

ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

The French Fabliau
B.N. MS. 837

Volume I

Edited by
Raymond Eichmann
John DuVal



Routledge Revivals

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RAYMOND EICHMANN
and JOHN DUVAL

Two Volume
Vol. I

Volume 16



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The French Fabliau
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and JOHN DUVAL

Two Volumes
Vol. I

Volume 16
Series A

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Most volumes contain Introductions with the following features: (1) a biography of the author or a discussion of the problem of authorship, with any pertinent historical or legendary information; (2) an objective discussion of the literary style of the original, emphasizing any individual features; (3) a consideration of sources for the work and its influence; and (4) a statement of the editorial policy for each edition and translation. There is also a Select Bibliography, which emphasizes recent criticism on the works. Critical writings are often accompanied by brief descriptions of their importance. Selective glossaries, indices, and footnotes are included where appropriate.

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The General Editors hope that these volumes will bring the general reader a closer awareness of a richly diversified area that

has for too long been closed to everyone except those with precise academic training, an area that is well worth study and reflection.

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Introduction

Origins and Problems

Joseph Bédier's century-old definition of the fabliaux, "*contes à rive en vers*" (comic verse tales; *Les Fabliaux*,* p. 30), has stood remarkably well, considering that the Middle Ages had no precise sense of *genre*, and the fableors themselves gave their creations a variety of names: *dit*, *ditié*, *fable*, *lai*, *example*, *proverbe*, *roman*, *risée*. Omer Jodogne notes that by the early fourteenth century, when the fabliaux were on the wane, the last known author, Jean de Condé, called them *truffes* (jokes) (1975, p. 24). Of the 160 surviving fabliaux, 56 are expressly called fabliaux; the fact that most of these end with some sort of moral, more or less appropriate to the tale, indicates that these authors might have thought of their *fabliaux* as mock-fables.

Scholars have accepted Bédier's definition with only minor adjustments. Attempts at structural definitions, such as Mary Jane Schenk's (1976) and Thomas Cooke's (1978) have never been meant to challenge Bédier's. Per Nykrog adds to Bédier's definition that the fabliau must belong to Medieval French literature, that it must be relatively short, and that it must restrict itself to the narration of one incident and its immediate consequences (1957, p. 13). Jodogne defines it as a "*conte en vers où, sur un ton trivial, sont narrées une ou plusieurs aventures plaisantes ou exemplaires, l'un et l'autre ou l'un ou l'autre*" (verse tales in a trivial tone that relate one or several incidents which are amusing or edifying or both; 1975, p. 23). He further points out that *Trubert*, which its author, Douin de Lavesne, called a fabliau, is not exactly "relatively short" with its 2,986 lines, and that, if we include it, a fabliau consists of several fables. Nykrog, however, did not accept *Trubert* as a

* See Select Bibliography for details for all authors cited here.

fabliau, calling it a novel. We agree, since its length and structure make *Trubert* vastly different from other poems in the fabliau canon. The disagreement over whether *Trubert* should be considered a fabliau, in spite of its author's claim, not only illustrates the loose nomenclature used by medieval authors but also emphasizes the necessity for a supple definition, one whose elements would not exclude obvious examples. This is why Bédier's "comic verse tales" has stood the test of time and is adequate for us.

Our primary source has been Henri Omont's 1932 facsimile reproduction of the late thirteenth century manuscript 837 in the Bibliothèque Nationale. The original manuscript is 362 pages of thick vellum, written on both sides, two fifty-line columns per page of close, virtually unpunctuated handwriting. Here romances, dramas, poems, translations, *lais*, *dits*, songs, moral tales and pious prayers, arranged with no great sense of order, keep company with our fabliaux.

