

The Imperial Implications of Medieval Translations: Old Norse and Middle English Versions of Marie de France's *Lais*

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BY examining the adaptations of Marie de France's *Lais* into Old Norse and Middle English, this article seeks to explore issues of cultural dominance and imperial influence in textual transmission during the late Middle Ages in northern Europe. The interrelations of the various national cultures and the respective medieval vernaculars, Old French, Middle English, and Old Norse, will be explored through linguistic and contextual analysis of the translations. The intention is to provide a comparative model of translation as intercultural by drawing on and conversing with postcolonial studies. Critical discourse about imperialism tends to focus on the aggression of a dominant nation, the empire, upon an ethnically defined "other." Despite the complex interplay of cultural authority and subordination in late medieval Europe, the definition of "empire" tends to shift such discussions away from the Middle Ages toward later periods of postcolonial activity. Recent studies, however, have borrowed the theoretical approaches of postcolonial studies to examine the complexities and ambivalences of intercultural relations in the medieval period.¹ While many adherents of postcolonial theories warn against their geographic and temporal

¹See Patricia Clare Ingham, "In Contrayez Straunge': Colonial Relations, British Identity, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," in *New Medieval Literatures*, ed. Wendy Scase, Rita Copeland, and David Lawton, vol. 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 61–94; 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).

displacement in this way, I agree with Patricia Clare Ingham's counter-argument that "the modernity of postcolonial studies blocks certain routes to the past, and thus maintains certain nationalist and historicist exclusions."² The deliberate distancing of postcolonial studies from the dynamics of both cultural and geographical conflicts in premodern civilizations reenacts the binary oppositions of modern and archaic, civilized and barbaric. The shifting of those temporal boundaries challenges this conception of modernity by allowing for the inclusion of the medieval as a site of potential imperial dynamics.

By drawing on imperial theorizing to explore pre-colonial issues of power and cultural marginality, I do not mean to question its later historical relevance but rather to expand the concept to include "cultural" imperialism. By using the metaphor of national conquest to incorporate cultural expansionism one can examine power dynamics without prejudging the stability of such categories as race, ethnicity, and nationality in medieval times. I conceptualize empire as the perceived cultural and political superiority of a cohesive sovereign, in this case the "Francophone court."³ This does not entail the imposition of national borders and ethnic distinctions—constructions that form a part of modern sensibilities rather than medieval—so much as the perception of regal rule based on political authority and linguistic coherence. Admittedly, the medieval imperium is to be found in Christendom and its propagation rather than in secular rulers. The impact of the teachings of the Roman Church upon its adjacent domains is however replicated on a cultural and linguistic level in the relationship between a culturally and politically dominant society and the surrounding territories. The authority of that cultural center is amplified by the dispersal of the imperial power of Christian ideology through missionary activity and religious dissemination.⁴ In England this becomes apparent when Anglo-Normans

² Ingham and Warren, eds. *Postcolonial Moves*, 2. For an argument against such usage, see, for example, Bill Ashcroft, "Introduction," in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995), 1–4; and Gabrielle Speigel, "Épater les Médiévistes," *History and Theory* 39 (2000): 243–50.

³ The concept of the "Francophone court" serves here as a term for the literary and cultural traditions of the French-speaking aristocratic courts (including such dialects as Francien of the royal court of France, Anglo-Norman in England, and Picard in the north-east).

⁴ The complex pattern of cultural transmission, such as the diffusion of Christian doctrine from Rome through France arriving ultimately in Norway via England, obviates any clear distinction between center and margins. Similarly the ethnic migrations (for example, the Norsemen in Normandy) and the often convoluted flow of literary themes and ideas (the Breton *lais*, for instance) preclude any rigid definition of cultural hier-

are installed in positions of power within the English Church after the Conquest and thus placed in control of the interpretation and representation of Christian ideas and principles.⁵ The interrelations between the ecclesiastic domain, education, and writing make literature the prime location for manifestations of imperial influence. The study of translations, particularly translations from a dominant language into a language with a less authoritative status, provides the ideal locus for examining problems of power and cultural transposition.⁶

The corpus of *Lais*, customarily ascribed to Marie de France, is believed to have been written in England between 1155 and 1170. The twelve *lais* have been preserved in only one complete Anglo-Norman manuscript, British Museum Harley 978, written in the mid thirteenth century in England.⁷ During the reign of Hákon Hákonarson (1204–63), king of Norway from 1217 to 1263, several translations from French literature into Old Norse were commissioned, ostensibly by the king himself, one of which was a collection of *lais*, called *Strengleikar*: “<E>N bok þessor er hinn virðulege hacon konongr let norræna or volsko male ma hæita lioða bok. þui at af þæim sogum er þæssir bok birtir gærðo skolld i syðra brætlande er liggr i frannz lioðsonga” (This book, which the esteemed King Hákon had translated into Norse from the French language, may be called “Book of Lais,” because from the stories which this book makes known, poets in Brittany—which is in France—composed *lais*).⁸ It contains eleven of Marie’s *Lais* (*Eliduc* is omitted) along

archy. There is, however, a clear sense of cultural dispersion and receptivity evident in the dissemination of French literary material into Middle English and Old Norse in the thirteenth and fourteenth century that draws on the perceived cultural and literary pre-eminence of Northern France.

⁵The division between the French-speaking ecclesiastic leaders and the English-speaking congregation foregrounds the inevitability of either a complete alienation and subjugation of the subjects, often observed in modern postcolonial states, or, conversely, the integration and assimilation of the dominating force into the existing social realm as evidenced in late medieval England.

⁶The editors of *The Idea of the Vernacular* point out that recent scholarship on medieval translations has been “less concerned with translation as a pragmatic or creative practice than a site where cultural relations of dominance and subservience might be played out” (Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al., “The Notion of Vernacular Theory,” *idem* [University Park: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1999], 317).

⁷There are additionally four extant manuscripts containing one or more of Marie de France’s *lais*, see *Les Lais de Marie de France*, ed. Jean Rychner (Paris: Éditions Champion, 1966), and *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1978). The intricacies of the Anglo-Norman and Old French linguistic and cultural interrelations will not be addressed directly in this article and a common “French” cultural background of all four texts will be assumed.

