

Two Danish Chaucer Translators in the 1940s and their Editors at the Literary Magazine

Cavalcade

Ebbe Klitgård

Several Chaucer translations that appeared in the Danish literary magazine *Cavalcade* from the late 1940s are analysed. The two translators, Lis Thorbjørnsen and Jørgen Sonne, are shown to be heavily influenced by the editorial line of editors Ole Storm and Orla Lundbo, who in effect transform Chaucer's poetic narratives into modern short stories. Despite a declared elitist intention, the editors deceive their readers by not explaining that they have transformed Chaucer's text into a new genre. Given the circumstances, the translators provide competent translations.

Keywords: Chaucer translations, English in Denmark, Danish literary magazine *Cavalcade*, Lis Thorbjørnsen, Jørgen Sonne, Ole Storm, Orla Lundbo

Cet article examine plusieurs traductions d'œuvres de Chaucer parues à partir de la fin des années 1940 dans le magazine littéraire danois *Cavalcade*. L'analyse montre que les deux traducteurs, Lis Thorbjørnsen et Jørgen Sonne, sont fortement influencés par la politique éditoriale des deux éditeurs, Ole Storm et Orla Lundbo, qui transforment les récits poétiques de Chaucer en nouvelles modernes. Malgré leurs intentions élitistes déclarées, les éditeurs trompent leurs lecteurs en ne pas expliquant cette transformation des textes de Chaucer en un genre littéraire différent. Étant donné les circonstances, les traducteurs fournissent des traductions compétentes.

Mots clés : traductions de Chaucer, anglais au Danemark, magazine littéraire danois *Cavalcade*, Lis Thorbjørnsen, Jørgen Sonne, Ole Storm, Orla Lundbo

The Literary Magazine *Cavalcade* and English in Denmark in the late 1940s

This article discusses the work of two Danish translators and authors, Lis Thorbjørnsen and Jørgen Sonne, when they were both young and working for the new literary magazine *Cavalcade* in the late 1940s. Their editors were Ole Storm and later Orla Lundbo, and an editorial hand is felt strongly in the overall translation strategies. My main aim in the paper is both to provide some precise analysis of the Chaucer translations in question, and to show how the particular translation of one author, in this case Chaucer, for an edited popular magazine, becomes an illustrative case for editorial policies.

First, however, let me provide a brief contextualization of the translations. In 1945 German was still the foreign language best known in Denmark. The Danish historian Jørgen Sevaldsen quotes statistics saying that 47 per cent of the population declared ability in German, the corresponding figure for English being only 30 per cent. According to Sevaldsen, English was already taking over in the younger generation as of the late 1930s and of course the allied victory also boosted English education.¹ The British Council, centrally located as of 1946 next to the Town Hall Square of Copenhagen, played a significant part in strengthening the cultural links in the postwar years. A lending library with British books and music was opened, their stock of books reaching 8300 by the end of the 1940s. Furthermore, an “English Bookshop” opened in late 1947 in the Town Hall Square itself. In 1948, an American library followed at the US embassy.²

The Danish literary historian Hans Hertel has noted that the war actually saw an increase in the share of translations from the English speaking world, despite the censorship of certain publications. Whereas proportionally the share of translations from English dropped during the 1920s and 1930s to a still important 44 per cent, it rose again from the early 1940s, reaching a peak of 72 per cent by the end of the 1950s.³ Considering that these figures also take translations from other Nordic countries into account, this is a remarkably high figure, which underlines the dominance of Anglo-American culture in postwar Denmark. The statistics are supported by a survey, quoted by Sevaldsen, from *Aviskronikindeks* (a Danish newspaper article index) for the period 1945-49, showing the distribution of book reviews. While reviews of British and American books together represented 18 per cent of reviews in 1945, this figure increased to 31 and 25 per cent respectively in 1949, with the number of reviews of translations from Scandinavian, French and German declining.⁴ It is tempting to conclude that the increased number of Anglo-American books on the Danish market reflected a silent protest during the war, and this may well have been the case for many. Certainly the statistics for the postwar period also show that a paradigm shift was

taking place from prominence to dominance. It is in this context that a new magazine with many translations from English appeared in the late 1940s.

