

The Power of Language: Chaucer as Translator in *The Manciple's Tale*

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Abstract

Some notable medieval poets, including Geoffrey Chaucer, were interested in meta-translation: in their texts these writers are calling attention to not only their roles as author and artist, but they also are advertising and defending their use of the vernacular language. As a rule translation into the vernacular was seen as questionable or suspicious during this period by these writers' respective cultures, particularly in the case of the English translators. Particularly for Chaucer, writing in Middle English, a language that was a relative newcomer in relation to other European vernacular literatures and of course to their classical precursors, authorship had an inherently dubious quality. In this paper I explore Chaucer's *The Manciple's Tale* and argue that this relatively ignored tale should be studied more extensively for what it says about authorship and translation. In the *Manciple's Tale* Chaucer explores in depth questions of language, its risks, and its consequences, examining fully notions of discretion in speech and language. The *Manciple's Tale's* significance lies in the fact that it is one of Chaucer's most distinctive, original translations, a point that scholars have generally not pursued.

Key words: *medieval poets, meta-translation, vernacular language, authorship, translation, language.*

Résumé

Certains poètes médiévaux, Geoffrey Chaucer y compris, se sont intéressés à la méta-traduction. Dans leurs textes ces auteurs annoncent et défendent l'utilisation de la langue vernaculaire. Généralement, la traduction dans la langue vernaculaire était considérée comme douteuse ou suspecte pendant cette période par les cultures respectives, en particulier dans le cas des traducteurs anglais. Particulièrement pour Chaucer, qui écrivait en anglais du Moyen Âge, une langue qui était relativement nouvelle par rapport aux autres littératures vernaculaires européennes. Dans cet article j'explore *Le Conte du Manciple*, écrit par Chaucer et je soutiens que cette histoire relativement ignorée devrait être étudiée plus largement pour ce qu'elle dit au sujet de la paternité de la traduction. Dans son ouvrage Chaucer explore des questions approfondies sur la langue, ses risques et ses conséquences, examinant des notions de discrimination parole/langue. L'importance de *Le conte du Manciple* réside dans le fait qu'il est considéré une traduction distinctive et originale de Chaucer, fait que les chercheurs n'ont généralement pas encore mis en valeur.

Mots-clés : *poètes médiévaux, méta-traduction, langue vernaculaire, paternité, traduction, langage.*

Geoffrey Chaucer's *Manciple's Tale* is a commentary on the fiction/truth dialectic, and it comments on the power and judicious use of language. In this tale Chaucer is reacting against contemporary literary conventions, such as those of *fin amor* and attempting to legitimize himself as a writer in an artistic milieu that

privileges *fin amor*. But the *Manciple's Tale's* significance lies primarily in the fact that it is one of Chaucer's most distinctive, original translations, a point that scholars have generally not pursued. My argument here is that Chaucer is able to most freely express the quandary in which medieval poets found themselves regarding truth versus fiction and thus their status as original, serious poets, through translation or rewriting, and that he seized upon the beast fable as the ideal form through which to express the condition of the fourteenth-century English poet.

Chaucer conveys his message in the *Manciple's Tale* through a brief tale that is seemingly straightforward but in fact decidedly complex. It is generally agreed among critics that "the subject of the tale is language"¹ but also that the tale deconstructs any affirmative, established, confident view of discourse and "finally leaves the poet no function at all."² As Michaela Paasche Grudin succinctly characterizes the critical consensus, "We are to believe that Chaucer concludes the *Canterbury Tales* by negating the assumptions about discourse and poetry that shaped it."³ A deconstructive reading of the *Manciple's Tale*, however, overlooks the subtle ways in which Chaucer uses language to affirm the importance and necessity of expression and not silence. To read any one part of the tale, especially its moral counseling silence, as Chaucer's final statement on human discourse is to miss his artfulness.