This manuscript, formerly labeled Bibliothèque du Roi 7218, is rightfully considered the oldest and one of the two most important and complete collections of medieval literature. Containing sixty-two fabliaux, by far the largest representation per manuscript (Berne 254 has 41 fabliaux; Hamilton, 30; B.N. 1593, 24; B.N. 19.159, 26), it is the most widely consulted medieval manuscript since its compilation in the thirteenth century. It was already well known in the fifteenth century, when an unknown hand added titles at the beginnings of individual pieces, thereby facilitating its use, since the original copyist had put the titles only at the *explicit* following each poem. Later, sixteenth-century cataloguers at the royal library of François I attested to its venerability and worth by claiming that its composition went back to the time of Charlemagne. Claude Faucher, president of the "Cour des Monnoyes," undoubtedly knew B.N. 837 and used it in the second volume of his anthology, *Recueil de l'origine de la langue et poésie française*, published in 1581. In the eighteenth century it acquired its present distinguished red binding, with a coat of arms and fleur-de-lis on the back, accentuating the rather sober title *Poésies* (Omont, p. v). Virtually every scholar of Medieval French literature is indebted to the manuscript for the wide range of subjects found among its two hundred fifty-two poems, all written in a clear, regular, gothic handwriting (Rychner, 1960, I. 136).

Beyond the manuscript, we may try to identify the scribe. Per Nykrog makes a good case that scribes in the libraries of wealthy amateur collectors copied down onto wax tablets the poems and stories recited by jongleurs who entertained there. Boivin in the fabliau *De Boivin de Provins* probably recited for such a scribe. He informs us that he was invited by the magistrate of Provins to stay there for three days, telling the story again and again. At some point a quantity of these wax tablets would accumulate and one scribe (as evidenced by a single handwriting) would set aside a few days to copy the materials from the wax tablets, in no discernible order, onto the expensive, durable parchment (Nykrog, 1957, pp. 45–48).

In addition, there were probably manuscripts of jongleurs, ephemeral and handy, like an actor's stage script, serving only as memory aids for an oral performance. One should, however, be very cautious with a genre like the fabliau, for which there exists a gap of sometimes one or two centuries between their performances and their actual *prise de forme* in the manuscript. As C.H. Livingston notes, "il est fort probable que seul un nombre restreint d'entre les fabliaux ont eu les honneurs de la copie sur parchemin et bien souvent, sans doute, longtemps après avoir été composés: (It is highly likely that only a select few of the fabliaux had the honor of being copied onto parchment, often, no doubt, long after being composed; *Jongleur*, 1951, p. 112). Since these jongleur manuscripts remain a mystery to us, we are woefully ignorant about the odyssey of a work from its author's imagination to its final written form.

The fabliaux must have existed for a long time in their elusive oral form before being finally received into the private library of a wealthy collector. Without this collector, our tales would have probably been lost, not because of their little worth or esteem but because of their oral nature and their brevity. As a matter of fact, this method of compilation probably insured the survival of the best and most popular poems of the genre, since the collectors must have elected to keep not only their personal preferences but also the ones considered classics. The jongleur of the tale *Des Deus Bordesors ribaus* boasts of his talent and the size of his repertoire, listing some fabliaux already close to one hundred years old (Nykrog 1957, p. 43) The poems he brags about are obviously the ones he considers the best, all of which have been preserved and have sur-

vived. Many fabliaux have come down to us in several manuscripts: *De la Coille noire* (mentioned in *Des Deus Bordeors*) in seven; *De la Dame escoillee* in six: *Aristote*, *Du Bouchier d'Abeville*, *Du Chevalier qui fist les cons parler*, *De Cele qui se fist fourtre*, and *Du Vilain qui conquist* in five. These multiple occurrences not only attest to the popularity of the individual pieces, but also of the genre in general, which is represented in well over thirty manuscripts.

In summary, the survival of the fabliau can be attributed to the following process, well explained by Nykrog. The original poet was conscious that he was composing according to high artistic, as well as popular, standards. He sent his work out to the public, where, if it was good enough, it would circulate from castle to castle, from private houses to inns, taverns and fair-markets, by the mouths of jongleurs or be written down on wax tablets or on parchment (Nykrog, 1957, p. 44). Finally, sometimes over a century later, if it survived the test of popularity, a fabliau would find its way into a handsome bound book of an amateur collector of good tales.