⁸*Strengleikar. An Old Norse Translation of Twenty-one Old French Lais*, ed. Robert Cook

with ten other *lais*, some of which have no known Old French originals.⁹ The Old Norse text has been preserved in a single manuscript, Codex De la Gardie 4–7, dated approximately 1270, in the Uppsala University Library, which is no longer in a complete state. Fragments varying in size are now conserved as manuscript AM 666b, 4^o, in the Arnarnag-næan collection in Copenhagen.¹⁰

Prior to King Hákon's ascendance to the throne in 1217, Norway had been racked by civil wars and strife for almost a century, and it was during his reign that peace was brought to the country under one rule.¹¹ His grandfather, King Sverrir Sigurðsson (reign 1177–1202), had instituted a central government and established the close connection to the English court that would only be reinforced during the sovereignty of his grandson. The Church was similarly dependent on English religious houses, both in terms of ecclesiastic organization and education, since the institution and dispersion of Christian doctrine in the thirteenth century was almost exclusively accomplished through England.¹² The

and Mattias Tveitane, trans. Cook (Oslo: Norsk Historisk Kjelldskrift-Institutt, 1979), 4–5. Cook's English translation of the Norse prose from this edition is used throughout the article with only minor amendments when needed for comparison purposes. All subsequent references will be cited parenthetically within the text by line.

⁹The major part of the codex "was originally made up of six regular gatherings, consisting of 8 leaves, or 4 double leaves each. It would, therefore, be natural to suppose . . . that the seventh and last gathering also consisted of 8 leaves, of which only the outer pair, leaves 1/8, is now preserved." It is likely that the last gathering contained ten leaves. *Eliduc* was probably never a part of the compilation as it could scarcely have fit on the lost leaves (ibid., xiii–xvii). For a description of the manuscript, see *Elis saga, Strengleikar and Other Texts*. Uppsala University Library Delagardieska Samlingen Nos. 4-7 Folio and AM 666 b Quarto, ed. Mattias Tveitane, Corpus codicum norvegicorum medii aevii, quarto serie, vol. 4 (Oslo: The Society for Publications of Old Norwegian Manuscripts, 1972), 9–16.

¹⁰The De la Gardie manuscript is the oldest and most important Norwegian source of Old Norse translations of courtly literature as most of the romance translations have been preserved only in later Icelandic manuscripts.

¹¹For information on the historical context of King Hákon's rule and his connection to England, see Henry Goddard Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921); R. Keyser and C. R. Unger, eds., "Introduction," in *Strengleikar eða Liðabok. En Samling af Romantiske Fortællinger efter Bretoniske Folkesange (Lais)* (Christiania, 1850); and E. F. Halvorsen, "Introduction," in *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland* (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1959).

¹²Religious houses were not only founded on Anglo-Norman traditions and through English sister houses but were often ruled by Anglo-Norman abbots. The Norwegian Cistercian houses Hovedøya and Lyse, near Bergen, which are linked to the production of texts during King Hákon's rule, were founded as the daughter houses of the English Fountains Abbey in 1146. The prologue of *Elis saga*, contained in the same manuscript as the Norse translation of the *Lais*, refers to a translator by the name of "Roðbert aboti," who purportedly translated the text at the request of King Hákon. The name is not Scandinavian, and it has generally been assumed that he was an English (Anglo-Norman) monk who perhaps resided at Lyse (*Elis saga, Strengleikar and Other Texts*, 32). For information on

ensuing peace and relative prosperity allowed for the pursuit by the king of his more refined interests. The burst of literary and translation activity in Norway during Hákon's rule testifies to his interest in such cultural activities. Several romance translations name him as patron and instigator of the translation activity, and the majority of the translated romances have been attributed to his reign. Similarly the opulence of his court at Bergen, in comparison with prior and other Scandinavian royal sites, as well as the education of his sons bear witness to a predilection for the sophistication evidenced by his English and French neighbors.¹³ It is not unreasonable to assume that the king would seek to emulate the courtly refinement of his royal allies in the British Isles, particularly considering the close and cordial relationship he enjoyed with King Henry III and the English throne. It is therefore quite plausible that the succession of translations, apparently commissioned by King Hákon and carried out during his reign, played a part in introducing and instituting the courtly tradition of the French and Anglo-Norman rulers among his entourage.¹⁴

This influx of French literature into Norway in the thirteenth century poses the question of cultural dominance in textual transmission. Those texts contained, embedded within them, the ideology of a dominant linguistic and cultural center that would impact the reading communities receiving them. The fact that the foreign material may have been imported purposely to influence social behavior draws attention to the volatility of cultural stability. Michael Doyle's definition of empire as a relationship between two political societies, defined by control and

Brother Robert, see, for instance, Sverrir Tómasson, "Hvenær var Tristráms sögu snúið?" in *Gripla*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson, 2 vols. (Reykjavik: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1977), 2:47–78, and works cited there.

¹³ Young Hákon (1232–55) was instructed in the arts of the Norman knights, and his brother, Magnús (1238–80), later king of Norway, became patron of Icelandic writers who visited the court at the king's request (Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*, 154–55).

¹⁴ Leach argues in *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia* that the Norse translations were literally intended as manuals in the customs of chivalry (153). Marianne E. Kalinke rejects this notion in her book, *King Arthur, North-by-Northwest* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1981), arguing that their main purpose was entertainment not instruction, since the very elements of courtly etiquette, such as descriptions of dresses and passages of love, were greatly condensed or omitted (28). The fact that the texts were adjusted to Nordic mentality by excluding or reducing elements that had no meaning within the receptive culture does not preclude their function as guidance in courtly mannerisms, with respect to appropriate manners, topics of conversation, and courtly behavioral codes. Similarly the very notion that they were intended as "entertainment," rather than educational, doctrinal, or documentary, indicates the extent to which the textual ideology of a leisured nobility free to pursue such frivolous matters has been assumed.

achieved by either direct violence or indirect social and cultural dependency, points to the significance of the underlying civilizing force in the imperial endeavor.¹⁵ The cultural and political authority of the Francophone court versus that of Norway establishes a connection between a dominant territory and a marginal one. The resulting unilateral communication of ideas hence reverberates conventional imperialist tenets.¹⁶ The fact that the Francophone court was only inadvertently implicit in its imperial mission does not negate the relationship established between the two sovereigns. It is the *perception* of superiority, rather than a forceful imposition of values by an empire, that results here in the dynamics of cultural supremacy and dependence.¹⁷ The infiltration of a dominant ideology into a marginal society highlights the imbalance of power and the imperial implication of the literary incursion.

