

# Travel, Orality, and the Literary Discourse: Travels in the Past and Literary Travels at the Crossroad of the Oral and the Literary

*Albrecht Classen*

## I. Theoretical Implications

The scholarly debate concerning the relationship between orality and literacy in the Middle Ages has still not resulted in a satisfactory situation, and the critical evaluation of either form of communication continues to puzzle medievalists.<sup>1</sup> Despite a virtual flood of critical studies on this topic, the question at stake poses highly thorny issues escaping easy answers. Scholars such as Paul Zumthor have energetically argued that originally all literary texts at least until the fourteenth century were by and large performed orally, whereas the written documents were the products of later times.<sup>2</sup> Others, such as D. H. Green, have suggested that all medieval texts were located at a crossroad between listening and reading.<sup>3</sup> The whole debate depends, of course, on the individual genres, on the specific readership, and the historical development of the relationship between individuals and audience, not to forget the specific situation in individual countries, cities, monasteries, at courts, and even at universities.<sup>4</sup> The investigation always would have to

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<sup>1</sup> Franz H. Bäuml, "Varieties and Consequences of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy," *Speculum* 55 (1980), pp. 237-265; *Kommunikation und Alltag in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit: Internationaler Kongress. Krems an der Donau. 9.-12. Oktober 1990*, ed. H. Hundsichler (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992); *Communicatie in de Middeleeuwen: Studies over de verschriftelijking van de middeleeuwse cultuur*, ed. Marco Mostert (Hilversum: Verloren, 1995); Werner Röscke, Ursula Schaefer, eds., *Mündlichkeit – Schriftlichkeit – Weltbildwandel. Literarische Kommunikation und Deutungsschemata von Wirklichkeit in der Literatur des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit* (Tübingen: Narr, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Paul Zumthor, *La lecture et la voix. De la "littérature" médiévale* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987), p. 214: "Tout texte médiévale est "oralisant"." See also Edward R. Haymes and Susann T. Samples, *Heroic Legends of the North. An Introduction to the Nibelung and Dietrich Cycles* (New York-London: Garland, 1996), p. 14; Edward R. Haymes, *Das Nibelungenlied. Geschichte und Interpretation* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1999), chapter 3, especially pp. 45 f., where he concedes a combination of orality and writing at least in the efforts of recording the text for posterity since 1200.

<sup>3</sup> D. H. Green, *Medieval Listening and Reading. The Primary Reception of German Literature 800-1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> Sylvia Huot, *From Song to Book: The Poetics of Writing in Old French Lyric and Lyrical Narrative Poetry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 2, 3; see also Michael Camille,

take into account the tension between Latin as the language of the elite – from early on used in writing – and the individual vernaculars which found their way into literacy only in the course of time, particularly since the thirteenth century.<sup>5</sup> We may certainly assume that oral presentations, especially at the courts, dominated throughout the Middle Ages and beyond, whereas chroniclers, legal authors, and philosophers, for example, but also clerical writers resorted to writing (in Latin) as the only reliable record for their purposes. In this sense the medieval book or the manuscript can be identified as the major emblem of an entire culture, at least as far as the learned culture is concerned, whereas courtly and heroic literature seems to have been presented orally in the first place.<sup>6</sup>

According to Patrick Geary, the major turning point in the historical development of writing and the creation of written documents might have been the eleventh century,<sup>7</sup> which also agrees with Brian Stock's observation that during that time clerical communities emerged working together on book projects and on the preservation of theological, philosophical, and also literary texts in written form.<sup>8</sup> The victory of literacy seems to have been a triumphant one, as many extraordinary examples of medieval manuscripts such as the *Luttrell Psalter* or the *Manesische Liederhandschrift*, both produced sometime in the early fourteenth century, illustrate, as here the writing process has led to the creation of outstanding art works of literary and, respectively, theological nature accompanied by a dazzling program of full-sized or astounding marginal drawings.<sup>9</sup> A vast number of similarly illustrated manuscripts, but also of fairly plain manuscripts from the eleventh and twelfth centuries confirm the growing interest in the written word to the detri-

"The Book of Signs: Writing and Visual Difference in Gothic Manuscript Illumination," in *Word and Image* 1-2 (1985), pp. 133-148; Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Harvey Graff, *The Labyrinths of Literacy: Reflections on Literacy Past and Present* (London and Philadelphia: Falmer Press, 1987); a good summary is provided by Jesse M. Gellrich, *Discourse and Dominion in the Fourteenth Century. Oral Contexts of Writing in Philosophy, Politics, and Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982); for a theoretical point of view, see Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban, *Natural Histories of Discourse* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Ana Maria Postigo de de Bedia, *De lo dicho a lo escrito* (San Salvador de Jujuy: Universidad Nacional de Jujuy, Secretaría de Ciencia y Técnica y Estudios Regionales, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> *The Book and the Magic of Reading*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York and London: Garland, 1999); Maria Selig, "Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit im Bereich der trobadoresken Lieddichtung," in Röcke, Schaefer, eds., *Mündlichkeit*, pp. 9-37; Juliann Vitullo, *The Chivalric Epic in Medieval Italy* (Gainesville et al.: University Press of Florida, 2000), pp. 93-99.

<sup>7</sup> Patrick J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

<sup>9</sup> *Codex Manesse. Die Miniaturen der Großen Heidelberger Liederhandschrift*, eds. Ingo F. Walther and Gisela Siebert (Frankfurt/Main: Insel, 1989); Janet Backhouse, *Medieval Rural Life in the Luttrell Psalter* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

ment of orality. In other words, the vast number of medieval manuscripts at first might indicate the preponderance of literacy over orality, and it appears to be highly tempting to project modern conditions back on to the past, inviting us to commit a major anachronistic fallacy because of the continued relevance of oral culture. Paul Saenger, for instance, argues that silent reading became the primary mode of reading in the late Middle Ages, but that its foundation was already established in the seventh century: "The visual mode of lay reading led authors to enrich vernacular texts with scholastic complexities that had hitherto been the restricted province of Latin literature."<sup>10</sup> His focus, however, rests on scholarly (scientific) and clerical literature and does not take into account the rather contradictory evidence of secular literature.

As Michael Clanchy has recently pointed out, "The monks and artists who made the earliest illuminated manuscripts, together with the kings and aristocratic patrons who supported them, valued writing primarily for its religious power."<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, as time progressed, on one level literary communication gained in relevance, and when we turn to the late Middle Ages orality as the major means of transferring information appears to have been definitely replaced by the written, then also printed document.<sup>12</sup> This observation, however, needs to be critically examined, as significant literary examples imply that in some cases and under specific circumstances the opposite can be confirmed. Despite the manuscripts, and the many illustrations of scribes writing down texts, of poets dictating their songs to another person who busily copies them down on parchment, and despite the supreme influence of the monastic culture on everyday life far into the late Middle Ages, orality continued to be the major mode of communication, both in pragmatic and literary terms. We can even go one step further. Depending on the literary genre and the author's purposes, orality maintained, as I will argue in this paper, a considerable role far into the early modern age and entered into a fascinating interplay with literacy even at a time when the printing press had gained full acceptance and was highly instrumental in transforming an entire culture.<sup>13</sup>

Currently the intriguing questions regarding communication in premodern times no longer refer to an either-other situation, but instead to when, how, how much, and by whom these forms of written and oral communication and performance took place.<sup>14</sup> The debate also would gain solid ground if the issue would be

<sup>10</sup> Paul Saenger, *Space Between Words. The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 273.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Clanchy, "Introduction," in *New Approaches to Medieval Communication*, ed. Marco Mostert (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), pp. 3-13, here 11.