Beyond the manuscript, we look for the fabliaux in their most intense existence, in the mouths and gestures of the jongleurs, or *ménéstrels*, as they often called themselves, and in the ears and eyes of their audience. What a wonderful one-man (or sometimes one-woman) show the jongleurs must have been! Economy demanded that they travel alone. They could not afford to share the small profits—except perhaps with a dancing bear. They were jugglers, acrobats, animal trainers, and reciters of war and love poetry. And whenever the audience was getting weary, they could always get a good laugh with a fabliau. Note what happens at a great feast where a count gives orders to the minstrels to show off their talents, promising his scarlet coat for the one who tells the best tale or does the best trick:

One minstrel after another labored
 To do his trade as best he could.
 One played the drunk, another the fool.
 One sang, another played music
 And others recited a debate,
 And another told jokes.
 Those who knew the art of the jongleur
 Played the fiddle before the count.

There were some who recited fabliaux
 Where many funny things were told . . .

(*Du Vilain au buffet*, 138–147)

The fabliau circulated in its multiversion form thanks to the jongleurs' memory and talent for recomposing. The occasional written reproductions of oral performances which we possess must be considered diachronic samples of different levels of development of a tale. For example, in the manuscript B.N. 24432 (P: Nykrog's siglum, 1957, pp. 310–11), a variant of *De Boivin de Provins* instructs the audience: "So as to be able to hear, please keep quiet for a while" (Appendix, lines 36–37). This call to the audience for attention is not found in A, our manuscript, and must refer to a different set of performing circumstances. The fabliau is therefore a multiversion genre whose multiplicity is not, as Jean Rychner explains, the result of faulty memories or scribal interferences (Rychner, *Contribution*, 1960, passim; Eichmann, 1978) but of the part played by the jongleurs in spreading and recomposing the tales. As Roy Percy has reasoned, a cross-fertilization of fabliaux is at the base of the multiplicity of versions because the jongleur could isolate and recombine from his repertoire common elements, borrowing from several to produce an original tale ("Structural Models," 1974, p. 113), and similarities among fabliaux do not account for a written relationship, but attest to a vibrant, ever-changing, malleable, oral genre.

Were the jongleurs also the composers of their repertoire? Textual evidence is not clear. As Nykrog points out (1957, p. 38), many authors of fabliaux predicted that their works would travel from place to place performed by others. They were proud of their creations and, wishing to continue to be recognized as the authors, often integrated their signatures into the tales. The performers, too, were proud of the original authors, for they preserved the signatures through many versions and in at least one case, *Du Chevalier qui fist parler*, gave credit to the original author whose work he had changed considerably. Noting that the same fabliaux may recur in widely diverse manuscripts, sometimes written over a hundred years apart, and that virtually every fabliau cited elsewhere still exists in manuscript form, Nykrog amply demonstrates that the average jongleur was not a composer of fabliaux, but a mere reciter and performer of older, popular tales (1957, p. 440).

Several jongleurs, however, were indeed composers of their own material, being thus at the same time *trouvères* and jongleurs. Such are, for instance, Gautier le Leu and Jean Bodel. The former composed his own works in order to perform them himself: "Since I want to set myself to rhyming and telling fabliaux . . ." (*Du Sot Chevalier*, 1–2). The latter, with a great deal of pride, takes credit for his fabliaux:

The man who did the tale of the gruel
 And the one about the dead peasant of Bailluel
 Who was never sick or failing,
 And the one about Gombert and the two clerks
 Whom he wickedly kept in his house,
 And about Brunain, the priest's cow,
 Who led Blerain away I believe,
 And told the tale of the dream of the pricks
 Which the lady had to handle,
 And the one about the wolf whom the goose deceived,
 And about the two envious jerks,
 And about Barat and Travers
 And their friend Haimet,
 Takes on another fabliau . . .