In the *Manciple's Tale* Chaucer explores the judicious use of language and the idea of having and losing the power of speech. This suggestion is embodied in the crow, whom Phebus taught to speak so well that he could "countrefete the speche of every man". (134) When the crow announces the adultery of Phebus' wife, he does it in what sounds like bird-talk: "Cokkow! Cokkow!" Cokkow!" (243) The wise crow in his excitement and temptation to *jangle* (gossip, tattletell)⁴ has been transformed into a foolish, lewd cuckoo.⁵ Or has he? Perhaps not quite yet. This seemingly bestial tweeting can be understood, of course, as a punning "Cuckold! Cuckold! Cuckold!" Larry D. Benson writes, "That the cuckoo/cuckold pun was known at this time is clear from Jean de Condé's *Messe des oiseaus*, 310-12, or Clanvowe's *Boke of Cupide*, ed. Scattergood, 1975, 183-85."⁶ Phebus does not understand the utterance, however, and calls for a translation:

"What, bryd? What song syngestow?
Ne were thou wont so myrily to synge
That to myn herte it was a rejoysynge
To heere thy voys? Allas, what song is this?" (244-247)

To this request the crow replies bluntly: "On thy bed thy wyf I saugh hym swyve" (256) Perhaps it is this direct, frank, common language which contributes to Phebus' violent reaction. This retelling in candid speech that his audience can understand proves to be the crow's undoing. The irony here is that this short, simple, "bestial tweeting" of the crow is laden with import; it conveys everything Phebus needs to know. Conversely, the translation into "human language," spelled out in more transparent, understandable terms, has catastrophic results, grave

consequences for the translator as well as the subject of his tale and even his audience. The idea of the crow transforming into a cuckoo takes on added interest when we consider the crow's forced exile and loss of community: in the marriage debate in *The Parliament of Fowls*, the outspoken cuckoo argues that all birds should remain single.⁷

The crow's counterfeiting here is, paradoxically, manifestly honest, and it fails catastrophically. For having revealed the "truth" of Phebus' wife, the crow is stripped of his lovely white feathers and becomes black, and he loses his power of speech and song, left only to squawk gratingly, or sadly, like Chaucer's crow "with vois of care" in *The Parliament of Fowls*.⁸ And all crows, in perpetuity, must pay this penalty, which seems an onerous one for the "indiscretions" of one loyal, honest creature.

The *Manciple's Tale* has a great deal to say about language and art. The word "tongue" appears ten times, numerous for such a short tale. And the Parson in the succeeding tale makes numerous references to the "synnes" and "humilitee" of the tongue and mouth, echoing the Manciple's theme that "whan [one] speketh moore than it nedeth, it is synne". (373) So what is Chaucer's point here, with these commentaries on the dangers of discourse?

The best approach to convey truths, Chaucer implies, is through ironic and latent language. To justify this idea Chaucer assumes the authority of Plato. Through the voice of the Manciple, Chaucer justifies his "fictions" by suggesting an apparently straight, equivalent line of translation from the classical philosopher to his own tale, casting himself as simply a replicator in (Middle) English of the ideas and words of Plato, when in fact he is crafting a complex, original story.

Chaucer was esteemed by his contemporaries as a translator. Indeed the late fourteenth-century French poet Eustace Deschamps famously wrote of his English counterpart in a *balade*: "Chaucer, le grant translateur."⁹ In *The Manciple's Tale* one can see Chaucer's formidable abilities as a translator distinctly manifest themselves. The tale is original and differs from its sources in a number of respects. Although he was probably familiar with the story of the raven in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the principal sources for Chaucer's *The Manciple's Tale* were likely two Old French poems, the massive *Ovide moralisé*, written early in the fourteenth century, and the mid-fourteenth-century *Voir Dit* by Guillaume Machaut. Upon examination of these two works, we can clearly note the differences between their tell-tale crow (or raven) stories and that of Chaucer, differences that are significant and demonstrate Chaucer's originality as a translator. The anonymous *Ovide moralisé* is a faithful yet greatly expanded translation of the *Metamorphoses* that adds allegorical commentary of, as the title suggests, a highly moral, and Christian, nature. The poem thus presents Phebus as a figure for God and the raven for the devil, and Coronis, Phebus' wife, for humankind. In his translation Chaucer avoids the Christian allegorizing altogether, and although he does include a "secular" moral—the danger of jangling and the corresponding prudence of silence—his tale is not a moral one (in the sense of a *moralitas* typology). One of Chaucer's specific touches that makes his tale original

is his villainizing, in a sense, Phebus, ascribing some culpability to this deity, and victimizing the crow, portraying him as, if not guilt-free, at least significantly more innocent than his master. Machaut also modifies the characters of Phebus and the crow in a similar fashion, but less markedly than does Chaucer.