A closer look at the text will reveal the complex interrelations of cultural authority and reception in textual transmission. The Norse translator transforms the verse form of Marie de France's *Lais* into prose, resulting in adjustments both in the aural effect of the text and in the condensation of its matter. The existing native meters, eddic and skaldic verse, were singularly unsuited for the octosyllabic couplets of Marie de France's *Lais*. Moreover, there was already an established custom of prose narration in Scandinavia at the time in the writings of *konungasögur* (lives of the kings) and *Íslendinga sögur* (sagas of Icelanders).¹⁸ Given

¹⁵ Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 45.

¹⁶ The Norwegian manual for princes, *Speculum regale*, presumably written during King Hákon's reign, contains a paragraph specifying the status of the French tongue as a language of political value: "oc æf þu willt wærða fullkomenn í froð- | leic. Þa næmðu allar mallyzkur en | alra hælz latinu oc walsku. Þwíat | þær tungur ganga wiðazt. En þo | dynþu æigi at hældr þinni tungo." (ed. Oscar Brenner [München, 1881], 8, my italics) (And if you wish to become perfect in knowledge, you must learn all the dialects, *first and foremost Latin and French, for these languages are most widely used*. And yet, do not forget your native tongue or speech). It is of note here that the manual underlines the significance of not neglecting the native tongue or allowing it to be corrupted by foreign influence, revealing an awareness of the correlation between language and identity, past and history.

¹⁷ The modern world is witnessing similar imperial tendencies in the incursion of American language and popular culture into the global community. The absence of direct political aggression does therefore in no way diminish the impact of the dominating culture upon those receiving the foreign material. These relationships undergo constant realignment as the native cultures try to resist the foreign influence based on linguistic policy, cultural integrity, and national identity. The very same impulses of resistance, albeit perhaps less overt and conscious, can be observed in the Nordic reception of the French literary matter.

¹⁸ While it is unclear to what extent such literature was being composed or even recognized in Norway, Halvorsen argues in his book that oral versions of such literature as *fornaldarsögur* (legendary sagas of pre-Icelandic Germanic heroes) must have existed outside Iceland due to allusions to them in texts such as *Gesta Danorum* by Saxo Grammati-

the lack of a suitable verse form and the strong tradition of vernacular prose writing, the choice of prose over verse as a medium seems logical as it would ensure the reception of the foreign material by an audience already accustomed to such narrative presentation. Yet the transfer from the evocative lyricism and delightful tone of Marie de France's poems to the traditionally austere and objective narrative mode of the native prose is particularly challenging. The beginning lines of the first poem in the collection, the Anglo-Norman *Guigemar* and Old Norse *Guimars lióð*, will serve to elucidate similarities and divergences in the translation process:

Les contes ke jo sai verrais,
 Dunt li Bretun unt fait les lais,
 Vos conterai assez briefment.
 El chief de cest comencement,
 Sulunc la lettre e l'escriture,
 Vos mosterai une aventure
 Ki en Bretaigne la Menur
 Avint al tens ancienur.¹⁹

[The tales which I know are true—
 and from which the Bretons made their lais
 I'll now recount for you briefly;
 and at the very beginning of this endeavor,
 just the way it was written down,
 I'll relate an adventure
 that took place in Brittany,
 in the old days.]²⁰

The Norse version follows the text closely and can be read almost line by line: "Sogur þær er ec væit sanⁿar oc brættar hava lióðsonga af gort. vil ec segia yðr sem ec ma með fæstom orðum. En sua sem ritningar hava synt mer vil ec sægia yðr atburði þa sem gerðuzt a hinu syðra bretlande i fyrnskunni" (12–13) ("The stories which I know are true and from which the Bretons have made lais I want to tell you as best I can in a very few words. And just as writings have revealed to me, so

cus (*The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland*, 106–7). It is likely that some form of native literature (whether oral or written) was being practiced in Norway that must have had similarities with those extant in Iceland. At the very least, Norway's writers were probably familiar with those being produced in Iceland due to the close cultural connections between the two countries.

¹⁹ *Les Lais de Marie de France*, ed. Jean Rychner, ll. 19–26.

²⁰ Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante's English translation is used in this article with some minor adjustments (*The Lais of Marie de France*, 30).

will I tell you the adventures which took place in Brittany a long time ago"). The soft, playful tone of the original is to a great extent lost in the adaptation of the material to the linguistic structure of Norse prose, where sentences become generally shorter and more abrupt. The result is often a more powerful and swift narration that shifts the focus from the inner perspective of the characters to the action. The impartial narrative tone, adopted from the native literary tradition, and the apparent lack of interest in the psychology of the characters differ fundamentally from the ostensibly lighthearted yet subtly judicious narrative presence in the Anglo-Norman poems. It is of some significance that the perspective shifts from the feminine to the masculine viewpoint in the translation. This may be due to a conscious commiseration by the translator, being almost certainly male himself, with the masculine protagonist or to the linguistic characteristics of French versus Old Norse, a traditionally "masculine" language in its aural resonance, the density of its rhetoric, and its rigor and sobriety of utterance.