<sup>12</sup> For the situation in England, see Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979); consult also Horst Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen. Schrift und Bild: Kultur und Gedächtnis im Mittelalter* (Munich: Beck, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Ronald J. Deibert, *Parchment, Printing, and Hypermedia: Communication in World Order Transformation* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1997), chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>14</sup> For a bibliography of the relevant scholarship, see *New Approaches to Medieval Com-*

seen in terms of a process of progressive literacy from the early to the late Middle Ages, as has recently been suggested by Christa Bertelsmeier-Kirst who evaluated the situation in the history of German literature.<sup>15</sup> Historically, however, the two “seemingly mutually exclusive and sequential epistemes [orality and textuality]” have regularly been the battleground of major philosophical approaches, as the interconnectedness “has been resisted (Augustine), negativized (Plato), deplored (Lévi-Strauss), elided (Derrida).” Nevertheless, the fundamental and always present interface continues to be an essential phenomenon difficult to fathom.<sup>16</sup> Critical analyses of medieval manuscripts have also unearthed that there was a considerable instability of the texts as the narratives, lyric poetry, and even scholarly treatises were obviously handed down both orally and in written form, allowing later copyists to edit the texts or to choose on their own what text version – of oral or literary nature – seemed to be superior for their own purposes.<sup>17</sup> Voice and text, orality and literacy thus appear to be not radical opposites during the Middle Ages – not even during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries – but rather as complementary factors determining medieval culture to a large extent.<sup>18</sup> Many late-medieval texts such as Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyda* and the anonymous *Till Eulenspiegel* illustrate the great role played by the messenger, the letter and its oral delivery, and also the oral discourse incorporated in the literary framework. The oral medium was different from the written, but the reliability and concreteness of the messages

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*munication*, ed. Marco Mostert, 1999; for a discussion of the orality versus literacy theme in the history of German literature, see Haiko Wandhoff, *Der epische Blick. Eine mediengeschichtliche Studie zur höfischen Literatur* (Berlin: Schmidt, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> Christa Bertelsmeier-Kierst, “Aufbruch in die Schriftlichkeit. Zur volkssprachlichen Überlieferung im 12. Jahrhundert,” in *Aspekte des 12. Jahrhunderts. Freisinger Kolloquium 1998*, ed. Wolfgang Haubrichs, Eckart C. Lutz, and Gisela Vollmann-Profe (Berlin: Schmidt, 2000), pp. 157-174.

<sup>16</sup> A. N. Doane, “Introduction,” in *Vox intexta. Orality and Textuality in the Middle Ages*, ed. A. N. Doane and Carol Braun Pasternack (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), pp. xi-xiv, here xii.

<sup>17</sup> For a pragmatic example concerning Middle High German courtly love poetry, see Hubert Heinen, ed., *Mutabilität im Minnesang. Mehrfach überlieferte Lieder des 12. und frühen 13. Jahrhunderts* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1989); for a discussion of the notion of “mouvance,” see Paul Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972); idem, *Introduction à la poésie orale* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1983); recently Joachim Bumke, *Die vier Fassungen der “Nibelungenklage.” Untersuchungen zur Überlieferungsgeschichte und Textkritik der höfischen Epik im 13. Jahrhundert* (Berlin-New York: de Gruyter, 1996), pp. 60-68, has reexamined this issue with regard to the German epic tradition.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Zumthor, *La poésie et la voix dans la civilisation médiévale* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1984); Jeffrey Kittay, “Utterance Unmoored: The Changing Interpretation of the Act of Writing in the European Middle Ages,” *Language in Society*, 17 (1986), pp. 209-30; see also the wide ranging contributions to this topic in ‘*Aufführung*’ und ‘*Schrift*’ in *Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Jan-Dirk Müller (Stuttgart-Weimar: Metzler, 1996); for further bibliographical references, see M. Mostert, ed., *New Approaches*, pp. 197-199; for a critical discussion of literacy, see Harvey J. Graff, *The Labyrinth of Literacy. Reflections on Literacy Past and Present* (London, New York, and Philadelphia: The Falmer Press, 1987).

conveyed were more or less the same.<sup>19</sup>

## II. Travel and Orality

To explore this issue further, to gain a solid grasp of this subtle but significant interaction of the oral and the written, and also in order to identify the oral element within the written medium, and vice versa, following I will examine a selection of literary texts from the later Middle Ages where the narrative account is situated in the framework of a travel, hence where the literary discourse is predicated on an oral exchange of tales, yet also proves to be the result of a writing process. Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Jörg Wickram's *Rollwagenbüchlein*, and Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptameron* will provide us with the crucial evidence to come to terms with the issue, or at least to unearth the dialectic relationship between both spheres.<sup>20</sup>

Medieval travel literature and actual travel experiences have been the topic of much debate and scholarly investigation in recent years, as travel narratives provide profound insight in mental concepts and attitudes with regards to other worlds, foreigners, and alien cultures.<sup>21</sup> Neither Boccaccio's *Decameron* nor Marguerite's *Heptameron* represent travel experiences in the narrow sense of the word, but both times the narrative framework is predicated upon the idea of the protagonist's transfer from one place to the other, both times initiated by severe external conditions, once the Black Death, once a natural catastrophe. Likewise, neither in the *Canterbury Tales* nor in the *Rollwagenbüchlein* are we fully confronted with a travel experience per se, as the narratives, such as in Chaucer's text, are framed by the concept of a pilgrimage, a spiritual quest carried out in concrete physical terms. And in the second case the narrator emphasizes that he offers his tales as a means to chase away the boredom which arises during travel, meaning that he does not intend to make the travel as such to his primary theme. Nevertheless, in all four

<sup>19</sup> Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral*. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Harvey J. Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); idem, *The Labyrinths of Literacy: Reflections on Literacy Past and Present* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995); Jacques Merceron, *Le message et sa fiction. La communication par message dans la littérature française des XI<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 85 ff.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Richter, *The Formation of the Medieval West. Studies in the Oral Culture of the Barbarians* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), pp. 262f., points out the need to expand the research of oral cultures from the early to the late Middle Ages.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, *Reisen und Reiseliteratur im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit*, eds. Xenja von Ertzdorff and Dieter Neukirch (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, 1992); *Diesseits- und Jenseitsreisen im Mittelalter*, ed. Wolf-Dieter Lange (Bonn and Berlin: Bouvier, 1992); Norbert Ohler, *The Medieval Traveler*. Trans. from the German (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1989); Arthur Percival Newton, *Travel and Travellers of the Middle Ages* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996; rpt. of the 1926 ed.); Wilhelm Baum, *Die Verwandlung des Mythos vom Reich des Priesterkönigs Johannes. Rom, Byzanz und die Christen des Orients im Mittelalter* (Klagenfurt: Kitab, 1999).

texts we are confronted with a narrator who interacts with us as his/her audience and indicates through his/her account how the protagonists carry out oral communication determined by a travel experience.

The aim of my paper is not to study these texts in order to gain a new understanding of the poets' overall messages, but instead I want to analyze some critical passages which specifically document orality and literacy which involve both us as the audience and the protagonists, both the narrator and his or her historical audience. In this sense I intend to suggest that late-medieval travel literature in the wider sense of the word represents a significant medium to explore the interrelationship between orality and textuality, while at the same time it reflects the phenomenon of "the other" and one self's inability to fend off the foreigner.

Most medieval literary texts contain indications of a narrator who addresses his or her audience, but in the late Middle Ages the peculiar arrangement of narrative accounts for the stated purpose of providing entertaining, to help pass the long time, and to overcome boredom seem to be a significant innovation. My choice of texts deliberately relies on an interdisciplinary approach so as to gain a broader perspective that might reveal the characteristic features of oral and literary communication at a time of cultural transition.

### III. Boccaccio's *Decamerone*

In his foreword to the *Decameron* (ca. 1350), Boccaccio points out how much he himself was comforted "by the pleasant talk and consolation of a friend."<sup>22</sup> He reflects upon his love pain and allows us a short glimpse into his soul by these confessions, but he also reveals how much he considers his presentation of tales as an oral performance. This is also confirmed by the entire narrative structure insofar as here individual protagonists tell a tale to the company of friends.<sup>23</sup> Although the written record made the *Decameron* available to us, the author relies on orality as the key feature for all his tales. Melancholy resulting from the unhappy development of a love affair can be soothed and alleviated by means of listening to pleasant stories: "driven away by new discourse" (26), which already finds its confirmation in Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan* (ca. 1210) where the author informs us in his prologue: "the noble lover loves love-tales."<sup>24</sup> Boccaccio the narrator underscores his role by pointing out: "I intend to relate one hundred tales or fables or parables or stories," and he alerts us to the fact that these in turn "were told in ten days by a band of seven ladies and three young men" (26). In contrast to medieval accounts from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, how-

<sup>22</sup> *The Decameron of Giovanni Boccaccio*, trans. by Richard Aldington (New York: Dell Publishing, 1930), p. 25; for a historical-critical edition, see Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decamerone*, ed. Vittore Branca (Firenze: Presso l'Accademia della Crusca, 1976).

<sup>23</sup> Vittore Branca, *Boccaccio medievale e nuovi studi sul Decameron* (Milano: R.C.S. Libri & Grandi Opere, 1996), pp. 165-187.

<sup>24</sup> Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, with an Introduction by A. T. Hatto (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), p. 42.

ever, when oral performance appears to have been the norm, that is, before the texts were eventually copied down by scribes, the later Middle Ages experienced a considerable paradigm shift toward literacy, although the oral component never faded away entirely. Insofar as the experience of traveling gained in importance, the intricate relationship between the written and the oral report also gained in significance and required an intensive interaction both by authors and audiences.