(*Des II Chevaus*, 1–14)

Did these performer-authors compose with a stylus and wax tablet, or did they work the verses out in their heads between performances, or did they actually compose during the performance in the same manner as the Yugoslavian epic singers (Eichmann, "Oral Composition," 19–9)? There are arguments against every one of these possibilities. It is unlikely that many jongleurs could afford enough parchment for all their scripts.

Since, on the other hand, wax tablets would have been too cumbersome either to carry from place to place or to use during a performance, the jongleur would have had to recite from memory, a difficult task for anyone with a sizable repertoire; or else he would have had to compose during narration, also difficult, since, unlike the Yugoslavian epic singers, the fableors had to find a rhyme every sixteen syllables. Also, did the authors freely give their creations to other jongleurs, or did they charge a fee? Did they perhaps teach their art and poems to apprentice jongleurs? Or were the tales simply pirated by jongleurs with exceptionally good memories? We have no certain answers to these questions.

Where did the stories come from before they were put into their definitive form? Attempts, none of them entirely successful, have been made to identify their origins through geographical location, through social class, and through previously existing genres. The earliest theories proposed that the fabliaux are remnants of Aryan mythology or belong to the anthropological heritage still in evidence in modern popular tales. Joseph Bédier effectively refutes these hypotheses but reserves most of his energies for his assault on the Orientalist theories of Theodor Benfey (1814) and Reinhold Köhler (1865). In almost two hundred pages of densely documented and cleverly reasoned arguments, Bédier demonstrates the total absence of evidence for a mass migration, via the crusades or the Spanish Moors, of tales from India to Western Europe. Nykrog (1957, pp. xx–xxxviii), points out that Bédier's attack was misdirected, since he aimed it at German Indianists instead of at John Dunlop and Gaston Paris, Bédier's former professor, to whom he dedicated his study.

Bédier proposed his own theory to explain the presence of the fabliaux in medieval literature: while the subjects of the fabliaux are part of the legacy of mankind, it was a specifically Gallic genius that shaped these universal tales into their forms. Having noted the simultaneous emergence of the fabliaux and of the bourgeois class during the Middle Ages, Bédier equated the two, thus making the same *post hoc ergo propter hoc* mistake he had earlier accused the Orientalists of making: "Il est exact que les fabliaux sont ordinairement l'oeuvre des bourgeois. Le genre naquit le jour où se fut vraiment constituée une classe bourgeoise: il fleurit concurremment à toute une littérature bourgeoise" (The genre was born at the very moment the bourgeois class was established: it flourished along with a whole bourgeois literature; pp. 371–72). Despite admitted evidence that the fabliaux were also enjoyed by the aristocracy, Bédier boldly stated that they were written by and for the bourgeoisie, from bourgeois source material. "A chacun sa littérature propre: ici la poésie des châteaux, là celle des carrefours" (To each his own literature: here we have the poetry of the chateaux; there the poetry of the street corners; p. 371).

To limit a genre to a certain class is indeed bold. If Bédier had meant *bourgeois* to refer only to an attitude, he should have said so. If, as is likely, he meant that the fabliaux belonged to the city, although enjoyed in the castles, he was in error. On the basis of

vocabulary analysis, Charles Muscatine has demonstrated that the fabliaux have more of a rural character than an urban one and that, in view of the mobile nature of medieval social classes, it would be wrong to make the fabliaux the property of a particular locality (Muscatine, 1976). Marie-Thérèse Lorcin has pointed out that while approximately forty fabliaux locate their events in what were considered cities in the Middle Ages (eight hundred inhabitants or more), forty-five occur in villages or hamlets and the rest are impossible to locate accurately. She concludes that the identification of fabliau settings with towns is basically fruitless: both the Parisian Rutebeuf and the urban Jean Bodel situate their tales in rural areas (1979, p. 18).

