

**Communication, Translation, and Community in the Middle Ages and
Early Modern Period**

Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture

Edited by
Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge

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Communication, Translation, and Community in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period



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Edited by
Albrecht Classen

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Albrecht Classen

Introduction: An Essay on Language, Culture, and Identity: Medieval and Early Modern Perspectives on and Approaches to Communication, Translation, and Community

Abstract: Human society throughout time has always struggled hard to come to terms with its fundamental needs, that is, above all, good, functional, and productive communication. Constructive communication establishes community, which in turn is predicated on compromise, compassion, coordination, and companionship. A community without basic agreements of that sort cannot survive and will easily become a victim of devastating atomization, as western society seems to experience increasingly since the turn of the new millennium. This phenomenon was already clearly addressed in pre-modern literature and also historiography, possibly in the arts and even music. This introductory study examines the theoretical and practical implications and illustrates the issues by means of a critical discussion of particularly pertinent cases.

Keywords: Communication, community, political discourse, translation, medieval literature, didactic literature, Andreas Capellanus, Marie de France, Hartmann von Aue, Gottfried von Strassburg, Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Huon de Bordeaux*, Ulrich Bonerius/Boner, Juan Ruiz, Dante, Boccaccio, Geoffrey Chaucer, Heinrich Kaufringer

Theoretical Reflections

We cannot engage with culture and history without understanding, first of all, that one of the crucial problems in human life has always been (mis)communication, or the unwillingness, if not inability to cooperate with another person, although both might share the same/similar interest or concern. Human identity and social framework are fundamentally determined by the use of language, which also includes gestures, mimicry, touch, and sound, by which the individual can and must reach out to the others. All social interactions depend on the

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ability to communicate, whether within one's own language or across languages via translations. I will refer to translation numerous times below, and often refer then either to the actual philological translation process involving texts, or to cultural and linguistic translations in metaphorical terms. Good communication, to be sure, is the result of a solid translation effort, of decoding signals or words conveyed by the partner within a society, or from across cultural divides, within a partnership, a marriage, a monastic community, an aristocratic court, a guild, or a rural group of people. Both diplomats and public notaries, apart from poets and other writers, work with translations and are translators, both literally and metaphorically. This effort to translate from one culture or text to another, requires excellent listening skills, the sensitivity to respond appropriately, and the ability to formulate one's own thoughts, concerns, feelings, and interests without overstepping one's boundaries within the social context. The exchange of words is one thing, the follow-up with actions is another.

We could go so far as to specify that many of the negative aspects of human history have often been determined by common conflicts based on communication or lack thereof, from which have resulted just too easily aggression, hostility, and even violence – certainly a phenomenon which continues to hold sway until today. In fact, the pre-modern world was not at all better or worse in that regard than our own, and despite huge differences in other respects, such as the great influence of the Catholic Church and the strict feudal boundaries separating the various social classes, in essence people's lives have always been conditioned by fundamentally the same desires, feelings, irritations, disrespect, and, once again, (mis)communication. This implies directly that we can gain a clear assessment of a specific society or social group by way of investigating the communicative channels used and the level to which all members are equally involved.

We are human beings, that is, we use language to communicate with each other, however we might define language (also including gestures, rituals, images, and movements, etc.), but this does not mean at all that we understand each other accurately and demonstrate tolerance, even if we speak the same language because semantic differences prove to be a huge factor of confusion and failed interpretation. Moreover, a good communication might establish mutual understanding, but not necessarily community, hence not toleration or tolerance. Meanings differ, intentions are hidden, expressions are ambivalent, or individuals simply lie to achieve their goal. Of course, this very human ability to speak a highly versatile language, which clearly distinguishes us from all other creatures here on earth, irrespective of some of their capacity to exchange

of information or data, also entails an endless source of misunderstanding, conflicts, confusion, and fundamental disagreements.¹

Virtually all medieval and early modern didactic writers, such as Thomas of Cantimpré, Thomasin von Zerclaria, Hugo von Trimberg, Freidank, Ulrich Bonerius, Christine de Pizan, etc., harshly condemned lying and warned about its dangerous consequences for all social interaction.² Yet, at the same time,

1 Paul Vincent Spade, *Lies, Language and Logic in the Late Middle Ages*. Collected Studies Series, 272 (London: Variorum Repr., 1988); Emily Corran, *Lying and Perjury in Medieval Practical Thought: A Study in the History of Casuistry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), see also the contributions to *Homo mendax: Lüge als kulturelles Phänomen im Mittelalter*, ed. Ulrich Ernst. Das Mittelalter, 9 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2005); *Verstellung und Betrug im Mittelalter und in der mittelalterlichen Literatur*, ed. Matthias Meyer and Alexander Sager. Aventiuren, 7 (Göttingen: V & R unipress, 2015). Cf. also Dorothea Klein, “Warum man nicht lügen soll, und warum man es dennoch tut: zur Pragmatik der Lüge im Märe,” *Neuere Aspekte germanistischer Spätmittelalterforschung*, ed. Freimut Löser. Imagines medii aevi, 29 (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2012), 91–105; see now also Albrecht Classen, “Hate, Lies, and Violence: The Dark Side of Pre-Modern Literature: Why would we care? And yet, the key rests in the past to solve our issues today. With a Focus on The Stricker (Thirteenth Century),” *Journal of Humanities and Applied Social Sciences* 5.2 (2021): 281–94; online at: <http://www.hillpublisher.com/UpFile/202112/20211231163859.pdf> (last accessed on April 1, 2022); id., “Neid und Hass auf den anderen: Universale Probleme in höfischen Romanen und Verserzählungen des deutschen Mittelalters. Gottfried von Strassburg, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Der Stricker und Heinrich Kaufringer,” to appear in *Menschen als Hassobjekte: Interdisziplinäre Verhandlungen eines destruktiven Phänomens*, ed. Arletta Szmorhun and Paweł Zimniak (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht). As to the unique quality of human language, see now Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (New York: Harper, 2015). He expanded on these fundamental thoughts and reflected also on where the current conditions will take us into the future, which particularly pertains to the situation of human language: *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (New York: Harper, 2017). For obvious reasons, I refrain from reflecting on the huge corpus of philosophical and linguistic studies on the very nature of language – it would be endless. But see my latest article on this global issue, Albrecht Classen, “Communication and Social Interactions in the Late Middle Ages: The Fables by the Swiss-German Dominican Ulrich Bonerius,” to appear in *Quidditas*.

2 *What Nature Does Not Teach: Didactic Literature in the Medieval and Early-Modern Periods*, ed. Juanita Feros Ruys. Disputatio, 15. Turnhout: Brepols, 2008. Cf. also the late medieval voice by the anonymous poet of *Des Teufels Netz* (ca. 1414); Albrecht Classen, “Death, Sinfulness, the Devil, and the Clerical Author: The Late Medieval German Didactic Debate Poem *Des Teufels Netz* and the World of Craftsmanship,” *Death in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: The Material and Spiritual Conditions of the Culture of Death*, ed. A. Classen. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 16. Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2016, 277–96; for a thorough study and a solid new edition, along with a German translation of Thomas of Cantimpré’s treatise on bees, see now Julia Burkhardt, *Von Bienen lernen. Das Bonum universale de apibus des Thomas von Cantimpré als Gemeinschaftsentwurf: Analyse, Edition, Übersetzung, Kommentar*. 2 vols. Klöster als Innovationslabore, 7 (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2020). Thomas formulated in II, 26, 7 and especially in II, 26, 9 a strong condemnation of lying, urging his

human beings are in greatest need of communicating with each other, and hence they must rely, in one way or the other, on the reliability of the word, or the speech acts, on the exchange of information being trustworthy. Lying and deceiving are probably some of the worst evils in human life, and only an honest, open, mutually respectful form of communication, if possible across all kinds of barriers – gender, age, sexual orientation, race, languages, space, time, religion, ideology, etc. – empowers us to form a cohesive, constructive, collaborative, compassionate, coordinated, and cooperative community!

I have explored this topic of (mis)communication already once before in a larger monograph, *Verzweiflung und Hoffnung*, investigating the issue of human language within a social context – language is always social in its function and purpose – at that time focusing on such texts as the Old English *Beowulf*, the high medieval Latin treatise *De amore* by Andreas Capellanus, the Middle High German romances by Hartmann von Aue, the political and didactic stanzas by Walther von der Vogelweide, the Grail romance *Parzival* by Wolfram von Eschenbach, the famous romance of *Tristan and Isolde* by Gottfried von Straßburg, the didactic verse narrative *Helmbrecht* by Wernher der Gartenaere, and the apocalyptic verse narrative *Der Ring* by the Constance public notary Heinrich Wittenwiler.³ Scholarship has not really or extensively taken note of that study despite some very positive reviews,⁴ perhaps because such ‘modern’ approaches to medieval literature were not yet welcome at that time (2002). The fact that I published that study in German did not help that book either; international medieval scholarship is less and less capable of understanding that language, which, ironically in the present context, undermines the very purpose of humanistic investigation, and this also across languages.

However, if we fail to explain the universal relevance also of pre-modern texts, art works, music, or philosophy, then we are bound to fall into the trap of working only on museal subject matters from the Middle Ages, exhibit pieces

readers to guard themselves against the temptation to deceive others. Even the most mighty and powerful individuals would quickly realize a drastic decline of their reputation and social esteem when caught lying. By contrast, a poor man whose words can always be trusted would always enjoy high public respect (vol. II, 508).

³ Albrecht Classen, *Verzweiflung und Hoffnung. Die Suche nach der kommunikativen Gemeinschaft in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*. Beihefte zur Mediaevistik, 1 (Frankfurt a.M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2002). See also my very condensed article “Communication in the Middle Ages,” *Handbook of Medieval Studies: Terms – Methods – Trends*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), vol. 1, 330–43.

⁴ *The Medieval Review* 03.05.09 (online at: <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/tmr/article/view/15500/21618>; last accessed on April 1, 2022); *The Year's Work in Modern Language Studies* 64 (2002): 2003.

for the curious one, and lose the opportunity to teach some of the timeless lessons of the past for the new and future generations.⁵ The central need for good communicative strategies has never gone away, so studying various communities from the past through a literary lens provides us with unique opportunities to examine the critical conditions on the ground as imagined by the respective authors or poets.

It would be not only very easy to expand on this topic by way of incorporating contemporary texts in all European languages (and beyond), but we would also gain a powerful tool in explaining the relevance of medieval literature at large for us today. After all, communication problems continue to be with us, and will not simply go away in the near future because people always tend to disagree with each other, to feel jealousy, envy, and hostility, and thus to be victims of the famous list of Seven Deadly Sins, which John Cassian had put together already in the early fifth century and which later Pope Gregory I (ca. 540–604) was to expound in his *Moralia, sive Expositio in Job (Books of the Morals)*.⁶

It would be hard to find any pre-modern text, didactic or not, where the poet or author does not address in one way or the other some of those fundamental concerns regarding ethics and their transgressions, such as lying. This finds a powerful expression in numerous medieval and early modern texts which include the theme of treason, as we will observe especially in the case of the Mid-

5 Albrecht Classen, “Transdisciplinarity – A Bold Way into the Academic Future, from a Medievalist Perspective, or the Rediscovery of Philology?,” *Humanities Open Access* 10: 96 (2021), Aug.; online at: <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0787/10/3/96> (last accessed on April 1, 2022); id., “Die Antwort auf die Frage nach der Zukunft liegt auch in der Vergangenheit: Neue Ansätze zu einer europäisch konzipierten Mediävistik. Oder: Wohin mit der national-geprägten Philologie in Anbetracht von St. Augustin, Martianus Capella, Boethius, Thomas von Aquin oder Christine de Pizan?,” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*. Sonderheft: *Deutsche Philologie: Nationalphilologien heute* 139 (2020, appeared in May 2021): 34–70.

6 *The Books of the Morals of St. Gregory the Pope, or, An Exposition of the Book of Blessed Job*. Vol. III, Book XXXI (Oxford: J. Parker, 1845–1883); online at: <http://www.lectionarycentral.com/GregoryMoralia/Book31.html> (last accessed on Oct. 25, 2021). For modern scholarship on this topic, see Richard Newhauser, *The Seven Deadly Sins: From Communities to Individuals*. Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions, 123 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007); Angela Tilby, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Their Origin in the Spiritual Teaching of Evagrius the Hermit* (London: SPCK, 2009); Shawn Tucker, *The Virtues and Vices in the Arts: A Sourcebook* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Press, 2015); *Sin in Medieval and Early Modern Culture: The Tradition of the Seven Deadly Sins*, ed. Richard G. Newhauser and Susan J. Ridyard (York: York Medieval Press, 2012). For an excellent overview of the history of the Seven Deadly Sins, the theological background, the literary responses, and art-historical visualizations, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_deadly_sins (last accessed on Oct. 25, 2021).

dle High German *Herzog Ernst* (ms. B, ca. 1220) or in the thirteenth-century Old French *Huon de Bordeaux* (see below).

But what social group, or class, if not society at large, would not know of lying, cheating, deception, and many other attacks against communication and community, both by individuals or even the entire collective? A horrific example from the high Middle Ages is given in the famous *Nibelungenlied* (ca. 1200), where Hagen is entirely bent on murdering Siegfried, his eternal nemesis. But the Netherlandish hero is a culprit himself of having deceived the Icelandic Queen Brunhild during the competitions for her hand in marriage, and during the second wedding night back in Worms in order to help King Gunther repress and silence this mighty woman warrior. If we ever wondered why Bishop Wolfger von Erla had commissioned the copying down of this heroic epic with its horrendous outcome, then we face here a most intriguing answer. Studying the *Nibelungenlied* illustrates what the catastrophic failure to communicate properly can entail.⁷ Many other examples can be found in short verse narratives (*fabliaux*; *mæren*; *tales*, *novella*, etc.) and prose texts from the late fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries (Jörg Wickram, *Rollwagenbüchlein*, 1555, et al.), and we could actually pinpoint as one of the major purposes of literary texts the critical examination of the dangers to constructive human communication.⁸

7 Britta Simon, “Höfisch-heroisch-fragmentiert: körpergebundene Kommunikation im ‘Nibelungenlied’,” Ph.D. thesis, University of Washington, Seattle, 1998; Albrecht Classen, “What Could the Burgundians Have Done to Avoid the Catastrophe? The Breakdown of the Communicative Community in the *Nibelungenlied*,” *Neophilologus* LXXXV.4 (2001): 565–87. For a well-developed psychological reading of this epic poem, see Irmgard Gephart, *Der Zorn der Nibelungen: Rivalität und Rache im “Nibelungenlied”* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2005). For a related approach to communication, but through mimicry, i.e., smiles, see Beatrice Michaelis, “Beredtes Lächeln im *Nibelungenlied*,” *Lachen und Schweigen: Grenzen und Lizenzen der Kommunikation in der Erzählliteratur des Mittelalters*, ed. Werner Röcke and Hans Rudolf Velten. *Trends in Medieval Philology*, 26 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2017), 129–38.

8 *The Nibelungenlied, with the Klage*, trans. William Whobrey (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2019); Hermann Reichert, *Das Nibelungenlied: Text und Einführung, nach der St. Galler Handschrift*, ed. and commented. 2nd rev. and expanded ed. (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2017); Hermann Reichert, *Nibelungenlied-Lehrwerk: sprachlicher Kommentar, mittelhochdeutsche Grammatik, Wörterbuch: passend zum Text der St. Galler Fassung (“B”)*. 2nd rev. ed. (Vienna: Praesens Verlag, 2019). For a major examination of this heroic epic, see Jan-Dirk Müller, *Spielregeln für den Untergang: die Welt des Nibelungenliedes* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1998); for a deconstructive critique of Siegfried, see Albrecht Classen, “The Downfall of a Hero: Siegfried’s Self-Destruction and the End of Heroism in the *Nibelungenlied*,” *German Studies Review* XXVI.2 (2003): 295–314. As to the late medieval verse and prose narratives, see now Christian Kiening and Hannes Koller, *Narrative Mikroökonomien der frühen Neuzeit: Am Beispiel von Wickrams Rollwagenbüchlein* (Zürich: Chronos, 2021); but confer also Klaus

There are countless reasons why people fight with each other, whether we think of the gender conflict, age conflict between parents and children, racial and xenophobic conflicts, etc. Language, i.e., communication, thereby tends to be the first victim, or is the very means of deception, whether we think of the tenth-century Latin heroic epic *Waltharius*⁹ or the late medieval prose novel *Melusine* by Jean d'Arras (1393).¹⁰ Of course, the situation presented in each text differs vastly, the former reflecting on war, battle, and fighting for sheer survival, the latter dedicated to the love affair between a half-human woman and her human husband. But each time the fundamental problem presented there hinges also on the failure to maintain open, honest, mutually respectful forms of communication, and we can easily unravel the essential messages contained in each text by way of focusing on the verbal exchanges, the conflicts caused by the conversations, and the duplicity and amorphousness of the language used in difficult situations. As we easily recognize here and elsewhere, the data transmitted through speech, gestures, mimicry, and other media is not fully registered, or is simply misunderstood, and when there is no process in place to verify the data, serious miscommunication sets in. This is a universal observation applying both to society at large (public) and to the individual (private).