The majority of alterations evident in the transmission from Anglo-Norman to Old Norse can be categorized as omission of inconsequential detail, reduction in sentimentality, increased focus on action, and an interpolation of explicative passages clarifying French words or concepts that would have been unfamiliar to the audience. In *Laustíks líoð* the translator adds a paragraph explaining the naming of the French poem, *Laiústic*, and the symbolic connotation of the nightingale, thereby indicating that those symbolic connotations might not have been associated with the bird among the Nordic audience: "sua er kallat í bræzko male. en í volsku russinol. en í ænsku nictigal. En þat er æinn litill fugl. er þægar sumra tækr þa syngur hon ok gellr um nætr sua fagrt. ok miori roddu at yndelegt oc ynnelegt er til at lyða" (102–3) ("So it is called in the Breton language, but in French "russinol," and in English "nictigal." That is a little bird who, when summer begins, sings and chants at night so beautifully and in such a thin voice that it is delightful and delicious to listen to"). The immediate and unconscious associations that the French-speaking readers would have drawn have to be explained verbally. The translator does so by depicting the song of the nightingale as emblematic of the unspoken love and feelings created by the thought of a loved one. In *Bisclarets líoð* (French *Bisclaret*), the translator interposes an account of a personal experience related to the topic of the story at the end of the translation: "En sa er þessa bok norrænaðe hann sa í bærnsko sinni æinn Rikan bonda er hamskiftisk stundum var hann maðr stundum í vargs ham. ok talde allt þat er vargar at hofðuzt

mæðan er fra honom ækki længra sægiande" (98–99) ("He who translated this book into Norse saw in his childhood a wealthy farmer who shifted his shape. At times he was a man, at other times in wolf's shape, and he told everything that wolves did in the meantime. But there is no more to be said about him"). The addition bears witness to a conscious effort by the translator to adapt the foreign text to the collective psyche of his readers by making the text more familiar through the medium of his own experiences. The precise translation reveals the underlying intent to convey the emotional and social mannerisms implicit in the linguistic presentation of the original poems. Yet there is a distinct attempt at integrating the foreign text into the existing Norse literary tradition, indicating an acute awareness of cultural disparity and the need to merge the translated text and its environment to ensure successful adaptation.

It is in the transmission and imposition of a univocal discourse of a dominating culture upon a marginal society that the imperial agenda, implicit in the Norse translations of the Anglo-Norman poems, can be found. The formal and linguistic alterations evident in the Old Norse translations, however, undermine the process of cultural transformation intrinsic to the original translation objective. The textual modifications signal the effort of integrating the material into an existing tradition rather than supplanting that tradition. The French material is replanted in the foreign Nordic soil, and the result is a distinctly different text, intimately interconnected with its source yet unexpectedly unique. The shift in tone and aural quality from the Anglo-Norman verse to Old Norse prose accentuates the capacity of language as a site of resistance to imperial control. While the Nordic tongue is made to expand to incorporate the unfamiliar elocution of the courtly lyrics, the linguistic subtleties integral to the French mentality are abandoned as the text assumes the character and texture of Nordic thought.²¹

The editors of *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* draw attention to the fact that "the control over language by the imperial centre—whether achieved by displacing native languages, by installing itself as a 'standard' against other variants . . . or by planting the language of empire

²¹It is of some significance in this context that *Strengleikar* does not seem to have had as great an impact upon its Nordic audience, judged by the manuscript preservation and perpetuation, as some of the other translated texts, which might possibly be due to the unfamiliarity of the form and material. The *chansons de geste*, more ruthlessly masculine and heroic, as well as many later romances, similar in substance and presentation to the native *fornaldarsögur*, were, for instance, retranslated, recreated, and plundered for centuries afterward.

in a new place—remains the most potent instrument of cultural control.”²² The notion of political control through linguistic displacement is, of course, of particular relevance to Middle English literature. The invasion of a foreign ruler and his followers into England in 1066 emulates in many aspects later colonial excursions into marginal territories, notwithstanding the fact that with the Norman invaders the connection to an “empire” was neither direct nor political but rather linguistic and cultural.²³ The substitution of the Norman language as the language of political and social distinction signals the colonizing implications of the Norman Conquest of England. There are indications that the imposition of the language upon the “occupied” country may not have penetrated through the various class layers.²⁴ English remained the language of the peasantry and lower classes—hence its demotion in status—and the majority of the upper and middle class simply adopted the new language in their official engagements while retaining the old. Most became bilingual (or multilingual), and French thus never displaced English as a common language used in everyday speech except perhaps among the exclusive and restricted circle of the nobility.²⁵ Whereas the three languages, Latin, Anglo-Norman, and English, coexisted in relative harmony, albeit in distinct hierarchical order and role, from the Conquest throughout the thirteenth century, the fourteenth century saw a rapid decline in Anglo-Norman use, both official and literary.²⁶ The lack of a

²² Aschoff, “Language,” 283.

²³ This discussion does not explore the existing ethnic diversity of Anglo-Saxon England or the inherent cultural multiplicity of the Normans. Such extant multiculturalism does, however, not detract from the argument concerning the imperial dynamics of cultural interrelations as they are not based on conceptions of ethnic homogeneity or national identity. In fact, it supports the argument of pre-modern patterns of conquest, dominion, settlement, and native integration.

²⁴ Susan Crane points out that the majority of the population in England remained monolingual and that soon after the Conquest the two vernaculars, English and French, became associated with “differing spheres of activity and registers of formality,” indicating that social ranking was based on linguistic attributes. The language spoken served therefore as an indicator of both social status and function (“Anglo-Norman Cultures in England, 1066–1460,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], 44).

²⁵ Derek Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 86–90.

²⁶ For a discussion of the usage of English, Anglo-Norman, and Latin in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century England, see W. M. Ormrod, “The Use of English: Language, Law, and Political Culture in Fourteenth-Century England,” *Speculum* 78 (2003): 750–87; W. Rothwell, “The Role of French in Thirteenth-Century England,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 58 (1976): 445–66; and “The Trilingual England of Geoffrey Chaucer,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 16 (1994): 45–68; Rolf Berndt, “The Period of the Final Decline of French in Medieval England (Fourteenth and Early Fifteenth Centuries),”

dominating outside force allowed for the rapid assimilation and integration of Anglo-Norman descendants and their traditions into existing English culture and ensured the ultimate replacement of their decaying language with the existing and still vibrant native tongue. The standardization of French on the Continent most likely accelerated the process of isolation and deterioration, as the French spoken in England was not a unified language but had the characteristics of a dialect spoken by the invaders.²⁷ The flexibility of the English tongue, which borrowed from the multiple and varied linguistic influences in Britain at any given time, made it a medium that could incorporate linguistic elements unfamiliar or new to the cultural sphere.²⁸ The coexistence with diverse languages probably promoted the mobility and resilience that ultimately made the reestablishment of English as a literary language possible, albeit much changed by those very influences upon it.