The most convincing arguments against Bédier's theory of the fabliau as a bourgeois genre come from the Danish scholar Per Nykrog, who sees the fabliaux as deliberate parodies of courtly subjects and manners:

Le fabliau est très souvent une parodie de la courtoisie, mais loin de viser l'aristocratie, cette parodie se moque des classes qui lui sont inférieures. Le fabliau paraît donc être le genre par lequel les nobles s'amuse au dépens de la courtoisie des vilains!

(The fabliau is very often a parody of courtly behavior, but far from aiming at the aristocracy, this parody pokes fun at the lower classes. Thus, the fabliau seems to be the genre that the nobility uses to make fun of the courtliness of commoners!; 1957, p. 104)

In Nykrog's theory, the questions of nature, destination, and origins of the fabliau seem to be confused. While establishing the nature of the fabliau to be an aristocratic parody of courtly genres, he hesitates to draw the easy conclusion that its nature and origin are the same. Later on in his work, he proposes that the fabliau has its origin in the fable, a theory that is supported by other scholars such as Johnston and Owen (hereafter J.O.) and R. Guiette. For etymological and thematic reasons, a link between the fable and the fabliau does seem likely. It is also reasonable to believe that after the fabliaux had their start, they began to feed on courtly genres (Busby, "Courtly Literature"), using them as a backdrop to generate or intensify laughter. Undeniably, such famous passages as the fight scenes in *D'Aloul* (560–719; 864–924) and *De Sire Hain et*

Dame Anieuse (166–230) are clear references to courtly and epic confrontations.

The controversies over the fabliau public, destination and connections with epic and courtly genres point to a very real medieval phenomenon, the interdependency among genres. Medieval authors did not share our consuming concern for categorizing and defining. They gathered their material wherever they found it: the author of *Des braies le prestres* claims that people who had witnessed a funny story told him about it (272, 279–290), whereas the author of *Des Braies le prestres* claims that people who had witnessed a funny story told him about it (272, 279–290), whereas the author of *D'Aloul* boasts an *escriture*, something written, as his source. Having gathered the material, the fableor put it to rhyme and recited it to whoever was likely to enjoy it. In *Du Prestre qui ot mere a force*, he tells us that “A cest mot finist cis fabliaus / que nous avons en rime mis / por conter devant nos amis” (Here ends this fabliau, which we have put into rhyme to recite before our friends; 200–202), while in the *Des .III. Avugles de Compiegne*, the tale was meant for dukes and counts (6). Some fabliaux were undoubtedly recited in taverns by jongleurs, such as the one in *Du Povre Mercier*, who cries, “Done moi boire si t’agree” (Give me something to drink, please; Montaiglon and Raynaud, 2, 122; hereafter, M.R.); others at the house of an individual, as we have seen in *De Boivin de Provins* (52). C. H. Livingston cites a fabliau told at a peasant’s house (1951, pp. 128–29, note 4.) Some fabliaux were told to a seated audience (*Du Prestre et des .II. ribaus*, 6); other fableors felt the need to hail passers-by, asking them to stop and listen (*Des .III. Boçus*, 1–3). In *De la Demoisele qui ne pooit oïr*, as well as in *Du Pescheor de pont seur Saine* (line 214), the audience was mixed. In general, it is safe to say that the fabliaux were collected from a variety of sources and repeated throughout the land to a variety of audiences, such as the ones whom the jongleur in *Du Jugement des Cons* goes “seeking throughout the land to find out whether the judgment is well done” (162–63).