Grubmüller, *Die Ordnung, der Witz und das Chaos: Eine Geschichte der europäischen Novellistik im Mittelalter: Fabliaux – Märe – Novelle* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2006); *Mittelalterliche Novellistik im europäischen Kontext : kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektiven*, ed. Mark Chinca, Timo Reuvekamp-Felber, and Christopher Young. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie, 13 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2006); as to lying as a moral, ethical, and legal issue in the Middle Ages at large, see Emily Corran, *Lying and Perjury in Medieval Practical Thought: A Study in the History of Casuistry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); valuable also proves to be for its global approach, Dallas G. Denery II, *The Devil Wins: A History of Lying from the Garden of Eden to the Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015); for a specific case study, see now Albrecht Classen, "Hate, Lies, and Violence: The Dark Side of Pre-Modern Literature: Why would we care? And yet, the key rests in the past to solve our issues today. With a Focus on The Stricker (Thirteenth Century)," *Journal of Humanities and Applied Social Sciences* 5.2 (2021): 281–94; online at: <http://www.hillpublisher.com/UpFile/202112/20211231163859.pdf> (last accessed on Jan. 17, 2022). As to Wickram's *Rollwagenbüchlein* (1555), one of the best sixteenth-century German literary compilations, see now Christian Kiening and Hannes Koller, *Narrative Mikroökonomien der frühen Neuzeit: Am Beispiel von Wickrams Rollwagenbüchlein* (Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 2021).

9 *Waltharius*, ed., trans., and intro. by Abram Ring. Dallas Medieval Texts and Translations, 22 (Leuven, Paris, and Bristol, CT: Peters, 2016).

10 Jean d'Arras, *Melusine: Or the Noble History of Lusignan*, trans. and with an intro. by Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012).

In *Waltharius*, betrayal and dishonesty lead to the fight between, on the one hand, Gunther and his men, and, on the other, the formidable warrior Waltharius. Although they exchange words before hostility breaks out, those fail to achieve their effects, so violence replaces communication. In *Melusine*, irrespective of which version we choose (Jean d'Arras [1393], Couldrette [ca. 1400], or Thüring von Ringoltingen [1456]),¹¹ husband and wife always remain distanced from each other because of the secret behind Melusine's human appearance and of the taboo imposed on him. Once the secret has been lifted, the taboo has been broken, so their marriage and hence happiness come to an end because she has to leave the world of humans, while he remains there heartbroken. In each case, human communication proves to be the first victim in all those conflicts.

Human language has never been as fully functionable and understandable in communicative terms as we would like it to be because it is not as precise as mathematical or chemical formulas. Misunderstanding and conflicts have thus been the common results, and this across all cultures, religions, languages, genders, and races. People have cursed each other already in antiquity, in the early Christian Church, in early Islam, and so forth, employing a form of negative communication with the attempt to excoriate, condemn, and excommunicate the hated other.¹² As sad and frustrating as all this might sound because it could sig-

11 Lydia Zeldenrust, *The Mélusine Romance in Medieval Europe: Translation, Circulation, and Material Contexts*. Studies in Medieval Romance (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020).

12 Albrecht Classen, "Gender Conflicts, Miscommunication, and Communicative Communities in the Late Middle Ages: The Evidence of Fifteenth-Century German Verse Narratives," *Speaking in the Medieval World*, ed. Jean Godsall-Myers. Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions, 16 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), 65–92; id., "Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature: Discourse, Communication, and Social Interaction," *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 278 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 1–42; for an encyclopedic overview, see id., "Communication in the Middle Ages," *Handbook of Medieval Studies: Terms – Methods – Trends*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), vol. 1, 330–43; see also Roger D. Sell, *Communicational Criticism: Studies in Literature as Dialogue*. Dialogue Studies 11 (Amsterdam: Benjamin, 2011); cf. also the contributions to *The Ethics of Literary Communication: Genuineness, Directness, Indirectness*, ed. Roger D. Sell, Adam Borch, and Inna Lindgren (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, 2013); and to *Communication and Peace: Mapping an Emerging Field*, ed. Julia Hoffmann and Virgil Hawkins. Routledge Studies in Peace and Conflict Resolution (London and New York: Routledge, 2015). For a valuable study of curses in late antiquity, see now Marco Frenschkowski, "Fluchkultur: Mündliche Flüche, das *Corpus defixionum* und spätantike Sichtweisen performativer Sprache," *Antike Fluchtafeln und das Neue Testament: Materialität – Ritualpraxis – Texte*, ed. Michael Hölscher, Markus Lau, and Susanne Luther. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 474 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 47–91, with an extensive

nal that the human interactions throughout time do not seem to improve much at all, it also opens fascinating perspectives regarding the role of pre-modern literature (and art) for us today in the exploration of how we as human beings communicate, where, how, and why we fail in that regard, and what we could do to improve our communicative ethics and effectiveness.

Literary history, but also the history of religion and philosophy, thus transforms most refreshingly into a laboratory for human interactions, providing us with a theoretical space where extreme situations can be experimented with, and those can then serve as platforms to reflect on personal conditions and broader social issues. The study of medieval literature could thereby provide the necessary framework, a historical lens, for individual and public therapy, and this also in terms of communication.¹³

As much as the Middle Ages as a subject matter in historical, literary, social, economic, religious, anthropological, art-historical, etc. terms have been questioned and debated for a long time,¹⁴ as much can we now also realize and accept one of the central functions of literary works from the past, serving as critical mirrors of human behavior. Studying examples of communicative situations from the past allows us to examine indirectly our own situation and thus to gain deeper insights into certain social and ethical patterns that are still in place today and constitute fundamental problems until now.¹⁵ Stunningly, when we consider a wide range of medieval literary texts, they easily allow us to translate

bibliography on the study of curses. As he concludes, “Sprache ist in allen antiken Religionen auch in diesen Fällen niemals nur ‘Bedeutung’, die auf etwas weist: Sie ist selbst Tat und Wirkmacht” (85; Language in all ancient religions is never only ‘meaning,’ which refers to something. It is, by itself, an action and an affective power). See also Alexandra Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust in Medieval Religious Polemic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

¹³ David C. Kydd and Emanuele Castano, “Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind,” *Science* 342 (2013): 377–80. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1239918> (last accessed on April 1, 2022); see also the contributions to *Cognitive Sciences and Medieval Studies: An Introduction. Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. Juliana Dresvina and Victoria Blud (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2020); Lorenza Lucchi Basili and Pier Luigi Sacco, “Fictional Narratives as a Laboratory for the Social Cognition of Behavioral Change: *My Ajussi*,” *Humanities Open Access* 10.4 (120) (2021), online at <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0787/10/4/120/htm> (last accessed on April 1, 2022).

¹⁴ *Making the Medieval Relevant: How Medieval Studies Contribute to Improving our Understanding of the Present*, ed. Chris Jones, Conor Kostick, and Klaus Oschema. Das Mittelalter. Perspektiven mediävistischer Forschung. Beihefte, 6 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2020).

¹⁵ See the contributions to *The Relevance of The Humanities in the Twenty-First Century: Past and Present*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Special issue of *Humanities Open Access*, June 2020-https://www.mdpi.com/journal/humanities/special_issues/pas_pre (last accessed on April 1, 2022)

them so that we can fathom the universal messages contained in them, messages that prove to be uncannily applicable to us today because the issue with communication continues to be deeply influential in all human societies, especially when it breaks down, which subsequently can cause infinite harm. What poets and philosophers had to say about wisdom, for instance, often rings very true until today and promises to provide us with critically important insights into our own social and personal conditions.¹⁶ Of course, we must never forget the different social-historical, religious, and mental-historical conditions, but a sensible translation handles those challenges constructively, without eliminating them.

Language, however, has always been a difficult medium, as our common experience is simply that the information or messages we want to share do not get across as accurately as we would like it to be the case. Modern email exchanges are highly fraught with misunderstandings since we send them out so fast and furiously, whereas an ordinary conversation supported by good listening skills, even an epistolary exchange as it was still quite common, say, ca. twenty years ago, used to be of high value. But even letters can confuse the recipient, and so can messengers and diplomats, as Jacques Merceron in his monograph on messengers and the contributors to the volume edited by Horst Wenzel have clearly outlined.¹⁷

Both original texts and translations contribute to the same process of communicating from one person to another, from one culture to another, building ever-growing communities of intellectuals. According to Marco Agnetta and Larisa Cercel,

Every text can be understood as part of a performance that has a unique and unrepeatable character thanks to its connection to the presentation and reception situation: a text is read (aloud), staged, declaimed or solemnly spoken, sung, etc. in different ways. Every text reception is also a unique event that is affected by a wide variety of variables. In this regard, the eminently hermeneutic activity of the translator can also be understood as an intercultural performance in which the role of the source text recipient and the role of the target

16 See now my book, *Wisdom from the European Middle Ages: Literary and Didactic Perspectives: A Study, Anthology, and Commentary* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2022).

17 Jacques Merceron, *Le message et sa fiction: La communication par messenger dans la littérature française des XIII^e et XIII^e siècles*. University of California Publications. Modern Philology, 128 (Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA, and London: University of California Press, 1998); *Gespräche – Boten – Briefe: Körpergedächtnis und Schriftgedächtnis im Mittelalter*, ed. Horst Wenzel. Philologische Studien und Quellen, 143 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1997).

text recipient converge. This leads to a language product that shows clear traces of this individual performance. Different translators, that is to say, perform in different ways.¹⁸

Marco Agnetta emphasizes in his own contribution:

the idea that one should not see texts as artifacts detached from the world of life, but as partaking of the performances thanks to which individuals and collectives define themselves in everyday life. Texts, as Stolze (2003: 174) points out, are an integral part of a highly dynamic “Mitteilungsgeschehen” [event of exchange of data or information]. Translations can be seen as ‘communicative events’ in two ways: as a dialogue between the original text and the translator, and also as an interaction between the translator and the recipients via the target text. At issue, this essay argues, is the key notion of performativity.¹⁹

In fact, as the contributors to this volume indicate, translation is a form of performance (Beata Piecychina), builds perspectives across cultures and languages (Radegrunde Stolze), involves much creativity because no good translation can

18 Quoted from the abstract online. *Text Performances and Cultural Transfer / Textperformances und Kulturtransfer*, ed. Marco Agnetta and Larisa Cercel. Translation Studies (Bucharest: Zeta Books, 2021); <https://zetabooks.com/all-titles/text-performances-and-cultural-transfer-textperformances-und-kulturtransfer/> (last accessed on Oct. 25, 2021). See now also the contributions to *Engaging with Translation. New Readings of George Steiner’s After Babel*, ed. Marco Agnetta, Larisa Cercel, and Brian O’Keefe. Translation Studies (Bucharest: Zeta Books, 2021). I do not intend to engage with translation studies at large here; this would balloon into a vast research review inappropriate for the current context. Nevertheless, as we will observe subsequently, all communication is somehow interlinked with translations, and those, in turn, create a form of community.

19 Quoted from the abstract of his own contribution to *Text Performances and Cultural Transfer* (see note 18), “Zur Translation als Performance mit Texten” (9–32; here 9; <https://zetabooks.com/wp-content/uploads/Agnetta-2021-intro.pdf> [last accessed on April 1, 2022]). He draws, in particular, from the insights developed by Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Performativität: Eine Einführung*. Edition Kulturwissenschaft, 10 (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2012); see also Edith Grossman, *Why Translation Matters* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); *Wissenstransfer und Translation. Zur Breite und Tiefe des Übersetzungsbegriffs*, ed. Alberto Gil and Robert Kirstein. Hermeneutik und Kreativität, 3 (St. Ingbert: Röhrig Universitätsverlag, 2015); Brian O’Keefe, Brian (2018): “Reading, Writing, and Translation in Gadamer’s Hermeneutic Philosophy,” *Philosophy and Practice in Translational Hermeneutics*, ed. John Stanley, Brian O’Keefe, Radegundis Stolze, and Larisa Cercel (Bucharest: Zeta Books, 2018), 15–45. There is an entire legion of relevant studies pertaining to translations, translation studies, and related aspects. For a good comprehensive coverage, see the contributions to *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, ed. Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha. 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2009); and to *The Oxford Handbook of Translation and Social Practices*, ed. Sara Laviosa and Meng Ji. Oxford Handbooks Online (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). Translation is also addressed numerous times by the various contributors to the present volume.

work when texts are rendered into another language word for word (Alberto Gil; cf. also Lavinia Heller and Larisa Cercel respectively), and achieves a performative hermeneutics, rendering a religious message into a human language below the divine sphere (Brian O’Keeffe). Most important, as Marco Agnetta underscores, “bei aller Planung [ist] das Übersetzen ein Prozess des Erwägens, (Neu)Verhandelns und Entscheidens, letztlich also eine Tätigkeit, deren Ausgang sich nicht von vornherein klar bestimmen lässt” (“Zur Translation als Performance mit Texten” [see note 18], 21; despite all planning, translation is a process of consideration, [new] negotiation, and deciding, hence ultimately an activity the outcome of which cannot be determine from the outset. Translating amounts to bringing together an active producer and a passive receiver, and both must establish a common ground, as in the overlapping area of two domains in a Venn diagram, or a form of communication which is the critical basis for making translation to a success.²⁰ As Agnetta emphasizes, the translator “lässt sich vom Original und zeitgleich von den zielsprachlichen Formulierungskonventionen bestimmen, andererseits bestimmt er aber immer auch, in welchem Maße er sich diesen Bindungen unterwirft” (22; allows the original to determine him/her, and at the same time submits to the conventions of formulation of the target language.

At the same time, s/he always decides as well to what extent s/he accepts those binding principles). It thus makes good sense when Jasmin Pfeiffer observes, “texts are usually part of larger communicative and cultural contexts which frame our interactions with them ... [Our reading experience] take[s] part in the constitution of meaning and thereby [can] alter our interpretation of the text.” She then asks in her contribution “how fiction extending beyond the borders of the ‘original’ text, and including other artifacts, can offer new interpretive dimensions.”²¹

A Few Remarks on Translation

Intriguingly, much of medieval literature was more or less the result of translations, although the term would have to be defined rather flexibly, with each poet pursuing his/her own approach in that process, some staying close to the original or relying on considerable freedom in the process. Consequently, we are cer-

20 Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Performativität: Eine Einführung*. Edition Kulturwissenschaft, 10 (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2012), 76, 87.

21 Jasmin Pfeiffer, “Lektüre und Performativität: Materialitäten fiktionaler Texte zwischen Semantik und Sinnlichkeit,” *Wissenstransfer und Translation* (see note 19), 359–78; here 359.

tainly poised to gain deeper insights into the pre-modern literary discourse if we understand this performative element of all translations, which in turn are predicated on communication. After all, no translation, from whatever language, culture, or period, can ever claim to be exactly like the original. All translations represent forms of conversations, debates, and reflections, leading over to new forms of communication.

The Middle High German poet Hartmann von Aue demonstrated these two strategies when he translated Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec* and then *Yvain*, using a more independent approach in the first, and a rather pedantic approach in the second case.²² Maud Burnett McNerney, in her recent study on Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie* (ca. 1155–1160), draws on theories of translation and temporality to analyze the *Roman de Troie* and its context. "It reads the text against Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* to argue that Benoît participates in the Anglo-Norman invention of a new kind of history. It demonstrates how the *Roman de Troie* participates in the invention of romance time, even as it uses its queer characters to cast doubt upon genealogical fantasies of romance."²³

If the issue of translation from one language to another was already such a thorny and complex issue at that time, how much more did the phenomenon of falsification or deliberate changing an original text impact the reception? One of the most dramatic cases illustrating the danger resulting from creating falsified letters, indirectly an assassination attempt, proves to be the anonymous Middle High German romance *Mai und Beafloer* (ca. 1290) where the jealous mother of Count Mai makes her son believe that his young wife Beafloer had committed adultery by sleeping with two priests during his absence and has hence delivered, as a divine punishment, a wolf child.²⁴

²² See, for instance, *Un transfert culturel au XIIe siècle: Erec et Enide de Chrétien de Troyes et Erec de Hartmann von Aue*, ed. Patrick L. Del Duca. Collection Centre d'études sur les réformes, l'humanisme et l'âge classique (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2010); cf. also Rita Copeland, "The Dream of Chivalry: A Study of Chrétien de Troyes's 'Yvain' and Hartmann von Aue's 'Iwein,'" *Romance Philology* 38.2 (1984): 256–60.

²³ Maud Burnett McNerney, *Translation and Temporality in Benoît de Sainte-Maure's Roman de Troie*. Gallica, 47 (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2021). The quote is taken from the publisher's website at <https://boydellandbrewer.com/9781843846154/translation-and-temporality-in-benoit-de-sainte-maures-iroman-de-troiei/> (last accessed on Nov. 2, 2021). She argues that the adoption of the Troy material in medieval Europe was a massive translation process creating a new cultural framework for the courtly world.

²⁴ *Mai und Beafloer*. Herausgegeben, übersetzt, kommentiert und mit einer Einleitung von Albrecht Classen. Beihefte zur Mediaevistik, 6 (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2006); for a recent study, though it does not quite address the topic pursued here, see Astrid Bußmann, "Im

There are many subsequent implications, confusions, and tragic events, and it takes the protagonist a long time and major efforts to overcome their separation and to join in union again. This late medieval verse narrative underscores the extent to which epistolary writing had already assumed major political significance, although this came along with the great danger of manipulation. We would call it ‘fake news’ today, which is an equally, if not even more damaging undermining of all and everything we believe to know. Once mutual trust and reliability have been weakened or even destroyed, all other social, ethical, even moral and religious structures are bound to collapse as well. That is, the trust in language, in communication, and in translation is undermined and corroded, and thus the sense of community is in great peril as well.