Cavalcade, the literary magazine I have chosen to focus on in this article, came out with its first issue in September 1946 with Ole Storm as editor, but as of the third of the five annual issues in 1947 Orla Lundbo took over as editor, and he is the editor of all but the first of the translations discussed here. Ole Storm (1918-88) was for many years a reader, editor and translator for the leading Danish publishing company Gyldendal and later an editor for the newspaper *Politiken*. His own competence in translation was recognized in 1986, when he was awarded an honorary prize by the Danish translator's association. Orla Lundbo (1909-86) worked as a journalist and later as a school teacher, but he is best known for his literary biographies and several edited volumes of short stories. Lundbo also translated literary works.⁵

The editorial line of *Cavalcade* is made quite clear in the first issue, where Storm provides a one-page welcome to the readers of the magazine, explaining that the short story will be the main genre in *Cavalcade*, but that the editorial line is emphatically different from the popular magazines offering “trash fiction for mediocre readers.”⁶ Storm even dares to say that the magazine is directed at elite readers, and he makes an appeal for literature that demands intellectual effort on the part of the reader.⁷ The issues from 1947 to the last issue in 1949 edited by Lundbo do not include any letters from the editor, but it is clear, from the selection of texts, that Lundbo followed closely in the footsteps of Storm.

Cavalcade consists mainly of short stories, with a mixture of translations from modern as well as classic authors from Europe and the US, as well as a selection of new, promising Danish short story writers. Most of the Danish short story writers remained only promising, whereas the selection of fiction from the English-speaking world includes more prominent names such as Edgar Allen Poe, Evelyn Waugh, Sherwood Anderson, Somerset Maugham and William Faulkner. Under Storm and

Lundbo editorial quality is high, and besides many quite brilliant texts, there are advertisements for such important publications as Danish translations of Pepy's *Diary* and Joyce's *Ulysses*.⁸ *Ulysses* was thus presented to the *Cavalcade* readers the year before Mogens Boisen's full translation appeared, with two brief extracts translated by Jørgen Sonne, whose Chaucer translations are treated below.⁹ Among older classics we find a couple of brief stories based on Boccaccio's *Il Decamerone*, and in 1947, 1948 and 1949, translations of Chaucer's Canterbury tales, as part of the magazine's emphasis on intelligent entertainment.

The *Cavalcade* editors seem to have worried less about the fact that these late medieval works were not originally short stories written in prose, but rather narrative poetry. They address this problem by having Chaucer's narrative poems adapted and transformed into short stories. They do this by demanding a focus on plot and editing Chaucer's tales in such a way that all plot delays, such as narrative side-steps and poetic or descriptive passages, are deleted or abbreviated heavily. In what follows I will analyse more exactly how the transformations of Chaucer's tales are carried out and how the final translations illustrate a genre shift from narrative poetry to short story.

Thorbjørnsen's Translations of Chaucer

Lis Thorbjørnsen (1918-) made her first appearance as a Chaucer translator with a booklet titled *Geoffroy Chaucer, De tre drikkebrødre* (The three toppers). This is a full text translation of *The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale*. I have analysed this translation elsewhere,¹⁰ and though partly successful, it is also illustrative of the difficulties in transforming Chaucer's poetry to prose. Poetic narrative, unfortunately a rare genre in the age of the novel, is dependent on the interplay between plot and poetry, and *The Pardoner's Tale* has its high point in the meeting between the three toppers and a mysterious old man. In this scene the plot is drawn to a temporary halt in a haunting linguistic and poetic presentation of its main theme, death. The Middle English original acquires its strength through a combination of content and form, the striking image of the old man seeking death in vain,

combined with the poetic forcefulness of Chaucer's language. When this is turned into modern prose by Thorbjørnsen, not surprisingly, all the forcefulness is lost. No translator could transfer such a passage successfully into prose without enormous loss.

Lis Thorbjørnsen was already an experienced translator when she turned to Chaucer, her previous work including an abbreviated translation of Dickens' *Oliver Twist* published in 1944, reviewed briefly by Jørgen Erik Nielsen.¹¹ Later she also published her own work on feminist issues, mysticism and ecology, besides writing reviews for the Danish newspaper *Aktuelt*. She has thus had a very productive and versatile writing career.

Thorbjørnsen's "Maj og Januar" (May and January) from 1947 of course takes its Danish title from the two main characters of *The Merchant's Tale*.¹² It appears as the first of several *Canterbury Tales* translations in *Cavalcade*, and probably for this reason there is a page-long portrait of Chaucer. The author of this page was Elsa Gress, who had been a student of both English and comparative literature at the University of Copenhagen, and who later became well-known as a writer. Her general familiarity with Chaucer is clear from her short portrait and her suggestion that Chaucer is a "Realismens pioner" (pioneer of realism) can certainly be accepted in a broad sense, although with some reservations. This is not the case for her claim that Chaucer's language is "det endnu kantede, ubehjælpomme og højst ufuldkomment udviklede Middelengelsk" (the yet awkward, clumsy, and highly incompletely developed Middle English).¹³ Gress is not the only critic to have passed such ignorance on to Danish readers, but her lack of respect for medieval literature is the worse because she actually had a chance to know better through her education.