Before the actual round of tale-telling begins, Boccaccio introduces the general situation of the Black Death affecting the entire city of Florence, from which resulted the occasion for the group of young people to withdraw to the countryside and spend carefree time there in safety from the terrible disease. Again the narrator comes forward and emphasizes that he will relate to the audience the horrors and dreadful events in the city: "What I am about to tell now is a marvellous thing to hear; and if I and others had not seen it with our own eyes I would not dare to write it, however much I was willing to believe and whatever the good faith of the person from whom I heard it" (31). Both eyewitness account and secondary witness reports assure the veracity of Boccaccio's report, but he also indicates that the account was subsequently or parallel to the oral presentation written down. Immediately following he relates a scene with some pigs which were rummaging through the clothes of a poor man who just had died from the plague, and as they were immediately affected by the disease they also died right afterwards. Boccaccio stresses that he saw this happen himself: "I saw with my own eyes (as I said just now)" (31), strengthening once again the oral character of his presentation. Following, the narrative performance within the written document assumes central function, as the immediacy of the previous report which had insinuated a sense of orality is now replaced by a sobering, logical description of the impact by the plague. In other words, the eye-witness has turned into a chronicler who uses the third person singular to address his audience.

This discourse is interrupted when the protagonists are introduced and then begin to speak themselves, such as Pampinea: "Dear ladies, you must often have heard, as I have, that to make a sensible use of one's reason harms nobody" (37). We as the audience are supposed to listen to her as we would listen to a person on the stage. Filomena, for instance, quickly reveals how much she represents the narrator's voice who has her say that all women are "fickle, wayward, suspicious, faint-hearted and cowardly" (39), supported by Elisa, who reconfirms men's misogynistic attitude about women: "Indeed men are a woman's head and we can rarely succeed in anything without their help" (39). Following, the narrator returns to the forefront, proving thereby that he is the mastermind behind the entire account, even despite the tale-telling circuit which seemingly implies oral performance by independent and seemingly historical characters. Nevertheless, Boccaccio regularly withdraws again behind their voices and has the ladies and men take center-stage positions as they agree upon the rules of telling tales and determine the sequence of whose term it is to begin with the narration and then to succeed as the next speaker.

The travel situation, in which the group of young people have moved away

from the city to their country estates, provides the ideal setting for oral performances which are then related in a literary framework of a written text, which in turn again is peppered with clear references to the oral exchange.<sup>25</sup> The conclusion of Boccaccio's *Decameron* allows for further investigations into the calculated structure of orality combined with literacy. The narrator refers to himself as the writer of these tales who is worried about having taken too much license "by making ladies sometimes say and often listen to matters which are not proper to be said or heard by virtuous ladies" (637). He openly relates that he had written down all his tales because his hand has become weary of the lengthy writing process, but he measures his collection of tales and their moral quality by means of reference to everyday speech. Defending his moral innocence and claiming not to have intended any subliminal erotic message by applying suspiciously sounding words, Boccaccio points out that many people use words such as "'hole,' 'peg,' 'mortar,' 'pestle,' 'sausage,' 'Bologna sausage,' and the like things" becoming much more guilty of double entendres than himself (637).<sup>26</sup> Even though Boccaccio includes painters in his discussion and defense of his own work, he really reaches out to the actual day-to-day communication where his important evidence derives from. The extensive explanation provides so much valuable material for our discussion that it is worth quoting at length:

anyone can see that these things were not told in church, where everything should be treated with reverent words and minds ... but they were told in gardens, in pleasure places, by young people who were old enough not to be led astray by stories, and at a time when every one threw his cap over the mill and the most virtuous were not reproved for it. (638)

Although there is sufficient evidence of Boccaccio considering himself as a champion of literacy in the classical sense of the word, he is realist enough to recognize the function of deeply rooted orality which continued to exert its influence on his literary productivity as well. His other defense against his attackers is a rather traditional one, as he emphasizes that the tales were told to him by other, here unnamed people: "But I could only write down the tales which were related; if they had told better ones, I should have written them down better" (368f.) – a topical explanation which finds many antecedents in the earlier Middle Ages, such as in the prologue to Marie de France's *lais*.<sup>27</sup> Boccaccio admits that his account is full of jokes and jests, decidedly oral statements, here interlaced with the literary exchange in written form. He assumes, however, that the tales will be read primarily by ladies with plenty of free time, with the emphasis on 'reading' as his primary

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Cramer, *Waz hilfet âne sinne kunst? Lyrik im 13. Jahrhundert. Studien zu ihrer Ästhetik* (Berlin: Schmidt, 1998), pp. 22-34, emphasizes that writing and oral performance were almost always intimately connected throughout the high and late Middle Ages.

<sup>26</sup> For metaphoric eroticism in medieval literature, see Stefan Zeyen, *...daz tet der liebe dorn. Erotische Metaphorik in der deutschsprachigen Lyrik des 12.-14. Jahrhunderts* (Essen: Item-Verlag, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> *The Lais of Marie de France*, transl. with an introduction by Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby (London: Penguin, 1986), pp. 41, 43.

means of transmitting his accounts. The intricate structure of the entire sequence of tales is gradually revealed both in the prologue and the epilogue, but we can also identify an intriguing interplay of orality and literacy in the individual narratives.

Once again, the general framework is that of a travel account relating the move first from the city to the countryside, then from estate to estate where the company of ladies and gentlemen enjoys each other for an extended period of time, and also experiences, metaphorically speaking, a literary travel from tale to tale, from speaker to speaker, and from discussion to discussion, and all this related by a master narrator who confirms that he both wrote his texts and also had his texts told by his protagonists to the other protagonists and his audience. One of many examples would be: "When they had all laughed at Pamfilo's last words and the queen saw his tale was ended, she turned to Elisa and ordered her to tell the next story. And she began cheerfully as follows." (139)

In the conclusion, however, we are suddenly informed that Boccaccio assumes that his tales will be read: "nor will the tales ever be thought anything but useful and virtuous if they are read at the times and to the persons for which they are intended" (638). At the same time he admits that he heard his tales told orally before he had been able to write them down himself: "But I could only write down the tales which were related; if they had told better ones, I should have written them down better" (638f.). Immediately following, we learn once again that he addresses a reading audience: "To those who read for pastime, no tale can be too long if it succeeds in its object." (639) Serious reading seems to be limited to clerical material, as he defends his jokes and jests as matters of literary medicine "to drive away ladies' melancholies." (639) If anyone objects to these funny narratives, Boccaccio recommends to turn to the Old Testament and read: "they can easily cure that by reading the lamentations of Jeremiah" (640). Of course, Boccaccio clearly presents himself as a writer, as a poet utilizing literacy, as he points out the "pen" that his weary hand had put down (637), yet he also relies heavily on the oral delivery as the most appropriate medium for the group of young people to entertain each other in those difficult times. The travel or transfer from Florence to the countryside and there from estate to estate enforces the oral delivery, and the ensuing debates reconfirm this impression. Nevertheless, in the background we remain fully aware of the writing process, a process for which Boccaccio is ultimately responsible and also proud of.<sup>28</sup>

#### IV. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

The 'General Prolog' in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* also provides us with important evidence in the debate about the role of orality within travel literature.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Burt Kimmelman, *The Poetics of Authorship in the Later Middle Ages. The Emergence of the Modern Literary Persona* (New York et al.: Peter Lang, 1996), pp. 117 f.