Failed Attempt and Self-Delusion: The Case of Juan Ruiz’s *El libro de buen amor*

Another great case, differently conditioned but similarly determined by an ironic perspective regarding intrahuman relations, would be the Spanish *El libro de buen amor* by Juan Ruiz (ca. 1330) which misleadingly suggests that the focus of the work would rest on how to achieve true love, whereas in reality the entire treatise proves to be a deliberate hodgepodge of various types of discourses, all of which, however, are deeply anchored in the question of how to establish a functioning type of communication. Not surprisingly, however, the narrator presents to us from the beginning a rather startling scenario which makes us wonder immediately whether humans will ever learn to speak to each other in a constructive, harmonious, and efficient manner. Language is not uniform or straightforward per se; instead, it easily proves to be opaque, ambivalent, even deceptive, and false. This is demonstrated in an early episode contained in this complex narrative which we can discuss here by itself without taking the larger context into consideration.²⁵

Bann der Inszenierung – Lachen, Weinen und Schweigen in der verzögerten Anagnorisis von *Mai und Beaflo*,” *Lachen und Schweigen: Grenzen und Lizenzen der Kommunikation in der Erzählliteratur des Mittelalters*, ed. Werner Röske and Hans Rudolf Velten. Trends in Medieval Philology, 26 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2018), 101–28. For the wider literary-historical context of this narrative, see Nancy B. Black, *Medieval Narratives of Accused Queens* (Gainesville, Tallahassee, et al.: University Press of Florida, 2003).

²⁵ Juan Ruiz, *The Book of Good Love*, trans. by Elizabeth Drayson Macdonald, ed. Melveena McKendrick (London: J. M. Dent, 1999). There are many solid editions available; see, for instance, Juan Ruiz Arcipreste de Hita, *Libro de buen amor*, ed. Alberto Blecha. Letras hispánicas,

The Romans are said to be in great need of establishing laws, and they request to receive them from the Greeks. In all likelihood, the poet refers to religious teachings, as the subsequent exchange indicates, but the Greeks at first refuse to help because they regard the Romans as uncouth, hence unlearned and thus unworthy of the desired instructions. Only if the latter would be able to demonstrate in a debate that they would be worthy of those laws, would they agree to share the instructions with them. Since both sides speak different languages, the debate is to be carried out with the help of signs.

While this appears to be promising for the Romans, they do not have anyone among themselves who might be able to win such a debate, which indicates that they would not really be worthy of receiving the laws, as the Greeks surmise. In their desperation, the Romans pick a ruffian, “un vellaco Romano” (51, 2), trusting that God would come to his rescue. They puff him up with splendid clothing and promise to fulfill any of his wishes if he were only to stand up to the Greek contestant, whatever he might do to live up to the challenge.

What happens next is simply astonishing because the two men appear to understand each other very well, responding to each other with the expected signs. The Greek, highly respected by all, at first shows only a finger, which the ruffian responds to by way of holding up three fingers. Next, the Greek presents the palm of his hand, to which the Roman replies by using his fist. All this proves to be sufficient for the Greek sage, who confirms that in light of the exchange with his opponent, he believes that the Romans command sufficient knowledge and wisdom to receive the law, i.e., religious instructions in Christianity. For the Greek, the conversation took this course:

At first, he had indicated with his one finger that there is only one God. The three fingers symbolized the expansion of that statement, since it indicated: “He was three persons in on” (159, 4). Next, using his palm of his hand, the sage person implied that everything was under God’s control and that people ought to submit under Him. The Roman’s sign, however, corrected his own comment, expanding on it and deepening it: “He held the world in His power” (60, 2). For the Greek, this simple exchange was clearly understandable, so he acknowledges

70 (Madrid: Ed. Cátedra: 1992); id., *El Libro de buen amor*. Biblioteca de Grandes Escritores (Dinslaken: IberiaLiteratura, 2015); id., *El Libro de buen amor*, ed. Raymond Smith Willis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015). For critical studies, see the contributions to *A Companion to the “Libro de buen amor”*, ed. Louise M. Haywood. Colección Tâmesis, A 209 (Rochester, NY: Tamesis, 2004); and to *A New Companion to the “Libro de buen amor”*, ed. Ryan D. Giles and José Manuel Hidalgo. Brill’s Companions to Medieval Literatures and Cultures, 2 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021). The issue of ‘communication,’ however, does not emerge in either volume, at least not in the way as the present volume intends to do.

that the Romans have, as demonstrated by his opponent, a good command of the Christian theology: "... I realized that they truly deserved the Laws" (60, 4).

However, the ruffian interpreted the signs in very different terms, and we can thus realize easily the depth of miscommunication between both, especially because hand gestures and signs can have many different meanings. For him, the show with one finger was a clear sign of aggression, a threat to poke out his eye, whereupon he had held up two fingers with which he would destroy his eyes, and the thumb to break his teeth. The open palm of the hand signaled to him that the other wanted to hit his ears, and his response was to show his fist, threatening to give the other such a punch into his face that he would never forget the pain again.

The narrator then concludes with a proverb allegedly commonly formulated by old women: "No evil word is spoken, if it is not thought to be evil" (64, 2), which underscores the importance of intention behind every spoken word. At the same time, as he also points out, if something is well understood, then a conflict is also avoidable, which implies that each person needs to reflect carefully on his/her own words and how to interpret those uttered by the others. Communication thus proves to be a considerable challenge, so he begs his audience's patience with his work behind which "subtle teaching" ("sotil", 65, 2) awaits the reader/listener. Only wise interpreters would be able to grasp fully what the messages about true love would entail ("Razones encubiertas," 68, 1), but the danger still lurks for the audience because "Where you fear it is false, it speaks the deepest truth" (69, 1), that is, "mayor verdat."

Subsequently, the poet develops his very long discourse on love, using many different narrative genres, but we are never fully sure what he might mean since we are constantly exposed to eliding, if not elusive messages and duplicitous statements. But this is the protagonist's own destiny in his constantly failing efforts to win his lady's love. Ironically, when he sends a messenger to her, she does not respond but accepts the messenger as her lover (113). Upon further ruminations, he concludes that love itself "always speaks falsely" (161, 4) because it creates deception and makes people assume things as they only seem to be. This thus casts all communication into granular light and questions its validity insofar as the individual tends to believe what s/he wants to accept as true. Quite fittingly, the narrator also emphasizes at one point: "callar a las de vegadas fase mucho prouecho" (1408, 4; Sometimes keeping silent is the best thing), obviously because confusion and misunderstanding can be avoided thereby.

Ruiz targets here foolish people who do not understand what meaningful speech would entail: "When the fool thinks he is speaking well and correctly / and thinks his deeds will serve and please, / he is speaking badly, foolishly, causing trouble and displeasure" (1408, 1–3). However, this is spoken by the

old go-between, and, as is so often the case in the *Libro de buen amor*, not fully to be trusted. Nevertheless, the subsequent fables convey deep wisdom and meaningful truth, such as “The Fable of the Lion and the Mouse” (350–54), but it all depends on the context and the intention with which they are told, especially within this episode with the old woman Trotaconventos and the lady debating the value and justification of love. People are always subject to the Seven Deadly Sins, which are listed at the end of the book, and the poet then leaves his audience guessing what to make of all of that, revealing the impossibility of human language conveying the full truth:

I have written you a short text, but the gloss
is anything but, I think; it is substantial holy verse,
where every story has another meaning
in addition to the one affirmed by elegant discourse.

It is a book full of advice on holiness,
but also a brief breviary of play and jest.
I will now punctuate it with a full stop and close my bookcase.
May it be short, entertaining and like an electuary to you.

(Stanzas 1631–32)

We are, essentially, left with nothing, and are forced to face the many evils and harm “that men and women bring upon each other with their / deceit, and to show extraordinary verse and tales to ordinary folk” (1634, 3–4). And yet, Ruiz still conveys a profound insight about language as such, with communication and translation, all of which easily escapes our epistemological grasp and proves to be highly slippery and deceptive, just as the individual might want to use it for his/her own purpose. Little wonder that in the Humanities we continue to debate and argue about literary works like the *Libro de buen amor* since they require our constant attention, and mirror at the same time our intellectual challenges in our interactions with other people.²⁶

Communication, however, is not possible without translation, both in a concrete, linguistic fashion, and in metaphorical, spiritual terms. And in many cases, translations have been instrumental in establishing new cultural dimen-

²⁶ See now Veronica Menaldi, “Enchanting Go-Betweens: Mediated Love Magic in the *Libro de Buen Amor* and Iberian Grimoires,” *A New Companion to the Libro de Buen Amor*, ed. Ryan D. Giles and José Manuel Hidalgo. Brill’s Companions to Medieval Literatures and Cultures, 2 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021), 75–88. Oddly, the dimension of communication is not fully addressed there.

sions.²⁷ Little wonder that the Mediterranean, above all, with its bordering countries, was one of the crucial nodal points in the entire process shaping the high and late Middle Ages.²⁸

27 Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (1999; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Natalia Blum-Barth, "Übersetzte Literatur: Tendenzen weltliterarischer Zirkulationsprozesse," *literaturkritik* 11 (2021), online at: https://literaturkritik.de/public/rezension.php?rez_id=28394 (last accessed on April 1, 2022). She observes, in particular: "Die Übersetzung eines literarischen Textes trägt *volens* zum Homogenisierungsprozess der Literatur bei. Seine hybride Beschaffenheit ist eine der wichtigsten Voraussetzungen dafür. Selbst wenn sie erfüllt wird, gibt es keine Garantie, dass der Text zur Weltliteratur gehören wird. Er ist auf dem Weg dahin, aber ob er das Ziel erreicht, kommt auf die Definition der Weltliteratur an" (The translation of a literary text contributes *volens* to the process of homogenization of literature. Its hybrid character is one of the most important conditions for that process. Even if it becomes fulfilled, there won't be a guarantee that the text will belong to world literature. It is on its way toward that goal, but the question whether it will get there depends on the definition of world literature). See also Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading*, trans. from the English by Christine Pries (2013; Constance: Konstanz University Press, 2016), 124. As to the great translation movement in Baghdad, see Maha Baddar, "Texts that Travel: Translation Genres and Knowledge-Making in the Medieval Arabic Translation Movement," *Travel, Time, and Space in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Time: Explorations of Worldly Perceptions and Processes of Identity Formation*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 22 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2018), 95–119; cf. now Muhsin J. Al-Musawi, *The Arabian Nights in Contemporary World Cultures: Global Commodifications, Translations, and the Culture Industry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

28 *Texts in Transit in the Medieval Mediterranean*, ed. Tzvi Y. Langermann and Robert G. Morrison (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016); for the early medieval exchange between Greeks and Arabs, see Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbasid Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th Centuries)* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998); cf. also the contributions to *The Ancient Traditions in Christian and Islamic Hellenism: Studies on the Transmission of Greek Philosophy and Sciences Dedicated to H. J. Drossaart Lulofs on His Ninetieth Birthday: Proceedings of the Third Symposium Graeco-Arabicum, Held at the University of Leiden on March 26–28, 1991*, ed. Gerhard Endreß and Remke Kruk. CNWS Publications, 50 (Leiden: Research School CNWS, School of Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies, 1997); *Vermitteln – übersetzen – begegnen: Transferphänomene im europäischen Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit; interdisziplinäre Annäherungen*, ed. Balázs J. Nemes and Achim Rabus. Nova mediaevalia, 8 (Göttingen: V & R Unipress, 2011). See also *Rethinking Medieval Translation: Ethics, Politics, Theory*, ed. Emma Campbell and Robert Mills (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012); *Translations médiévales: Cinq siècles de traductions en français au Moyen Age (XIe–XVe siècles), étude et repertoire*, ed. Claudio Galderisi. 3 vols (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011). Fundamental also prove to be the contributions to *The Medieval Translator: The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages*, ed. Roger Ellis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1989); Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); *Text, Transmission, and Transformation in the European Middle Ages, 1000–1500*, ed. Carrie Griffin and Emer

Discourse, Dialogue, and Communication on Love in Andreas Capellanus's *De amore*

Love as a personal and a public issue has always been associated with community, communication, and translation (in concrete, specific terms as well as metaphorically). We would not go entirely wrong if we acknowledged this dialectical phenomenon also for the older treatise on love by Andreas Capellanus, *De amore* (ca. 1180/1190), where the narrator's attempts to define and explain love, and to illustrate the best ways an individual can or should talk with his beloved, only appear to be serious, whereas in reality the outcome of all those many different dialogues, legal statements, rules and regulations pertaining to love are, at the end, contradicted and rejected after all. Whatever might be the full truth in Book One and Book Two, Book Three reneges on and undermines, which creates, altogether, a dialectic of rhetorical attempts without full basis in truth, or rather, it exposes the falsity of believing in the existence of absolute truth in matters of love and human discourse.

As much as Andreas Capellanus presents specific cases of love conversations, as much does he parody, satirize, and devalue them at the end.²⁹ As much as we are confronted with continuous dialogues, debates, and instructive narratives, which often result in specific lists of laws pertaining to love, ultimately, we are left with nothing because Book Three contradicts everything which had been stated before. There, the narrator radically condemns love outside of the bonds of marriage and accuses women at large of being disingenuous, unethical, immoral, and seductresses who cannot be trusted. As the mentor tells his disciple, Walter, "If you wish to practice the system, you will obtain, as a careful reading of this little book will show you, all the delights of the flesh in fullest measure; but the grace of God, the companionship of the good, and the friendship of praiseworthy men you will with good reason be deprived of, and you will do

Purcell. *Cursor mundi*, 34 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018); *Translation in Europe During the Middle Ages*, ed. Elisa Borsari (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2020). See also Domenico Pezzini, *The Translation of Religious Texts in the Middle Ages: Tracts and Rules, Hymns and Saints' Lives*. Linguistic Insights, 69 (Bern, Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2008). The research literature on this topic is truly legion, which is quite understandable since translation affects virtually all areas of human knowledge.

29 Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, with intro., trans., and notes by John Jay Parry. Records of Civilization in Norton Paperback Editions (1941; New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1969). For the critical edition, see Andreas aulæ regiae capellanus, *De amore Libri tres*. Text nach der Ausgabe von E. Trojel. Übersetzt und mit Anmerkungen und einem Nachwort versehen von Fritz Peter Knapp (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006).

great harm to your good name, and it will be difficult for you to obtain the honors of this world” (211).

Andreas, at least his mouthpiece, voices greatest concern about the danger of love and strongly suggests to his disciple that a close and thorough reading of this book would help him understand the true dangers in the world of love. Despite his own intensive effort to explain everything he knows about love and women, the narrator finally turns his back to it all and advises Walter to avoid “practicing the mandates of love, and labor in constant watchfulness so that when the Bridegroom cometh He may find you wakeful” (212).

This stands in obvious contrast to his own words in the preface: “I know clearer than day that after you have learned the art of love your progress in it will be more cautious, in so far as I can I shall comply with your desire” (27). Although Capellanus indicates that it would be inappropriate for a wise person to engage with the topic of love, he himself admits of having had sufficient experience (27), and then he proceeds in giving extensive insights into the matter of love and how lovers ought to communicate with each other.

In fact, at the end of Book Two, the final rules of love are promulgated and established as a firm set of laws by which all ladies and knights ought to behave. We are even told that those rules are then spread across the world and communicated to all people who are concerned with love, that is, to all adults: “Every person who had been summoned and had come to the court took home a written copy of the rules and gave them out to all lovers in all parts of the world” (186). Even though not explicitly stated as such, the ultimate means to achieve love is identified as communication, and if the future lovers follow the rules as outlined here, they would be able to count on achieving happiness in love as well. However, as we have already realized, Book III turns all that upside down and destroys all hopes for the achievement of love by means of communication because now all those rules are apparently no longer of any value (187).

Even though the first two books are determined to a large extent by dialogues between a man and a woman, each time in a different social relationship, those dialogues never lead to the happy conclusion and the blooming of love. Only the little Arthurian tale at the closure of Book Two seems to project a happy outcome. With Book Three then destroying all premises of the previous two books, we suddenly also face the denial of the value of those debates and hence the rejection of the communicative interaction between the men and women. By contrast, as the preface and the comments in Book Three indicate, true friendship rests only between Andreas and his disciple Walter. They both seem to exchange honest feelings of respect of and liking for each other, so their communication operates well, but this certainly at the cost of heterosexual love at large.

Within Book One and Two, we also encounter many other dialogues, but despite the mutually respectful tone of voice, there is never a good outcome, at least not for the men because the women refuse to submit to their pleading.³⁰ As much as Andreas plays with the role of the objective observer and teacher, he proves to be deeply involved in the matter of love and speaks with the voice of an authority figure who employs here deliberately dissimulation and disingenuousness to profile and challenge the foundation of all communication, especially in the world of courtly love.³¹

Even if the language used in this treatise, or in the much more satirical *Libro de buen amor*, is characterized by its opaqueness, it is still language with which the poet tries to convey a message. But there are many topics which language, based on words, written or oral, cannot express, whether we think of mysticism or the esotericism of philosophy, of courtly love or the love of God. Nevertheless, throughout the entire pre-modern period, the effort to come to terms with the apophatic or ineffable never came an end, as both the most famous and minor poets indicated.

Late Medieval Communicators: Dante, Chaucer

Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) strongly appealed to his audience to pay close attention to the deeper meaning of his words in *Inferno* IX, 61–63: “O you who have sound understanding, / mark the doctrine that is hidden under / the veil of the strange verses!”³² For him, as for many of his contemporaries, the literary work was not just entertainment, i.e., pure fiction, but a medium to convey deeper truth, so the poet was a communicator and mediator between the secular audi-

³⁰ See Knapp’s comments as to the social-cultural background (see note 29), 618–20. See also Peter L. Allen, *The Art of Love: Amatory Fiction from Ovid to the Romance of the Rose*. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 59–78; John W. Baldwin, *The Language of Sex: Five Voices from Northern France Around 1200*. The Chicago Series on Sexuality, History, and Society (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 16–20, 58–60, et passim.