Chaucer does closely follow the *Ovide moralisé* in his moral, as the French poem clearly denounces, with harsh invective, “jenglerie,” “jengles,” “jenglerres,” and “jengleours,” and concludes:

Mieux doit mentir,
Ou taire soi, pour pais avoir,
Que mal souffrir pour dire voir. (246-248)

It is better to lie
Or to keep quiet in order to have peace
Than to suffer harm for telling the truth. (*my translation*)

The most notable difference in the respective morals is that in the *Ovide moralisé* it is the poet himself, or a vague narrational voice that comments throughout the entirety of the work, moralizing on the narrative tales, yet in Chaucer, of course, the moral lesson and diatribe are taken over fully by the “gentil” Manciple. The Manciple’s voice embodies the spirit and, to some extent, the wording of the French text. The main difference is one of simplification: Chaucer simplifies the narrative dramatically, omitting episodes that in the French poem are clearly important considering their length and how they logically and seamlessly fit into the narrative. The French poem in its narrative structure and content closely follows the *Metamorphoses*. The poet evidently wanted to render the tales exactly as they appear in Ovid; no element of the stories themselves is missing. In the *Manciple’s Tale*, however, entire scenes and episodes from the earlier tales are omitted. For example, in the *Metamorphoses*, the *Ovide moralisé*, and Machaut’s version, Phebus’ raven, on his way to inform Phebus of his cuckolding, meets a crow who warns the raven against janglerie, attempting to dissuade him by recounting her own similar experience, in which she witnessed one of Pallas’ servant girls betraying her mistress and promptly told Pallas of what she had seen.

Pallas’ crow, who already had been transformed once by the goddess from a beautiful princess into a bird to escape being ravished by Neptune, now endures a second transformation at the hands of Pallas, this time having her feathers changed from white to black and being banished as a consequence of her “janglerie.” The insouciant raven, however, dismisses the crow’s warnings and hurries off to inform his master. In his tale Chaucer completely removes the entire narrative of Pallas and the crow, the story within a story, which naturally leaves us wondering why. The *Manciple’s Tale* is one of Chaucer’s more dramatic alterations of his sources to be found in the *Canterbury Tales*. The classical myth in his hands becomes a simpler and more stark tale, perhaps appropriate to the voice and character of the “lewed” Manciple (who, like the raven from the Ovidian tales, was warned about

the perils of janglerie and the virtues of silence, by his mother), but there must be something more we can point to. The chief effect of Chaucer's elision is to make Phebus' crow (raven) appear less guilty, and to make Phebus, and particularly his wife, appear more guilty. Chaucer's crow, although turning somewhat verbose after initially being a little coy in telling his master of his wife's adultery, informs Phebus, we sense, out of a sense of loyalty or idealism, in innocence, without having been warned in advance against tattle-telling.

Another change in Chaucer's tale that serves to mitigate the crow's guilt is the excessive punishment he suffers in relation to his "crime," particularly when compared to his punishment in the French sources. (*and in Ovid*) This harsh punishment that Phebus metes out to his loyal servant, for simply telling the truth, evokes a sense of pathos in the reader for the crow. In the Latin and French sources, the crow (raven) is punished chiefly by being changed from white to black. In none of the sources do we see Phebus castigating the crow for his actions or directly blaming him. Chaucer goes much further, having Phebus heap multiple punishments, both physical and psychological, upon the creature:

And to the crowe, "O false thief!" seyde he,
"I wol thee quite anon thy false tale.
Thou songe whilom lyk a nyghtyngale;
Now shaltow, false thief, thy song forgon,
And eek thy white fetheres everichon,
Ne nevere in al thy lif ne shaltou speke.
Thus shal men on a traytour been awreke;
Thou and thyn ofspryng evere shul be blake,
Ne nevere sweete noyse shul ye make,
But evere crie agayn tempest and rayn,
In tokenynge that thurgh thee my wyf is slayn."
And to the crowe he stirte, and that anon,
And pulled his white fetheres everychon,
And made hym blak, and refte hym al his song,
And eek his speche, and out at dore hym slong
Unto the devel, which I hym bitake;
And for this caas been alle crowes blake. (292-308)