<sup>29</sup> *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford, London, and Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1957/78); the modern standard edition is *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. L. D. Benson, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

This collection of tales reflects both the travel experience on a pilgrimage and the exchanges between the individual pilgrims. Chaucer's intriguing combination of many different voices, his play with direct and indirect speech, and his artistic interaction of the first person narrative with the carefully planned literary discourse carried out by his figures allow us to gain excellent insight in the intricacies of the oral and the written as practiced in late fourteenth-century England.<sup>30</sup>

Chaucer introduces himself as the master narrator who had embarked on a pilgrimage to Canterbury: "In Southwerk at the Tabard as i lay/Redy to wenden on my pilgrymage/To Caunterbury with ful devout corage" (20-22). There he encountered all the characters who later populate his collection of tales: "So hadde I spoken with hem everichon/That I was of hir felaweshipe anon" (31f.). Insinuating a realistic situation, he makes us believe that the introduction of each of them would personalize the narrative framework and make us understand better the interactions later to dominate the discourse: "Me thynketh it acordaunt to resoun/To telle yow al the condicioun/Of ech of hem, so as it semed me" (37-39). Addressing his audience, Chaucer begs forgiveness for the crudeness of his language – a classical modesty topos – and emphasizes, very much the same way as Boccaccio had done, that he will present an oral delivery: "Thogh that I pleyntly speke in this mateere,/To telle yow hir wordes and hir cheere" (727f.). Moreover, Chaucer also refers to the difficulties of an oral presentation where each word has a particular weight because of the swiftness with which language passes away: "He moot reherce as ny as evere he kan/Everich a word, if it be in his charge,/Al speke he never so rudeliche and large,/Or ellis he moot telle his tale untrewe" (732-35).<sup>31</sup> Most important, Chaucer introduces the "Hoost" who subsequently serves as the main character directing and controlling the tale telling event by means of his commands, comments, encouragements, and criticisms. Chaucer clearly outlines an oral situation with the "Hoost" giving a major speech after a communal meal: "And after soper pleyen he bigan,/And spak of myrthe amonges othere thynges" (758f.). In this speech he urges the company of pilgrims not to pass the long time of their journey without exchanging any words, and so initiates the tale telling, specifically insisting on oral delivery: "Ye shapen yow to talen and to pleye;/For trewely, confort ne myrthe is noon/To ride by the weye doun as a stoon" (772-74). By relating entertaining stories to each other, the pilgrims will be able "to shorte withoure weye" (800), although this has very little to do with their actual travel purpose. And whoever will prove to be the best story-teller will win a free dinner once they will have returned home. The pilgrims will ride on horseback and will have to rely on their own mnemonic skills. Chaucer unmistakably emphasizes the oral character of the fictional set-up, as he has the host say to the rest of the group: "Lat se now who shal telle the firste tale" (831), recommending to them to

<sup>30</sup> Derek Brewer, *A New Introduction to Chaucer*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London and New York: Longman, 1998 [1984]), pp. 79, 270 f.

<sup>31</sup> S. Lerer, "'Now Holde Your Mouth': The Romance of Orality in the Thopas-Melibee Section of the Canterbury Tales," in *Oral Poetics in Middle English Poetry*, ed. M. C. Amodio and S. Miller (New York and London: Garland, 1994), pp. 181-205.

be as brief as possible. Following, the knight is asked to deliver his first tale: "He which that hath the shorteste shal bigynne" (836).<sup>32</sup> The knight is agreeable enough to consent to the request to begin with his tale, and characterizes their plan as a "game" (853) in which he will happily participate: "Now lat us ryde, and herkneht what I seye" (855). In other words, the travel experience enforces the oral delivery. At the same time the knight, similarly as the other pilgrims, refers to old narrative traditions deeply steeped in orality: "Whilom, as olde stories tellen us" (859). The other tales begin with almost parallel formulas, such as in the Miller's case: "Whilom ther was dwellynge at Oxenford" (3187), in the Cook's case: "A prentys whilom dwelled in oure citee" (4365), in the Man of Law's case: "In Surrye whilom dwelte a compaignye" (134), or in the Wife of Bath's case, though there with some stylistic variation: "In th'olde dayes of the Kyng Arthour" (853). Many Middle English romances reveal similar features, as oral performance continued to be a major form of delivery to an audience, although only projected by the poets within their literary (written) text.<sup>33</sup> As Nancy Bradbury now points out, "Even in the most learned medieval authors, acts of telling, hearing, reading, and remembering blend in ways that we now keep more separate."<sup>34</sup> This also applies to many other texts composed by Chaucer, such as his *Troilus and Criseyde* where in the first three books "Chaucer uses orally performed genres to convey both the hero's explicit passion and the less distinct atmosphere of erotic expectancy that surrounds Criseyde."<sup>35</sup> The knight also provides us with clear cues as to the oral delivery of his tale as he refrains from going into all the details in order to avoid taking too much of time: "I wolde have toold yow fully the manere/How wonnen was the regne of Femenye" (375f.). This is immediately matched by the exchange between the host and the various pilgrims who discuss the continuation of their "game" and provide sufficient evidence that Chaucer intended this exchange for dramatic purposes with the individual figures fighting and arguing with each other. Nevertheless, even here we discover specific references to the reading process to which the main narrator refers to more or less directly, so when he comments on the Miller's tale and makes excuses about its potentially risqué quality: "And therefore, whoso list it nat yheere,/Turne over the leef and chese another tale;/For he shal fynde

<sup>32</sup> Scholarship has repeatedly dealt with this issue, focusing on individual tales, but has not examined it from an interdisciplinary perspective, especially with regard to the dialectics of orality versus literacy. See, for instance, Eugene Green, "Speech Acts and the Art of the Exemplum in the Poetry of Chaucer and Gower," in Rosanne G. Potter, ed., *Literary Computing and Literary Criticism: Theoretical and Practical Essays on Theme and Rhetoric* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), pp. 167-187; George R. Petty, Jr. "Deceit, and Misinterpretation: Uncooperative Speech in the Canterbury Tales." *The Chaucer Review* 27, 4 (1993), pp. 413-423; Leslie K. Arnovick, "Dorigen's Promise and Scholars' Premise: The Orality of the Speech Act in the Franklin's Tale," in Mark C. Amodio and Sarah Gray, *Oral Poetics in Middle English Poetry* (New York-London: Garland, 1994), pp. 125-147.

<sup>33</sup> Nancy Mason Bradbury, *Writing Aloud. Storytelling in Late Medieval England* (Urbana-Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), pp. 3 f. et passim.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 192.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 197.

ynowe, grete and smale" (3176-78). Primarily, however, Chaucer carefully structures his account so as to reflect the oral performance throughout, even though the element of writing is not entirely excluded or hidden.

In comparison with Boccaccio's *Decameron*, the narrative framework of traveling serves Chaucer equally well to insinuate a lively scenery in which orality dominates. Together with the group of pilgrims we are riding along and experience the change of day to night and vice versa, and so also the transition from tale to tale, such as in the "Introduction to the Man of Law's Tale." The "Prologue of the Frankeleyns Tale" adds the important note that memory serves the narrators to tell their tales, and not a written text: "And oon of hem have I in remembrance,/Which I shal seyn with good wyl as I kan" (714f.). The Pardoner, on the other hand, prepares the listeners of his tale by outlining in considerable detail the structure of his account: "First I pronounce whennes that I come" (335), and: "And after that thanne telle I forth my tales" (341). He also announces that he plans to pepper his report with Latin phrases such as "Radix malorum est Cupiditas" (334), but he still relies on oral delivery throughout, as he says, for example, "Youre lykynge is that I shal telle a tale" (455). The Parson, on the other hand, submits his tale to his audience requesting criticism and corrections because "I am nat textueel" (57), whereas it would be the task of the "clerkes" to be concerned with textual examinations based on the written word. However, this very concern of submitting his tale to the audience's careful perusal directly implies that his narrative should be considered, after all, as a written document.

The intricate relationship between orality and literacy finds solid corroboration in Chaucer's work which relies both on the concept of telling tales while one spends time on a travel, and on the dramatic setting with a group of people loudly and rambunctiously arguing over the sequence of narrators and with the host as the lead speaker in between.<sup>36</sup>

### V. Jörg Wickram's *Rollwagenbüchlein*

In the sixteenth century the German Jörg Wickram composed a collection of tales using a very similar approach as Chaucer and Boccaccio, his *Rollwagenbüchlein*. This was one of the last of his works, published in 1555, seven years before he died in 1562. Wickram was born in 1505 in Colmar and later worked as a book agent and clerk for the city council of that city, spending much of his time traveling to the various book markets.<sup>37</sup> The *Rollwagenbüchlein*, probably Wickram's most popular text, is also conceived as a travel narrative insofar as the indi-

<sup>36</sup> Victoria Lee Wodzak, "Reading Dinosaur Bones: Marking the Transition from Orality to Literacy in "the Canterbury Tales," "Moll Flanders," "Clarissa," and "Tristram Shandy"" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Missouri, Columbia, 1996).