³¹ Knapp, commentary (see note 29), 623–30.

³² Here quoted from Chauncey Wood, “The Author’s Address to the Reader: Chaucer, Juan Ruiz, and Dante,” *Hermeneutics and Medieval Culture*, ed. Patrick J. Gallacher and Helen Damico (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 51–60; here 52. Wood offers the following rumination: “while meaning is available on the veiled level, it is nevertheless veiled, so it is not available to everyone – rather it is accessible only to one kind of reader and not to another In a sense, then, to ask the reader to switch levels while reading a medieval poem is only a partial interruption, for apprehension continues changed but unbroken” (53–54).

ence and the divine. By the same token, Geoffrey Chaucer (ca. 1343–ca. 1400) signals to us in the *envoi* of the *Nun's Priest's Tale*: “Taketh the moralite, goode men. / For Seint Paul seith that al that writen is, / To oure doctrine it is ywrite, ywis; / Taketh the fruyt, and lat the chaf be stille.”³³

Of course, every writer and every poet throughout history has trusted in the power of his or her words and reached out to the audience, appealing to their sense of admiration for the magnificence of the creative word. The struggle between orality and literacy, however, which dominated the early Middle Ages,³⁴ was won by the book culture, and the triumph of the written word has reverberated throughout the Western world ever since.³⁵

Intriguingly, the public discourse of courtly love – at least in the vernacular – as it began in Southern France in the early twelfth century, was as much focused on the power of the poetic word as on love itself, and a worthwhile hypothesis might be that the theme of courtly love was developed primarily as a venue for the exploration of new vehicles to exert cultural and intellectual influence and to determine the direction of society at large outside of the confines of the Latinate Christian Church.³⁶ As Brian Stock once observed, “Aspects of human relations that were once thought to deal with reality were now consid-

33 Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 4630–33. See also the contribution to this volume by Jane Beal.

34 Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), emphasizes the emergence of a literate culture by the end of the eleventh century. C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950–1250*. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), attributes this shift from oral to written to the loss of the charismatic teacher type at the cathedral schools and the heretofore unknown degree of urgency to rely upon textbooks.

35 For a collection of pertinent studies on this topic, see *The Book and the Magic of Reading in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Garland Medieval Bibliographies (New York and London: Garland, 1998).

36 Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Denise L. Despres, *Iconography and the Professional Reader: The Politics of Book Production in the Douce Piers Plowman*. Medieval Cultures, 15 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); as to dialectical thinking that determined the progression of the literary discourse, see Constance Brittain Bouchard, “Every Valley Shall Be Exalted”: *The Discourse of Opposites in Twelfth-Century Thought* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), esp. 57–75. In more than one way, the reflections in this introduction and the subsequent contributions represent the continuation of the investigations carried out at the first international symposium on Medieval and Early Modern Studies, held at the University of Arizona, April 2003, see the volume which resulted from it: *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen (see note 12).

ered to deal only with words; hence a literature sprang up, not only glossing and supplementing textually interrelated forms of behavior, but also substituting, as literature, for patterns of life no longer thought to have validity.”³⁷ This literature was part of a larger discourse community, and this community energetically worked toward establishing rational principles, logical strategies, and communicative operatives for the maintenance, improvement, and ultimately the perfection of their society. Our interest today in medieval words of love and hence in the poets’ love of words is fundamentally grounded upon the inquiry of the extent to which humans can expand their potential, not through physical force, but through the power of the word. The example of the thirteenth-century Old French *Roman de Silence* by Heldris de Cornuälle, where the knight Cador and his beloved Euphemie struggle hard to find each other and to reveal their true feelings by means of words, underscores this phenomenon well, as the narrator comments at the end: “There was no more miscommunication between them.”³⁸ Love could thus be identified as the greatest communicative operative in human life, which hence would explain well the enormous outpouring of courtly love poetry since ca. 1100 (troubadour poetry, William IX, etc.) and hence the emergence of The Twelfth-Century Renaissance.

But communication also pertains, probably even most centrally, to spiritual matters, that is, to the relationship between the individual and the divine. Sermon literature would have to be considered here above all, especially because the relevant research has made huge progress in that regard during the last decade.³⁹ But we discover, behind much of the entertainment literature of that era –

37 Brian Stock, *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (1990; Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 46.

38 I have borrowed almost the entire paragraph with some adjustments from my Introduction “The Quest for Knowledge Within Medieval Literary Discourse: The Metaphysical and Philosophical Meaning of Love,” *Words of Love and Love of Words in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 347 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), 1–51; here 2–4. As to the quote, see Heldris de Cornuälle, *Le Roman de Silence*, trans. Regina Psaki. *Garland Library of Medieval Literature, Series B*, 63 (New York and London: Garland, 1991), 33, v. 1155; for the Old French version, “Il n’ont mais entr’als nule error,” see *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance*, newly ed. and trans. with intro. and notes by Sarah Roche-Mahdi. *Medieval Texts and Studies*, 10 (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1992), p. 54. I have discussed the final exchange between these two lovers in the form of their kiss in a new study, “The Kiss in Medieval Literature: Erotic Communication, with an Emphasis on *Roman de Silence*,” to appear in *International Journal of History and Cultural Studies*.

39 See, for instance, *Fasciculus morum: A Fourteenth-Century Preacher’s Handbook*, ed. and trans. by Siegfried Wenzel (University Park, PA, and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989); *Predigt im Kontext*, ed. Volker Mertens, Hans-Jochen Schiewer, Regina D. Schiewer,

fabliaux, *mæren*, *novelle*, *tales*, *exempla*, etc. – the same effort, though masked by the humor and comedy, to reach out to the audience, to convey messages, to discuss about values and ideals, and thus to establish an exchange that leads to a mutual learning process and to the creation of a narrative community, as Brian Stock already identified it a few years ago.⁴⁰ At the same time, we have to be careful not to rely too heavily on the term ‘communication’ as an hermeneutical instrument for just too many different purposes, as the contributors to *Literarische und religiöse Kommunikation in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* seem to have done.⁴¹ It could be used in an inflationary fashion for the study of virtually any aspect in human affairs as reflected by medieval poets, whether we think of rhetoric, theology, sermons, the worship of the Virgin Mary, allegory, or the quest for the construction of the own identity. Of course, the celebration of the Eucharist was fundamental for all Christian communities, and it continues to be so, especially because the individual is thereby invited to participate in the spiritual union with the Godhead, that is, communion paired with communication, as Michael Stolz formulates it.⁴² But studying medieval codices, the hybridity of a sacred relic, hagiographies, the scandalous nature of some *fabliaux*, etc. within the context of communication waters down the concept, making it almost meaningless and which I would claim to be a major shortcoming of that volume.

and Wolfram Schneider-Lastin (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2013); *The Art of Cistercian Persuasion in the Middle Ages and Beyond: Caesarius of Heisterbach's Dialogue on Miracles and Its Reception*, ed. Victoria Smirnova, Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu, and Jacques Berlioz. Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions, 196 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015); Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sermons of William Peraldus: An Appraisal*. Sermo, 13 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017); Meister Eckhart, *The German Works: 56 Homilies for the Liturgical Year. 2. De Sanctis*, intro., trans., and notes by Loris Sturlese and Markus Vinzent. Eckhart: Texts and Studies, 12 (Leuven, Paris, and Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2020); *Pastoral Care in Medieval England: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Peter D. Clarke and Sarah James (London and New York: Routledge, 2020). For a solid summary of this genre, see Robert W. Zajkowski, “Sermons,” *Handbook of Medieval Studies: Terms – Methods – Trends*, ed. Albrecht Classen. 3 vols. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), Vol. 3, 2077–86. The international research on this topic and genre is legion.

⁴⁰ Stock, *Listening for the Text* (see note 37).

⁴¹ *Literarische und religiöse Kommunikation in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit: DFG –Symposion 2006*, ed. Peter Strohschneider (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009). The term ‘communication’ appears often here, but the volume really serves only as a broadly conceived platform for a vast range of topics pertaining to medieval and early modern religion, literature, and philosophy.

⁴² Michael Stolz, “Kommunion und Kommunikation: Eucharistische Verhandlungen in der Literatur des Mittelalters,” *Literarische und religiöse Kommunikation in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (see note 41), 453–505; esp. 464.

Of course, virtually all literary and also non-fictional texts aim at an audience and thus intend to communicate with them. If we argued poignantly that this would be the central focus of this volume, we would carry the proverbial owls to Athens or the coals to Newcastle. Instead, the issue must be, to make good sense here, the community itself with which an author communicates and the exploration of how this communication operates, either effectively or ineffectively. What do the words achieve which an individual utters, and how does the community thereby gain a solid foundation? Of course, this entails both a universal response and more concrete medieval and early modern perspectives. After all, if we can utilize the literary-historical examples for a critical analysis of our own language use within a communicative context, then we can easily grasp the critical value of these pre-modern texts for our own intellectual growth today, whether we think of Wolfram von Eschenbach, Heinrich Kaufringer, Geoffrey Chaucer, Fernando de Rojas, William Shakespeare, or Aphra Behn.

Late Medieval Language Communities

The pre-modern speech communities were probably somewhat different from our own today, and yet, all humans operate with speech and rely on it to convey information, either very personal or public/factual. All speech acts are both linguistic and content-specific, so our analysis of them provides a springboard for larger investigations about how society operates, both then and today.⁴³ The medieval and early world was clearly marked by the existence of social and spiritual communities, both in cities and at court, in monastic orders (*Klosterlandschaft*) and in confraternities.⁴⁴ Guilds and beguine groups made greatest

⁴³ See the contributions to *Speaking in the Medieval World*, ed. Jean Godsall-Myers. Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions, 16 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003); *Language and History, Linguistics and Historiography: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Nils Langer, Steffan Davies, and Wim Vandenbussche. Studies in Historical Linguistics, 9 (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012); *Moving Words in the Nordic Middle Ages: Tracing Literacies, Texts, and Verbal Communities*, ed. Amy C. Mulligan and Else Mundal. Acta Scandinavia, 8 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019).

⁴⁴ Sarah Ann Long, *Music, Liturgy, and Confraternity Devotions in Paris and Tournai, 1300–1550*. Eastman Studies in Music (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2021), studies, above all, the confraternities in Paris and Tournai, focusing on their rituals, musical performances, chants, devotional manuscripts, and religious practices. Although situated in two separate cities, there existed, as she observes, strong networks between both. See the review by Brianne Dolce online in *The Medieval Review* (22.02.06). See also the contributions to *Confraternities in Southern Italy: Art, Politics, and Religion (1100–1800)*, ed. David D’Andrea and Salvatore Marino.

efforts to establish firm rules and principles for their organizations, and this also applied to rural entities (villages). All of those organizational activities were, by default, predicated on communication, both oral and written, and they were commonly the results of intensive negotiations and decision-making processes.⁴⁵ We can also count the large number of pilgrims traversing medieval and early modern Europe and the eastern Mediterranean as a community, irrespective of language differences, since they all had very similar or even identical goals, used badges recognizable everywhere, and probably supported each other to a certain extent. In addition, while the Catholic Church dominated all of medieval Europe and beyond, there were countless religious groups organized around their own leaders and ideals.⁴⁶

Today, we still have available large documentary data confirming the degree to which all those social entities collaborated and exchanged with each other and at the same time demarcated themselves in contrast to outsiders or other groups. Recent historiography has, for instance, focused increasingly on notaries and chanceries, i.e., on professional organizations charged with legal aspects which required intensive communication, and this both within an urban community, for instance, and outside. Whenever the internal and external communication broke down or was threatened from inside or outside, then the communal bonds also frayed, splintered, and collapsed. In all likelihood, however, our own world today, globally speaking at least, does not seem to differ fundamentally from that situation in the pre-modern era. Our investigation could hence

Essays and Studies, 52 (Toronto: Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2022). It was not yet available at the time when I composed this essay.

⁴⁵ See now the contributions to *Entscheidungsfindung in spätmittelalterlichen Gemeinschaften*, ed. Wolfgang Eric Wagner. Kulturen des Entscheidens, 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022). One fundamental problem here is, of course, that all of human life is constantly determined by the decision-making process, which hence makes the focus as pursued here to a rather banal matter; see my review to appear in *Mediaevistik* 35.

⁴⁶ Ann Marie Rasmussen, *Medieval Badges: Their Wearers and Their Worlds*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 12–13, et passim. As she rightly points out, badges were communicative messengers, or media, signaling that their wearers belonged to the same category of people, had carried out a pilgrimage, and thus believed in the power of the saints and of sacred spaces (17). She also addresses pilgrim fraternities, 93, 98. Cf. further Hanneke Van Asperen, *Silver Saints: Prayers and Badges in Late Medieval Books*. Nijmegen Art Historical Studies, 26 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021); Stephan Bruhn, *Reformer als Wertegemeinschaften: Zur diskursiven Formierung einer sozialen Gruppe im spätangelsächsischen England (ca. 850–1050)*. Mittelalter-Forschungen, 68 (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke, 2022).

move from here into many different thematic directions because all social history is predicated on the existence on a community.⁴⁷

We should also not forget that all religious groups, whether Christian, Jewish, or Muslim, were predicated on the strong sense of a community as it had emerged over a long period of time through the collective effort of hermeneutic strategies to comprehend their Scriptures, so all three Abrahamic faiths were based on a foundational text, or texts, and made sure throughout time that its

47 As to guilds and craftsmanship seen through the lens of social networks (including the exchange of technical know-how, at least in northern Europe), see the contributions to *Crafts and Social Networks in Viking Towns*, ed. Steven P. Ashby and Søren M. Sindbæk (Oxford and Philadelphia, PA: Oxbow Books, 2020). For the culture of urban sociability and networking see, for instance, the contributions to *Urban Space in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, 4 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009); and to *Rural Space in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: The Spatial Turn in Premodern Studies*, ed. Albrecht Classen, with the collaboration of Christopher R. Clason. *Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, 9 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2012); for the concept of the *Klosterlandschaft*, see now the studies assembled in the volume *Klosterlandschaft Niedersachsen*, ed. Arnd Reitemeier (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2021). For the history of beguines, see Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200–1565*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 2001). In fact, we could probably examine most aspects of the pre-modern world through the lens of communities, communication, collaboration, etc. See now the contributions to *The Roles of Medieval Chanceries: Negotiating Rules of Political Communication*, ed. Christina Antenhofer and Mark Mersiowsky. *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy*, 51 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021). See also the contribution to the present volume by Nere Jone Intxaustegi Jauregi investigating the role of notaries in the Basque territories. A workshop at the University of Mainz, Nov. 5–6, 2021, furthered these perspectives more in depth: “Tagungsbericht (report about the symposium): New perspectives on civic administration in 15th-century towns”, 05.11.2021–06.11.2021 Aberdeen und digital, H-Soz-Kult, 08.01.2022, online at <https://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-9242> (last accessed on Jan. 6, 2022). A very different yet meaningful approach to this whole issue is the question of what late medieval communities did to establish a police force, a fundamental factor to maintain law and order. See now Gregory Roberts, *Police Power in the Italian Communes, 1228–1326*. *Premodern Crime and Punishment* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019). For a local perspective, see Hans Kirsch, *Sicherheit und Ordnung betreffend: Geschichte der Polizei in Kaiserslautern und in der Pfalz 1276–2006*. *Studien zur pfälzischen Geschichte und Volkskunde*, 1 (Kaiserslautern: Historischer Verein der Pfalz, 2007); for the early modern period, see Thomas Simon, “Gute Policey”: *Ordnungsleitbilder und Zielvorstellungen politischen Handelns in der Frühen Neuzeit*. *Studien zur europäischen Rechtsgeschichte*, 170 (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 2004); see also the contributions to *Kriminalität in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit: soziale, rechtliche, philosophische und literarische Aspekte*, ed. Sylvia Kesper-Biermann and Diethelm Klippel. *Wolfenbütteler Forschungen*, 114 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007). There is a legion of further research on crime, punishment, the police, laws, prisons, legal courts, executions, etc.

members were constantly involved in the comprehension of the religious messages, embraced the central theological concepts, and perceived the world though a commonly shared perspective.⁴⁸ Religion thus proves to be one of the major ideologies binding people together in a communicative community, which in turn relies heavily on the principles of translation, both in the concrete technical sense of the word (Bible translations, Qur'ān translations, interpretations of scholastic texts, analysis of the liturgy, etc.) and in metaphorical terms, i.e., the translation of the spiritual message of God into something understandable for the laity.

Boccaccio's Message About the Literary Discourse

We discover an excellent example for the problematic nature of language and its impact on the community in one of Boccaccio's tales contained in his *Decameron* (ca. 1350). Of course, we would be hard pressed to identify any one of his texts in which he would not address this issue in one or the other way, as all great storytellers do. But the very first tale invites a particularly convenient gateway to comprehend the duplicity and contradictory nature of language.⁴⁹ We are regaled

48 Reinhold Rieger, "Neue theologische Hermeneutik im 15. Jahrhundert," *Das 15. Jahrhundert*, ed. Günter Frank, Franz Fuchs, and Mathias Herweg. Melanchthon-Schriften der Stadt Bretten, 15. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog, 2021), 403–35. See now also the contributions to *Religious Connectivity in Urban Communities (1400–1550): Reading, Worshipping, and Connecting Through the Continuum of Sacred and Secular*, ed. Suzan Folkerts. New Communities of Interpretation, 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021); see also my review in *sehepunkte.de*, online, 22.2 (2022), online at: <http://www.sehepunkte.de/2022/02/35984.html> (last accessed on April 1, 2022).