Even the Manciple himself can't resist getting in on the act and "bitake[s]" the crow unto the devil. Phebus, after rashly and angrily killing his wife, even goes so far as to claim that the crow is responsible for his wife's death. (302) Earlier in the narrative Chaucer uses only two lines to describe Phebus' killing of his unfaithful wife, and then he writes seventeen lines to detail the indignities suffered and penalties paid by the faithful, truth-telling bird. The effect of all this unbalanced treatment, ostensibly, and on its surface, may be to induce in the audience more antipathy for the crow and sympathy for Phebus, and his wife, but what Chaucer effectively does here is to render the crow a pathetic creature, while not fully exonerating him, and to ascribe more culpability to Phebus. And, while Phebus' wife, in the narrative, comes across as a somewhat innocent victim of both

Phebus and the crow, through the Manciple's digression and apology for his choice of words to describe Phebus' wife, Chaucer indirectly assigns blame to her and underscores her sullied role in the affair. This censorious stance toward and demystification of the wife of Apollo are wholly absent in the Latin and French sources.

So why would Chaucer make these significant changes and deletions of a story he is translating? One possible answer is that Chaucer is trying to make a veiled statement about certain contemporary social issues that concern him, as well as about traditional literary and cultural institutions that he questions. For example, through his victimization of the crow and corresponding villainization of Phebus, Chaucer seems to be exposing and criticizing the inequitable, oppressive relationships between institutional powers and those groups or individuals subservient to them. If we examine the relationship between the crow and Phebus in this context, we can see that the *Manciple's Tale* illustrates this problematic association.

It is curious to note that, as John J. McGavin points out, "With very few exceptions, critics have inclined to agree with the Manciple and consign Phoebus' crow to the devil."¹⁰ These critics have seemingly unquestioningly accepted the Manciple's moral on the virtues of silence as Chaucer's moral. As I have already suggested, however, Chaucer's text challenges this traditional precept, and the Apollonian myth which embodies it. Other critics have commented on the servitude or "slave morality" of the Manciple,¹¹ but few have examined the crow in this light. In the Latin and French source texts, Apollo's crow is inscribed as a sordid creature (perhaps not only because of the lewd, dishonorable scene he has witnessed but also because he unabashedly recounts the scene?) who deserves the indignities he suffers as a result of his jangling. In the *Manciple's Tale*, however, the crow engenders more pathos: Chaucer departs from his sources in that he explicitly puts the crow in a cage (131) (anticipating Lydgate's use of the caged bird motif), which evokes an image of servitude from the beginning of the narrative. And the crow's subsequent fleecing, blackening, and banishment at the hands of his lord, in addition to the maledictions Phebus heaps upon him, for being faithful, loyal, and telling the truth, clearly reflect a gross imbalance and unjust power relation, and this fable can thus be seen as Chaucer's way of critiquing oppressive relations between nobility and the lower classes. Chaucer also is subverting the prevailing medieval Apollonian mythos that idealizes the god, and, as well, the courtly romance conception of woman in this mythos.

One of Chaucer's significant departures from his source texts that underscores his translational objectives in the *Manciple's Tale* is his treatment of Phebus' wife. Indeed readers of Chaucer know her as "Phebus' wife" and nothing else, but in the *Metamorphoses* as well as the French texts she is named Coronis of Larissa. Thus through suppressing her name and therefore her identity and turning her into an anonymous wife, Chaucer begins his demystification and humbling of this deified figure who, notwithstanding her cuckolding of Apollo, is generally depicted in idealized terms in the French poems, a depiction not unlike that of the