<sup>37</sup> Erich Kleinschmidt, "Jörg Wickram," in *Deutsche Dichter der frühen Neuzeit (1450-1600). Ihr Leben und Werk*, ed. Stephan Füssel (Berlin: Schmidt, 1993), pp. 494-511. Whereas Boccaccio and Chaucer would hardly need any introduction, the biographical references for Wickram are given here because the author might be less known among medievalists.

vidual texts are supposed to serve people who need entertainment and begin to tell each other tales.<sup>38</sup> Wickram's *Rollwagenbüchlein* provides highly interesting information about the dialectics of orality and literacy as it was written almost exactly hundred years after Johann Gutenberg's invention of the movable type, and yet clearly suggests that all the tales included in this book had been presented orally. The author collected them, as he says on the frontispiece, for travelers on ships and in coaches, but also for barbers and doctors, but especially for those merchants who have to attend many different fairs and suffer from boredom and melancholy.<sup>39</sup> However, Wickram unmistakably states his authorship of this book and claims recognition for having written down all of these funny tales which will be, as he assumes, read by his audience ("lesen," 5, 19). More specifically, he recommends his book to those who need reading material during a journey to offer entertainment for their fellow travelers: "welchs auch vor menigklich on allen anstoß mag gelesen werden" (5, 29f.; what can be read to a group of people without being objectionable).

The very first page begins with an address to the reader: „Zum gütigen Leser" (7, 1; to the gracious reader), but immediately following the author projects an ordinary situation during travels when people discuss with each other and listen to oral reports and tales: "wenn man etwan schampere und schandliche wort geredt" (7, 3f.; when one has told some funny and entertaining stories). Nevertheless, the introduction concludes with a final greeting to the reader: "Bewar dich Gott freündlicher Leser" (7, 30; dear reader, may God protect you), insinuating an exclusive reading situation. As soon as we turn to the actual text, however, both forms of communication are mentioned. On the one hand, Wickram explains that he has heard a good story which he now wants to relate to his audience: "daß ich euch den selbigen erzell" (9, 5f.; which I want to tell you). But the sentence concludes with a verb which implies just the opposite: "von deren einem ich euch hie schreiben wil" (9, 8f.; of which I want to write down one for you). In fact, at the end Wickram himself offers a moral teaching divided into several parts ("Erstlichen," "Zum andren," and "Zum dritten," 11; first, second, third), implying a written text which needs to be analyzed in a critical fashion. In the introduction to the second tale we find the almost classical formula "wer den lißt oder hört" (13, 6, whoever reads or hears this), a combination of reading and listening, of the oral and the literary.<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, the actual tale entirely relies on the oral exchange

<sup>38</sup> Albrecht Classen, "Witz, Humor, Satire. Georg Wickrams *Rollwagenbüchlein* als Quelle für sozialhistorische und mentalitätsgeschichtliche Studien zum 16. Jahrhundert," *Jahrbuch der ungarischen Germanistik*. 1999, pp. 13-35; for a social-historical approach to Wickram's work, see Elisabeth Wäghall, *Dargestellte Welt – Reale Welt: Freundschaft, Liebe und Familie in den Prosawerken Georg Wickrams* (Bern, Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 1996).

<sup>39</sup> Quoted from: Georg Wickram, *Das Rollwagenbüchlein*, Sämtliche Werke, 7, ed. Hans-Gert Roloff (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1973).

<sup>40</sup> Similar formulas can be found throughout the Middle Ages, see Manfred Günter Scholz, *Hören und Lesen: Studien zur primären Rezeption der Literatur im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1980).

of statements and transports us into the concrete situation of a group of voyagers who face a shipwreck and discuss what to do in their last hour. The same observation applies to the entire collection, as the tales relate concrete situations and gain their major comic element from the discussion of people. A good example proves to be the story of the drunken minister who makes a fool of himself at a dinner reception and constantly calls for the inn keeper to refill his glass: "schenck dapffer eyn" (15, 21). Even the host's reproaches have no effect on him, but when he has to cross a narrow bridge on his way home and falls into the deep water, and then is about to drown, he shouts out the same words and fails to appeal to God for help (16).

Wickram operates within a literary discourse, but heavily utilizes the oral performance as the basic procedure within the tales. The witticism relies on the dialogues and either the ignorance of one speaker or the smartness of the other. In "Von zweyen zenckischen Bauren" (no. 6) two peasants are constantly fighting with each other and finally turn to the mayor for help. The latter's wife lets them in but criticizes them for their cantankerous nature. Immediately one of the peasants asks her whether she is a prostitute: "Fraw sind ir nit auch ein hûr?" (22, 13f.), upon which she vehemently retorts and threatens him with a law suit. In response the peasant explains that this is exactly the same way how he and his neighbor begin their fights, as one word leads to the other, until the conversation erupts into a serious struggle. The mayor's wife had demonstrated that she was not one iota better than the peasants, as she had reacted so violently to the simple question: "ob ir ein hûr seyen" (22, 18). In other words, within the framework of the written text, Wickram introduces extensive oral scenes and provides us with significant examples for the continuity of orality even at a time of intense printing, and so of the overarching dominance of the written word. The comic depends on the witty and quick retort, derives, in other words, its power from the oral exchange which continued to be of great significance far into the modern age. Similarly as in the case of Boccaccio, Wickram also confirms the authenticity of some of his tales, such as in "Ein grawsame unnd erschrockenliche History" (no. 55), which deals with an event of which he had been an eye witness: "so ich dann selb erlebt / auch beide personen Weyb und mann fast wol erkant hab" (110, 6-8; as I have witnessed it myself, and have well known both wife and husband). But Wickram also emphasizes that he included this tale in his collection, i.e., wrote it down for his audience's enlightenment about proper behavior and appropriate attitudes and opinions about material goods, thereby reemphasizing the basic literary quality of his text. In other cases we are transported directly into scenes where the protagonists orally exchange statements and explanations, such as in "Ein Franck hatt sich auß eim Becher kranck getrunken" (no. 57), where no reference to the text as having been written down can be found: "Diser red lachten alle umbstender / und auch der Artzet / nam urlob und zoch seins weges wider zû hauß" (116, 24f.; all people standing around laughed at these words, and so also the doctor; he took his leave and returned home).

Insofar as Wickram collected narrative accounts for the entertainment of

travelers, he follows the same stylistic patterns as those used by Boccaccio and Chaucer. Even though the creative process resulted in a written document, the primary focus rests on the oral transmission. Many tales begin with the rhetorical formula “Es hat sich zu Paris begeben” (142, 3), “hats sich begeben” (147, 2), “Auff ein zeyt” (154, 3), “begab es sich” (163, 3), “Es begab sich” (185, 5), “beschach es ein mal” (200, 4), “Es hat sich begeben” (203, 4), and “Zu Venedig war ein Doctor” (206, 4). In other words, the author (like Chaucer) situates his account in an oral framework and retrieves the dialogues and discussions from the past for the entertainment in the present. Wickram’s literary strategy, however, subtly utilizes both the oral and the literary and applies both forms of communication in a highly skillful fashion. In “Von einem grossen Eyferer” (no. 84) the narrator at first refers to Sebastian Brant’s famous *Narrenschiff* (*Ship of Fools*) from 1494 to draw from the insight developed there: “Es schreibt der hochgelert Doctor Sebastianus Brandt in seinem Narrenschiff ... und spricht” (161, 3f.; the highly learned Doctor Sebastianus Brant writes in his Ship of Fools ... and says).<sup>41</sup> But as soon as he has elaborated his point with regard to Brant’s message, he turns to his audience and begins with his tale, obviously intended as an oral delivery: “Davon mercke ein gûten schwanck. Es was auff ein zeyt ...” (161, 9f.). The narrative itself depends entirely on orality, as all events, talks, and actions are described in this mode: “Wann dann die gût Fraw bey iren Nachbawren saß / stunden sie hinzû / triben gûte schwânck und bossen mit inen” (161, 19-21; when the good woman set next to her neighbors, they stood next to her and made fun with her and joked around). Another example can be found in “Ein Junger Gesell schlûg sein Brawt vor der Kirchen” (no. 87), as here the public event – the groom’s beating of his bride in front of the church just before their wedding – is reported orally to the authorities who immediately take action and imprison the young man to teach him a lesson: “Dise geschichte kam bald für die Herrschafft unnd Oberkeiten / die gaben billichen unnd rechten bevelche” (166, 19-21; this story was soon told to the lords and the authorities who gave appropriate and adequate order). In “Ein klûge antwort eines Rahtsherren” (no. 90) Wickram takes us one step further and has us listen to the deliberations in the city council where one member makes a witty comment which reveals how much the mayor has governed the city in a tyrannical manner: “Also geschahe ein gemeine umbfrag / unnd sagt ein yeder sein gût beduncken hierzû” (170, 17f.). The witty councilor pretends to be asleep, and when it is his turn to speak up he acts as if he had been asleep and quickly utters that he would follow the mayor’s decision. The latter, however, is not present, but since the mayor would not pay attention to the council’s recommendation anyway, it would be futile not to submit to the tyrant: “Ich volgs dem Obristen Meister” (170, 22f.). The narrative provides us direct insight in the subsequent deliberations and reactions, all serving as immediate reflections of the oral process, and then turns back to the master narrative: “Dise wort bedachten unnd erwagen die andern Her-

<sup>41</sup> Sebastian Brant, *Das Narrenschiff*. Nach der Erstausgabe (Basel 1494) mit den Zusätzen der Ausgaben von 1495 und 1499, ed. Manfred Lemmer (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1962).

ren gar hoch" (170, 31f.; the other members carefully thought about these words and weighted them).