49 Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. with an intro. and notes by G. H. McWilliam. Sec. ed. (1972; London: Penguin, 1995); for a critical edition, see *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca. Sixth rev. and corrected ed. (1980; Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1987). There are many other good editions as well, but here I quote from Branca's which proves to be the most reliable and critically trustworthy. For an excellent online platform with a text edition, translation (by J. M. Rigg, 1903, which is still one of the best despite its antiquated language), commentary, etc., see http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/ (last accessed on June 7, 2020). Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. with an intro. and notes by G. H. McWilliam. Sec. ed. (1972; London: Penguin, 1995). There is much modern research on Boccaccio; see, for instance, Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The World at Play in Boccaccio's Decameron* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); Pier Massimo, *Adventures in Speech: Rhetoric and Narration in Boccaccio's Decameron*. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Alessandro Archangeli, *Recreation in the Renaissance: Attitudes Towards Leisure and Pastimes in European Culture, c. 1425–1675* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Valerio Ferme,

with the story of a highly dubious person, the so-called Saint Ciappelletto, who is characterized from the beginning as an utterly evil man with a fantastic ability to talk his way out of any problem he might find himself in, irrespective of the nature or type of his crimes, deceptions, lies, or inventions. For instance,

He would take a particular pleasure, and a great amount of trouble, in stirring up enmity, discord and bad blood between friends, relatives and anybody else; and the more calamities that ensued, the greater would be his rapture. If he were invited to witness a murder or any other criminal act, he would never refuse, but willingly go along; and he often found himself cheerfully assaulting or killing people with his own hands. (26).

But then, while on a business trip to France upon behalf of a Florentine merchant, he falls ill and is visited by an old and pious friar who then takes his confession. However, Ciappelletto lies so outrageously about himself, and makes such enormous claims about his supposedly holy lifestyle that the poor and frail friar cannot do anything but to believe his every word, whether about having always been an absolute virgin (31) or an honest business man. For instance, asked whether he had ever deceived anyone as merchants tend to do, as the friar formulates it, Ciappelletto admits that he once accepted a payment for a loan which

Women, Enjoyment, and the Defense of Virtue in Boccaccio's Decameron. The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); see also the contributions to “*Umana cosa è aver compassione degli afflitti*”: *raccontare, consolare, curare nella narrative europea da Boccaccio al Seicento*. Special issue of *Levia Gravia: quaderno annuale di letteratura italiana* (Alessandria: Ed. dell' Orso, 2015); Guido Ruggiero, *Love and Sex in the Time of the Plague: A Decameron Renaissance*. I Tatti Studies in Italian Renaissance History (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021). See also Pia Claudia Doering, *Praktiken des Rechts in Boccaccios “Decameron”: die novellistische Analyse juristischer Erkenntniswege* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2020). Currently, each day in the *Decameron* becomes the topic of a separate edited volume; see, for instance, *The Decameron Sixth Day in Perspective*, ed. David Lummus (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021). Most useful is now *The Decameron: A Critical Lexicon. Lessico Critico Decameroniano*, ed. Pier Massimo Forni and Renzo Bragantini. English edition by Christopher Kleinhenz, trans. Michael Papio (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval & Renaissance Studies, 2019), where the issue of communication is also addressed numerous times. See especially the study by Francesco Bruni, “Communication,” *The Decameron* (57–78), who emphasizes Boccaccio's profound training in rhetoric, which was not unusual for any learned person in the pre-modern era. But Bruni goes much further into details as there are many scenes in the *Decameron* determined either by communication or miscommunication, much depending on the individual's ability to grasp the deeper meaning of words or of entire messages. Many times, as he notes, there are instances of narrative incongruity, misreadings of information, contradictory statements, and faulty interpretations. But, as Bruni emphasizes, Boccaccio did not yet rely on allegory for the narrative development in *Decameron*, though he would later totally embrace it in his *Genealogie deorum gentilium*.

was a few pennies over what had been owed to him. He admits his 'guilt,' though he also claims that he then had given away that extra money to a beggar (32). One of his greatest guilts, he said, had been that he had spat one day in church without thinking much about it, which the old friar smiling dismisses as a simple trifle (32). In fact, he completely accepts the dying man as a totally contrite person and honors him greatly for his true piety, and he also disregards Ciapelletto's final confession that as a boy he had once cursed his own mother (33–34). Nothing is true in this dying man's confession, but the friar believes him every word and pays him greatest respect as a living saint.

Their conversation runs smoothly, they both seem to understand each other perfectly, with Ciapelletto creating a most amazing fictional account about himself as a most pious, devout person. The two brothers who had housed him and who had overheard his 'confession' to the monk can only marvel about the outrageousness of his lies, especially because he knows of his imminent death and the certainty of soon meeting his creator. "Seeing, however, that he had said all the right things to be received for burial in a church, they cared nothing for the rest" (35).

The friar, on the other hand, completely deceived and ignorant of Ciapelletto's cruel game of deception, makes every effort to get him venerated as a saintly man by the entire monastery (35). But not only has the by then dead man pulled the wool over the friar's eyes, the latter soon convinces through his sermon the entire community of the marvels he had heard from him. No one has any doubts about these accounts, and so this master liar is buried with the greatest respect and devotion, worshipped by the entire community. Moreover, miracles are then said to have even happened at his grave, and the narrator concludes that those miracles "continue to work [...] on behalf of whoever commends himself devoutly to this particular Saint" (36).

As the narrator Panfilo concludes, however, it might have well been that Ciapelletto had, indeed, suddenly changed his mind: "Nor would I wish to deny that perhaps God has blessed and admitted him to His presence. For albeit he led a wicked, sinful life, it is possible that at the eleventh hour he was so sincerely repentant that God had mercy upon him and received him into His kingdom" (36). In other words, Panfilo suggests that there might have been a chance that despite all of his lies, this newly created 'saint' was indeed more saintly than we might have assumed, especially because the friar was so deeply convinced of the truth of his words and because miracles indeed then happened at the grave. "And if is the case, we may recognize how very great is God's loving-kindness towards us, in that it takes account, not of our error, but of the purity of our faith, and grants our prayers" (37).

Thus, Ciapelletto's astounding and very trustworthy lies – a hilarious paradox which sheds much light on the intricacies and ambivalence of human language as such – turned into miracle accounts, and since everyone believed them, those transformed into a new truth. Narration thus has made itself independent from the narrator and takes over the control of the people who happily accept the bait and subscribe to it without any qualms because it conforms so well to their own needs to have a saint amongst their own.

What does that tell us about communication, however, and why did Boccaccio place this story as the first one of the entire collection, it being the first of one hundred stories? After all, it sets the tone for the *Decameron*, it provides a model, we might say, for all the other ones, and underscores the importance of narration to explain life itself, whether based on truth or on fiction. As the queen of the first day, Pampinea, outlines, extolling the beauty and value of storytelling, it is “an activity that may afford some amusement both to the narrator and to the company at large” (23). The company needs entertainment, needs distraction from the pandemic in the city, and thus transform their idle time into meaningfully spent hours telling and listening to stories, even though the very first one seems to undermine the validity of all narrations. Or, maybe, it confirms the absolute value of all fiction and highlights that truth, in terms of material facts, would not matter so much as long as there is a good intention underneath the narration. Did Ciapelletto really lie, or did he fantasize so much that he began to believe his own words?

In fact, we find ourselves immersed in the same quandary as in the previous cases, with language conveying some information, but not necessarily truth. Hence, we are required to investigate further what Boccaccio might have intended, and yet cannot go that much further here because each individual story contained in the *Decameron* and the many conversations among the storytellers would require intensive discussions all by themselves and also critical reflections on the many opinions formulated by Boccaccio scholars.⁵⁰ Of course, the story is predicated on anti-clericalism, poking fun at the gullible friar, and so at the equally gullible audience who simply believe the preacher's words about the recently deceased. As much as we know that everything related by him is nothing but a huge lie, as much the words all by themselves appear to carry truth because miracles then happen at the great sinner's grave.

Panfilo refuses to decide on his own what was right and what was wrong with this terrible sinner who suddenly seemed to have turned into a penitent ex-

50 *The Decameron First Day in Perspective: Volume one of the Lecturae Boccaccii*, ed. Elissa B. Weaver (Toronto, Buffalo, NY, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

traordinaire. We know that Ciapelletto faced certain death, and only intended to receive an honorable burial in a church, and this despite an endless list of crimes and sins he had committed throughout his life. By resorting to a highly sophisticated show of contrition, he seemed to have convinced both the friar and himself of the veracity of his words, as much as they were all certain lies.

This then leads over to the next story, told by Neifile, about the Jew Abraham whom his Christian friend Jeannot de Chevigny tries to convince to abandon his faith and to convert to Christianity. While resisting all those requests for a long time, Abraham finally decides to test the Christian Church himself and goes to Rome, where he observes the worst hypocrisy possible, crime and sinfulness committed by the highest-ranking members of the clergy. Although this would have been enough to convince him never to turn his back to Judaism, Abraham does, and so he accepts Christian baptism because “it is evident to me that their attempts are unavailing, and that your religion continues to grow in popularity, and become more splendid and illustrious. I can only conclude that, being a more holy and genuine religion than any of the others, it deservedly has the Holy Ghost as its foundation and support” (41).

For our purposes, suffice it here to conclude that Boccaccio, very similar to Geoffrey Chaucer, Heinrich Kaufringer, or much later Marguerite de Navarre, deeply recognized the fundamental value of human language as an effective and consequential social medium, as faulty and deceptive as it might be. Behind all lies there still rests some truth, even if the liar does not display any awareness about it. Language makes us human, and so it transforms the horrible sinner Ciapelletto into a pious person, after all, and the friendship between Abraham and Jeannot brings it about that the former accepts the Christian faith because behind all the hypocrisy and sinfulness of the Roman clergy there is still the higher ideal and value of language itself, the communicative community, and the hope that the performance of human words might achieve the desired results of establishing some sense of truth and veracity which promises to bind all people together.

Whether we might have to associate Boccaccio with the Italian Renaissance or not – this probably pertains more to his later works, and not his *Decameron* – we can be certain that the playful and experimental operation with language places him directly into the same tradition as Andreas Capellanus and Juan Ruiz, if not many other medieval intellectuals who have left us their intriguing and sophisticated treatises and poems. To investigate this astounding phenomenon to a greater depth, we would also have to examine Matfre Ermengaud’s Occitan *Breviari d’Amor* (ca. 1288) or William of Ockham’s *Quodlibetal Questions* (edited and published in 1324–1325), according to whom ‘truth’ and ‘falsity’ are “connotative

terms that signify the same thing in contrary ways.”⁵¹ In fact, many medieval poets and philosophers pursued more or less similar epistemological quests and engaged with these fundamental questions concerning language, communication, and community, as the contributors to *Words of Love and Love of Words* have already convincingly illustrated by applying particular lenses in their investigations.⁵² Reflecting on Abelard’s famous *Sic et Non*, as examined by Bonnie Wheeler, I had suggested: “The need to utilize words to come to terms with the most powerful inner feeling humankind has ever experienced, erotic love, reverberates throughout almost all medieval narratives and lyrics dealing with the relationship between, on the one hand, man and woman, and, on the other, the human creature and the Godhead.”⁵³

Translation as a Communicative Metaphor

This then leads us over to the next stage of our investigation, translation, a major philological and hermeneutic process in all cultures and all periods. Language is to a large extent an effort to translate, both from one language to another and from one person to another. We do not even need to consider the problems separating languages from one another, such as Latin and Middle High German; already the efforts by individuals within one community to understand each other constitute enormous challenges, both in the past and the present.⁵⁴ In the pre-modern period, there was a clear awareness of main languages versus dialects, as the late thirteenth-century didactic poet Hugo von Trimberg formulated it explicitly in his famous *Der Renner*, a massive volume addressing many different aspects in human life, and so also the use of dialects (vv. 22265–70).⁵⁵ Concom-

51 Michelle Bolduc, “Transgressive Troubadours and Lawless Lovers? Matfre Ermengaud’s *Breviari d’Amor* as a Courtly *apologia*,” *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen (see note 12), 65–83; for William of Ockham, see my introduction, 75.

52 *Words of Love and Love of Words in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Albrecht Classen (see note 38).

53 Albrecht Classen, “The Quest for Knowledge Within Medieval Literary Discourse: The Metaphysical and Philosophical Meaning of Love,” *Words of Love and Love of Words in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (see note 38), 1–51; here 8–9.

54 Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* (see note 28).

55 Hugo von Trimberg, *Der Renner*, ed. Gustav Ehrismann. Vol. III. With an epilogue and additions by Günther Schweikle. Deutsche Neudrucke. Reihe: Texte des Mittelalters (1909; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1970); for critical comments, though not necessarily pertaining to the phenomenon of language as discussed by Hugo, see Jutta Goheen, *Mensch und Moral im Mittelalter*:

itantly, the use of Latin by the intellectual elite marked a strong linguistic boundary separating them from the ordinary lay people. But in many regions of pre-modern Europe, bi- and even trilingualism was a very common phenomenon, such as in England or Hungary. The latter case was the focus of a thorough study by Janós M. Bak,⁵⁶ whereas the former case was studied by Harry Peters,⁵⁷ to mention just a few of the recent scholars dedicated to this topic.

The phenomenon of multilingualism has particularly attracted much attention, maybe because the modern world is witnessing an unprecedented migration of people of many different tongues, which causes huge conflicts particularly in western countries poorly prepared for this influx and mixing of languages, cultures, religions, and entire communities.⁵⁸ Already the Middle Ages knew of the presence of various languages in one and the same territory, whether we think of the Iberian Peninsula, Bohemia, Southern Italy, etc.⁵⁹ The presence of a Jewish population in the various countries where they were tolerated – they were expelled from England in 1290, from France first in 1306, then again in 1394, and from Spain in 1492, for instance – always entailed the coexistence of Hebrew with one of the vernaculars. We know of many other multilingual situations and could even assume that the pre-modern world was much more flexible in handling various languages within the same community than the early modern society.⁶⁰

Geschichte und Fiktion in Hugo von Trimbergs 'Der Renner' (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990); Rudolf Kilian Weigand, *Der 'Renner' des Hugo von Trimberg: Überlieferung, Quellenabhängigkeit und Struktur einer spätmittelalterlichen Lehrdichtung*. Wissensliteratur im Mittelalter, 35 (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2000); Tobias Bulang, *Enzyklopädische Dichtungen: Fallstudien zu Wissen und Literatur in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit*. Deutsche Literatur, 2 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2011).

⁵⁶ János M. Bak, "A Kingdom of Many Languages: Linguistic Pluralism in Medieval Hungary," *Multilingualism in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: Communication and Miscommunication in the Premodern World*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 17 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 165–76.

⁵⁷ Harry Peters, "John Gower – Love of Words and Words of Love," *Words of Love and Love of Words in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Albrecht Classen (see note 38), 439–60.

⁵⁸ Jonathan Hsy, *Trading Tongues: Merchants, Multilingualism, and Medieval Literature*. Interventions: New Studies in Medieval Culture (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2013).

⁵⁹ *Zwischen Babel und Pfingsten: Sprachdifferenzen und Gesprächsverständigung in der Vormoderne (8.–16. Jahrhundert)*, ed. Peter von Moos. Gesellschaft und individuelle Kommunikation in der Vormoderne, 1 (Vienna, Zürich, and Berlin: Lit, 2008).

⁶⁰ Albrecht Classen, "Polyglots in Medieval German Literature: Outsiders, Critics, or Revolutionaries? Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan*, Wernher der Gardener's *Helmbrecht*, and Oswald von Wolkenstein," *Neophilologus* 91 (1) (2007), 101–15; *Medieval Multilingualism: The Francophone World and Its Neighbours*, ed. Christopher Kleinhenz and Keith Busby. Medieval Texts

Several scholars have, for instance, investigated the multilingual situation in the Nordic countries, even though the Icelanders, for instance, were rather isolated and might not have been so much in need of foreign languages. However, they were traveling far and wide, trading and waging war, buying and selling slaves from very distant lands, and were thus, due to their high level of mobility, probably more accustomed to acquiring new language skills than the literary or historical testimony might indicate.⁶¹ The Saga literature often remarks on the protagonists' almost global travels, and how they interacted with people in Scotland, Ireland, England, Sweden, Finland, Russia, Lapland, but then also Germany, Italy, and even the Byzantine Empire, and there are hardly any comments on linguistic difficulties. In other words, we can assume that a considerable degree of multilingualism existed, even though authors did not comment on it particularly.⁶²

and Cultures of Northern Europe, 20 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010); *Conceptualizing Multilingualism in Medieval England: C. 800 – c. 1250*, ed. Elizabeth M. Tyler. Studies in the Early Middle Ages, 27 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011); *Mehrsprachigkeit im Mittelalter: Kulturelle, literarische, sprachliche und didaktische Konstellationen in europäischer Perspektive; mit Fallstudien zu den "Disticha Catonis"*, ed. Michael Baldzuhn and Christine Putzo (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2011); *Multilingualism in Medieval Britain (c. 1066 – 1520): Sources and Analysis*, ed. Judith A. Jefferson. Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe, 15 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013); Oliver M. Traxel, "Languages," *Handbook of Medieval Culture: Fundamental Aspects and Conditions of the European Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen. 3 vols. (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), vol. 2, 794–835; *The French of Medieval England: Essays in Honour of Jocelyn Wogan-Browne*, ed. Thelma Fenster and Carolyn P. Collette (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK; Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2017); Amelie Bendheim, "'Zehen sprach hab ich gebraucht': Mehrsprachigkeit in der mittelalterlichen Literatur als kulturelle Repräsentation und performative Kommunikation," *Zeitschrift für interkulturelle Germanistik* 10.1 (2019): 11–31 (mostly a summary of previous research).