regal lady in courtly romance. As another leveling device, Chaucer then lowers the level of discourse in the form of the Manciple, particularly in reference to Phebus' wife, to reflect greater offense on her part. Acknowledging his "knavysssh speche," the Manciple emphatically concludes his report to Phebus of his wife's philandering by bluntly stating "For on thy bed thy wyf I saugh hym swyve". (256) He then uses the colloquial word "lemman" to refer to Phebus' cuckold and also indirectly in reference to Phebus' wife. (220) The Manciple also twice uses the word "wenche" in his *apologia*, another possibly lewd and offensive word, in suggesting that the only difference between Phebus' wife and a poor woman who has also "werke[d] amys" is a socially-constructed linguistic one: the former is called a "lady" and the latter labeled a wenche or lemman. "Wenche" usually denotes a lower-class woman, often a servant, and is, according to E. Talbot Donaldson, "not a respectable word in Chaucer's eyes."¹² In this digression the Manciple, somewhat incongruously, appeals to the authority of Plato in order to vindicate his use of "lemman" and "wenche" in reference to Phebus' wife where "lady" or "lovere" might be thought more polite and appropriate. These words merit a closer examination in this context, wherein The Manciple interrupts his narrative and begins his digression thusly:

His wyf anon hath for hir lemman sent.
Hir lemman? Certes, this is a knavysssh speche!
Foryeveth it me, and that I yow biseche. (204-206)

He thus implores his audience to forgive him his use of "lemman," which some might find offensive, particularly in reference to the wife of Apollo. With Chaucer the term "lemman" usually carries connotations of "adultery, lust, treacherous love, and rape . . . But the word was not held to be coarse, and the Manciple is the only pilgrim to apologize for it. . . . Perhaps Chaucer felt that the word had lower-class connotations and was somewhat old-fashioned. (Benson 954) Intriguingly, the meanings of "lemman" in the *Middle English Dictionary* vary from "concubine" to "the Virgin Mary; God, Christ."¹³ One wonders whether Benson interprets the word in a pejorative sense because of its use in the fabliau *The Miller's Tale*, where both Nicholas and Absolon repeatedly apply the term to the "likerous" Alisoun. "Lemman" thus seems more appropriate for a "knavysssh" tale like the Miller's and its use in not only a morally didactic beast fable but one which features gods such as Apollo carries more ironic connotations.

One of the significant points of this passage is its antifeminism: the Manciple is plainly expressing a series of misogynistic remarks directed against Phebus' wife but also against women in general. In addition to the words above, he also considers woman in animalistic terms, comparing her to a bird, a cat, and, more pointedly, a "she-wolf". Moreover, the "lemman" with whom Phebus' wife cuckolds her husband is not another god, or king, or, as in the courtly romance, a princely hero, but an underling, as the Manciple emphasizes:

“For under hym another hadde shee,
A man of litel reputacioun,
Nat worth to Phebus in comparisoun. (198-200)

With the choice of her lover Phebus' wife is adding insult to injury, the Manciple makes clear. This unflattering portrayal of the lover is an addition to the story on the part of Chaucer, and reflects a parodic strain vis-à-vis the ideals of *fin' amor* wholly absent in the *Ovide moralisé*. In Chaucer's tale the myth has been reworked to ascribe more baseness to the event and more guilt to Coronis and to Phebus, while reclaiming the crow.

One of Chaucer's more intriguing ironic strokes in the *Manciple's Tale* can be seen when we contrast this antifeminist discourse regarding Phebus' wife with the end of the tale, in which the Manciple repeatedly invokes his mother during his verbose moralisation, and (paradoxically) relies upon saws taught to him by his mother to drive home his final assertions to his fellow pilgrims. What are we to make of this story-teller who follows his digressions wherein he insults women with invoking another woman as an *auctour*?

As suggested above, one of the principal translational changes that Chaucer makes in his myth of Phebus and the crow is his inversion of courtly ideals and *fin' amor* that the *Ovide moralisé* upholds and that Machaut's *Le Voir Dit* ostensibly upholds but in actuality questions as well. This inversion reveals some of Chaucer's objectives as a translator, i.e. satirizing the popular poetics of the late Middle Ages. In addition to Chaucer's reworkings demonstrated above, another significant element of Chaucer's poem that departs from the French texts, particularly from the *Ovide moralisé*, is its commentary on art and the artist. Like the account in the *Metamorphoses*, the narrative in the *Ovide moralisé* practically ignores the fact that Apollo is a musician. The only reference comes when the crow informs Apollo of his wife's philandering, whereupon Apollo drops his lyre. Chaucer's account, is a however, is an exploration of the complexities of art and of the power yet also the vulnerabilities and failings of the artist. Chaucer fills his brief tale with numerous references to music and song and, of course, story-telling itself. Of all the various qualities associated with Phebus, it is that as an artist that Chaucer privileges, as we can see near the beginning of the tale when Phebus is praised for his music and song:

Pleyen he koude on every mynstralcie,
And syngen that it was a melodie
To heeren of his cleere voys the soun. (113-115)

And as Phebus' artistic counterpart, the crow is also described as having a voice nonpareil:

Therwith in al this world no nyghtyngale
Ne koude, by an hondred thousand deel,
Syngen so wonder myrily and weel. (136-138)

Chaucer valorizes the crow's representation of the artist by adding, "And countrefete the speche of every man / He koude, whan he sholde telle a tale" (134-135), and it is this specific description of the crow as tale-teller that is most significant. The operative word here, of course, is "countrefete," which carried the same meaning in the fourteenth century as "counterfeit" does today-- denoting something deceptive and false -- as well as meaning "to imitate, emulate, or represent something". (*MED: Middle English Compendium*) This notion of emulating or representing the speech of every man while at the same time using covert or duplicitous language underscores the challenge for Chaucer and others writing in English in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, one that attained its resolution in the fable genre.

In Chaucer's case, this challenge lay in the realm of language itself. Simply the choice of the vernacular tongue as his literary medium -- his attempt to "countrefete the speche of every man" -- had a transgressive quality to it. Chaucer's use of English, particularly in the *Canterbury Tales* and in *Troilus and Criseyde*, challenges the authority of the hierarchy of medieval languages. These two texts gave English the weight and esteem it needed (and had hitherto been missing) to stand on its own as a literary language, comparable with classical, French, and Italian authors. His novel choice of English for these two works, and its significant and lasting influence on the English language and literature, can be compared in some respects to Dante's decision earlier in the century to write the *Divine Comedy* in Italian. Nicholas Watson states that during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries "Middle English writing was and went on being much preoccupied with its own legitimacy and status, while the use of written English, both in England itself and in Scotland, was highly politically charged throughout the period... Writing in English raised large questions about national/cultural identity and about the consequences of the spread of literacy and learning both down the social scale and across the gender divide." Watson further adds that the "general literary history of Middle English [is] one whose focus is sociopolitical and linguistic, rather than formal or aesthetic."¹⁴ Adding to this subversive character is Chaucer's choice of the Manciple to narrate this tale featuring the speech of every man.

While English was making inroads at the turn of the century as the language for a variety of written texts, it nevertheless had to wait almost a century after Chaucer wrote the *Canterbury Tales* before Caxton made it the standard literary language with his first printing press in English. As a London poet and diplomat for Richard II, Chaucer must have faced a degree of hostility to his choice of English verse, in that the main language of Richard II's court, a significant part of his audience, was Parisian French.¹⁵ And Latin and Anglo-Norman continued to be widely used, not only in schools, monasteries, churches, law courts, and municipal and guild records, but in literature as well. Numerous fourteenth-century tracts, poems, and hagiographies were composed in Latin, and one of the most important writers of the early fourteenth century was Nicole Bozon, a Franciscan writing in Anglo-Norman, who wrote, among other works, a number of Aesopic fables.

Writing at the same time as Chaucer, John Gower wrote two of his three principal works, the *Mirour de l'omme* and the *Vox clamantis*, in Anglo-Norman and Latin, respectively. Watson suggests that Gower chose to write the former, his first long poem, in Anglo-Norman "perhaps as the most appropriate language for a member of the gentry such as himself to address his peers."¹⁶ Chaucer's decision to write a collection of tales in Middle English recounted by a diverse group of individuals that span the various classes, estates, and professions of late medieval England provided him with the framework to represent the array of voices and dialects that peopled fourteenth-century England.