The act of writing in the English vernacular thus assumes a completely new dimension in relation to the source language and text—far different than in the Old Norse translations where those internal linguistic ambivalences were nonexistent. The social and political implications of linguistic choice in textual production in fourteenth-century England make the correlation between source text and translation inherently more complex than in Norway.²⁹ Similarly the interconnect-edness of the two cultures coexisting within the same locality almost certainly impacted authorial attitude in a manner inherently absent from the Nordic translations. The ambiguity of the relations between the French originals and the English redactions is compounded for the modern reader by the fact that only two of Marie's *lais* have been preserved in Middle English: *Lay le Freine* and *Sir Launfal*, along with *Sir Landevale*. The anonymous *Lay le Freine* is a relatively close translation

Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik 20 (1972): 341–69; and Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

²⁷ Crane, "Anglo-Norman Cultures in England," 56–57.

²⁸ Rothwell rejects the notion of the extinction of Anglo-Norman due to its status as a dialect and argues against the standardization of Francien as a source of modern French in his article, "The Trilingual England of Geoffrey Chaucer." He points out that English and French were both living vernaculars, whereas Latin was a dead construct, but he does concede that during the fourteenth century Anglo-French became increasingly a "written language of record" as opposed to a dynamic, spoken vernacular (*Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 16 [1994]: 54).

²⁹ Nicholas Watson draws attention to the preoccupation with legitimacy and the status of the vernacular as well as to the political implications of the use of written English in the fourteenth century ("The Politics of Middle English Writing," in *The Idea of the Vernacular*, ed. Wogan-Browne et al., 331–52).

of *Lai le Fresne* dating from the early fourteenth century and exists in only one manuscript copy, the Auchinleck compilation, which is partially damaged. Thomas Chestre's *Sir Launfal* is a loose adaptation of the story of *Lanval* written in the late fourteenth century and preserved in only one early-fifteenth-century manuscript, British Library Cotton Caligula A.ii.³⁰ The temporal disparity between the source text and the two Middle English versions makes the discussion of the translation aim and the textual representation of the source material especially difficult. Whereas the Norse text was translated within a generation or so of the originals and therefore is still embedded within the intellectual realm that produced the *lais*, the Middle English texts are not only written at a much later date, but they are also separated from each other by up to a century.

The later text, Thomas Chestre's *Sir Launfal*, is written in a period that witnessed significant changes in the political structures of English society that are, to a certain extent, reflected in the shift in the hierarchy of the two vernaculars. The poem is written in tail-rhyme stanza, a "native" stanzaic form used in a number of other Middle English romances. The change in verse form, in and of itself, necessitates some dramatic changes due to the conversion from the four-stress couplets to the twelve-line tail-rhyme stanza, which results in a different rhythmic pattern and expands the text significantly. Similarly the change in verse form indicates the shift that has occurred from the mainly aristocratic audience of Marie de France's *Lais* to the more mixed social classes, among whom the tail-rhyme romances were popular.³¹ Whereas

³⁰The primary source for Thomas Chestre's tale is the anonymous Middle English *Sir Landevale*, which is similarly an adaptation of Marie de France's *Lanval* preserved in three manuscripts (Bodleian MS. Rawl. C 86; Cambridge University Library MS. Kk v.30; and British Library MS. Add. 27897) and in two fragments of early printed books (Malone 541 and Douce Fragments e. 40, both in the Bodleian Library). The other known source is the anonymous Old French *lai* of *Graelent*. Most scholars assume there to be a third lost source containing episodes missing in both *Graelent* and *Sir Landevale* (A. J. Bliss, ed., *Sir Launfal*, by Thomas Chestre [London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1960], 1–31; and Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, eds., *The Middle English Breton Lays* [Kalamazoo: TEAMS, 2001], 201–2). All future quotations of *Sir Launfal* are from Bliss's edition; quotations of *Lay le Friene* are from Laskaya and Salisbury's. Hereafter both works will be cited parenthetically within the text, *Launfal* by page, and *Lay le Friene* by line.

³¹Bliss states in his edition of *Sir Launfal* that the tail-rhyme romances were the work of "traveling [sic] minstrels, intended for a mixed audience" ("Introduction," *Sir Launfal*, 31). The tail-rhyme meter was a native form particularly suited to the communal recital of popular narratives favored by the middle class and the diverse audiences of public places. For a discussion of the tail-rhyme tradition, see A. McI. Trowce, "The English Tail-Rhyme Romances," *Medium Ævum* 1 (1932): 87–108; continued in *Medium Ævum* 2 (1933): 189–98; and in *Medium Ævum* 3 (1934): 30–50.

the Anglo-Norman version of *Lanval* is courtly with a simple yet eloquent verse structure and a compassionate narratorial attitude toward its protagonist, *Sir Launfal* exhibits quite the opposite tendencies. The language is brusque with a large amount of added phraseology. The characterization of Sir Launfal is also rather unconventional. He is less idealized, and his representation frequently deviates from that of the traditional romantic hero. The typical romantic exploits and heroic progression are undercut by an impression of realism. The story draws attention to the mundane problems of Launfal's existence, and there is a direct correlation between his actions and the misfortunes that befall him. This intimate link between Launfal's acts and the consequences of those acts make his tribulations integral to his character portrayal as opposed to simply forming the traditional elements of a romance plot. The distancing of the narrative voice from the protagonist similarly generates a detachment between Sir Launfal and the reader that detracts from a generic reading and thus actively involves the reader in the reinterpretation of the text. The satirical tone in the following example, where Launfal is unable to dine with the aristocracy or go to church due to his lack of appropriate accessories and clean clothes, underlines this disassociation:

'Damesele,' he sayde, 'Nay!
 To dyne haue J no herte:
 Pre dayes þer ben agon,
 Mete ne drynke eet y noon,
 And all was for pouert.
 Today to cherche y wolde haue gon,
 But me fawtede hosyn & schon,
 Clenly brech & scherte.