61 Marianne E. Kalinke, "The Foreign Language Requirement in Medieval Icelandic Romance," *The Modern Language Review* 78.4 (1983): 850–61; Ian McDougall, "Foreigners and Foreign Languages in Medieval Iceland," *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* XXII (1986–1989): 180–233; Kurt Braunmüller, "Receptive Multilingualism in Northern Europe in the Middle Ages: A Description of a Scenario," *Receptive Multilingualism: Linguistic Analyses, Language Policies and Didactic Concepts*, ed. Jan D. ten Thije and Ludger Zeevaert. Hamburg Studies in Multilingualism, 6 (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Pub. Co., 2007), 25–48; Ludger Zeevaert, "Receptive Multilingualism and Inter-Scandinavian Semicommunication," *Receptive Multilingualism*, 103–36; Katherine Thorn, "'The Limits of My Language Mean the Limits of My World': Multilingualism in Medieval Iceland," M.A. thesis, University of Iceland, 2016; online at <https://skemman.is/bitstream/1946/24044/1/The%20Limits%20of%20Language.pdf> (last accessed on Oct. 28, 2021).

62 Albrecht Classen, "Multilingual Awareness through Travel," *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 61.1 (2007): 84–96; id., "Multilingualism in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Time," *Neophilologus* 97.1 (2013): 131–45; id., "Multilingualism in Medieval Europe: Pilgrimage, Travel, Diplomacy, and Linguistic Challenges. The Case of Felix Fabri and His

To say the least, we must acknowledge that the medieval and early modern world was not at all completely cordoned off as to the use of languages, at least among the middle and upper classes. Granted, peasants hardly ever have had the opportunity to learn foreign tongues; instead they have normally been confronted by various dialects, simply a different type of linguistic challenge within their own social environment. But virtually all intellectuals, and also burghers (merchants) in the medieval cities, were deeply interested in, if not simply required, to learn a foreign language, either as part of their educational training (in that case: Latin), or as a result of economic needs since merchants had to communicate with their customers far and wide.⁶³

Some of the best confirmations of multilingualism can be found in medieval literary texts. Marie de France, for instance, in the prologue to her *lais* (ca. 1190), emphasizes that she could have drawn from Latin sources, but that she then preferred to rely on Old Breton stories for her own creations. Her reasons are not that her knowledge of Latin might be lacking. However, many other people had already turned to those classical sources and had utilized them for their own translation efforts (Prologue, 28–33). Turning to the oral poems from the old days, which had been composed to be remembered by posterity, she believes to contribute more meaningfully to the creative process of narration: “I have heard many of them told; / I do not wish to leave them aside or forget them” (39–40). In the introductory section of “Guigemar,” she goes one step further and praises those sources: “The stories I know to be true, / from which the Bretons made the *lais*, / I will tell you quite briefly” (19–21). The issue, hence, was not whether she had the linguistic skill, but whether she could create some novelties with her ‘translations,’ that is, her adaptations and versification of those oral poems for her own purposes. In short, Marie was a polyglot in her own way and utilized those oral sources as inspiration for her own creativity, superior even to her Latin sources.

Contemporaries,” *Multilingualism in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: Communication and Miscommunication in the Premodern World*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 17 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 279–311; id., “Multilingualism and Multiculturalism in the Pre-Modern Age: Medieval Welsh and Icelandic Literature in a Literature Survey Course. Interdisciplinary Approaches on a Pan-European Level,” *Leuvense Bijdragen* 102 (2018–2020): 357–82; id., “Unexpected Exposures to Multilingualism in the Late Middle Ages: A Global Perspective by Travelogue Authors: *Der Niederrheinische Orientbericht*, Georgius of Hungary, and Johann Schiltberger,” *International Journal of Culture and History* 9.1 (2022); online at: <https://www.macrothink.org/journal/index.php/ijch/article/view/19078> (last accessed on April 1, 2022).

⁶³ Bernhard Bischoff, “The Study of Foreign Languages in the Middle Ages,” *Speculum* 36.2 (1961): 209–24.

Many other poets also referred openly to their sources and thus revealed the extent to which they were familiar with other languages. Famously, Gottfried von Straßburg discussed intensively the various older versions of *Tristan and Isolde* until he found the one that proved to be the most reliable. Although he explicitly underscored his own intention to “bring pleasure to noble hearts, to choose hearts that are one with mine” (5), he also admitted that he had to search far and wide to discover who had told this story correctly until he finally hit upon the version by Thomas of Brittany, who was “the master of this material and read about the lives of the nobility in the books of Britain, which he passed on to us” (5). At first, Gottfried had searched for the original version in various French and Latin sources, but only when he had hit upon the manuscript containing the one by Thomas, did he know that he had discovered the original, which then allowed him to render it into Middle High German: “I now present [it] freely to noble hearts, that they might occupy themselves with its contents” (5).⁶⁴

For Gottfried, however, linguistic challenges do not seem to exist since he does not engage with any language barriers for himself; instead, his focus rests on love, loyalty, affection, devotion, honor, and other values characterizing those who belong to the community of those who have a noble heart. At the same time, his young protagonist Tristan proves to be a true polyglot, both when he is kidnapped by the Norwegian merchants (use of French for key terms in the game of chess) and later at King Mark’s court where he demonstrates his perfect command of many languages, whether Norwegian, Irish, German, Scot, Danish (53), not to mention French and also Latin (48 and 53).⁶⁵ By

64 For a good modern English translation, see now Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan and Isolde* with Ulrich von Tûrheim’s *Continuation*, ed. and trans., with an intro. by William T. Whobrey (Indianapolis, IN, and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2020). For a critical edition and modern German translation, see Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, ed., trans., commentary, and epilogue by Rüdiger Krohn (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1980); see his commentary, vol. 3, 22–23, for verses 150 ff. For an extensive discussion of the prologue and the relevant research, see Tomas Tomasek, *Gottfried von Straßburg* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 2007), 124–74.

65 Albrecht Classen, “Polyglots in Medieval German Literature: Outsiders, Critics, or Revolutionaries? Gottfried von Straßburg’s *Tristan*, Wernher the Gardener’s *Helmbrecht*, and Oswald von Wolkenstein,” *Neophilologus* 91.1 (2007): 101–15. <http://www.springerlink.com/content/nr774f6775221421/fulltext.pdf> (last accessed on April 1, 2022). The game of chess at aristocratic courts and elsewhere was also commonly a medium for intense conversations, debates, and exchange of ideas, maybe even across racial, religious, and generational lines, as beautifully illustrated by the miniatures in the famous book on chess and other board games created for the Castilian King Alfonso X el Sabio, the *Libros de ajedrez, dados y tablas* (Madrid: Patrimonio Nacional, 1987), such as fols. 17v, 18r, 24v, 25v, etc. An entire team of scholars discusses the manuscript in the volume accompanying the facsimile.

means of Irish, for instance, he is fully capable of operating without any difficulties in Ireland, receiving medical treatment from Queen Isolde and later, after his return, wooing for Princess Isolde's hand on behalf of his uncle, King Mark. Moreover, at the end of the romance, we hear of him roaming throughout various countries, striking friendships with different princes, but language barriers do not seem to exist for Tristan.

However, in contrast to the previous examples, the protagonist does not succeed in establishing a social home for himself as he keeps traveling around, without having a firm goal. His only focal point continues to be the Irish princess, but he cannot stay with her despite their deep love for each other, which ultimately transforms the polyglot and globetrotter, so to speak, into an exile and forlorn soul, longing for his love and being prevented from joining with her because of the social constraints.

In Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* (ca. 1205), we learn specifically of how the poet drew from his French source, Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval* (ca. 1180), though it is evident that Wolfram vastly expanded on it and changed it considerably.⁶⁶ Especially the books 3–12 do not find any correspondence in Chrétien's work, but instead, Wolfram appears to have drawn from other Middle High German and Old French sources, such as the *Bliocadran* prologue (a pre-sequel to Chrétien's *Perceval*) and the so-called *Gauvain* continuation, apart from a variety of Middle High German texts. He also included lists of Arabic terms, which the Grail messenger Cundrie presents (astrology and alchemy), but it remains uncertain to what extent Wolfram was really informed about Arabic.⁶⁷ Whatever his familiarity with that language and the science formulated in it might have been, he certainly invited his audience to reflect on the significance of foreign languages and their effectiveness in building a global community.⁶⁸ Little wonder perhaps that he hence also included the mysterious reference to the completely unknown source for the Grail story by the Provençal Kyot, who in turn

⁶⁶ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* and *Titirel*, trans. and notes by Cyril Edwards. Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004/2006).

⁶⁷ Heiko Hartmann, *Einführung in das Werk Wolframs von Eschenbach*. Einführungen Germanistik (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2015), 55–56; he summarizes briefly previous research.

⁶⁸ Arthur Groos, *Romancing the Grail: Genre, Science, and Quest in Wolfram's Parzival* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 170–83; see also Paul Kunitzsch, "Die Arabica im *Parzival* Wolframs von Eschenbach," *Wolfram Studien* 2 (1974): 9–35; see also the extensive commentary by Eberhard Nellmann in Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*. Nach der Ausgabe Karl Lachmanns revidiert und kommentiert von id., trans. Dieter Kühn. Bibliothek des Mittelalters, 8.2 (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1994), 421.

had learned about it from the Syrian Flegetanis, who in turn had discovered it through his study of the stars. As the narrator highlights:

Kyot was called *la schantiure* – he whose art has not spared him from so singing and speaking that plenty still rejoice at it. Kyot is a Provençal, he who saw this adventure of Parzival written down in heathen tongue. What he told of it *en franzoys*, if I am not slow of wit, I shall pass on in German (Book 416, here p. 176).⁶⁹

Even though it would seem very unlikely that this Kyot actually existed, Wolfram certainly projected with this reference a fictional community across languages and cultures. As Joachim Bumke noted:

Durch die Rückführung auf die französische Dichtung Kyots und auf deren Quellen, die arabische Sternkunde des Flegetanis und die lateinischen Anjou-Chroniken gewinnt das eigene Werk eine historische Dimension, die in auffälliger Weise der Geschichte des Grals entspricht.⁷⁰

[By way of tracing the story back to the French composition by Kyot and its own sources, the Arabic astronomy by Flegetanis and the Latin Anjou chronicles Wolfram's own work gains a historical dimension which notably corresponds with the history of the Grail.]

Another excellent example for the close connection between knowledge of a foreign language and community building can be found in Rudolf von Ems's remarkable and rather unusual *Der guote Gêrhart* from ca. 1220 where the protagonist, a Cologne merchant, demonstrates astounding linguistic abilities and concomitantly an extraordinary character as a role model also for the aristocratic

69 Hartmann, *Einführung* (see note 67), 23–24; Albrecht Classen, “Noch einmal zu Wolframs ‘spekulativer’ Kyô-Quelle im Licht jüdischer Kultur und Philosophie des zwölften Jahrhunderts,” *Studi Medievali* XLVI (2005): 281–308. See also Fritz Peter Knapp, “Der Gral zwischen Märchen und Legende,” id., *Historie und Fiktion in der mittelalterlichen Gattungspoetik: Sieben Studien und ein Nachwort* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1997; orig. 1996), 133–51; Michael Stolz, “Kyot und Kundrie: Expertenwissen in Wolframs ‘Parzival’,” *Wissen, maßgeschneidert: Experten und Expertenkulturen im Europa der Vormoderne*, ed. Björn Reich, Frank Rexroth, and Matthias Roichh. *Historische Zeitschrift, Beiheft, N.F.*, 57 (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2012), 83–113. Very useful also prove to be Ulrike Draesner, *Wege durch erzählte Welten: intertextuelle Verweise als Mittel der Bedeutungskonstitution in Wolframs Parzival*. Mikrokosmos, 36 (Frankfurt a.M., Bern, et al.: Peter Lang, 1993), and Gertrud Grünkorn, *Die Fiktionalität des höfischen Romans um 1200*. Philologische Studien und Quellen, 129 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1994).

70 Joachim Bumke, *Wolfram von Eschenbach*. 8th completely rev. ed. (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 2004), 247; Hartmann, *Einführung* (see note 67), 24.

world.⁷¹ First, he reaches the Moroccan shore on his way back from an extensive mercantile trip far into the Middle East. The encounter with the local castellan Strânmur quickly develops into a strong friendship between both men who immediately recognize each other's great character qualities. Of course, Strânmur does not know German, and Gêhart is unfamiliar with Arabic, but both have a good command of French and can thus communicate well, never to experience any misunderstandings (1314–1430). They treat each other with great respect and even admiration, and find themselves in good terms, both personally and politically, and eventually also agree on a highly unusual barter.

Gêhart's ship is fully loaded with most precious goods ready to be sold at any market, but probably back home in Cologne. Strânmur, on the other hand, holds as captives a Norwegian princess, her maids, and a group of English lords who had unfortunately been driven with their ship into this Moroccan harbor. For the castellan, that was a great opportunity because he expects to secure a high ransom for these high-ranking individuals, but he also faces the difficulty that their home countries are so far away, making his outreach to the family members there almost impossible.⁷² To solve his dilemma, he offers to barter those captives for all of Gêhart's goods, a deal which the latter eventually accepts despite considerable hesitations for a number of good reasons. In that process, however, he meets the English lords and talks with them in English since they do not know French or German (1981–86). With the Norwegian princess, he talks in French (2155–62), and can thus easily establish a very friendly conversation with her. Ultimately, Gêhart agrees to the castellan's business offer

71 See now my *An English Translation of Rudolf von Ems's Der guote Gêhart* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2016); I have engaged with the relevant research there in greater detail.

72 Albrecht Classen, *Freedom, Imprisonment, and Slavery in the Pre-Modern World: Cultural-Historical, Social-Literary, and Theoretical Reflections*. *Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, 25 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2021), 160–66. I have expanded on that further, see: "Piracy, Imprisonment, Merchants, and Freedom: Rudolf von Ems's *The Good Gêhart* (ca. 1220): Mediterranean Perspectives in a Middle High German Context; with Some Reflections on the Topic of Imprisonment in Other Medieval Narratives," *Incarceration and Slavery in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: A Cultural-Historical Investigation of the Dark Side in the Pre-Modern World*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Studies in Medieval Literature* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, and London: Lexington Books, 2021), 261–83; for the relevant research on captivity, slavery, and related topics, see there. But cf. also the historical studies by Daniel Hershenzon, *The Captive Sea: Slavery, Communication, and Commerce in Early Modern Spain and the Mediterranean* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), addressing primarily the seventeenth century; and Hannah Barker, *That Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves, 1260–1500*. *The Middle Ages Series* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

and can thus liberate all those miserable prisoners. He later allows the English lords to return home without paying for their ransom, and he takes the princess with him home to Cologne, hoping that her father would eventually react and try to free her, but that never happens.

Instead, Gêrhart then tries to marry her to his son, when suddenly the long-lost fiancé appears, the English prince Willehalm, whom the merchant happily accepts and allows to resume his marriage plans, although his own son is deeply chagrined about this loss for himself. Subsequently, Gêrhart takes the couple back to England where he manages to solve a dangerous internecine strife among the nobles over who should succeed to the royal throne after the king's death. Returning Willehalm to them, he thus solves all conflicts and establishes peace and happiness in England, but he refuses to be rewarded and remains a humble individual everyone deeply admires.

All that matters here is that the poet projected a true polyglot, a German merchant, capable of speaking fluently French and English, which makes it possible for him to establish harmonious social contacts across linguistic and religious divides. In fact, this protagonist creates new communities in spite of traditional religious tensions and hostility both because of his profound inner value system and because of his enormous linguistic abilities. Whereas Tristan in Gottfried von Strassburg's eponymous romance made use of the many different languages for his personal goals to pursue trickery and deception, first for himself, later for his love with Isolde, Gêrhart employs his linguistic competence for social, political, and economic goals, building bridges across the world. To be sure, Rudolf von Ems portrayed him as an early global player *avant la lettre*.

Comments by Geoffrey Chaucer and Others

Of course, medieval and early modern writers were completely open to and interested in translations, but we can now add that the intimate exchange with the various sources in different languages facilitated a powerful community of intellectuals across Europe and far beyond, as perhaps best represented by Geoffrey Chaucer (d. ca. 1400) who was deeply influenced by French, Latin, and Italian literature, as scholars have demonstrated already for a long time.⁷³ While he

⁷³ See, for instance, Piero Boitani, *Chaucer and Boccaccio*. Medium Aevum Monographs, ns., 8 (Oxford: Society for the Study of Mediaeval Languages and Literatures, 1977); Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1975); R. A. Shoaf, *Dante, Chaucer and the Currency of Word: Money, Images, and Reference in Late Medieval Poetry* (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1983); *Chaucer and the Italian Trecento*, ed.

traveled to France on commission several times, he reached Italy not until 1372, where he stayed until May 1373, visiting Genoa and Florence. In 1378, Chaucer traveled to Milan, to the court of Bernabò Visconti to solicit political and military support for the English war against France. Moreover, Chaucer had many opportunities to enjoy contacts with Italian bankers and wealthy merchants located in London, which certainly involved not only economic transactions, but also led to many cultural and literary exchanges.

