the French material was translated in Norway and eventually transported to Iceland. If *Partalopa saga* was in fact translated in Iceland in the fourteenth century it would reveal direct and dynamic engagement with foreign literary material by writers in fourteenth-century Iceland. The fourteenth century in Iceland has frequently been regarded as the century of literary decline, marking the end of native saga composition, which was succeeded by the 'lesser' non-indigenous genres such as the romances. Recently, however, scholars have begun to direct their attention to the more marginal genres of *riddarasögur* (romances) and *fornaldarsögur* (legendary sagas) as evidence of a flourishing literary tradition that is moreover intimately interconnected with continental literary activity.[55] Christopher Sanders states, in his edition of *Bevers saga*, that there is in fact no conclusive evidence that points to a Norwegian origin of the translation, which suggests that not only may *Partalopa saga* have been translated in Iceland, but so may *Bevers saga*.[56] The relocation of the translation of *Bevers saga* and *Partalopa saga* would indicate the active engagement with foreign literary material in fourteenth-century Iceland. *Bevers saga* is a translation of the Anglo-Norman *Boeve de Haumtone* and Sanders argues for close correlations between the Icelandic version and the existing manuscript copies of the Anglo-Norman version, making it likely that the text came to Iceland (or Norway) via Britain.[57] The connections with England and English literary activity are of particular interest here as both the Norse and English translations of *Partonopeu de Blois* preserve the variant version of the Partonope legend.

The chapter contemplates this question of transmission patterns and the role the textual transmission has played in the reconstruction of the text. The focus is on the cultural impact in the analysis of modifications in gender structures and character representation. These modifications in turn indicate distinct differences in gendered social and cultural values. Perhaps more than anything, the chapter suggests a new mode of approaching such a study, one that favours the translation as an independent work representative of the social and literary context from which it originates and foregrounds the differences between source text and translation as evidence of cultural creativity. The chapter is therefore intended to both deepen and complicate the argument of cultural transmission.

[55] For a discussion of *riddarasögur* see for instance Kalinke, *King Arthur North-by-Northwest* and *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland*; Barnes, 'Romance in Iceland'; and Glauser, 'Romance (Translated *riddarasögur*)'. For approaches to *fornaldarsögur* see for instance Torfi Tulinius, *The Matter of the North. The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth-Century Iceland*, trans. Randi C. Eldevik (Odense: The Odense University Press, 2002); and Agnete Ney, Ármann Jakobsson and Annette Larsen, eds., *Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og virkelighed* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanums Forlag, 2008).

[56] *Bevers saga* has been preserved in Icelandic manuscripts only, although the story is listed in an inventory written in Ryfylke in Norway in 1366. Sanders points out that while remarkable, the citation is not an indication of Norwegian origin as Icelandic manuscripts were frequently exported to Norway in the fourteenth century (*Bevers saga*, ed. Christopher Sanders, Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 2001, xc–xci).

[57] Ibid. clii–clvi.

The structure of the book is thus neither linear nor geographically organised, but is based instead on a thematic development. It moves from the notion of literary imperialism in the first chapter to examination of behavioural patterns in the second, through analysis of narrative transformations in the third and ultimately to investigation of representational modifications as evidence of intrinsic disparities in societal perceptions of gender and social structures. The broad scope, both in terms of texts and methodology, is intended to denote the complexity of cultural transfer. The exploration of literary and cultural influence in the first chapter serves to foreground the concept of *mouvance* on a national scale, or perhaps more accurately on an international scale. The movement of texts and their implicit cultural content across linguistic and territorial boundaries underlies the entire topic of the volume and hence is addressed in the first chapter on the expansive level of cultural and social contact. The second chapter in turn narrows the focus from the encounter between the sometimes conflicting ideologies of separate cultural domains to the study of behavioural and emotional modifications. The view thus shifts from the trans-national movement of texts to the examination of behavioural codes intrinsic to every community and the way in which those existing codes shape the substance of the translation.

The third chapter maintains the more restricted perspective by analysing narrative and formal conventions as means of establishing the mobility and regenerative quality of literary traditions. In the fourth chapter the scope is broadened again to explore the ideologically prescribed perceptions of such concepts as masculinity, femininity and authority. This in a way completes the circle and returns to the first chapter in the questioning of the inherent qualities of the societal perception of gender. It seeks to illuminate through the comparative reading of the various versions of the Partonope story how such structures are culturally determined and hence unstable and variable. In a sense, the last chapter thus confirms the notion of cultural resistance proposed in the first chapter through the depiction of the literary transformations of the socially prescribed codes of gendered behaviour. The discussion therefore seeks to capture the multiplicity of cultural movement in the late Middle Ages through the exploration of the various aspects of textual transmission, such as the impact of culturally prescribed codes of conduct and narrative conventions as well as the significance of pre-existing literary traditions in translation. Similarly it aspires to reveal how the reception of ideologically determined narrative functions and character portraits affects the refashioning of those texts and what that tells us about their ultimate reading communities.