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Book Review of *TRANSLATORS
AND THEIR PROLOGUES
IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND*. By Elizabeth
Dearnley. Bristol Studies in Medieval Cultures.
Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2016. Pp. xiv + 300;
22 illustrations. \$99.

Elizaveta Strakhov

Elizabeth Dearnley's monograph approaches medieval translation studies by concentrating on a surprisingly overlooked area: the translator's prologue. Translators' prologues grow out of the *accessus* tradition, Dearnley argues, but they have their own set of concerns: the speaker asserts his identity as a translator; discusses the origins of and her access to her sources, his reasons for producing the work, and her intended audience and its linguistic proficiency; and offers a statement, positive or negative, about his or her own linguistic skills. Dearnley suggests that examination of the terms by which translators discuss translation practice can shed light on

medieval translation theory in the absence of existing medieval *ars poeticae* on translation. Dearnley is specifically interested in what translators' prologues can tell us about the emergence and development of literary culture. English prologues, Dearnley suggests, are faced with the unique task of establishing English as a literary language against the *auctoritas* of Latin and the cultural prestige of French, the latter occupying a particularly vexed position in the post-Conquest English literary imaginary. As a result, Dearnley writes, "[t]o study Middle English translation, through the lens of the prologues, is therefore to ponder the growth of the English language in the Middle Ages as a literary and learned medium" (p. 4). In this way, Dearnley joins the tide of scholars—such as Ardis Butterfield, Christopher Cannon, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Ad Putter, Claire Waters, and Joanna Bellis—who are complicating narratives of medieval England's multilingualism.

Dearnley focuses on twenty-six English prologues to translations from French into English, from Layamon's *Brut* (1189–ca. 1250) to Richard Roos's *La Belle Dame Sans Mercy* (ca. 1450). Dearnley selects a wide range of genres—romances, devotional works, ballade cycles, the medical writings ascribed to Trotula—that nevertheless have remarkably similar translators' prologues. This phenomenon supports her claim that translators' prologues are their own subgenre, revealing a developing technical vocabulary for conceptualizing translation among Francophone English translators.

English translators faced a peculiar challenge as they operated in a Germanic language with a Romance lexicon, much of it imported through conquest. Dearnley therefore situates her corpus within the larger history of other translators' prologues facing related challenges, namely, Latin to German, Latin to Anglo-Saxon, and Latin to Continental French. In this contextualization resides the book's biggest strength, as Dearnley uncovers a consistency in strategies used by translators to position their work both linguistically and socioculturally, which illuminates the maneuverings found in English prologues. In her first two chapters, Dearnley compares post-Conquest prologues discussing translation into Anglo-Norman with Continental prologues discussing translation into French. She observes that Anglo-Norman prologues situate themselves in a *longue durée* of insular translation activity going back to the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Latin traditions; meanwhile, Continental French prologues demonstrate instead a sense of brand-new undertaking. This comparison suggests to Dearnley that post-Conquest translation into Middle English emerged with a sense that it was part of a rich literary history, as observable, for example, in John Trevisa's situating his translation of Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon* in a tradition running from Jerome through Alfred to his present day.

Dearnley's third chapter plumbs her corpus of French to English translators' prologues. The *Cursor Mundi* (ca. 1300) is the first to use the term "translaten" and asserts the importance of using English as the common language of "Ingland þe nacion," while French is "for frankis man" (the French man); other contemporary prologues are similarly assertive. Later prologues from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, however, note their choice of using English with little to no explication or justification, suggesting that the decision no longer produces literary anxiety. Dearnley includes here a reading of Chaucer's Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, the playful negotiations of which speak, she argues, to a confidence concerning English as a literary language. Chaucer's "prologue," however, does not really fit the subgenre as defined by Dearnley, and while Chaucer's self-consciousness concerning English as a literary language certainly seems symptomatic of the phenomenon Dearnley describes, it is perhaps too exceptionally robust to be exemplary. Dearnley concludes with a discussion of Robert Grosseteste's *Chateau d'amour*; its fifteenth-century English translator claims the *Chateau* was written in France for the French and therefore must be translated into English and to England. This translator's effacing of the English provenance of Grosseteste's text, because it is not *in* English, speaks to the changing face of England's multilingual landscape.