As Helen Fulton now summarizes the phenomenon: “What is striking about Chaucer’s use of his Italian sources is the way in which he distributes the borrowed material throughout his work, smelting it, combining it with other elements and then refashioning it into new gold of his own making.”⁷⁴ She warns us, however, not to rely too much on the term ‘translation’ because Chaucer was much more creative in his adaptation process to render his Italian, French, or Latin sources simply word by word. Fulton suggests, rather, the concept of “re-mediation” (5) insofar as the poet operated quite flexibly and followed his own literary path when using these inspirations. He was, after all, as William T. Rossiter has now identified, a member of an intellectual elite operating across Europe in ambassadorial functions combining political, economic, and also military issues with the literary and artistic discourse.⁷⁵ In fact, most medieval writers or poets demonstrate a certain degree of bi- or multilingualism and proudly referred to their various sources, whether in Latin, French, Italian, or in some local dialects (Marie de France).

Originality was, after all, not a stated ideal; and if a poet had a chance to demonstrate his/her learnedness, then s/he certainly referred to the sources drawn from. And the entire European Christian clergy was certainly bilingual (Latin and a vernacular); the same applied to the Jewish scholars, the rabbis, many of whom might have been tri- or quadrilingual (Hebrew, Yiddish, Latin, and a vernacular). Merchants were required to have a good command of various languages so that they could sell their products on foreign markets. Countless

Piero Boitani (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Howard Schless, *Chaucer and Dante: A Revaluation* (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1984); Karla Taylor, *Chaucer Reads the Divine Comedy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989); Warren Ginsberg, *Chaucer’s Italian Tradition* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002); Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy* (2009); William T. Rossiter, *Chaucer and Petrarch*. *Chaucer Studies*, 41 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010).

⁷⁴ Helen Fulton, “Introduction: Chaucer Imagines Italy,” *Chaucer and Italian Culture*, ed. eadem. New Century Chaucer (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2021), 1–15; here 5. Cf. also the other studies in this valuable volume.

⁷⁵ William T. Rossiter, “Chaucerian Diplomacy,” *Chaucer and Italian Culture* (see note 74), 17–44.

scholars traversed much of Europe, speaking both Latin and their own vernacular. And many Jewish merchants and rabbi were famous for their multilingual abilities which made it possible for them to travers both Europe and Asia as far as China.⁷⁶

Middle English as a language thus stood shoulder to shoulder with the various Romance languages, and both Chaucer and his colleagues thereby formed a fairly close-knit community drawing both from classical literature and the contemporary works especially by the triumvirate of Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch. It would be fascinating to explore to what extent Chaucer's own works might have influenced his French or Italian contemporaries, but we are still far away from understanding this possible reverse impact. That Chaucer himself often hides his sources and resorts to irony and satire to experiment with the ideas borrowed from French, Italian, or Latin works without taking a firm stand, is not surprising considering his commonly acknowledged brilliance as a weaver of many different narrative threads.⁷⁷

William Langland and Translations – such as of the Qur'ān

It also deserves to be mentioned that William Langland included, without ever pausing for particular explanations, both Latin (Bible) and French verses in his famous *Piers Plowman* (ca. 1370), which mirrors the trilingual condition of late medieval England.⁷⁸ The nobility mostly spoke Anglo-Norman, the rural population was limited to Anglo-Saxon, and the clergy resorted to Latin, with many cross-overs and combinations on the higher level of the educational

⁷⁶ For an example, see Ibn Khurradādhbih, *Kitāb al-masālik wa'l-mamālik* (ca. 885; Book of Roads and Kingdoms), in: *Ibn Fadlān and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers in the Far North*, trans. Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone (London: Penguin, 2012), 111. I thank Fidel Fajardo-Acosta for alerting me to this source.

⁷⁷ Teresa A. Kennedy, "From Imitation to Invention: Chaucer's Journey from *The House of Fame* to the *Nun's Priest's Tale*," *Chaucer and Italian Culture* (see note 74), 217–40.

⁷⁸ William Langland, *Piers Plowman: The A Version*. A New Translation with Introduction and Notes by Michael Calabrese (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2020); see also my review in *Mediaevistik* 34 (forthcoming). There are, of course, many other editions and translations; the one by Calabrese is characterized by his deliberate effort to appeal to modern and young readers with no knowledge of Middle English, medieval Latin, or Old French.

scale.⁷⁹ This does not mean, of course, that the population on the British Isles remained linguistically sharply divided; just as in other parts of Europe, the late Middle Ages witnessed a constant process of standardization to the detriment of dialects and specialized languages, though Latin remained, and so also on the Continent, the *lingua franca* for the intellectual elite.⁸⁰

As Jeanette Beer and her contributors have extensively demonstrated, translation from one language to another was a very common method of studying science and medicine, and creating literary texts.⁸¹ As two contributors to our volume indicate, both diplomats (Chiara Melchionno) and public notaries (Nere Jone Intxaustegi Jauregi) were commonly tasked with handling various languages and thus to translate between their customers and the officials, or worked particularly to build political bridges between different courts or governments. Moreover, medical doctors commonly handled different languages in order to deal with various recipes and medical products (see the studies by Chiara Benati and David Tomíček).

Translation constitutes, and this very much until today, an essential aspect of all culture, especially because it constantly builds bridges between languages and people.⁸² Already in the high Middle Ages, numerous Christian scholars en-

79 *Multilingualism in Later Medieval Britain*, ed. D. A. Trotter (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000); *Conceptualizing Multilingualism in Medieval England: c. 800 – c. 1250*, ed. Elizabeth M. Tyler. *Studies in the Early Middle Ages*, 27 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011).

80 *The Beginnings of Standardization: Language and Culture in Fourteenth-Century England*, ed. Ursula Schaefer. *Studies in English Medieval Language and Literature*, 15 (Frankfurt a.M., Berlin, Bern, et al.: Peter Lang, 2006).

81 *A Companion to Medieval Translation*, ed. Jeanette Beer (Leeds, Arc Humanities Press, 2019); see also Eugenio Refini, *The Vernacular Aristotle: Translation as Reception in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*. *Classics After Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); cf. also Irene Salvo García, “‘Que l’en seult balaine clamet’: Linguistic Commentary and Translation in the Middle Ages (Ca. Thirteenth to Fourteenth Centuries, Spain and France),” *Médiéval* 75.2 (2018): 97–116. For older studies on translation, see *Translatio Litterarum ad Penates: Das Mittelalter übersetzen – Traduire le Moyen Âge*, ed. Alain Corbellari and André Schnyder, together with Catherine Dittenbass and Irene Weber Henking (Lausanne: Centre de Traduction Littéraire, 2005). As to the specific efforts to translate the works by Aristotle and the impact of that work on the history of Italian culture from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, see now Eugenio Refini, *The Vernacular Aristotle: Translation as Reception in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*. *Classics after Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). He emphasizes that translators “are readers as much as readers are translators” (13). And: “Aristotle is read, translated, transformed and appropriated, giving shape to the multiple meanings that his reception creates over time” (16). See the review by Octavian Gabor in *The Medieval Review*, online, 22.02.25, who poignantly selected these two quotes.

82 *The Medieval Translator: The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages*, ed. Roger Ellis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1989); *Translators Through History*, ed. Jean Delisle and Judith

deavored to translate the Qurʾān into Latin, but not because they were particularly interested in Islam. Instead, they understood that they would not be able to missionize among Muslims without a solid knowledge of their holy scripture. Those efforts continued well into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and actually ever since, and we can identify them as important bridge-building strategies, irrespective of the often rather ‘colonizing’ intentions behind them.⁸³

Sadly, of course, despite many efforts to make all kinds of Holy Scriptures available in other languages, whether the Torah or the Bagavad Gita, religious tensions have continued until today, probably because faith is such a powerful ideology and easily leads to exclusive claims to the disadvantage of everyone

Woodsworth. Benjamins Translation Library, 13 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1995); *Translation and the Transmission of Culture Between 1300 and 1600*, ed. Jeanette Beer and Keneneth Lloyd-Jones. Studies in Medieval Culture, XXXV (Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University, 1995); *The Medieval Translator*, ed. Roger Ellis. Vol. 5 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1998); *The Oxford Handbook of Translation Studies*, ed. Kirsten Malmkjær and Kevin Windle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); cf. also Rosalynn Voaden and Michael Alexander. *The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages*. Medieval Translator, 8 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003); *Translation in Europe During the Middle Ages*, ed. Elisa Borsari (see note 28). As Borsari points out: “Translation activity during the Middle Ages is the cornerstone of all posterior literary production to this day. It would be impossible to speak of the history of literature without considering that translation, in its attempts to spread and transmit wisdom, was the basis for the development and the improvement of the Romance and other European languages” (7). The literature on this topic is expansive. See also above.

83 Here and throughout the entire volume, I prefer the spelling ‘Qurʾān in contrast to the spelling often used in other publications. See now the valuable contributions to *The Latin Qurʾan, 1143–1500: Translation, Transition, Interpretation*, ed. Cándida Ferrero Hernández and John Tolan. The European Qurʾan, 1 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2021); cf. also *Frühe Koranübersetzungen: Europäische und außereuropäische Fallstudien*, ed. Reinhold F. Gleis. Bochumer Altertumswissenschaftliches Colloquium, 88 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2012); cf. Ulisse Cecini, *Alcoranus Latinus: Eine sprachliche und kulturwissenschaftliche Analyse der Koranübersetzungen von Robert von Ketton und Marcus von Toledo*. Geschichte und Kultur der Iberischen Welt, 10 (Münster: LIT-Verlag, 2012); see also Reinhold F. Gleis, “Die Polemik des ‘Christlichen Abendlandes’ gegen Judentum und Islam,” *Pluralistische Identität: Beobachtungen zu Herkunft und Zukunft Europas*, ed. Dirk Ansoerge (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2016), 68–83; see also his new study, “Dixit apostoli. The Word-By-Word Principle in Latin Translations of the Qurʾan,” *The Latin Qurʾan, 1143–1500* (2021; see above), 57–69. Noteworthy also proves to be Andrew Gray, “Translations of the Qurʾan and other Islamic Texts before Dante (Twelfth and Thirteenth Century),” *Dante Studies* 125 (2007): 79–92; Ulli Roth, “Juan of Segovia’s Translation of the Qurʾan,” *Al-Qantara* 35.2 (2014): 555–78; Bruce B Lawrence, *The Koran in English: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017); Jesse D. Mann, “Throwing the Book at Them: Juan de Segovia’s Use of Qurʾan Revista?,” *Española de Filosofía Medieval* 26.1 (2019): 79–96. For more details, see the contribution to this volume by Najlaa Aldeeb, with a focus on seventeenth-century efforts in England.

else. True religion, however, and this represents my personal opinion, is predicated on a strong sense of toleration and then even tolerance. The famous ‘Ring Parable’ in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s *Nathan der Weise* (1779) has said it all,⁸⁴ and it is so powerful also for us today and in the future because the Jew Nathan understands so profoundly that the differences between religions can only be overcome by narration, first of all, and then by mutual respect, and finally by love for humankind.⁸⁵ The Humanities have always been a form of ‘translating,’ which carries many different meanings, both philological and legal, linguistic and social, but ultimately it builds community across all barriers throughout time and space.⁸⁶

Communication and the Humanities

We could claim that one of the purposes of this volume is thus to contribute to the goal of building and improving world community, here mostly from a historical and literary perspective. Human civilization essentially relies on communication, which is only possible if there are open processes of translation, which altogether form a community. In short, this volume, drawing from a variety of different cases, situations, languages, historical conditions, etc., wants to contribute to the essential efforts by all fields within the Humanities to improve the lives of all people by way of shedding light on what makes a community work properly and harmoniously. It all begins with good communication, and it ends with good communication. This is, however, a challenge which even post-modern society has not yet fully learned, if we are not even slipping backwards at the current moment, with the various political fractions refusing to talk to each other, with entire societies demonstrating an unwillingness to listen to

84 There is a whole library of research dedicated to this famous play by Lessing; see, for instance, *Lessing-Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, ed. Monika Fick. 3rd. rev. ed. (Stuttgart and Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 2010). For a convenient introduction, plot summary, and bibliography of modern editions and translations, see the English website, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nathan_the_Wise. However, the German complement, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nathan_der_Weise, actually proves to be much more detailed and better researched (both last accessed on Oct. 27, 2021).

85 Albrecht Classen, *Toleration and Tolerance in Medieval and Early Modern European Literature*. Routledge Studies in Medieval Literature and Culture, 8 (New York and London: Routledge, 2018; paperback, 2021); id., *Religious Toleration in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: An Anthology of Literary, Theological, and Philosophical Texts* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020).

86 See, for instance, the contribution to this volume by Nere Jone Intxaustegi Jauregi, dealing with early modern notaries in the Basque countries.

others, with our world failing increasingly to translate other cultures and hence literatures (values, ideals, ethical and moral concepts, etc.) into our own.

The many struggles in the pre-modern world, as studied by the contributors, powerfully underscore the ever-ongoing efforts and endeavors by people at all social strata and in all cultural contexts to come to terms with each other, ethically, morally, politically, and linguistically. Life has never been easy, but those who know how to communicate well with others, or are at least willing to give it a try, have always been in an advantageous position to thrive and to help others in that process. The many examples from medieval literature, history, and sciences discussed in this volume promise to shed important light on the great need, if not the existential prerequisite, for people throughout time to learn better to communicate and to create linguistic bridges to other languages and cultures.

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, medieval and early modern literature knows countless examples where the very opposite of all communication and translation efforts is the case, with traitors, liars, deceivers, cheaters, and criminals operating highly effectively to achieve their nefarious, greedy, and highly selfish ends (see, for instance, the anonymous *Huon de Bordeaux*, mid-thirteenth century; see below). This is best expressed in the famous *Reinhart Fuchs* by Heinrich der Glîchezâre from the late twelfth century (ca. 1192, or even after 1197), where the fox always manages to cause harm to the other animals and who knows how to trick the lion king so much that he can eventually kill him. European authors well into the sixteenth century engaged with the same material, whether we think of Pierre de Saint-Cloud's French version from 1176 (*Roman de Renart*), the anonymous *Ecbasis captiva* and Magister Nivardus's *Ysengrimus* (both middle of the twelfth century), Willem die Madoc maecte's Dutch *Van den vos Reynaerde* (mid-thirteenth century), the English translation by William Caxton, *The Historie of Reynart the Foxe* (1481), or the Low-German *Reinke de vos* (1498; reprinted 1510 and 1517; and then eleven more times until 1610). Johann Wolfgang von Goethe created his own version, the *Reinecke Fuchs*, in 1793, published in 1794, which he had based on the edition by Johann Christoph Gottsched (1752).⁸⁷ Evil triumphs here, the community at court collapses, and open and

⁸⁷ Heinrich der Glîchezâre, *Reinhart Fuchs: Mittelhochdeutsche und Neuhochdeutsch*, ed., trans., and commentary by Karl-Heinz Gottert (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1976); Massimo Bonafin, *Le malizie della volpe: Parola letteraria e motivi etnici nel Roman de Renart*. Biblioteca Medievale, Saggi, 22 (Rome: Carocci editore, 2006); Hannah Rieger, *Die Kunst der 'schönen Worte': Füchsische Rede- und Erzählstrategien im Reynke de Vos (1498)*. Bibliotheca Germanica, 74 (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto Verlag, 2021); for two excellent overviews of the many different versions and responses until the modern time, see (in English) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reynard_the_Fox#Roman_de_Renart, and (in German) <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Re>

honest communication are the victims of the fox's endless rhetorical strategies and manipulations.

Serendipitously, just when I completed these reflections to introduce this new volume, the first critical edition of Thomas of Cantimpré's major treatise on bees appeared in print, his *Bonum universale de apibus*, composed sometime around 1263 and 1270. Here we encounter a highly influential study of the ideal form of communal leaving, as best exemplified by bees. Although Thomas had primarily the communities of Dominicans in mind, the examination of how bees collaborate for the better of their entire people sheds important light on medieval ideals of community, with a clearly defined hierarchy, mutual agreement and support, and a shared ideal about what the community is to achieve collectively.⁸⁸ Of course, the author fully subscribed to the medieval concept of monarchy and feudalism, but he perceived his world as open to realizing order and harmony as long as the individual subjects accepted the Christian faith and operated just as the bees do. The king, if dignified and honorable, receives complete support and aid from his people, and he in turn takes care of their needs, as the first book emphasizes, above all. Thomas presented a powerful social model, characteristic of the Middle Ages, and as such it illustrated some of the ideals of community in the pre-modern period.

He had certainly not in mind to project the ideals of a democracy, which would be a very anachronistic concept pertaining to the pre-modern world.⁸⁹ Instead, the *Bonum universale de apibus* outlines concrete steps how the individual members of a monastic community ought to submit under the general rules of their Order and use the example of the bees as a model for their own behavior. Community has always been existentially important, a *conditio sine qua non*, and as we will see in the subsequent contributions, without a properly functioning communication, none of those social ideals could be achieved.

ineke_Fuchs (both last accessed on Jan. 11, 2022). This is accompanied by a good bibliography and numerous links to the various original texts.

88 Julia Burkhardt, *Von Bienen lernen. Das Bonum universale de apibus des Thomas von Cantimpré als Gemeinschaftsentwurf: Analyse, Edition, Übersetzung, Kommentar*. 2 vols. Klöster als Innovationslabore, 7 (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2020); see also my review in *Mediaevistik* 35 (forthcoming).

89 However, as I recently discovered, throughout the medieval period, the notion of 'freedom' was not really unknown, and we can identify certain regional groups which espoused political concepts surprisingly similar to 'democracy,' such as the Icelanders, the Frisians, Pommeranians, Bohemians, and Swiss. Albrecht Classen, *Freedom, Imprisonment, and Slavery in the Pre-Modern World: Cultural-Historical, Social-Literary, and Theoretical Reflections*. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 25 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2021).