The variant versions of tales also attest to a fableor’s concern for a varied public, as he changed and adapted the poems to suit the particular needs of the performance or the taste of his audience. Jean Rychner, however, is not very convincing in his claim that the style of a certain fabliau reveals the social class of the audience for

whom a certain fabliau was composed. In his analysis of the variants of several fabliaux, Rychner assumes that the ones written in the most elevated style were destined for an audience of a higher social level, and that unfortunate revisions and adaptations were made for a less demanding public of a lower social status (1960, I, 58). As Roy Percy has noted, such a methodology is fallacious because it reduces "the history of redaction . . . to a history of corruption and degradation" (1972, p. 117). Robert Harrison probably best describes the vicissitudes of oral tales from performer to performer and audience to audience:

It is possible that in the fabliaux we see the emergence into written literature of a body of folklore that has always been with us, living a scurrilous underground life in the bawdy joke and the tavern tale, and constantly transmitted and enriched by local wags and visiting firemen who, knowing how to make a good story better, kept intact the general theme and punch lines while revising superficial details to suit the local audience. (p. 5)

In short, the fabliaux, universal and timeless, gained esteem and were deemed artistically worthy of being put down on parchment in the thirteenth century, a time of literary, social, and economic revival, and a time when they satisfied the need of one class to laugh at another one or at itself.

Style

In the scant sixteen pages (341–357) that Joseph Bédier devotes to the style of the fabliaux, the best he can say about them is that they are brief and unpretentious. (Bédier calculates that the fabliaux average between 300 and 400 lines per fabliau). What he fails to observe is that these qualities are not accidental, but the very essence of a skillfully developed art. R. Guiette puts it succinctly:

Ces contes sont menés à la française, tambour battant, droit devant eux. La composition en est toute linéaire, et en pleine clarté. Pas de détours, pas d'ombres troubles, pas de mystères. L'atmosphère est pure et nette. On respire librement. Les couleurs sont fraîches, comme chez les anciens peintres que l'on dit primitifs.

(These tales march along, French style, with the drum beating ahead of them. The composition is entirely linear and clear. No detours, no disturbing ambiguities, no mysteries. The atmosphere is pure and neat. We can breathe freely. The colors are fresh as with the old, so-called primitive painters; *Fabliaux et contes*, 1960, pp. 24–25)

Spoken before live audiences, they cannot afford the trappings of the literary works—elaborate settings, deep examinations of character, rich, realistic details of contemporary life. Instead, they provide masterful sketches, silhouettes, brush-strokes which allude to more than they describe. Hundreds of scenes take place in banquet halls, bedrooms or along the road, ordinary places requiring little description but resonant with possibility because they are places where people meet.

With little time for elaboration, the fabliaux often draw upon existing familiar genres and use them as backdrops. Thus, the fabliaux, are dotted with “signals,” to use Keith Busby’s term (“Courtly Literature”), which allude to other genres, such as the *Roman de Renart*, lyric poetry, the Bible (Helsing, pp. 98–103), but mostly to courtly novel situations, for which the fabliaux often propose humorous or even obscene solutions, obviously different from the ones proposed by the works they parody. With a few words, these connections, or “signals,” can summon a whole complex of emotions and attitudes. Courtly expressions such as *fin’amors* place a character securely in a context that has already been established in the courtly tradition. Honeycutt shows that the very fact that the character is a knight is a signal for a whole set of courtly expectations and that humor rises from the disappointment of these expectations (1974, pp. 90–91).

The fabliaux, however, do not rest solely on courtly literature. Many signals refer to situations in other fabliaux; the genre often feeds on itself. The ten-line explanation of how the husband in *Du Pescheor de Pont seur Saine* (87–96) finds the penis can be effectively brief because the pattern is familiar. Likewise, the mention of the goose which the lover brings for dinner and the bath which his mistress prepares for him alerts the audience to many other situations where the unexpected (but not for the public) return of the husband interrupts the bath. In the same manner, fabliau characters arouse certain expectations. Thus when a lecherous monk or priest

arrives on the scene, we get the signal that his attempts at seduction will not be successful, for, as Nykrog notes, his success ratio is only five out of twenty-two (1957, p. 110). On the other hand, the introduction of a clerk or squire signals a chance for successful love play.