(*Sir Launfal*, 194–201)

It is hard to imagine Marie de France discussing her protagonists' "dirty breeches" or otherwise "demoting" her characters to confront such ordinary and pragmatic problems. In fact, A. C. Spearing criticizes the poem for its apparent lack of sophistication, stating that "Thomas Chestre either failed to grasp or failed to value the true nature of the *Lanval* story"; for Spearing, it is a "fascinating disaster."³² Yet he, along with Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, suggests that the poem "rather masterfully satirizes a bourgeois mentality" in its sometimes mocking

³²Spearing, "Marie de France and Her Middle English Adapters," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 12 (1990): 148.

depiction of the courtly realm and urban society.³³ Rather than relegating the text to a “disastrous” adaptation of Marie de France’s *Lanval*, it can be seen as an independent reworking of the French *lai* to produce a “commentary” on contemporary culture. Whatever its success on the level of literary achievement, it can then be seen as fully embedded within the historical and cultural framework of the author.

As was the case with the Norse translations, the Middle English version has been adjusted to its new reading community, probably the aspiring middle class where the intricacies of courtly etiquette had less of an immediate relevance than with the presumably mostly aristocratic audience of Marie de France’s *lais*. Dieter Mehl notes that the “same period that saw the emergence of the English romances, also saw the steady decline of the knight, who had been such an essential part of courtly society,” signaling the disintegration of the fundamental societal structures and elements that had supported the courtly value system.³⁴ Whereas the material was translated precisely for the novelty of its content in Norway, the Anglo-Norman text had, in all probability, existed for over two centuries in England, and the courtly signifying system embedded within it was therefore not only already in place but no longer had such practical relevance to its audience. The refined elocution of courtly love and knightly adventures of Marie’s *Lanval* assumes a burlesque tone of practical and ordinary problems in the English text. Sir Launfal is denied hospitality by the Mayor, who refuses to lodge him and his fellow knights in his house and sends him to “a chamber by my orchardsyd(e)” (*Sir Launfal*, 124) as a means of ridding himself of this presence. The refusal of the Mayor to provide lodging, which underlies the fundamental structure of both aristocratic society and the courtly ideal of the knight, calls into question the entire foundation of the romantic ideology of noble behavior.³⁵ The departure of Sir Huwe and Syr Jon due to Launfal’s financial inability to support their knightly lifestyle similarly undermines the very courtly ideology the text is drawing on: “Þey seyð, ‘Syr, our robes beþ torent, / And your tresour ys all yspent, / And we goþ ewyll ydy3t’” (*Sir Launfal*, 139–41). The

³³ Laskaya and Salisbury, eds., *The Middle English Breton Lays*, 203; and Spearing, “The Lanval Story,” in his *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 97–120.

³⁴ Mehl, *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1969), 4.

³⁵ For a discussion of the literary conventions of aristocratic hospitality and its function within courtly ideology, see John W. Baldwin, *Aristocratic Life in Medieval France* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 98–121.

focus on money as an economic necessity for maintaining appropriate clothing and equipment rather than a symbolic feature of social status indicates the fundamental shift that has occurred from the courtly tone of Marie de France's text to the Middle English version. It is possible that this may reflect an earlier generic shift: the author may have come into contact with the works of the early thirteenth-century French writer Jean Renart, whose unusual narrative approach to the genre could have provided the creative motivation for the rewriting of *Sir Launfal*.³⁶ The focus on the economic aspect of the knight's search for glory and the subtle undermining of the conventional narrative structures of the romance that occur throughout Renart's *Romance of the Rose* or *Guillaume de Dole* are reminiscent of Sir Launfal's generic instability.³⁷ Whether or not the author was familiar with the text and influenced by it in the composition of his texts, the Middle English version of *Launfal* deviates from the original in a particular and specific manner that places it in a discordant relationship with its source text. This refashioning of the French tale indicates the disparity between the function of the original and the purpose of its translation. Rather than imitating the tone and presentation of the French poem, as the Norse text does, the material is appropriated in favor of a contemporary political agenda. Where the Old Norse text seeks to internalize the courtly discourse of the French text (whether it succeeds as such or not) *Sir Launfal* engages in a contestatory dialogue with the original. The text thus plays on the resulting discord between the French courtly ideology, inherent in the original, and the contemporary English social conditions that the English version implicitly addresses.

By contrast, the anonymous *Lay le Freine*, dating from the early fourteenth century, shows a much closer correlation to the original. It is

³⁶ It is not implausible that Renart's writings would have been known in England. For the suggestion that the Bohun family may have owned a manuscript containing the romances *Guillaume de Palerne* and Renart's *L'Escoufle*, see the forthcoming edition of *William of Palerne*, ed. David Lawton (Rochester: TEAMS). This would confirm the fact that at least one of Renart's works existed in England during the time *Sir Launfal* was written and that the English author, and possibly even his intended reading community, might have been familiar with this more ironic alternative approach to romance writing.

³⁷ Critics differ in their interpretations of the "problem spots" of Renart's *Guillaume de Dole*, but later critics seem to agree that the inconsistencies in the text are due to the intentional and deliberate undermining of the romance genre, into which Renart is placing his own work rather than demonstrating his lack of skills as a writer. The critical debate over his works in many ways reflects the debate over *Sir Launfal*'s literary quality ("Introduction," in *Romance of the Rose* or *Guillaume de Dole*, trans. Patricia Terry and Nancy Vine Durling [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993], 1–15).

written in short couplets, which would have been the most comparable Middle English metric form to the French *Le Fresne's* octosyllabic couplet. Despite remaining close to the original, the text shows signs of a deliberate adaptation to its new linguistic and geographical sphere in two minor modifications in the text. The translator moves the scene of the poem from "Bretaine" in Marie's version to the "west cuntré," thereby thematically localizing it and hence reclaiming it as a part of Britain's literary heritage.³⁸ The translator furthermore inserts an explication for the French name of the poem suggesting that he assumes his audience might no longer be capable of comprehending the French word. This is reinforced later in the poem when the translator adds a passage explaining the signification of the heroine's name:

Sche cleped it *Frain* in that stounde.
 (The Freyns of the "asche" is a *freyn*
 After the language of Breteyn;
 Forthe *Le Frein* men clepeth this lay
 More than *Asche* in ich cuntray).
 (*Lay le Freine*, 230–34)