Finally, sometimes Wickram also addresses his audience and tells them specifically how to interpret his tale and what the consequences would be for them, such as in "Ein Weyb hieß iren Mann auß dem Hauß bleiben" (no. 91). The narrative begins with the author's general introduction, setting the framework of the subsequent actions. The central part consists of the oral debate between husband and wife, and in the conclusion the author turns to the female members of his audience: "Darumb ir Weyber sein gewarnet / ir habend Rawch oder Staub imm Hawß / heyssend darumb die Mann nit hinauß gehn" (173, 1-3; therefore, women, be warned, if you have smoke or dust in the house, do not tell your husbands to go outside).

In other words, orality continued to be an important part of the literary discourse even in the sixteenth century, as we can identify important elements of speech acts within the narrative framework. Wickram operates both as a skillful writer addressing both a reading and a listening audience, and he relies on both aspects in the delivery of his tale. Insofar as his *Rollwagenbüchlein* draws from the wide corpus of oral tales recounted by travelers for their mutual entertainment, the written product still reflects this oral component and actually heavily depends on the direct exchange of opinions and statements for the full development of the intended satire and general humor.

## VI. Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptameron*

Our final example of travel literature where the oral and the literary interact in an intriguing fashion comes from Marguerite de Navarre who composed, very much in the tradition of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, a famous collection of tales, *The Heptameron*, first published in 1558, nine years after the author's death in 1549.<sup>42</sup> Even though it would be erroneous to categorize this work as a travelogue, the basic narrative scheme depends on the experience of travelers who are trying to escape a nature catastrophe in the Pyrenees but have to wait until a bridge can be rebuilt over a flooded river. They all had spent time in a mountain spa, but when torrential rains had set in, the housing situation had become so miserable that they had to flee. Whereas many overly daring patients drown in rivers or die under different circumstances (robbers, wild animals, etc.), a group of ladies and gentlemen finds rescue in a country estate where they begin to tell each other stories to pass the time. They specifically refer to Boccaccio's *Decameron* which was, as we are told, "recently ... translated from Italian into French" (68). In contrast to their Italian forerunner, however, the group intends to tell only tales that are truthful, and in this

<sup>42</sup> Marguerite de Navarre, *The Heptameron*, transl. with an introduction by P. A. Chilton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984/86); for the original, see Marguerite d'Angoulême, *L'Heptameron des Nouvelles*. Publié sur les manuscrits par les soins & avec les notes de MM. Le Roux de Lincy & Anatole des Montaignon, 4 vols. (Paris: Auguste Eudes, 1880).

sense to outdo their model.<sup>43</sup> In contrast to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Wickram's *Rollwagenbüchlein*, but fairly comparable to Boccaccio's text, the travelers and story tellers in Marguerite's work have arrived at a safe haven and have to wait for ten days until they can continue their journey back home. But every travel requires rest stops, and these breaks are normally filled with story telling. In this sense we can also categorize the *Heptameron* as 'travel literature' in which the oral component is intimately intertwined with the written discourse.<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, the master narrator does not fully disappear behind the protagonists' voices and also comments on the scenery where the company gathers: "At midday they all went back as arranged to the meadow, which was looking so beautiful and fair that it would take a Boccaccio to describe it as it really was. Enough for us to say that a more beautiful meadow there never was seen." (69) She continues to maintain this control throughout, but the actual oral discourse among the protagonists quickly dominates and pushes the written presentation in the background: "Hircan did not notice the colour rising in her cheeks, and simply went on to invite Simontaut to start, which he did at once." (70)

The actual narratives following the introductory section do not shed much light on the dichotomy of orality versus literacy, although even here many dialogues are included, coupled with lengthy commentary and descriptions in the third person singular. The ensuing debates, however, after each tale clearly indicate how much Marguerite intended to combine the two forms of communication in her collection. Simontaut, for instance, the first to tell his tale, immediately comments on his report and uses it as a basis for attacks against all women: "I think you'll agree that ever since Eve made Adam sin, women have taken it upon themselves to torture men ... I've experienced feminine cruelty, and I know what will bring me to death and damnation" (78). To this Parlamente responds with negative criticism: "Since Hell is as agreeable as you say, ..." (78) In turn Simontaut retorts almost aggressively, obviously because he feels frustrated in his unrequited and one-sided love for his lady: "But the fire of love makes me forget the fire of this Hell." (78) The debate focuses on the ancient "querelle des femmes" and forces the representatives of both genders to argue carefully and skillfully to avoid the traps of revealing their prejudices and stereotypical thinking.<sup>45</sup> Marguerite succeeds, how-

<sup>43</sup> Volker Kapp, "Der Wandel einer literarischen Form: Boccaccios Decamerone und Marguerite de Navarres Heptameron," *Poetica: Zeitschrift für Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft* 14, 1-2 (1982), pp. 24-44.

<sup>44</sup> For other scholarly approaches, see Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani, *La conversation conteuse. Les nouvelles de Marguerite de Navarre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992); Michel Bideaux, *Marguerite de Navarre: "l'heptaméron" de l'enquête au débat* (Mont-de-Marsan: Editions InterUniversitaires, 1992); Maddalena Ham, "La nouvelle et la quête de la vérité: Marguerite de Navarre et Boccaccio" (unpublished doctoral thesis, Northern Illinois University, 2000); Timothy Hampton, *Literature and Nation in the Sixteenth Century: Inventing Renaissance France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>45</sup> Gerard Defaux, "Marguerite de Navarre et la guerre des sexes: Heptaméron, première journée," *French Forum* 24, 2 (1999), pp. 133-161; for a good collection of relevant texts pertaining to this "querelle," see *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended. An Anthology of*

ever, to relay to us the emotions and irritations resulting from the individual tales which either confirm or refute certain opinions and thus provoke considerable reactions. Oisille's tale of a mule-driver's wife who was murdered by her husband's servant, for instance, moves all listeners to tears and provokes the story teller herself to encourage the ladies to "strengthen [their] resolve to preserve this most glorious virtue, chastity." (81) Therefore, to avoid general depression and melancholy which threaten to affect the entire group, Madame Oisille, the head of the company, turns to Saffredent and requests a story from him which would not only provide entertainment, but also free the audience from the somber mood resulting from the previous tale. The truly intriguing element of Marguerite's *Heptameron* thus proves to be the complex interaction between author, master narrator, fictional narrators, literary figures, and also us, the present audience, a phenomenon which Jean Jost, studying Chaucerian examples, has defined as "infinite regression" and as the "Narcissus syndrome."<sup>46</sup> Saffredent at first hesitates and wants to defer to other members of the group to tell a tale, but he eventually agrees, realizing that "he might as well speak now – after all, the longer he delayed, the more competition he would have" (82). The story itself is presented as an oral delivery – once again, as the teller points out: "I've often wished, Ladies, that I'd been able to share the good fortune of the man in the story I'm about to tell you." (83)

The debate among the participants grows more heated, it seems, the longer the story telling process goes on, as individual listeners provoke each other to respond to a story, to refrain from some vice, to pursue virtue, to be a better lover, or to restrain one's desires. In order not to let the discussion go out of hands, normally one person requests from one of the speakers to continue with the telling, such as in the case of Saffredent turning to Ennasuite: "let me invite you to tell the fourth story, and let's see if you can produce an example to refute what I say." (89)

More than in all the three other text examples, Marguerite's *Heptameron* is predicated on orality as the prime form of communication, especially as the story tellers struggle with each other over personal issues and use their stories as arguments. There are multiple layers of audiences, both as listeners and as readers, because the company at first refers to Boccaccio's *Decameron* in its French translation, thus implying a reading audience. Next they set up a tale-telling scenario in which all present are transformed into an oral audience. But Parlamente also suggests that their endeavor should bear fruit in the form of a new book which they could later present as a gift to ladies and lords at the French court: "we shall make

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*Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires with Karen Pratt and C. W. Marx (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Albert Rabil, Jr., "Introduction," in Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*, transl. and ed. with an Introduction by Albert Rabil, Jr. (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. ix-xxviii.