The quality of a story, whether parodic or not, still depends on the manner of telling. The verse form clearly distinguishes the fabliaux from their source material: as prose tales, these stories would not have been written down at all. The fabliaux give a feeling of freshness, energy and rhythm, much of which is due to the flexible octosyllabic couplet. Nykrog notes that it was the fabliau that most fully freed the octosyllabic couplet from the heavy sobriety of saints' lives and historical chronicles and allowed the form to display the full range of its capabilities in comic action and dialogue (1957, pp. 245–48). Avoiding long descriptive passages, the authors move rapidly to the most dramatic element of the tale, the dialogue. The quick-paced octosyllabic couplet is ideal for the give-and-take of dialogue. Whenever possible, the narrator, aware of the dramatic potential in the binary movement of verbal confrontation, steps aside and leaves the stage to his protagonists. Quoted directly or indirectly, the characters come alive in their scenes, often revealing more of themselves than their description does. The repartees sparkle when two or sometimes three characters face off, usually answering each other mid-couplet or even mid-line, as in the confrontation between the priest, his mistress, and the servant girl in *Du Bouchier d'Abeville* (369–494).

These tales are not without faulty lines and tiring line-fillers, which Bédier points out (pp. 342–43), weaknesses probably due to the oral nature of the genre, although they also occur in other, respectable “literary” ones. But the line-fillers are often appropriate (Honeycutt, 1975). The characterization, though rarely deep, is vivid, and the tales are told economically and energetically.

Influences

The fabliaux, although extinct as a genre after Jean de Condé in the middle of the fourteenth century, have continued to leave a remarkable impression on the literature of the following centuries. It would indeed be impossible here to cite every influence and adapt-

ion of each fabliau. We must refer for evidence to Joseph Bédier's bibliographic notes (pp. 442-76) and to Victor Leclerc's "Fabliaux" (pp. 69-215). The influences of the fabliau can be noticed either in its subject matters or in its artistic achievement, or in both. Chaucer, the *Nouvelles*, and Jean de La Fontaine, to name three, seem to be indebted to the fabliau. Influences must of course be computed not by how many times the fabliaux as a genre or individual tales have been repeated through the centuries but by what degree they have kept themselves alive under new forms.

It is as hard to determine precisely any direct influence of the fabliaux on Boccaccio, Chaucer, and La Fontaine as it is to trace the origins of the fabliaux. All three authors devote considerable talent to writing their own variations on the genre, yet none of them credits any fabliaux as sources. It may be that the tales were so widespread, not only throughout France but through all Europe, that any talk of one particular tale's influencing another is meaningless, and that the fabliaux, Boccaccio's tales, and Chaucer's tales are three parallel responses to a common folk source. It is very likely that the artistic skill of the jongleurs, as they spread the fabliaux through all levels of society in the French-speaking world, left its mark on popular story-telling throughout Europe after the jongleurs were gone.

To the south the emergence of the Tuscan *novella* may at least be seen as part of the same story-telling tradition as the fabliau. The term itself, meaning *story*, is French; it had already been used by Chrétien de Troyes and in the *Roman de Renart* (Dubuis, 1973, p. 31). Nykrog conjectures that Boccaccio's tales, which derived from early fable-like prose Italian tales, evolved parallel to the fabliaux from "la mine inépuisable des exemples" (the inexhaustible mine of *exempla*; Nykrog, 1957, pp. 259-60). Like the fabliaux, the novellas retain the clear narrative style of oral delivery, uncluttered by long descriptive passages of philosophical digressions (Sempoux, p. 15). Part of Boccaccio's genius, Sempoux explains, is to highlight these oral characteristics with a frame tale that identifies the stories as oral entertainment (pp. 15-16). (Chaucer gives even greater oral life to his stories where the relationship between tale and teller is much more intimate.) The one oral characteristic which did not descend to Boccaccio is the verse. Nykrog reasons that this is because of the early development of prose in