The translator in a similar manner omits the passage containing the play on the connotations of the twin sisters' names, Ash and Hazel, instead inserting a comment clarifying the French names: "Better than Ash is Hazle y ween! / (For in Romaunce *Le Frain* "ash" is, / And *Le Codre* "hazle," y-wis)" (*Lay le Freine*, 346–48). The repeated gestures to the French source indicate the rhetorical self-consciousness of the English writer regarding the material he transmits and the cultural and linguistic diversity of the reading community into which he inserts his text. Anglo-Norman had already begun losing the regenerative faculties necessary for linguistic survival in the beginning of the fourteenth century. The Anglo-Norman ruling class was also steadily being integrated with their English counterparts, resulting in the disintegration of the existing cultural barriers. The established framework of linguistic order and function was beginning to come apart as there emerged a new class of people unable (or unwilling) to read French anymore

³⁸The geographical change from Brittany to the "west cuntré" of England is noted by most critics. In their edition of *The Middle English Breton Lays*, Laskaya and Salisbury comment that the "west country" was often associated with Wales and the Celtic fairy world and that based on that one could intimate that the move was possibly a conscious attempt at relocation back to the assumed place of origin of the tales by the Middle English redactor (8n8o). This article will not go into the complexity of the English/Welsh relation, both linguistic and ethnic, and the Anglicization of the British Isles.

but still existing within the cultural realm shaped by Anglo-Norman literature and tradition. The recurring textual reference to a French original in *Lay le Freine* calls attention to the ambivalent relationship between class, identity, and language in fourteenth century England.³⁹ Given that translation was in effect the mode through which reading and writing was taught within the multilingual context of England, it can be conceived of as simply another form of writing.⁴⁰ Whereas the Norse texts were translations of a foreign work and culture, the Middle English version of *Le Fresne* can be better described as a recreation of an existing authoritative text within a more local and diverse context of its English speaking audience. Rita Copeland claims, in her book on translation in the Middle Ages, that "as a rhetorical act, literary translation seeks to erase the cultural gap from which it emerges by contesting and displacing the source and substituting itself."⁴¹ As such, the Middle English translation can be seen as an effort to bridge the cultural gap by forging a connection to the original, through the repeated gestures to the French source, while simultaneously replacing the French text with the new English version.

Lay le Freine shows similar signs of what Spearing terms "a move down the social scale," as did *Sir Launfal*.⁴² The polite tone, with its attention to manners, is reduced, and many of the linguistic transformations shift from an inward perspective to an outward spatial and sequence-based focus. It is nevertheless quite possible that what appears to be a primitive structure may not indicate authorial inadequacy or an insensitivity to imagery or emotion. Rather, it may simply suggest a preference for stories based on action. Both Nordic and English reading communities

³⁹ It was, paradoxically, during the latter part of the period, which saw the most substantial writing in Anglo-Norman, that the resurgence of English occurred most extensively in literary writing (Crane, "Anglo-Norman Cultures in England," 49–51).

⁴⁰ Children learning to read and write in England were in fact learning to read and write a foreign language. While boys were instructed in Latin and often French, girls were generally taught French. The translations of words and concepts back into the mother tongue served to conceptualize the foreign vocabulary, making the act of translation and movement between languages intimately interconnected with the act of writing itself. For information on French instruction in England in the Middle Ages, see, for instance, Douglas A. Kibbee, *For to speke French trewely* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1991); and W. Rothwell, "The Teaching of French in Medieval England," *Modern Language Review* 63 (1968): 37–46. For a discussion of pedagogy and Latin in medieval England, see Rita Copeland, "Childhood, Pedagogy, and the Literal Sense," in *New Medieval Literatures*, ed. Scase, Copeland, and Lawton, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 125–56.

⁴¹ Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 30.

⁴² Spearing, "Marie de France and Her Middle English Adapters," 127.

show a predilection for compact and rapid narrative sequencing and a lack of interest in extended rhetorical flourish of emotive or psychological characterizations. The difference between the Old Norse and Middle English texts, however, is intimately related to the question of geographic and cultural demarcation. Whereas Norway was an autonomous kingdom, the question of English sovereignty is much more complex. Foreign and native rulers had succeeded one another, often with multiple rulers and multiple ethnic fragmentations with diverse territorial boundaries. Despite the imposition of Danish law in pre-Conquest England, the Nordic settlements never extended much outside the so-called Danelaw, and the principles behind the rule were more in the line of cultural preservation and integration. The Anglo-Normans, however, were bent on conquest and dominion and sought to subdue even the most remote regions of the country through settlement, delegation of land, political maneuvers, and, last but not least, linguistic authority.⁴³ At the time of Marie de France's *Lanval*, the English were thus subject to the rule of an Anglo-Norman king and court, albeit one not ruled by an absent empire but by the invading force itself, which maintained only indirect connections with the originating site of authority and power. The coexistence of French tongue, literature, and social norms alongside the English language and customs altered the relationship between the two and hence affected authorial objectives and textual presentation. The writing of *Sir Launfal*, however, took place at a time when those relations of dominion and authority were disintegrating. English was reappearing as a fashionable and literary language, and the country had been at war with France since the middle of the century, which created a disjunction between the established earlier parameters of supremacy and subjugation.⁴⁴ As can be seen in *Sir Launfal*, the translated text undermines the authority of the original by destabilizing the courtly ideology inherent to Marie de France's *Lanval*. The shift in the

⁴³ Whereas the intent of the Conquest was one of domination, many of the means used to gain control were both pacifying and integrating—such as intermarriage and commercial relations—indicating the qualities that made the Normans so successful in their exploits elsewhere in Europe (see Crane, “Anglo-Norman Cultures in England,” 36). The Norse origin of the Normans foregrounds the territorial and cultural movement of invasion, subjugation, and assimilation taking place in Northern Europe during the Middle Ages.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of the linguistic interrelations of English and Anglo-Norman and the concept of England as a nation and its coexistence with France in the fourteenth century, see Rothwell, “The Trilingual England of Geoffrey Chaucer,” 45–68; Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*.

function of the story together with the ironic narratorial presentation revokes the assumed cultural authority of the original text. In *Lay le Freine*, the relocation of the tale to English (or Welsh) soil speaks similarly of the dissident nature, whether intentional or not, of the translation. The French exploitation of literary material across the Channel is foregrounded through the shifting of the location of the tale's origin from Brittany to the "west cuntré," quite likely the Marches.⁴⁵ This interplay of linguistic authority and cultural transformation becomes more subtle in the case of Norway as there is no physical dominance by a foreign "empire." Translation becomes in this case means of cultural reproduction rather than its displacement owing to the cultural authority of the French and the possible admiration expressed by the Norwegian court. The precision in the Old Norse textual and thematic reproduction of the French *Lais* indicates the effort at accuracy in the transposition of the French material and alludes to the underlying objective of preserving and promoting the courtly ideology embedded within the structure of the original text.