Ironically, however, the very opposite approach was pursued by the medical doctor and social-economic thinker, the Dutch author Bernard Mandeville, who in his English-language treatise *The Fable of the Bees* (1705, 1714, 1724, etc.) advocated for selfishness, strong individualism, capitalistic thinking *avant la lettre*, and private property, arguing that vices were the essential drivers of this world.⁹⁰

Translation, here broadly defined, adds, of course, to the entire complex insofar as it makes possible the transmission of ideas from other cultures, languages, religions, and social systems. I would like to conclude with the concept that the struggles in the past for a functioning communicative community continue to stay with us, though in slightly different contexts. Medievalists and Early Modernists are hence in an ideal situation when they try to come to terms with problems in our own world because they have available the historical dimension and can draw most valuable insights, if properly translated, both linguistically and philosophically.

The Unusual Case of *Huon de Bordeaux*

When we briefly address this thirteenth-century Old French *chanson de geste*, or romance, much depending on the generic definition we might prefer to use, we will have the additional opportunity to gain further insights into the global discussion of communication, truth, lying, deception, and community. Although the text has survived only in three manuscripts (and one fragment), it witnessed an astounding popularity far into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for a variety of reasons.⁹¹

90 Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: Or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits. With An Essay on Charity and Charity-Schools. And a Search into the Nature of Society. The fifth edition. To which is added, A vindication of the book* (1705; 1714; London: Tonson, 1724), which was reprinted many times over the following century; for a digitized version of the 1724 edition, see <https://books.google.com/books?id=vNQGAAAcAAJ&pg=PP7#v=onepage&q&f=false> (last accessed on Jan. 18, 2022). Cf. Richard I. Cook, *Bernard Mandeville*. Twayne's English Authors Series, 170 (New York: Twayne, 1974); M. M. Goldsmith, *Private Vices, Public Benefits. The Social and Political thought of Bernard Mandeville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); E. G. Hundert, *The Enlightenment's Fable: Bernard Mandeville and the Discovery of Society*. Ideas in Context, 31 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

91 For the critical edition, see *Huon de Bordeaux: Chanson de geste du XIIIe siècle, publiée d'après le manuscrit Paris BNF fr. 22555*. (2003). Ed. and trans. William W. Kibler and François Suard (Paris: Champion, 2003); for an English translation, which proves to be excellent, see *Huon of Bordeaux*, trans. Jones, Catherine and William W. Kibler. Medieval & Renaissance Text Series (New York and Briston: Italica Press, 2021); *Le Huon de Bordeaux en prose du*

There is, above all, the highly negative treatment of King Charlemagne, who displays tyrannical characteristics, especially against young Huon, certainly an increasingly common theme in late medieval literature.⁹² Then, the protagonist has to journey to the Orient (or at least to various Muslim countries) and overcome a number of life-threatening challenges; he is regularly, but not always, helped by the king of the fairies, Auberon, whose magical powers are unparalleled and simply astounding, him being free from the constraints of time and space, being almost an equal to God Himself; and having the ability to read people's minds and to foresee the future, and all this without any association with the devil or any other demonic forces.

Huon de Bordeaux, however, is centrally determined by the presence of traitors, especially at Charlemagne's court. Since the king is weak and unstable, undecided and open to all kinds of manipulations, those traitors have a fairly easy time carrying out their evil plans. Even Huon's own brother, Gerard, later commits treason against Huon out of sheer greed and lust for power. In fact, the protagonist would have almost been executed upon Charlemagne's order despite all of his enormous efforts to fulfill his exorbitant demands if Auberon then had not come to his rescue once again, exposing the traitors and getting them hanged instead of Huon. The protagonist's own words no longer count in Charlemagne's mind, and their communication is fatally broken because the king is consumed with hatred of the young prince, which the various traitors fan into flames every time an opportunity arises. Without Auberon's decisive involvement, the ruler and his barons/vassals would not be able to overcome their profound social disconnect from each other.

As the poet indicates throughout the romance, betrayal, deception, lying, and maligning critically undermine the well-being of any close-knit society.

XVème siècle, ed. William W. Kibler, Jean-Louise G. Picherit, and Thelma S. Fenster. 2 vols. (Geneva: Droz, 1980); cf. also *Huon de Bordeaux*, ed. Pierre Ruelle (Brussels: Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles, 1960); for subsequent versions, see Barbara Anne Brewka, "Esclarmonde, Clarisse et Florent, Yde et Olive I, Croisant, Yde et Olive II, Huon et les géants: Sequels to 'Huon de Bordeaux': An Edition" Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, 1977. For the most recent discussion of this narrative, see Albrecht Classen, "Huon de Bordeaux," *Literary Encyclopedia*, Dec. 30, 2021 (3302 words), online at: <https://www.litencyc.com/php/sworcs.php?rec=true&UID=40688> (last accessed on April 1, 2022).

⁹² Albrecht Classen, *Charlemagne in Medieval German and Dutch Literature*. Bristol Studies in Medieval Culture (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2021); id., "The Myth of Charlemagne: From the Early Middle Ages to the Late Sixteenth Century," peer-reviewed online article at <http://www.charlemagne-icon.ac.uk/further-reading/articles/>; or: <http://www.charlemagne-icon.ac.uk/wp-content/blogs.dir/332/files/2016/01/Classen-2016-The-Myth-of-Charlemagne.pdf> (last accessed on April 1, 2022).

Even Huon once utters a lie, pretending to be a Muslim in order to trick one of the four porters guarding bridges leading to the court of Emir Gaudisse (5551–53), which would have almost destroyed his good friendship with Auberon. Even the communication between the king of the fairies and the protagonist does not work so well because the latter betrays the former's trust almost regularly. Only because Auberon harbors such a profound love for the young man and hence forgives him over and over again against his own previous pledges, does their relationship survive, does their social interaction flourish.

Overall, as the romance strongly suggests, only truth, of course, can create community, build good communication, and solve most conflicts both in private and in public. Auberon immediately knows that Huon had lied, so there is no way for the protagonist of hiding. At the same time, on the public stage, all those traitors presented here, both at Charlemagne's court and in the Orient, are ultimately exposed and then receive their deserved punishment. Neither family bonds nor political alliances prevent treason, and we could thus read Huon de Bordeaux, like many other contemporary texts, as a major literary platform to examine the consequences of miscommunication and the destruction of any kind of community, poignantly identified as treason.

Those are strong messages from the late Middle Ages, but they resonate with us as well, maybe even more than ever before considering the downfall of political culture and the public discourse in the twentieth-first century, and this both in West and East, resulting in a growing atomization of post-modern society.⁹³ Of course, we also would have to keep in mind the very traditional outlook regard-

93 Michel Maffesoli, *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*. Theory, Culture & Society (London: Sage, 1996); Justin P. DePlato and Alex C. Minford, *America in Decline: How the Loss of Civic Virtue and Standards of Excellence Is Causing the End of Pax Americana* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021); Glenn Diesen, *The Decay of Western Civilisation and Resurgence of Russia: Between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft*. Rethinking Asia and International Relations (London and New York: Routledge, 2019). There are many recent studies that deplore the collapse of democratic principles and ideals in the present era. Of course, there have been scores of doomsday prophets, believers in the imminent apocalypse, and cultural pessimists; foremost, among them Oswald Arnold Gottfried Spengler (1880–1936) with his *The Decline of the West* (*Der Untergang des Abendlandes*; 1918 and 1922); see Arthur Herman, *Propheten des Niedergangs: der Endzeitmythos im westlichen Denken* (Berlin: Propyläen, 1998). In the late Middle Ages, not surprisingly, there was also a strong sense of decline and decay; see Albrecht Classen, "The Crisis of Spirituality in the Late Middle Ages: From the Twelfth Century to the Protestant Reformation; with an Emphasis on the *Reformatio Sigismundi* (1439)," *Global Journal of Human-Social Science* 19.2 (2019): 7–16, online at: https://globaljournals.org/GJHSS_Volume19/2-The-Crisis-of-Spirituality.pdf; see also the contributions to *The Crisis of the 14th Century: Teleconnections Between Environmental and Societal Change?*, ed. Martin Bauch and Gerrit Jasper Schenk. Das Mittelalter. Beihefte, 13 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2020).

ing Huon's future relationship with Charlemagne, who had deviously operated against him numerous times. King Auberon, however, strongly urges the protagonist to respect his lord under any circumstances: "... I forbid you, on pain of death, / To have any further conflict with the king. / He is your lord, and you must be faithful to him" (10763–65). The concepts of feudalism and vassalage are not to be touched, and yet there is also strong criticism against Charlemagne as a tyrannical ruler throughout the narrative – a quite common motif in late medieval literature, philosophy, and religion.

We can thus conclude, pulling together the various argumentative strands, that according to the anonymous poet of *Huon de Bordeaux* and many of his contemporaries, community can only be upheld and expanded if both sides of the power divide respect each other, if the words uttered publicly are trustworthy and reliable, and if each person acknowledges the privileges and obligations of the other in their social-historical context. In that narrative, Charlemagne obviously carries a lot of responsibility for the breakdown of their communication and the collapse of courtly community, which carries a particular load of guilt because of his role model and representative function for all of his people.

The Relevance of the Past for the Present

What else can we learn about these three huge interlocking topics in pre-modern literature and culture? We know that they all depend on each other and function through collaboration in abstract terms. But what was the situation on the ground, in social and economic history? How did poets and other writers engage with the notion of community and its corollary, communication? Translation will always stand in the background of all explorations of the relationship between community and communication, but it will not be addressed overly explicitly in this volume. Finally, we will realize how much all of human cultural history is constantly determined by the ongoing struggles to establish constructive communities, which has always been possible primarily due to good communication, good translation of values and ideals, compassion, compromise, and coordination.

Unfortunately, which makes the present volume uncannily timely and hopefully also relevant, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also already before that, increasingly post-modern societies have witnessed a catastrophic fraying of the social cohesion, the growth of an atomization among the members of many communities, the increasing disconnect between individuals and groups, and, worst of all, the drifting apart of factions, fractions, organizations, church groups, associations, and political parties, and this to a point at which the mass-

es, the mob, and violent hate groups arise and appear on the streets of many cities, fighting against the government, society, minority groups, etc. The year 2021, for instance, was the most deadly one in the history of the United States, both as a result of COVID-19 and, tragically, massive shootings and murders across the country, often due to stress, mass psychosis, drug abuse, and other fatal factors.⁹⁴

Populism, the modern catch-word, appears like a feverish frenzy which brings about a toxic infiltration destroying consensus, hence community, and the shared sense of values. The horrifying hatred directed against the press, the media, and then even against sciences and medicine as the arch-evil of everything people are discontent with, which ultimately can only hurt those who vocalize that hatred, constitutes a self-destructive force the post-modern world is fending with, quite helplessly, as a toxicity destroying ourselves.⁹⁵ I would not argue that pre-modern societies were in a much better shape in that regard,⁹⁶

⁹⁴ See, for instance, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/covid-helped-make-2021-the-deadliest-year-in-u-s-history>; <https://time.com/6166281/coronavirus-overdoses-2021-deadliest-year/> (both last accessed on April 13, 2022).

⁹⁵ Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger and Gunna Wendt, *Unsere gefährdete Demokratie. Wie wir mit Hass und Hetze gegen Politiker und Journalisten umgehen* (Stuttgart: S. Hirzel, 2022). I would like to thank the publisher for letting me have a PDF of the book prior to its publication. Both authors are highly respected public figures in Germany. As Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger laudably proclaims: “Es braucht die demokratische Kultur des von gegenseitiger Wertschätzung getragenen diskursiven Umgangs, der wieder gelernt und vermittelt werden muss. Und die bedrohten Politiker, Journalisten und ehrenamtlichen Helfer brauchen Mut, Rückgrat und vor allen Dingen Unterstützung” (12; We need the Democratic culture of a discursive engagement determined by mutual respect. That culture needs to be learned and taught again. And the threatened politicians, journalists, and political volunteers need courage, a moral spine, and above all support). The two authors then conclude, which mirrors our very current situation, and yet can also apply to the pre-modern world: “Das alles ist kein gänzlich neues Phänomen, aber gepaart mit einer weltweiten Pandemie unvorstellbaren Ausmaßes und dem Verlust des gewohnten, normalen Lebens ist daraus im digitalen Zeitalter eine dynamische Welle geworden, die die Demokratie zwar nicht in eine grundsätzliche Krise stürzt, aber ein nicht zu unterschätzendes Gefährdungspotenzial birgt” (224; All that is not a completely new phenomenon, but paired with a global pandemic of an unimaginable dimension and the loss of the ordinary, normal life, it has triggered in this digital age a dynamic wave which, though it does not create a fundamental crisis for democracy, contains a potential of risk which should not be underestimated). See also Alan Arwine and Lawrence Mayer, *Identity Politics as an Alternative to Conservatism and Social Democracy: The Emergence of Neo-Volkism in Advanced Western Societies* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011); Georg Schmid, *The Treachery of the Elites: On Political Discontent*. Studies in Philosophy, History of Ideas and Modern Societies, 22 (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021).

⁹⁶ For the critical conflicts in medieval times involving the public versus the Church, above all, see Charles W. Connell, *Popular Opinion in the Middle Ages: Channeling Public Ideas and Atti-*

especially if we reflect on the enormous conflicts and strife during the Reformation age, leading up to the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648). The Middle Ages were certainly also filled with violence and disruptions everywhere, and the various communities were often threatened both from within and from outside.⁹⁷ However, our attempts to examine communication, community, and translation from pre-modern perspectives will empower us to study the issues more objectively and *sine ira et studio*. Ultimately, hence, once we have learned the lessons from the past, we might be in a much better position today and in the future to come to terms with our own problems and to attempt to solve them by focusing on these three concepts which are constitutive for all of human society.

How This Volume Came About

The following contributions, most of them based on one of my international symposia held at the University of Arizona, Tucson, May 8–9, 2021, offer a wide range of approaches, examining magical charms, medical treatments and physicians' relationships with their clients, literary reflections, and historical and art-historical documents pertaining to social groups, the treatment of minor-

tudes. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 18 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2016). As he observes: "Public opinion operates at many levels at all times, but it comes to our attention most fully during times of crisis. When events that affect the greatest number, and/or threatened or are perceived (or made to perceive) as a threat to the common good, it becomes necessary to seize control of rumor and news in order to shape opinion" (283). This seems to apply in a shockingly prophetic measure to our own current situation in the era of Trumpism in the USA and the COVID-19 pandemic all over the world, with much social unrest, protest, and rebellion against any traditional authority, including the sciences and medicine.

⁹⁷ Cf. the contributions to *Violence in Medieval Courtly Literature: A Casebook*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Routledge Medieval Casebooks (New York and London: Routledge, 2004); and to *Crime and Punishment in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: Mental-Historical Investigations of Basic Human Problems and Social Responses*, ed. Albrecht Classen and Connie Scarborough. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 11 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2012); *Krisen, Kriege, Katastrophen: Zum Umgang mit Angst und Bedrohung im Mittelalter*, ed. Christian Rohr, Ursula Bieber, and Katharina Zeppezauer-Wachauer. Interdisziplinäre Beiträge zu Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit, 3 (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2018); *Christianity and Violence in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period: Perspectives from Europe and Japan*, ed. Fernanda Alfieri and Takashi Jinno (Berlin, Munich, and Boston: Walter de Gruyter – De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021); see now Frank Meier, *Gewalt und Gefangenschaft im Mittelalter*. Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Forschung (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2022). The literature on this topic is really legion, and this for very good reasons.

ities, and political conflicts, and all that under the umbrella of the key concepts of communication, community, and translation. After the completion of the symposium, I invited several colleagues who had not had a chance to participate to add their own research since it appeared to be rather apropos for this project.

Readers will notice that there are hardly any specific studies of translations in the pre-modern age (see the exception with Chiara Benati's contribution), which is mostly intentional because, as I have pointed out before, here that concept is primarily understood in metaphorical terms, as much as the philological side of translation matters as well, of course. But translation emerges everywhere in pre-modern literature as a trope, as a strategy, as a concept, and as a worldview insofar as the medieval poets commonly regarded themselves as conveyors of truth garnered from their classical and other sources (see the contribution to this volume by Jane Beal). To help the readers, and also to reflect myself carefully on the many different arguments presented, I will subsequently offer brief summaries and add, whenever it seems useful, additional references or comments, trying to embed each individual piece within the wider context addressed by this volume.

Thus, I would like to suggest to the readers to consult the summaries in conjunction with the actual contributions because here I engage critically with the authors' arguments while trying to add further information and to flesh out some points as much as possible. I could not avoid the problem, if that's the right term, that there is a certain imbalance among the papers; some are virtually double the length of others. But they all contribute in a very meaningful way to the exploration of the same topic around those three terms, communication, community, and translation, and this from many different disciplinary perspectives and ranging from the early Middle Ages to the eighteenth, and in one case even the nineteenth century.

Summaries

As scholars of the early Middle Ages can easily confirm, heroic poetry commonly served to establish bonds among the audience, to communicate with all members of society about the fundamental values and ideals, and to strengthen the critical concepts essential for the maintenance and further development of the community (*Beowulf*, "The Hildebrandslied," *El Poema de Mío Cid*, etc.). The same phenomenon can be observed in early medieval Arabic poetry, such as in the case of Abū Tammām's "Ode on the Conquest of Amorium" (838 C.E.), a highly celebrated work by this famous Abbasid bard. Despite considerable criticism against his 'modernist' approach, Tammām founded a new poetic