At the end of her Chaucer introduction, Gress notes that Thorbjørnsen's translation is from verse to prose and "let forkortet" (slightly abbreviated).¹⁴ It turns out that it is actually substantially abbreviated, as the long marriage debate at the beginning of Chaucer's version is completely left out. With roughly 500 lines of debate and reflection on the nature of old January's marriage to a

young girl missing, the tale in Thorbjørnsen's version becomes a fairly simple *fabliau*, not a complicated and nuanced mixture of *debate* and *fabliau* as in Chaucer. The Danish translator, probably after instruction from the editor, has violated Chaucer's composition and reduced a Canterbury tale to its main plot. This policy of simplifying would have been understandable if *Cavalcade* had been targeted at children, but it is specifically targeted at an elite readership.

This being said, Thorbjørnsen is a skillful prose narrator, and she picks up the dialogue between the main characters very well. This is the case, for instance, at the dramatic moment when January regains his sight and reacts impulsively at seeing his wife May having sex with her lover Damian in a pear tree. Chaucer's "Out! help! allas! harrow! he gan to crye,/O stronge lady store, what dostow?" (ll. 2365-6) is translated by Thorbjørnsen as "Han gav et Brøl fra sig og raabte, 'Hjælp! Ned med dig! Hvad gør du, frække Kone?'" [He made a roar and cried, Help! Get down from there! What are you doing, shameless wife].¹⁵ Changing the word sequence slightly, Thorbjørnsen certainly covers the sense well, and she catches the drama as well as the humour of the passage. In her translation we are also in no doubt that the humour is about sex, even though she avoids translating Chaucer's very explicit sexual references, such as "in he throng" (l. 2353) and "in it wente!" (l. 2376). These references to penetration are left out, but can still be deduced from the context. In the case of "swyved thee" (l. 2378, meaning "fucked you"), Thorbjørnsen gives up the avoidance strategy and uses the Danish euphemism "belaa dig" [lay by you] instead.¹⁶ Both the avoidance strategy and the euphemism are understandable, as correct translations of Chaucer's sexual terms might well have led to charges of pornography in the late 1940s.

Thorbjørnsen's 1948 translation of Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, as *Konen fra Bath*, is condensed to just over three pages. In all likelihood, this was due to editorial policy and not her own decision, since *Cavalcade* published both full translations and extracts, as well as abbreviated material. Thorbjørnsen's abbreviated translation of *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* focuses entirely on

the story of the main character's life with her five husbands with a strong emphasis on the climactic episode of her fight with Jankyn, her fifth husband. The Wife's private reflections on Christian morality in the first part of the *Prologue* are simply cut out, and worse, so are all her reflections on bodily, including sexual functions. We do meet her in bed with one husband, but Thorbjørnsen avoids reference to most of the elements of the *Prologue* that have bothered other Danish translators with the exception of Bergsøe, whose poetic translation of the prologue and tale was published in 1943. I have argued elsewhere that, because of his respect for Chaucer's poetry and his very accurate and still idiomatic translation, Bergsøe's *Konen fra Bath* is one of the most successful Chaucer translations in Danish.¹⁷

Thorbjørnsen's text reflects her chief translation strategies of omission, summary and avoidance. Some parts are nonetheless translated without cuts, and the episode with Jankyn includes translation of substantial passages, including the *denouement* where Jankyn hands over the reins to his wife. However, Thorbjørnsen cheats a little bit by using a line from *The Wife of Bath's Tale* as the final line of the *Prologue*: "Gud sende os Ægtemænd, der er føjelige, unge og livlige i Sengen!" [God send us husbands that are yielding, young and vigorous in bed!]. While this is an accurate translation of Chaucer's "Jesu Christ us sende/Housbondes meke, younge, and fresshe a-bedde," it belongs in another context, although admittedly it fits in well here.¹⁸ Some details are worth mention. In Thorbjørnsen's first line, the Wife is married five times at the altar, rather than at the church door.¹⁹ More significant is the translation of such lines as Chaucer's "I had the best *quoniam* mighte be" (l. 608) as "ingen Kvinde kunde være bedre at sove hos" [no woman could be better to sleep with].²⁰ Thorbjørnsen's Wife of Bath, having lost her frivolous language and provocative religious attitudes, becomes a shadow of the real thing, although the basic plot in Thorbjørnsen's version is still funny in its own way.