Although closer to Machaut's *Le Voir Dit* than to the *Ovide moralisé*, particularly in its anticourtly elements, the *Manciple's Tale* departs from Machaut's poem, its most immediate source, in a couple of significant ways. One such change is Chaucer's deletion of one of the key features of *Le Voir Dit* (as well as of Ovid's tale): Phebus' "*amie*" (Coronis) was pregnant with his child, whom Phebus saves and who would become Aesculapius, the god of healing and medicine. Chaucer's suppression of this element also serves to enhance the guilt of Phebus and his wife, and by extension mitigate that of the crow, by obviating the pathos that certainly would have adhered to Phebus and his wife had Chaucer included the pregnancy. Perhaps an even more significant change associated with this element is Chaucer's creation of a literal cuckolding and adultery in that he transforms Coronis, Phebus' "*belle amie*," to Phebus' wife, thus, again, increasing the culpability of both the god and his wife. And the crow's jangling in this context, a report of a literal cuckolding, takes on a less blameworthy note. Chaucer's crow's shout of "Cokkow!" is an original touch; nowhere in either of the French sources do we see the bird crowing "Cocu!" or "Cucuault!", the Old French corresponding terms. Chaucer also displays his originality through his choice of the Manciple as his narrator, and this choice underscores Chaucer's subtle challenge to the prevailing contemporary institutions as well as his safeguarding of the position of the poet while still managing to convey his message about art and the artist.

In the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer presents himself as a compiler of tales told by others, and Chaucer the poet therefore disassociates himself from his Manciple narrator, just as the Manciple disassociates himself from the characters in his tale – when Phebus slings the crow out the door and "unto the devel," the Manciple interjects, "which I hym bitake." Like Chauncleer exhibiting his pride of voice, Phebus' crow conveys his words a little too flauntingly, the result being the exile of crows from a paradisiacal home. Both birds express themselves, their voices, imprudently, and there seems a heavy price to pay – the permanent loss of language. But, as with so much of the *Manciple's Tale* that we have observed, there is more than one way to read this situation. What appears to be a loss of language may instead be a rebirth, offering a unique, multifaceted perspective of the notion of "lost in translation." The experience of Chauncleer and of Phebus' crow suggests not only a loss of voice, language and the meaning of words, but also of home and community (with the obvious potential- or near-loss of life itself). Yet since their stories are retold, their stories – and thus their language – live on in

the words of their translators, in this case the Nun's Priest and the Manciple, and of course Chaucer himself.

Notes

¹ Britton J. Harwood, "Language and the Real: Chaucer's Manciple," *Chaucer Review* 6 (1972): 268.

² Helen Cooper, *The Structure of the Canterbury Tales* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984) 199.

³ *Chaucer and the Politics of Discourse*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996. 150.

⁴ The *Middle English Dictionary* definitions for *jangling* include "tale-telling" and "calumny"; a *jangler* is a "calumniator" and "raconteur"; and the verb *janglen* means "Of a bird: to chatter, twitter. See Middle English Compendium online, University of Michigan.

⁵ In *The Parliament of Fowls*, the narrator describes the raven or crow as "wys," and the "unkynde" (unnatural) cuckoo is called a "fol" and "lewed" (ll. 363, 505, 616).

⁶ *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987. See "Notes," p. 954.

⁷ See line 607.

⁸ See line 363.

⁹ See Tim William Machan, *Techniques of Translation*, 1985.

¹⁰ See "How Nasty Is Phoebus's Crow?" *The Chaucer Review* 21.4 (1987): 444.

¹¹ Ann W. Astell, "Nietzsche, Chaucer, and the Sacrifice of Art," *Chaucer Review* 39 (2005): 323-40; Louise Fradenburg, "The Manciple's Servant Tongue: Politics and Poetry in the Canterbury Tales," *ELH* 52 (1985): 85-118.

¹² *Speaking of Chaucer*, 1970, 25n., quoted in Benson, 954.

¹³ *Middle English Dictionary*. Middle English Compendium online. University of Michigan.

¹⁴ See "The Politics of Middle English Writing," *The Idea of the Vernacular*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999) 331.

¹⁵ See William Rothwell, "The Trilingual England of Geoffrey Chaucer," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 16 (1994): 45-67.

¹⁶ "The Politics of Middle English Writing," 333.

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