<sup>46</sup> Jean E. Jost, "Chaucer's Literate Characters Reading Their Texts. Interpreting Infinite Regression, or the Narcissus Syndrome," in *The Book and the Magic of Reading*, pp. 171-217; see also Helen Eugenia Klinke Groves, "Sex, Lies and the "Framed" Narrative: Deception in the "Heptameron" of Marguerite de Navarre" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Colorado, Boulder, 1998).

them a present of them when we get back" (69). The noble recipients then would represent the next level of audience, both as listeners and readers; finally the tales as they were recorded in the sixteenth century were specifically intended as reading material.<sup>47</sup> In this regards it becomes understandable why at a later moment one of the stories deals with a priest who barely can read and "whose only teacher was love" (313), as the play with orality assumes central position in the interaction of the fictional protagonists. In fact, Marguerite's prime interest seems to be focused almost more on the discussions preceding and following each tale than on the tales themselves,<sup>48</sup> although we as readers are also invited to engage in a critical examination of both the tales and the discussions.<sup>49</sup> But she also has some of her protagonists challenge the oral discourse and question it as a highly unreliable, almost dangerous form of interaction with an opponent. Geburon, for instance, when he refers to the siege of a fortress or city, states that "neither threats nor offers of money could persuade the defending forces [of some places] to parley, for they say that once you engage in talks, you're already half defeated!" (219)

However, since the tale telling depends on oral delivery, and the entire group exchanges their opinions freely without resorting to writing, such opinions have only limited value and form part of a larger issue, that is, the enormous intricacy of human language and its powers to relate both truth and lies, to deceive and to illuminate. Marguerite demonstrates through her *Heptameron* how much the written and the oral are connected with each other and that the search for truth must be carried out on both levels. This observation is the more surprising as we have already moved far into the sixteenth century, into a time when the written literary discourse seemingly has long discarded orality as a pragmatic function.<sup>50</sup> The travel situation as reflected in all our four texts, however, provided the authors with a powerful literary strategy to demonstrate the continuing relevance of orality even at a time when printing and the written word had gained absolute dominance. Whereas medieval scholarship has so far assumed that "speaking in two languages" – oral and written – was a benchmark primarily of the early Middle Ages, our evidence suggests that this dialectic continued far into the late Middle Ages.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Cathleen M. Bauschatz, "'Voyla, mes dames ...' Inscribed Women Listeners and Readers in the *Heptameron*", in John D. Lyons, Mary B. McKinley, eds., *Critical Tales: New Studies of the Heptameron and Early Modern Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), pp. 104-122.

<sup>48</sup> Sylvie L. F. Richards, "Fictional Truth and the Prologue of the *Heptaméron*," *Rocky Mountain Review on Language & Literature*, 48 (1994), pp. 61-76.

<sup>49</sup> Mary J. Baker, "The Role of the Reader in the *Heptameron*," *French Studies: A Quarterly Review* 43, 3 (1989), pp. 271-278.

<sup>50</sup> This, at least, is the oft repeated position by many scholars who take the poets' statements and approaches toward books and reading at face value; see, for instance, Laurel Amtower, *Engaging Words: The Culture of Reading in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave, 2000). Reality, however, was much more complex, as I hope to have demonstrated here.

<sup>51</sup> *Speaking Two Languages: Traditional Disciplines and Contemporary Theory in Medieval Studies*, ed. Allen J. Frantzen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

ORAL HISTORY OF THE MIDDLE AGES  
THE SPOKEN WORD IN CONTEXT

Edited by Gerhard Jaritz and Michael Richter

**MEDIUM AEVUM QUOTIDIANUM**

SONDERBAND XII

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**CEU MEDIEVALIA**

VOLUME 3

**Oral History of the Middle Ages**  
**The Spoken Word in Context**

Edited by Gerhard Jaritz and Michael Richter

Krems and Budapest 2001

**GEDRUCKT MIT UNTERSTÜTZUNG DER ABTEILUNG  
KULTUR UND WISSENSCHAFT DES AMTES  
DER NIEDERÖSTERREICHISCHEN LANDESREGIERUNG**

**niederösterreichkultur**

copy editor: Judith Rasson

Cover illustration: The wife of Potiphar covets Joseph: "... erat autem Joseph pulchra facie et decorus aspectu: post multos itaque dies iecit domina oculos suis in Ioseph et ait domini mecum." ("... And Joseph was [a] goodly [person], and well favoured. And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me."), Gen. 39: 6-7 (KJV). Concordantiae Caritatis, c. 1350. Cistercian abbey of Lilienfeld (Lower Austria), ms 151, fol. 244v (detail). Photo: Institut für Realienskunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit (Krems an der Donau).

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## Table of Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Preface .....   | 7   |
| Michael RICHTER, Beyond Goody and Grundmann .....   | 11  |
| Tom PETTIT, Textual to Oral: the Impact of Transmission<br>on Narrative Word-Art .....  | 19  |
| Előd NEMERKÉNYI, Fictive Audience. The Second Person Singular in the<br><i>Deliberatio</i> of Bishop Gerard of Csanád .....   | 39  |
| Katalin SZENDE, Testaments and Testimonies. Orality and Literacy<br>in Composing Last Wills in Late Medieval Hungary .....  | 49  |
| Anna ADAMSKA, The Kingdom of Poland versus the Teutonic Knights:<br>Oral Traditions and Literate Behaviour in the Later Middle Ages .....   | 67  |
| Giedrė MICKŪNAITĖ, Ruler, Protector, and a Fairy Prince:<br>the Everlasting Deeds of Grand Duke Vytautas<br>as Related by the Lithuanian Tatars and Karaites .....                                  | 79  |
| Yurij Zazuliak, Oral Tradition, Land Disputes, and the Noble Community<br>in Galician Rus' from the 1440s to the 1460s .....  | 88  |
| Nada ZEČEVIĆ, Λέξις γλυκεῖα. The Importance of the Spoken Word<br>in the Public Affairs of Carlo Tocco<br>(from the Anonymous <i>Chronaca dei Tocco di Cefalonia</i> ) .....                        | 108 |
| John A. NICHOLS, A Heated Conversation:<br>Who was Isabel de Aubigny, Countess of Arundel? .....  | 117 |
| Tracey L. BILADO, Rhetorical Strategies and Legal Arguments:<br>'Evil Customs' and Saint-Florent de Saumur, 979-1011 .....  | 128 |
| Detlev KRAACK, Traces of Orality in Written Contexts.<br>Legal Proceedings and Consultations at the Royal Court<br>as Reflected in Documentary Sources from 12 <sup>th</sup> -century Germany ..... | 142 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Maria DOBOZY, From Oral Custom to Written Law:<br>The German <i>Sachsenspiegel</i> .....  | 154 |
| Martha KEIL, Rituals of Repentance and Testimonies<br>at Rabbinical Courts in the 15 <sup>th</sup> Century .....  | 164 |
| Michael GOODICH, The Use of Direct Quotation<br>from Canonization Hearing to Hagiographical <i>Vita et Miracula</i> .....   | 177 |
| Sylvia SCHEIN, Bernard of Clairvaux's Preaching of the Third Crusade<br>and Orality .....   | 188 |
| Michael BRAUER, Obstacles to Oral Communication in the Mission<br>of Friar William of Rubruck among the Mongols .....   | 196 |
| Elena LEMENEVA, From Oral to Written and Back: A Sermon Case Study .....  | 203 |
| Albrecht CLASSEN, Travel, Orality, and the Literary Discourse:<br>Travels in the Past and Literary Travels<br>at the Crossroad of the Oral and the Literary .....         | 217 |
| Ulrich MÜLLER and Margarete SPRINGETH, "Do not Shut Your Eyes<br>if You Will See Musical Notes:" German Heroic Poetry<br>("Nibelungenlied"), Music, and Performance ..... | 236 |
| Jolanta SZPILEWSKA, Evoking Auditory Imagination:<br>On the Poetics of Voice Production in<br><i>The Story of The Glorious Resurrection of Our Lord</i> (c. 1580) .....   | 248 |
| Jens T. WOLLESEN, Spoken Words and Images<br>in Late Medieval Italian Painting .....  | 257 |
| Gerhard JARITZ, Images and the Power of the Spoken Word .....   | 277 |
| List of Contributors .....  | 295 |

## Preface

Oral culture played an instrumental role in medieval society.<sup>1</sup> Due to the lack of any direct source evidence, however, research into the functions and importance of oral communication in the Middle Ages must confront a number of significant problems. Only indirect traces offer the opportunity to analyze phenomena that were based on or connected with the spoken word. The 'oral history' of the Middle Ages requires the application of different approaches than dealing with the 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century.