Whereas the Norse translator attempted to reconstruct a foreign poem from a distinctly different poetical and linguistic tradition, the English adapter had no such need. The English were familiar with courtly literature through the influx of continental literary material and values that followed the Conquest. The multitude of literary themes, forms, and ideals that existed simultaneously within the multilingual territory of England after the Conquest afforded a diverse literary space quite removed from that of the rather uniform cultural domain of Norway. The conflict between "native" and "foreign," which had to be bridged in the Norse translations, therefore assumes another form in the context of England. Whereas the Norse translator had to convey the unfamiliar signifying system embedded within his source text, the familiarity of both language and cultural context in the English reading communities shifted the incentive from a native rendition of a foreign text to the vernacularization of an existing local text.⁴⁶ This change in textual mo-

⁴⁵ For information on the Breton lays and their origins, see Laskaya and Salisbury, eds., *The Middle English Breton Lays*; Mortimer J. Donovan, *The Breton Lay: A Guide to Varieties* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969); and Spearing, "Marie de France and Her Middle English Adapters." For information on the ethnic and linguistic conflicts on the borders of Wales and England, see Robert Bartlett, *The Hanged Man* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁴⁶ Regardless of whether the intended audience of the Breton lays discussed here were capable of understanding French or not, they were, by virtue of the coexistence of both Normans and English within the same location, accustomed to and cognizant of the various traditions present within England. Despite the substantial contact, both mercantile

tivation underlies both the flexibility with which the English adapters approached their sources and the social implications of their texts. The fusion between the French and the English literary cultures and languages thus removes the cultural disparity and diminishes the need for textual modification. Yet the transformations evident in the Middle English versions of the Anglo-Norman texts indicate that the recreation of those texts within the English language entails their adaptation to separate codes and conventions. Similarly, the shift from the mainly aristocratic audience of *Lanval* to the middle-class audience of *Sir Launfal* requires the adaptation of courtly ideology to the conceptual realm and the narrative predilections of its new reading community. Those alterations are brought about not only by linguistic changes, due to the move from one language to another, but also by the entire cultural and ideological history embedded within the signifying structures of that language. The aural quality, structural capacity, and grammatical complexities of each language inevitably influence the extent to which rhythmical or acoustic characteristics and metrical forms are conveyed.⁴⁷ They also impact, therefore, how the thematic content of a poem is transmitted.

Ruqaiya Hasan notes that the difficulty of comprehending a foreign tongue arises “not because the sounds and the wordings are unfamiliar, but more because the ways of meaning are not familiar—the manner in which the universe is made meaningful is not fully apprehended.”⁴⁸ Just as language is a code that requires familiarity with the underlying system for a successful act of communication, so culture can be characterized as a semiotic system requiring the same familiarity with the code in order to interpret successfully cultural acts such as behavior, manner, and, ultimately, textual conventions. In the Norse text this can be seen in such minor details as the nightingale in *Laustiks liod̄*. The symbolic function of the bird within the French poem loses its significance within the new Nordic context due to the lack of a *signified* within

and political, between Norway and other nations, the manner of familiarity and integration must by necessity have differed quite profoundly.

⁴⁷The grammatical and phonological differences between Anglo-Norman, Old Norse, and Middle English are too complex to be addressed here in a short manner. Particularly significant in this context is the way in which the sound of a language impacts the manner in which the content is received when read out loud. The common groupings of plosive and affricative consonants with short vowels in Old Norse versus the more nasal and fricative consonants and number of vowels within Old French illustrate the differing aural impact. Middle English often uses similar groupings as Old Norse, which is particularly effective in battle descriptions as it aurally intensifies and enhances the action described.

⁴⁸Hasan, “Ways of Saying: Ways of Meaning,” in *The Semiotics of Culture and Language*, ed. Robin P. Fawcett et al., vol. 1 (London: Frances Pinter, 1984), 108.

the cultural code of Nordic readers. Unrecognizable to its audience, the nightingale has no specific connotation and would hence be meaningless as a symbol within the text. The translator must translate the *function* of the bird within the text not just its image in order to convey the symbolic nuances of the bird both as a text and as a cultural sign. Within the English context such disparity should be less evident due to the coexistence of the two cultures within the same geographic location, resulting, it would seem, in an increased familiarity with the semiotic system behind each language. The textual adaptations, however, demonstrate the fundamental uniqueness of each system and the interconnectedness of the specific linguistic code to certain cultural conceptualizations. The transfer from one system to the other not only necessitates formal and stylistic changes, due to the basic grammatical and syntactical differences between languages, but more importantly occurs at the level of rhetorical presentation. By recreating an Anglo-Norman account in Middle English, the text takes on the collective textual and cultural memory of its creator and hence becomes profoundly localized and separate from the source it sought to replicate or replace. It is thus profoundly resistant to the dominating impulse of foreign control. The linguistic and formal transformations of the text undermine the notion of translation as a confirmation of privileged discourse. On the contrary, they draw attention to the intrinsic capacity of language to either resist or subsume foreign influence. Those transformations similarly emphasize the bearing that the intended reading community has on the nature of authorial modifications as well as its influence on the ultimate endurance of a translated text. The Middle English versions of the Anglo-Norman poems therefore bear witness, along with the Old Norse texts, to the conceptual configurations fundamentally interconnected to the linguistic constitution of a society. Similarly the Norse and English translations reveal the inevitable cultural transformations that occur in the transposition of a text, written in a certain language and within a particular ideological framework, to a quite different linguistic and conceptual realm.⁴⁹

The University of Iceland

⁴⁹ A shorter version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the ACLA at Pennsylvania State University, March 11–13, 2005. I am very grateful to David Lawton and Robert Henke for their insightful reading and helpful comments on this paper, as well as to Edward Donald Kennedy for his kind suggestions.

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