In the fourth through sixth chapters, Dearnley investigates translators themselves by considering contemporary representations of translators discoverable through other sources, the possible avenues by which English translators would have acquired French, and the role of female translators. Translators' prologues themselves

offer little biographical detail, but the occasional appearance of translators as characters in several works, such as late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Dutch versions of the *Roman de la Rose* or Roos's mid-fifteenth-century *Belle Dame Sans Mercy*, speaks to an emergent sense of the translator as possessing authoritative status. Dearnley further unearths infrequent but intriguing visual representations of textual transmission between authors and scribes or amanuenses in iconography surrounding the *Rose* as well as Bridget of Sweden. The fourth chapter concludes by suggesting that the opposition between the learned clerk, transmitting written texts, and the wandering minstrel, transmitting oral texts, may not have been as definitive in practice as it was rhetorically constructed in translators' prologues.

In Chapter 5, Dearnley tackles the question of French language acquisition in England; unfortunately, Dearnley cannot delve deeply into the longstanding debate over the relationship between Insular and Continental French in medieval England and over the duration of England's multilingualism in her twenty-page chapter. Chapter 6 opens with a discussion of the only female translator, Eleanor Hull, known to the Middle English historical record and suggests avenues for exploring the phenomenon of female translation activity. Here Dearnley assesses women's real-life access to French instruction and to writing; considers four twelfth-century translator's prologues written by women (including Marie de France and Clemence of Barking), interestingly concluding that the women's self-representation is, in fact, markedly gender neutral; and ends by drawing parallels to Chaucer's Second Nun to explore male portrayals of female translator figures.

Dearnley's seventh chapter treats the rhetoric used by translators' prologues to construct their audiences in contrast with the texts' real-life reception by audiences. Many translators' prologues, especially early ones, place great stress on the linguistic capacity of their audience, as correlated to its collective socioethnic identity, in a justification of the translation itself. These seem to contradict historical linguistic realities, however, thus suggesting a purely rhetorical construction of audience. That said, translators' prologues that emphasize the multilingualism (yet, for whatever reason, English predilection) of their audiences are often found in texts bound in multilingual compilations, while texts that underscore monolingualism are often in monolingual compilations, suggesting some degree of accurate presentation of audiences. (Here, I wish Dearnley had included a discussion of anthologies versus miscellanies to highlight the challenges of separating a compiler's intention from haphazard assemblage from bespoke compilation by a commercial bookseller.) Revisions made specifically to discussions of audience in prologues by later scribes and readers emphasize that medieval readers understood prologues to be in some natural relationship to their stated audience.

The final chapter offers an illuminating parallel case to English translators' prologues: the Dutch. Dutch translators' prologues, Dearnley demonstrates, also negotiate—and in starker fashion—between the authority of Latin and the cultural prestige of French by pitting themselves against French, which they dismiss as false or fanciful. This parallel case of a region's employing a Germanic language for translation from Romance languages concludes the book by opening a fruitful avenue for further study into cross-Channel Francophone translation culture. Unfortunately, Dearnley's analysis omits any discussion of the politics of Franco-Flemish-Dutch relations that would help explicate the Dutch prologues' aggressive stance. Similarly, while Dearnley repeatedly discusses post-Conquest protonationalist English positions in her earlier chapters, she does not delve further into the political context behind these rhetorical postures. To be fair, neither the Conquest nor the Hundred Years War is the object of Dearnley's investigation here, but some treatment of the events conditioning England's push-me-pull-you relationship with France would enrich this argument.

Bringing a wide variety of textual genres together, along with exploration of language manuals, visual iconography of authors and translators, evidence of female scribal activity, and multiple linguistic traditions of translation, Dearnley deftly maneuvers her tight focus to offer a wide-ranging consideration of medieval translation. By centering on this small but crucial aspect of medieval translation activity, Dearnley rescues a

subgenre from longstanding scholarly neglect and reveals it to be fertile territory for digging into the question of medieval translation and the flowering of the English literary tradition.