For some decades Medieval Studies have been interested in questions of orality and literacy, their relationship and the substitution of the spoken by the written word.<sup>2</sup> Oral and literate culture were not exclusive and certainly not opposed to each other.<sup>3</sup> The 'art of writing' was part of the 'ars rhetorica' and writing makes no sense without speech.<sup>4</sup> Any existing written statement should also be seen as a spoken one, although, clearly, not every oral statement as a written one. Authors regularly wrote with oral delivery in mind. 'Speaking' and 'writing' are not antonyms.

It is also obvious that "the use of oral communication in medieval society should not be evaluated . . . as a function of *culture populaire* vis-à-vis *culture savante* but, rather, of the communication habits and the tendency of medieval man

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<sup>1</sup> For the late Middle Ages and the early modern period, cf. Willem Frijhoff, "Communication et vie quotidienne à la fin du moyen âge et à l'époque moderne: réflexions de théorie et de méthode," in *Kommunikation und Alltag in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. Helmut Hundsbichler (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992), p. 24: "La plupart de gens vivait encore pour l'essentiel dans une culture orale et les procédés d'appropriation des idées passaient de préférence par la parole dite et écoutée, quand bien même on était capable d'une lecture visuelle plus ou moins rudimentaire."

<sup>2</sup> See Marco Mostert, "New Approaches to Medieval Communication?" in *New Approaches to Medieval Communication*, ed. Marco Mostert (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), pp. 15-37; Michael Richter, "Die Entdeckung der 'Oralität' der mittelalterlichen Gesellschaft durch die neuere Mediävistik," in *Die Aktualität des Mittelalters*, ed. Hans-Werner Goetz (Bochum: D. Winkler, 2000), pp. 273-287.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Burke calls the construct of "oral versus literate" useful but at the same time dangerous: idem, "Mündliche Kultur und >Druckkultur< im spätmittelalterlichen Italien," in *Volkskultur des europäischen Spätmittelalters*, eds. Peter Dinzelsbacher and Hans-Dieter Mück (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1987), p. 60.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Clanchy, "Introduction," in *New Approaches to Medieval Communication*, ed. Marco Mostert (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), p. 6.

to share his intellectual experiences in the corporate framework.”<sup>5</sup> Oral delivery was not “the sole prerogative of any socioeconomic class.”<sup>6</sup>

For all these reasons, it is important to analyze the extent of and context, in which ‘speech acts,’ auditive effects, and oral tradition occur in medieval sources.<sup>7</sup> Research into the use of the spoken word or references to it in texts and images provides new insight into various, mainly social, rules and patterns of the communication system. It opens up additional approaches to the organization and complexity of different, but indispensably related, media in medieval society, and their comparative analysis.<sup>8</sup>

The spoken word is connected with the physical presence of its ‘sender.’ Speech may represent the authenticity of the given message in a more obvious way than written texts or images. Therefore, the use of ‘speech acts’ in written or visual evidence also has to be seen in context with the attempt to create, construct, or prove authenticity. Moreover, spoken messages contribute to and increase the life-likeness of their contents, which may influence their perception by the receiver, their efficacy and success. Being aware of such a situation will have led to the explicit and intended use and application of the spoken word in written texts and images – to increase their authenticity and importance, too.

If one operates with a model of ‘closeness’ and ‘distance’ of communication with regard to the level of relation of ‘senders’ and ‘receivers,’ then the ‘speech acts’ or their representation have to be seen as contributors to a ‘closer’ connection among the participants of the communication process.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, however, speech might be evaluated as less official. One regularly comes across ‘oral space’

<sup>5</sup> Sophia Menache, *The Vox Dei. Communication in the Middle Ages* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 21. Cf. also Jan-Dirk Müller, “Zwischen mündlicher Anweisung und schriftlicher Sicherung von Tradition. Zur Kommunikationsstruktur spätmittelalterlicher Fechtbücher,” in *Kommunikation und Alltag in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. Helmut Hundsbiehler (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992), p. 400: “Offensichtlich sind schriftliche und nichtschriftliche Tradierung von Wissen weiterhin relativ unabhängig voneinander, nachdem die Schrift längst dazu angesetzt hat, Inseln der Mündlichkeit oder praktisch-enaktiver Wissensvermittlung zu erobern. Die Gedächtnisstütze kann die Erfahrung nicht ersetzen, sondern allenfalls reaktivieren. Sie ist sogar nur verständlich, wo sie auf anderweitig vermittelte Vorkenntnisse stößt.”

<sup>7</sup> Cf. W.F.H. Nicolaisen, ed., *Oral Tradition in the Middle Ages* (Binghamton: Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> See, esp., Horst Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen, Schrift und Bild. Kultur und Gedächtnis im Mittelalter* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1995), passim.

<sup>9</sup> See also Stefan Sonderegger, “>Gesprochen oder nur geschrieben?< Mündlichkeit in mittelalterlichen Texten als direkter Zugang zum Menschen,” in *Homo Medietas. Aufsätze zu Religiosität, Literatur und Denkformen des Menschen vom Mittelalter bis in die Neuzeit. Festschrift für Alois Maria Haas zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. Claudia Brinker-von der Heyde and Niklaus Largier (Bern et al.: Peter Lang, 1999), p. 665: “Jedenfalls darf man sich bewußt bleiben, daß auch in den Texten des deutschen Mittelalters die Reflexe gesprochener Sprache eine bedeutende Schicht ausmachen, die besonders dann immer wieder hervortritt, wenn es um einen direkten Zugang zum Menschen geht, um ein Verstehen aus unmittelbarer Partnerschaft heraus ...”

that has become institutionalized or more official by the application of 'written space.'<sup>10</sup> Simultaneous employment of such different levels and qualities of messages must often have had considerable influence on their efficacy.<sup>11</sup>

The papers in this volume are the outcome of an international workshop that was held in February, 2001, at the Department of Medieval Studies, Central European University, Budapest. Participants concentrated on problems of the occurrence, usage, and patterns of the spoken word in written and visual sources of the Middle Ages. They dealt with the role and contents of direct and indirect speech in textual evidence or in relation to it, such as chronicles, travel descriptions, court and canonization protocols, sermons, testaments, law-books, literary sources, drama, etc. They also tried to analyze the function of oral expression in connection with late medieval images.

The audiovisuality of medieval communication processes<sup>12</sup> has proved to be evident and, thus, important for any kind of further comparative analysis of the various levels of the 'oral-visual-literate,' i.e. multimedia culture of the Middle Ages. Particular emphasis has to be put on methodological problems, such as the necessity of interdisciplinary approaches,<sup>13</sup> or the question of the extent to which we are, generally, able to comprehend and to decode the communication systems of the past.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the medievalist does not come across any types of sources in which oral communication represents the main concern.<sup>15</sup> Instead, she or he is confronted, at first glance, with a great variety of 'casual' and 'marginal' evidence.

We would like to thank all the contributors to the workshop and to this volume. Their cooperation made it possible to publish the results of the meeting in the same year in which it took place. This can be seen as a rare exception, at least in the world of the historical disciplines. The head, faculty, staff, and students of the Department of Medieval Studies of Central European University offered various help and support. Special thanks go to Judith Rasson, the copy editor of

<sup>10</sup> This, e.g., could be well shown in a case study on the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela: Friederike Hassauer, "Schriftlichkeit und Mündlichkeit im Alltag des Pilgers am Beispiel der Wallfahrt nach Santiago de Compostela," in *Wallfahrt und Alltag in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, eds. Gerhard Jaritz and Barbara Schuh (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992), pp. 277-316.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Bob Scribner, "Mündliche Kommunikation und Strategien der Macht in Deutschland im 16. Jahrhundert," in *Kommunikation und Alltag in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. Helmut Hundsichler (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992), pp. 183-197.

<sup>12</sup> Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen*, p. 292.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Ursula Schaefer, "Zum Problem der Mündlichkeit," in *Modernes Mittelalter. Neue Bilder einer populären Epoche*, ed. Joachim Heinze (Frankfurt am Main and Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1994), pp. 374 f.

<sup>14</sup> Frijhoff, "Communication et vie quotidienne," p. 25: "Sommes-nous encore en mesure de communiquer avec la communication de jadis?"

<sup>15</sup> Michael Richter, *Sprache und Gesellschaft im Mittelalter. Untersuchungen zur mündlichen Kommunikation in England von der Mitte des elften bis zu Beginn des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1979), p. 22.

this volume, who took particular care with the texts of the many non-native speakers fighting with the pitfalls of the English language.

Budapest, Krems, and Constance  
December 2001

Gerhard Jaritz and Michael Richter