Thorbjørnsen is by no means a squeamish translator, and all her translations of Chaucer demonstrate that she has enjoyed working with her material. I conclude that Thorbjørnsen is competent in transforming the content of Chaucer's tales. As far as form is concerned, however, it is a pity that, due partly to translation norms in the 1940s and partly to the editorial preference for foregrounding the plot elements, Thorbjørnsen has not been allowed to be more loyal to Chaucer's poetic composition.

Sonne as Chaucer Translator

Jørgen Sonne (1925-) has had a life-long passion for European medieval poetry, which has so far culminated in translations of a wide selection of English, French and Italian lyrics 1100-1700, including some poetic translations of Chaucer.²¹ I will only deal here with the prose translations of Chaucer Sonne published in the late 1940s when he was also making his debut as one of Denmark's most distinct poetic voices. Sonne has himself been translated into German, English, French, Italian, Hungarian and Macedonian.²²

The publication history of Sonne's early Chaucer translations is somewhat complicated. The most substantial publication is *Geoffrey Chaucer, Canterbury Fortællinger*, published by the printing house L. Ihrich in a deluxe numbered edition as a present to its customers on New Year's Day 1950. The edition contains a one page preface by Sonne, woodcuts by Erik Christensen and translations of *The Reeve's Tale* under the title "Forvalterens fortælling," *The Franklin's Tale* under the title "Fribondens fortælling" and *The Nun's Priest's Tale* under the title "Munkens fortælling om Hanen og Hønen, Chantecler og Pertelote" [The Monk's tale about the Cock and the Hen, Chantecler and Pertelote].²³ However, Sonne had already published two of these translations in *Cavalcade* in 1947 and 1949. The first translation of *The Reeve's Tale* had the same title as the later revised editions, "Forvalterens fortælling," whereas *The Franklin's Tale* appeared under the title "*De sorte klipper*" [The black rocks].²⁴ Two other Chaucer translations by Sonne appeared in *Cavalcade* in 1949: "Den

syngende hvide ravn og Føbus” [The singing white crow and Phoebus], a slightly abbreviated translation of *The Manciple’s Tale*, and “En ung piges hoved” [A young girl’s head], an abbreviated translation of *The Physician’s Tale*.²⁵ The translation of *The Reeve’s Tale* was revised again by Sonne for publication in *Humor fra hele verden* [Humour from all over the world], a collection of texts edited by Mogens Knudsen and *Cavalcade* editor Orla Lundbo, first published in 1952. A further minor revision was undertaken by Sonne for the second, condensed edition of this publication, which appeared in 1967.²⁶

I shall start by considering the *Cavalcade* translations that were not subsequently revised. First of all it is worthy of note that Sonne selected *The Manciple’s Tale* and *The Physician’s Tale* among his first Chaucer translations, as they are generally not among the most frequently reprinted and translated tales. The Danish titles “Den syngende hvide ravn og Føbus” and “En ung piges hoved” de-contextualise the tales from the tale-telling contest of *The Canterbury Tales*, all the more so because Sonne does not translate the introductions and prologues to the tales. He also leaves out the interludes at the end of the tales where the pilgrims react to the stories. Apart from that only a few rather insignificant lines near the beginning have been left out, and the lacunae are marked with dots in Sonne’s text. *The Manciple’s Tale*, with its story of how the white raven got its black colour as a punishment from Phoebus because it had witnessed his wife’s infidelity and sang to him about it, is well transformed into prose.

Sonne has a talent for translating spoken language, as shown in the dramatic climax of the tale: “Hvadfornoget, Fugl! udbrød Føbus, hvad er det for en sang du synger” [What on earth is this, Bird, exclaimed Phoebus, what song is this you are singing].²⁷ Chaucer’s text has the slightly simpler if also dramatic “‘What, brid?’ quod Phebus, ‘what song singestow?’” (H, l. 244), but Sonne’s introduction of the dramatic idiom “Hvadfornoget” effectively represents the embarrassed and frustrated outcry of Phoebus in the scene. Less successful is the translation of what the crow

actually sings to evoke this response. Chaucer's "cokkow! cokkow! cokkow!" (l. 243) is translated by Sonne as "bøh, bøh, bøh,"²⁸ a Danish exclamation used to frighten young children gently in a hide-and-seek game or the like, which is not exactly the situation here.

On a more positive note, Sonne has taken care with his translation of medieval references. Thus Chaucer's "Minstralcyte," a reference to the minstrel performance tradition, is translated as "luthenspil" [lute play], which in Danish includes a reference to the main minstrel instrument, the lute, and covers the concept well.²⁹ In passing let me also note that Sonne uses the same strategy of downplaying Chaucer's overt sexual language as Thorbjørnsen, so that Chaucer's "swyve" (l. 256), which correctly translated should be "kneppe" [fuck], becomes "besove" [literally 'be-sleep']. In his translations of *The Reeve's Tale*, Sonne uses "besove" again and also "ligge med" [lie with] for "swyve." "*En ung piges hoved.*"

Sonne's version of *The Physician's Tale*, is condensed to such a degree that one would have expected the *Cavalcade* editor, or Sonne himself, to have mentioned this at the end of the translation, as was done in the case of Thorbjørnsen's "Konen fra Bath." With only 286 lines this is a short Canterbury Tale already, but Sonne's three pages of prose skip past several lines, including some allusions near the beginning to the classical sculptors Pygmalion, Apelles and Zeuxis, the ensuing discussion of beauty and virtue, and some descriptive passages. The omission of Chaucer's classical allusions is quite surprising in a magazine aiming at an elite readership. It certainly affects the rhetoric of Chaucer's narrative voice and turns the reader's attention to the plot.

Indeed, from line 118 in *The Physician's Tale*, when the main plot starts, Sonne translates more or less everything, and he does so quite accurately, with a few exceptions. This is the cruel story from Livy of a traitorous judge, Apius, who provides false evidence to get possession as slave of the innocent and beautiful daughter of a noble knight, Virginius, and sentence is passed in Apius' favour. In an unbearable scene Virginius then agrees with his daughter that death is to be preferred

to shame, and he chops off her head himself and hands it over to the judge, after which the latter gets his punishment. However, Sonne is inaccurate when he not only lets Apius lose his men by hanging and be turned in exile, but also makes him “fredløs” [outlawed].³⁰ Sonne may have been affected by the stories of Robin Hood, because there is no mention of outlawed people in *The Physician’s Tale*, nor in Livy’s story, nor in *The Romant de la Rose*, where the story also appears. Sonne had clearly worked further with Chaucer by the time he published his deluxe edition of three other Canterbury tales, as evidenced by his revisions of his translations from *Cavalcade* of *The Reeve’s Tale* and *The Franklin’s Tale*. The title “De sorte klipper” [the black rocks] has been changed to “Fribondens fortælling” [The Franklin’s tale, but the title could also mean The Yeoman’s tale], and the portrait of the Franklin from *The General Prologue* has been added in translation as an introduction, along with the portraits of the Reeve and the Nun’s Priest respectively for the other two tales. Apart from that the changes are mainly small corrections, but a couple of revisions are more substantial. For instance, Sonne has changed “aldrig” to “ingensinde” at the beginning of the tale, in the important promise from Arveragus to his beloved wife, “ingensinde i sit liv, dag og nat, skulle han tvinge hende” [never in his life, day and night, would he force her].³¹ “Aldrig” and “ingensinde” both mean “never,” but the latter is a formal and slightly archaic word. The effect of using it here is a dramatic reinforcement of the promise, which fits the situation very well. A revision at the end of the tale is also successful. Sonne first translated Chaucer’s “Everich of yow dide gentilly til other” (l. 1608) as “hver af jer handlede smukt,” but sensibly changed this to the more idiomatic Danish expression “I handlede smukt begge to.”³² Whereas the second version of Sonne’s translation of *The Franklin’s Tale* can be characterized as an improvement on the first version, there is still the question of the cuts. For instance, the scene just considered where Arveragus makes his promise does not contain a translation of 10 lines focused on his wife Dorigen (ll. 734-43), and no less than 50 lines (ll. 761-814) containing the

narrator's reflections on the nature of love have been passed by. The omissions continue (ll. 885-9 and 951-63), and again it seems that Sonne's editor has wanted the plot only, with no narratorial asides. Furthermore, as some of the omitted passages contain references to classical legend (Ekko and Narcissus in lines 951-2, for example), Sonne's abbreviated translation becomes a simplified version of the tale, losing the allusions and also the reflection and perspective that Chaucer wanted as part of his tale. With Erik Christensen's woodcuts of the characters and the dominant image of the tale, the black rocks, along with a separate woodcut of the magician who calculates the disappearance of the rocks, the plot can be followed almost like a cartoon, but Chaucer's depth of perspective has been lost.³³ "Fribondens fortælling" becomes a poor reflection of Chaucer's advanced poetic composition.

In "Munkens fortælling om Hanen og Hønen, Chantecler og Pertelote" [The Monk's tale about the Cock and the Hen, Chantecler and Pertelote] Sonne and his editor are far more loyal to *The Nun's Priest's Tale*. Less than 50 lines are missing, and Sonne remains for the most part faithful to Chaucer's text. The omissions and abbreviations appear mainly in a passage with references to such authorities as St. Augustine and Boëthius (ll. 4416-4456) and in a few other subsequent allusions to the classics. Whereas Sonne simply omits most allusions and references, Chaucer's mention of the popular medieval bestiary *Physiologus* (l. 4461) is an exception. Here Sonne actually translates with a reference to another medieval work, the *Lucidarius*, a Danish theological handbook from ca. 1350, based on a much earlier German handbook of the same name.³⁴ It appears that Sonne is not afraid of allusions to the medieval world, but that he has chosen something more familiar to Danes, adopting in other words what Lawrence Venuti terms a *domestication* strategy.³⁵ Whether his Danish readers actually knew of the *Lucidarius* is another matter.

Sonne is clearly familiar with the genre of beast fable, and he makes a particular effort to draw up clear images of the animals. For example the fox, which in Chaucer is among other things "ful of

sly iniquitee” (l. 4405), becomes “fuld af underfundig træskhed” [full of cunning guile].³⁶ This must have sounded just right in 1950, but “træskhed” has since then lost ground as a common idiom. The cock Chantecler is characterized by the French loan word “grandiose,”³⁷ which is slightly off the mark and perhaps reflects Sonne's background as a translator also from French. Chaucer uses the adjective “free” [noble]. On the other hand the cock *is* grandiose in the eyes of the admiring hens in the passage. This image is further strengthened in Erik Christensen's woodcut of a full page proud cock.³⁸

In conclusion, Sonne's *Nun's Priest's Tale* is fairly successful compared to other, severely abridged and transformed *Cavalcade* translations. This translation has been edited in such a way that Sonne has been allowed to show his translator's skills, taking care not only of characters and plot. This evaluation also applies to his neat translation of the famous proverbial guide to readings of fables expressed at the end of the tale. Sonne translates “Taketh the fruyt, and late the chaf be stille” (l. 4633) by “Tag kernen, og lad avnerne flyve” [Take the fruit/core and let the chaff fly], which is exactly the corresponding Danish proverb.

In “Forvalterens fortælling,” Sonne's translation of *The Reeve's Tale*, several proverbs are also well translated, not least the proverb used as a narrator's moral comment at the end of the tale, “Him thar nat wene wel that yvel dooth; A gylour shal him-self bigyled be” (group A, ll. 4321-2). Sonne translates this as “Den, der ikke ta'r sig i vare, når han vil narre, bli'r selv en nar” [He who is not careful when wanting to fool somebody will be fooled himself].³⁹ This is a slight transformation, but it covers the meaning precisely and also sounds proverbial, with the rhyme “vare/narre” matching Chaucer's alliteration “wene wel,” and with the same agent inversion, “narre”/bli'r en nar” as in Chaucer's “gylour/bigyled.” “Forvalterens fortælling” is in my estimate Sonne's best *Canterbury Tales* translation precisely because he has taken so much care with details of this kind, and because he has not left out bits and pieces in this translation. Sonne's revision of his 1947

version of “Forvalterens fortælling” for the 1949/50 edition is not successful in all respects, and he wisely decided to return to his first version when contributing to the text to the humour collection published in 1952, and very slightly revised again for a second edition.⁴⁰

The mistakes are not many but include the shape of Simkin the miller’s nose, which in Chaucer is “camuse,” a pug-nose (l. 3934). Sonne first translated this as “buttet næse” [chubby nose], then changed it to “opstoppennæse” [snub-nose], before returning to “buttet næse” [chubby nose] in the revised editions.⁴¹ “Buttet næse” is not wrong and is at least better than the incorrect “opstoppennæse,” but “braktud” would have been quite precise for pug-nose and is idiomatic Danish. Another correction involves a double mistake concerning the miller’s wife’s snoring, which can be heard “two furlong” away (l. 4166), meaning 440 yards away or just a long distance away. Sonne first translates this incorrectly as “to favne væk” [two fathoms away], which is only 12 feet away, then changes it to the also incorrect “to minutter i træk” [two minutes nonstop], before returning to “to favne væk”.⁴² This scene contains another serious translation mistake, as all versions have “ungen” [the baby] accompanying the miller and his wife in the snoring concert. It is not very realistic to have a baby in a cradle snoring, and in Chaucer it is in fact the adult daughter who snores, after having taken a full meal with lots to drink. Finally, I have found an example where a correct revision is changed back to a mistake. This is Chaucer’s reference to a mare speaking to a wolf (l. 4055). Sonne rightly translates this as “hoppem sagde til ulven” [the mare said to the wolf] in the 1949-50 edition, but the first and the later editions have the wolf speaking to the mare.⁴³

These examples are exceptions to the, as a rule, very sensible translation. Sonne’s idiomatic language generally brings about the liveliness of one of Chaucer’s finest *fabliaux*. In some cases the idiomatic translations include giving up accuracy, such as the translation of “He was a market-beter atte fulle” (l. 3936) about Simkin. Sonne first translated this as “Han var helt igennem en slagsbror”

[he was a fighting man through and through], which is a better idiomatic solution than the revision “Han yppede altid kiv på markederne” [He always started a quarrel at the market-places], although the market-places have been left out.⁴⁴ A similar strategy can be seen in the replacement of the more easily understandable paraphrase in Danish, “en stor præsteskole i Cambridge” [a big religious school in Cambridge] in the first version with the place name “Soller Hall ved Cambridge,”⁴⁵ directly translating Chaucer’s “Soler-halle at Cantebregge” (l. 3990). “Soler-halle” is present day King’s Hall. The paraphrase avoids the possible name confusion and is a better communicative solution, as the name of the hall is not important in the context, and as Sonne does not operate with explanatory notes.

It may be regretted that Sonne has not translated the northern dialects of the two students into a characteristic Danish sociolect, but generally he has a successful hand with the dialogues. For instance the many exclamations are dealt with carefully, such as the miller’s wife’s colourful outcry “Æsch” when she realizes she has gone to the wrong bed after taking a leak.⁴⁶ Chaucer’s miller’s wife says “ben’cite” or “benedicite” (l. 4220) in other versions, but whereas Sonne’s translation is not exactly accurate, it works rather well in the scene. “Æsch” belongs to a series of exclamation forms in Danish that can be varied endlessly and still recognized for an outcry of surprise, relief or irritation with oneself. In the bedroom scene these are the exact mixed feelings that the miller’s wife is meant to have.

It may be established that Sonne is generally a good, but not a flawless Chaucer translator. His revisions are not always successful, and in the case of “Forvalterens fortælling” the first translation is in many ways the best. However, as we have seen, the 1949-1950 edition includes translations of the portraits in *The General Prologue*, and this gives us at least some contextualisation. It would have been even better to translate the introductory passages in Chaucer’s *Reeve’s Tale*, *Franklin’s*

Tale and *Nun's Priest's Tale*, but the alternative, providing nothing at all, as in the revised translations, is of course much less desirable.

Conclusion

Thorbjørnsen and Sonne have both made a sensible attempt at transforming Chaucer's narrative poetry into short stories, although there are a number of errors and inaccuracies. The result fits the format demanded by the editors of *Cavalcade*. It must be noted that one of the two Danish translations of *The Canterbury Tales* from the 1950s, by Mogens Boisen, also represents the tales as a sequence of prose narratives.

Whereas it may thus be concluded that the two translators have performed relatively well, and that their prose translations work well in communicating to a modern audience, the editorial policies of *Cavalcade* may certainly still be questioned. In this article I started out by quoting editor Ole Storm formulating an elitist strategy for the magazine's readers. This is all very well, but the editors' decision to severely transform refined medieval poetic narrative into modern prose without informing their readers about it can hardly be said to appeal to an elite readership. Storm and Lundboe lead their readers to believe that Chaucer and Boccaccio, and indeed all their other writers from very different periods, wrote short stories. And they cut up and abridge works of narrative art, in some cases spoiling intricate compositional patterns. Recalling Storm and Lundboe's derogatory editorial remarks about trash fiction for mediocre readers, it is surprising that they have not made more of an effort to be loyal to a literary classic. It is laudable that they select so many of Chaucer's tales for presentation in their magazine, but in sum, there is a huge difference between their elitist declaration of intent and their actual editing practice.⁴⁷

Notes

¹ Jørgen Sevaldsen, "Culture and Diplomacy: Anglo-Danish Relations 1945-49," in *The Twain Shall Meet*, ed. Jørgen Sevaldsen (Copenhagen: Department of English, University of Copenhagen, *Publications on English Themes*, vol. 18, 1992), p. 12.

- ² Jørgen Sevaldsen, "Culture and Diplomacy," p. 22 and note, p. 32.
- ³ Hans Hertel, "Armstrong, Churchill... Penguin: the Danish Turn to Anglo-American Cultural Values from the 1920s to the 1950s," in *Britain and Denmark: Political, Economic and Cultural Relations in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Jørgen Sevaldsen, with Bo Bjørke and Claus Bjørn (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2003), p. 448.
- ⁴ Jørgen Sevaldsen, "Culture and Diplomacy," p. 14, and note.
- ⁵ Anonymous entry, "Ole Storm," <<http://www.danskefilm.dk/index2.html>> and anonymous article, "Orla Lundbo," <http://www.denstoredanske.dk/Dansk_Biografisk_Leksikon/Uddannelse_og_undervisning/Skolein_spekt%C3%B8r/Orla_Lundbo>, websites accessed November 2012.
- ⁶ Ole Storm, "trivallitteratur for middelmådige læsere," *Cavalcade*, no. 1 (1946), p. 3. Translation mine. Unless otherwise indicated all subsequent translations from Danish are mine.
- ⁷ Ole Storm, "trivallitteratur for middelmådige læsere," pp. 2-3.
- ⁸ *Cavalcade*, no. 1 (1948), p. 81 and *Cavalcade*, no. 2 (1949), p. 50.
- ⁹ See extracts from *Pepe's Diary* and *Ulysses* translated by Jørgen Sonne in *Cavalcade*, no. 2 (1948), pp. 78-80 and *Cavalcade*, no. 3 (1948), pp. 37-39.
- ¹⁰ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Geoffrey Chaucer, De tre drikkebrødre*, trans. Lis Thorbjørnsen (Copenhagen: Carit Andersens Forlag, 1946) and Ebbe Klitgård, *Chaucer in Denmark: A Study of the Translation and Reception History 1782-2012*, (Odense: University of Southern Denmark Press, forthcoming).
- ¹¹ Jørgen Erik Nielsen, *Dickens i Danmark* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2009), pp. 46-47.
- ¹² Geoffrey Chaucer, "Geoffrey Chaucer, Maj og Januar," trans. Lis Thorbjørnsen, *Cavalcade*, no. 1 (1947), pp. 73-80.
- ¹³ Elsa Gress, "Geoffrey Chaucer," *Cavalcade*, no. 1 (1947), p. 74.
- ¹⁴ Elsa Gress, "Geoffrey Chaucer," p. 74.
- ¹⁵ Geoffrey Chaucer, "Geoffrey Chaucer, Maj og Januar," p. 79.
- ¹⁶ Geoffrey Chaucer, "Geoffrey Chaucer, Maj og Januar," p. 80.
- ¹⁷ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Geoffrey Chaucer, Konen fra Bath*, trans. Flemming Bergsøe (Copenhagen: Thaning & Appel, 1943, and later imprints). For an analysis of the translation see Ebbe Klitgård, *Chaucer in Denmark*.
- ¹⁸ Geoffrey Chaucer, "Geoffrey Chaucer, Konen fra Bath," trans. Lis Thorbjørnsen, *Cavalcade*, no. 3 (1948), p. 35 and Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Wife of Bath's Prologue, The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. W.W. Skeat, vol. 1-6 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1894-7), group D, ll. 1258-9. Subsequent references to Chaucer's text are to this edition with the line and volume number given in brackets after the quotation.
- ¹⁹ Geoffrey Chaucer, "Geoffrey Chaucer, Konen fra Bath," trans. Lis Thorbjørnsen, p. 32.
- ²⁰ Geoffrey Chaucer, "Geoffrey Chaucer, Konen fra Bath," trans. Lis Thorbjørnsen, p. 34.
- ²¹ Jørgen Sonne, "Geoffrey Chaucer 1360-1400," in *Europæisk lyrik fra 1100tallet til 1700 i England, Frankrig og Italien med biografier og essays*, ed. and trans. Jørgen Sonne (Copenhagen, C.A. Reitzel, 2007).
- ²² There is a record of Sonne's publications until 1995, including translations into other languages, compiled by Orla Pedersen, in *Denne Sonne*, eds. Per Olsen and Søren Schou (Copenhagen: Munksgaard/Rosinante, 1995), pp. 217 ff.
- ²³ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Geoffrey Chaucer: Canterbury Fortællinger*, trans. Jørgen Sonne, woodcuts by Erik Christensen (Copenhagen: L. Ihrich, 1949-1950).
- ²⁴ Geoffrey Chaucer, "Geoffrey Chaucer, