

# TELLING THE STORY IN THE MIDDLE AGES

ESSAYS IN HONOR OF EVELYN BIRGE VITZ



EDITED BY  
KATHRYN A. DUYS, ELIZABETH EMERY AND LAURIE POSTLEWATE

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Evelyn 'Timmie' Birge Vitz

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D. S. BREWER

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# Introduction

KATHRYN A. DUYS, ELIZABETH EMERY, LAURIE POSTLEWATE

The storyteller on the cover of this book stands on the margin, both inside and outside the story.<sup>1</sup> Will he momentarily step into the hall to begin his entertainment at the feast going on inside? Or will he turn his eyes our way instead and launch into the Arthurian romance that has already begun within the frame to his right? Either way, his *vielle* is raised to play an overture whose melodies have grown so faint that we can now only imagine them. His eyes are trained on the courtly revelry beside him, as are the eyes of the kneeling page and the bishop peering up from below. For this brief moment and forever, these figures all ignore the readers – kings and ladies, monks and nuns, historians, scholars and critics – who watch and listen for the story to begin.

Reading the words on a manuscript page like this one is like watching a performance unfold. The elegant script twines across the page, carrying voices and backstories as dramatic as the message Tristan inscribed on the hazel branch for Iseut. The page is framed by vines among whose colorful leaves animals carry out their impertinent ruses. The reader warms to the drama by the light reflected in the miniatures' burnished gold, just as the child Marcel warmed to his mother's voice as she read bedtime stories in Proust's exploration of memories both personal and medieval. There is no denying the enchantment.

Before the Gutenberg era, storytelling met critical and dynamic social needs related to governance and war, communication and education, faith and artistic creation, as well as a thousand gradations of entertainment to elicit everything from awe to raucous laughter among people of every age and station. Many feared that storytelling had died when it entered print, but Boccaccio is proof that it thrived in the new medium. As we pass into a world beyond Gutenberg, stories are told in tweets of 140 silent characters, and they stream on the internet, traveling great distances to vast audiences of solitary individuals, their responses illuminated by smartphones and tablets. Humanistic investigation into storytelling has likewise taken a web-based turn, as manuscript libraries the world over make their holdings available in high-quality digitizations, free and open to all on the internet. Online sites indiscriminately collect amateur

<sup>1</sup> London, British Library, MS Royal 14 E. III, fol. 89r, *La Queste del Saint Graal*. A digital version of the entire manuscript may be consulted at [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=royal\\_ms\\_14\\_e\\_iii\\_fs001r](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=royal_ms_14_e_iii_fs001r) (accessed 31 May 2014). We thank Joyce Coleman for bringing this image to our attention.

and professional performances alike, creating a storytelling cyberspace whose accessibility is akin to the open-air markets and festivals of medieval times.

We dedicate this volume on medieval storytelling to Evelyn ‘Timmie’ Vitz, a scholar and teacher whose work keeps the Middle Ages dynamic for the public and the academy. Over the years she has assembled a great circle of students and colleagues, philosophers, musicologists, scientists and performers, and urged us not just to read medieval stories, but to listen, watch and try performing them as well. Her focus on performance both engaged and confounded the strict distinction between oral and written that giants of the field – such as Parry and Lord, Goody, Ong, Finnegan and Havelock – handed down to us.<sup>2</sup> She encouraged us to look for storytellers and listen to their voices in genres outside the minstrel’s typical repertory, both within and beyond the temporal limits of the Middle Ages. She frequently reminded us that in socio-historical context, the book was read aloud, making it a *porte parole* that put authors, narrators, characters and audience into storytelling circles. Stories are ‘amphibian’: they thrive in ‘a variety of composition and performance habitats’, she said, as happy in performance as they are in writing.<sup>3</sup>

Timmie Vitz has played a prominent role in breaking medieval storytelling out of strict confines, but she has not been alone; the shoulders of giants are crowded. Modern scholars inherited the classification of storytelling as oral narrative – inferior through its association with women and illiterates (peasants and children) – from nineteenth-century critics involved in shaping social and educational policy.<sup>4</sup> Sprung from this environment,<sup>5</sup> Parry and Lord’s ethnographic work on Serbian epics led them to propose that the great Homeric epics were orally composed, fixed in writing only after centuries of oral transmission – whence the *storybook* entered the discussion alongside performance. Parry and Lord focused on composition, however, which brought about the reconceptualization of the author: thus the illustrious, blind epic poet of antiquity became an illiterate storyteller. In the last thirty years, scholars have continued to investigate the voice, the book and the figure of the storyteller, while also inquiring into the life of performed narrative. With performance came the audience, and with the audience have come questions about the social function of storytelling.

The current critical activity around storytelling springs from the roles that

<sup>2</sup> Milman Parry, *L'épithète traditionnelle dans Homère* (Paris, 1928); Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA, 1960); Jack Goody, ed., *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge, 1968) and *The Logic of Writing and the Organisation of Society* (Cambridge, 1986); Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London, 1982); Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry* (Cambridge, 1977); Eric A. Havelock, *Literate Revolution in Greece and its Cultural Consequences* (Princeton, NJ, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> Evelyn Birge Vitz, *Orality and Performance in Early French Romance* (Cambridge, 1999), 20.

<sup>4</sup> See the essay by Elizabeth Emery in this volume.

<sup>5</sup> Milman Parry credited his own professor, the Sorbonne linguist and philologist Antoine Meillet, with first recognizing the formulaic nature of Homeric epic, and published his 1928 dissertation, ‘L'Épithète traditionnelle dans Homère’ in French.

have been identified, examined and questioned by scholars: author, storyteller, performer and audience. It is commonplace to say that a story begins with an author, but who do we mean when we say that? Since the heady days of deconstructionist thought and the ‘death of the author’, scholars such as Michel Zink, Howard Bloch and Sarah Kay, among others, have reframed and nuanced the concept of authorship from different perspectives that show the necessity to remain open, especially in the pre-print era, to a range of situations of textual creation and recreation.<sup>6</sup> From the author, we move to the storyteller; the two may be one and the same, or they may be distinct figures, one a creator and the other an interpreter. Of late, critical interest has focused on the identity and stance of the storyteller, not only as a social construct, but as a literary construct as well – artifice embodied.<sup>7</sup> However, the storyteller may also be a performer, which shifts the question from the creation of the story to its enactment.<sup>8</sup> It also splits the question about reception in two: what is the difference between a reader and an audience, how do they overlap? Studies of medieval performance have adopted methodologies from theater, anthropology and reader-response theory, all of which provide useful inroads into understanding the core dynamic between performer and audience. This line of inquiry incorporates reading aloud, recitation, acting, mime and, of course, singing and the playing of music.<sup>9</sup>

Voice is central to all of the roles of the storyteller and to those who gather

<sup>6</sup> Michel Zink, *La Subjectivité littéraire autour du siècle de Saint Louis* (Paris, 1985); R. Howard Bloch, *The Anonymous Marie de France* (Chicago, 2003); Sarah Kay, *The Place of Thought: The Complexity of One in Medieval French Didactic Poetry* (Philadelphia, 2007); Zrinka Stahuljak, Virginie Greene, Sarah Kay, Sharon Kinoshita and Peggy McCracken, *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes* (Cambridge, 2011); Simon Gaunt, *Marco Polo's Le Devisement du Monde: Narrative Voice, Language and Diversity* (Cambridge, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Examples include Deborah McGrady, *Controlling Readers: Guillaume de Machaut and His Late Medieval Audience* (Toronto, 2006); *Visualizing Medieval Performance. Perspectives, Histories, Contexts*, ed. Elina Gertsman (Aldershot, 2008); Mark Chinca and Christopher Young, *Orality and Literacy in the Middle Ages: Essays on a Conjunction and its Consequences in Honour of D. H. Green* (Turnhout, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Among the most notable of these are *The Entertainer in Medieval and Traditional Culture: A Symposium*, ed. Flemming Andersen, Thomas Pettitt and Reinhold Schröder (Odense, 1997); Evelyn Birge Vitz, *Orality and Performance in Early French Romance* (Cambridge, 1999); *Performing Medieval Narrative*, ed. Evelyn Birge Vitz, Nancy Freeman Regalado and Marilyn Lawrence (Cambridge, 2005); *Cultural Performances in Medieval France*, ed. Eglal Doss-Quinby, Roberta L. Krueger and E. Jane Burns (Cambridge, 2007); Linda Marie Zaerr, *Performance and the Middle English Romance* (Cambridge, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin Bagby, Anne Azéma and Christopher Page have been leaders in discussing strategies for performances of medieval stories and song. See Bagby's DVD of *Beowulf* and accompanying critical material: an interview and conversations with *Beowulf* scholars, as well as its companion website, <http://www.bagbybeowulf.com/dvd/index.html> (accessed 30 May 2014). Azéma, the director of the Boston Camerata, has produced many recordings as well as articles reflecting on her choices. See “‘Dunc chante haut et cler’: remarques sur l’interprétation de la musique médiévale”, in *Cultural Performances in Medieval France*, ed. Eglal Doss-Quinby, Roberta L. Krueger and E. Jane Burns (Cambridge, 2007), 289–99. Christopher Page has also provided rich insights into medieval practices by examining



around. The work of Paul Zumthor redirected the orality focus of Parry and Lord and forged a new path, taken in different directions by scholars including Suzanne Fleischmann, Simon Gaunt and Sophie Marnette.<sup>10</sup>

The roles that the storyteller plays in creation and performance are not complete without considering the material reality of storytelling in the only form actually left to us from the Middle Ages: the manuscript book as literary artifact of storytelling. Over the past three decades numerous approaches have arisen from the disciplines of philology, paleography and codicology to produce editions that sharpen insight into the functions that the production and transmission of writing played within the storytelling ethos of the Middle Ages.<sup>11</sup> The discussion, which once focused on whether extant 'texts' were composed orally or in writing, and whether they were directed at listeners or readers, has now turned to the interaction of multiple variants, scribal intervention, *mise en page* and codex organization and use. Stories often come with pictures, which become part of the experience of storytelling, as the essays in this volume by Maureen Boulton, Joyce Coleman and Mark Cruse demonstrate. Scholarship on manuscript illustration and decoration has shown how powerful the intersections of textual studies and art history can be. Voice literally entered the picture when art historians such as Michael Camille and Jonathan Alexander showed us the visual language of sound: storytellers' speech made visible in scrolls and speaking gestures, and the subtle dynamics of performance depicted in the gazes exchanged among performers, readers and their audiences within illuminations.<sup>12</sup> And, just as performance can be challenged by digressions and

evidence through the lens of performance. See, for example, *Voices and Instruments of the Middle Ages: Instrumental Practice and Songs in France, 1100–1300* (London, 1987).

<sup>10</sup> Paul Zumthor, *La lettre et la voix de la «littérature» médiévale* (Paris, 1984) and *La poésie et la voix dans la civilisation médiévale* (Paris, 1987); Suzanne Fleischmann, *Tense and Narrativity: From Medieval Performance to Modern Fiction* (Austin, TX, 1990); Simon Gaunt, *Retelling the Tale: An Introduction to Medieval French Literature* (London, 2001); Sophie Marnette, *Speech and Thought Presentation in French* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 2005); Nancy Bradbury, *Writing Aloud: Storytelling in Fourteenth-Century England* (Champaign-Urbana, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Sylvia Huot, *From Song to Book: The Poetics of Writing in Old French Lyric and Lyrical Narrative Poetry* (Ithaca, NY, 1982); Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, NJ, 1983); Bernard Cerquiglini, *Éloge de la variante* (Paris, 1989); Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge, 1996); Paul Henry Saenger, *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford, CA, 1997); Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Rhetoric, Meditation, and the Making of Images, 400–1200* (Cambridge, 1998); Rosemond McKitterick, *History and its Audiences* (Cambridge, 2000); Keith Busby, *Codex and Context: Reading Old French Verse Narrative in Manuscript* (Amsterdam and New York, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (London, 1992) and *Mirror in Parchment: The Luttrell Psalter and the Making of Medieval England* (Chicago, 1998); Jonathan J. G. Alexander, *Medieval Illuminators and their Methods of Work* (New Haven, CT, 1992).

distractions, so the medieval page has its marginalia that graft extra stories on to the text.

Finally, from performances and the texts that transmitted them, we turn to the world that stories reflect and move through, examined by critical studies of the social function of storytelling. This includes work deeply informed by interdisciplinary collaboration such as that of Clifford Geertz, combining the methods of anthropology and ethnography with literary and performance studies, and cultural history.<sup>13</sup> Here, the conversation moves toward the dynamic of relationships, political and personal, among authors and performers, their subjects, audience and community, artifact and ritual, the townscape and culture at large. The ground-breaking micro-histories of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Robert Darnton, among others, along with the work of ethnographers Steven Feld and Susan Slyomovics, and medievalists Elizabeth A. R. Brown and Carol Symes, have all put literary material in new frames of reference, reinvigorating the investigation of stories and the poetics of their telling.<sup>14</sup>

The essays in this volume take inspiration from these approaches to pay tribute to the scholarship of Timmie Vitz, who practiced cultural studies before it came into fashion. From her graduate work on literary semiotics with Paul Zumthor, which produced *The Crossroads of Intention: A Study of Symbolic Expression in the Poetry of François Villon* (1974), Timmie has worked to investigate the intersections of literary form and meaning, and their transmission to a reading, listening and watching audience. Her explorations resulted in a volume of original essays applying theories of narratology to medieval texts in *Medieval Narrative and Modern Narratologies: Subjects and Objects of Desire* (1989). These interests in critical theory expanded in the late 1980s to move the discussion of the performance of medieval literature beyond the limits of the orality/literacy paradigm to consider the role and quality of voice in the creation and dissemination of medieval literature. Timmie's work in this area was enriched by the interdisciplinary Colloquium on Orality, Writing and Culture at New York University that she and Nancy Regalado founded in 1988, a forum that fosters collaboration across disciplines among scholars, performers and students. It led to the publication of her seminal study, *Orality and Performance in Early French Romance* (1999), and to a collection of essays compiled with Nancy Regalado and Marilyn Lawrence, *Performing Medieval Narrative* (2005). A most modern medievalist dedicated to making medieval storytelling

<sup>13</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973).

<sup>14</sup> Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *La Sorcière de Jasmin* (Paris, 1983), for example, and Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, 1984); Steven Feld, *Sound and Sentiment* (Philadelphia, 1983); Susan Slyomovics, *The Object of Memory* (Philadelphia, 1998); Elizabeth A. R. Brown, *The Monarchy of Capetian France and Royal Ceremonial* (Aldershot, 1978); Carol Symes, *A Common Stage: Theater and Public Life in Medieval Arras* (Ithaca, NY, 2007); Sharon Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia, 2006).



accessible, Timmie took to the internet with the pioneering website *Performing Medieval Narrative Today: A Video Showcase*, elaborated and maintained with Marilyn Lawrence.<sup>15</sup> Timmie's interests are varied and reach across geographical boundaries, cultural limits and time zones. In recent years she has begun to study and participate in ballad traditions from a range of periods and places, including Eastern Europe and South Africa. The passion for storytelling that inspired this volume has led Timmie to teach in Abu Dhabi and to take students to witness professional storytellers in action in India.

As the work of Timmie Vitz demonstrates, the ground of storytelling studies is rich, constantly bringing forth new perspectives and approaches just as old stories develop new branches. This is the fruit of our labor, gathered to honor our friend and colleague, with whom we have long toiled in this vineyard.

The present volume is divided into three branches that are at once distinct and conjoined: 'Speaking of Stories', 'Inscribing Stories' and 'Moving Stories'. All the essays investigate the effects of voice and writing, images and retellings; they also explore the motivation, movement and mutability of stories. Moreover, within each branch, the theoretical concerns of one essay inform the others. In the first section, 'Speaking of Stories', voices resound. Linda Marie Zaerr, a literary scholar and performer, examines modes of storytelling that have been largely overlooked: the informal, improvised, impromptu and intimate. Using experimental archaeology, she examines references to informal amateur performance in English romances, and, as in a mirror, reflects back and forth on the qualities of voice, the interweaving of song, and audience rejoinder in her own experiences and those of romance characters. In her essay on 'Renart jongleur', Marilyn Lawrence explores a distinctive brand of informal storytelling in which the trickster fox, a jongleur *extraordinaire*, fakes bad French to pose as an inept minstrel. Allegedly at loose ends without a *vielle*, he begs off and allows others to take over his story, but at the climax he draws his sword-like tongue, and slices back and forth with double entendres.

The drama of doubled and overlapping voices in a less swashbuckling, more courtly context is the subject of Simonetta Cochis' analysis of her own performances of two *lais* by Marie de France. Reflecting on the responses of her scholarly audiences, she analyzes medieval storytelling's capacity to illuminate what performed non-Aristotelian narrative can be: the expressive recounting of stories not driven by the heroic actions of a tragically flawed character, but by the play of vocal inflections, tone, texture and dynamics of one performer with little else on hand. In the final essay of this section, Nancy Freeman Regalado wonders at the power of the narrator's voice in Villon's *Testament*, a slim, enigmatic poetic confection that compels readers to spin their own yarns: the adventures of the legendary rogue, François Villon. Working back through accumulated stories, Regalado reveals an extravagant narrative edifice, stories built

<sup>15</sup> <http://mednar.org/> (accessed 1 June 2014).

upon stories that have forgotten their fragile base, a lyric poem that is, by its very nature, fundamentally disinclined to story.

The second branch of our volume, 'Inscribing Stories', focuses on the manuscript book, whose contents, characters, listeners and readers are frequently organized by the figure of a storyteller. The authors, scribes and illuminators who crafted these central figures cleverly shaped voices, gestures and images to promote themselves, seduce an audience or elevate their authority – sometimes with grave sincerity, and other times with a wink and nod. Kathryn Duys examines how Gautier de Coinci fused historical allusion and poetics at the center of the *Miracles de Nostre Dame* to represent the playful yet serious response of his audience of young novices before a *mise en scène* of a royal marital crisis and its moral implications. Within a sermon and its interpolated song, Gautier combined story and history, commentary and response in an orchestration of voices that borders on the operatic in its manipulation of perspective and tone. Cristian Bratu demonstrates that writers of medieval histories and chronicles – texts that recount actual events in chronological order – also incorporated such special effects to fashion the presence of the author as a sometimes-storyteller, sometimes-clerk within complex textual communities. The effects of the voice (*effet de parlé*) and of the pen (*effet d'écrit*) combine authenticity and authority to invest accounts of lived experiences, such as those on crusade, with a compelling *effet de présence*, a powerful marketing tool designed to appeal to a wide variety of audiences. Kathleen Loysen examines Jacques Tahureau's *Dialogues*, a sixteenth-century humanist philosophical discussion that sets stories into a conversational frame that evokes the celebrated storytelling circles of the Renaissance. The work's dialogic structure naturally blends storytelling and philosophy in a syncretic humanist experience for the reader, whose expectations of discursive and narrative stances are both met and challenged.

In her study of two accounts of Christ's infancy miracles, the Anglo-Norman *Enfaunces Jesu Crist* and the Occitan *Infancy*, Maureen Boulton demonstrates that 'narrative theology' delivered weighty teachings to lay audiences through stories enhanced by attributes that are both distinctly performative and bookbound. When the Christ child pertly demands the deeper meaning of the alphabet, and when the subtle movement of characters and their shifting gestures in a narrative sequence of miniatures 'stage' the story of the Flight into Egypt, Christ's *sermo humilis* assumes the feel of live storytelling while also modeling appropriate responses to Christ's maximum authority. Visualizing authority is the subject of Joyce Coleman's essay on two images that introduce Machaut's *Remede de Fortune* and *Dit de l'alerion* in which the illuminator Perrin Remiet reflected the status of story as prelection by conferring academic honors on the great storyteller-poet Machaut. Coleman's detailed analysis of the clothing, furniture, locale, background, gaze and stances of the narrator and his audience renders the images a kind of metatextual inscription on Machaut's identity as a 'doctor of love'.

Paul Zumthor's conception of *mouvance* has profoundly influenced medieval studies since he coined the term in 1972 to refer to the 'mobility' of medieval

texts and their many reworkings through a complex cultural dynamic involving storytellers, writers, scribes and editors.<sup>16</sup> Zumthor is particularly important for this volume because of his emphasis on the oral transmission of stories; he included singers, performers, prelectors and copyists among the medieval ‘authors’ he identified<sup>17</sup> and would later insist on the importance of *intervocalité* among the network of storytellers, writers and audiences responsible for the dissemination of medieval texts.<sup>18</sup>

The essays in the third section of our book, ‘Moving Stories’, all demonstrate to varying degrees the scope of Zumthor’s concept of *mouvance*, and how it has come to define movement, not just in the largely French oral context he described, but also across cultures, languages, geography and time, from storytellers to audiences and writers, and back again. Stories move from place to place, but while fixed in one place they can also move among competing cultures, as in the case of the life of St Eugenia discussed by E. Gordon Whatley. Two versions of the saint’s life, one from the late fifth century and the other from the early sixth, demonstrate cultural *mouvance* within late antiquity. In an episode that rings with echoes from Hellenistic romance and Menippean novels, the pagan veneration of idols is challenged by an idol who, in the great Christian tradition, ‘becomes flesh’ to assert the authority of Christ to audiences within and without the story. Elizabeth Archibald’s essay likewise examines storytelling by clerics, focusing on the tantalizing fragments of the *Ruodlieb*, an eleventh-century Latin verse narrative that combines elements from romance, epic, lyric and didactic traditions, presented with wit and flair. Archibald compares it to the popular *Apollonius of Tyre* and later Arthurian Latin romances, and speculates about the hybrid nature of romance in Latin, the motives of its authors, and the nature of its target audience, which may well have included women.

In Laurie Postlewate’s essay on the thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman life of St Clement, *mouvance* takes the form of religious conversion: as Clement’s family is pulled apart, not to be reunited until each member has turned toward God, the author of the Anglo-Norman life effects a similar move by translating or ‘turning’ the Latin text toward vernacular storytelling to better inspire his audience to turn toward God. Thus conversion within the story is mirrored in the act of translation and reading: it is the slow, never-ending journey toward understanding the meaning of reunion with God. In Mark Cruse’s essay on the crusade manuscript of Philippe VI – London BL MS Royal 19.D.i – stories move from one language to another and across continents with a sense of urgency; *translatio* was critical to kingship. Messengers and translators thus become political actors with crucial roles in constructing ideologies, and the manuscript, a mirror of kings, allows Philippe VI to see himself alongside the likes of Alexander the Great, Kublai Kahn and St Louis as a protagonist in the story of a changing world.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale* (Paris, 1972), 71–3.

<sup>17</sup> Zumthor, *Essai*, 73.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Zumthor, ‘Intervocalité et mouvance’, in *La lettre et la voix*, 160–8.

In a final essay, Elizabeth Emery crosses centuries to question the nineteenth-century marginalization of oral storytelling – and medieval literature by association – as literary critics and educators classed medieval poetry as the ‘cradle’ of French literature, best fit for children. They established hierarchies that privileged modern language over medieval, written texts over oral storytelling, urban centers over rural and colonial lands – an order that continues to be prevalent and is now frequently challenged in modern scholarship.

In closing, we return to the liminal figure of the storyteller on the cover of this volume, both inside and outside of the story, forever active in engaging others in the dynamic process of sharing stories. Samuel Rosenberg’s ‘Retelling the Old Story’ does just this, explaining his own process of translating the friendship of Lancelot and Galehaut in a modern edition composed for a friend, Timmie Vitz.

Just as new branches sprout on a firmly grounded tree in a dense forest, stories come into being and flower. Leafy vines grow around the branches, following their length, twisting and overlapping, and connecting them to other branches, above and below. The lines of critical inquiry that we have traced in this volume are like those vines that extend and join stories to each other in infinite and complex ways. Many other themes flourish and interconnect these branches like vines, enriching the substance and beauty of the tree.

One of these vines grows from the roots of gendered power dynamics, from the forceful misogyny and sexual politics in Renart the Fox’s storytelling that Marilyn Lawrence discusses, to the nuanced view of a woman’s thought process revealed by Simonetta Cochis’ performance of Marie de France’s *Le Chaitivel*. The abused, slandered, but tenacious empress and queen at the center of Kathryn Duys’ essay on Gautier de Coinci’s *Chasteé as nonains* provide powerful exempla and counter-exempla for novices – the inscribed audience of the book – while perhaps offering other stories for the external audiences. The powerful female characters at the heart of Elizabeth Archibald’s and Gordon Whatley’s essays call into question cultural stereotypes about medieval women, while Elizabeth Emery’s essay reveals the insidious misogyny at play in marginalizing medieval stories by associating them with mothers and nursemaids recounting bedtime stories. Two more vines, tightly intertwined, are related to Horace’s concept of pleasure and profit. Often, as in the case of the texts discussed by Cochis, Duys, Bratu, Boulton, Coleman, Loysen, Archibald, Postlewate and Emery, instruction and entertainment are as interdependent as the honeysuckle and the hazel tree. If we branch into genre, we find that almost all of the contributors discuss generic conventions – including those of romance, *lai*, fabliau, lyric song, novel, history, chronicle, memoir, saint’s life and beast epic, to name but some – and show how texts both exploit and break with their standards. Our index reflects these and other critical interconnections among the stories and essays in this volume.

Many people have been instrumental in the composition of this volume. The idea for this book first arose in conversations between Laurie Postlewate and Kathryn Talarico, a dear friend and colleague with whom Timmie Vitz co-directed the Medieval and Renaissance Studies Program for many years. We

extend deep thanks to Nancy Regalado who, in addition to her essay in the volume, gave generously of her time and attention to many details of the execution of the book. Our initial project for the volume was met with enthusiasm by Caroline Palmer, and she has been unflagging in her support, encouragement and editorial direction throughout the process. Finally, our gratitude goes to the contributors for their generous scholarly offerings and many delightful exchanges. Just as storytelling circles moved into writing, so ours has now become a book to honor Timmie Vitz.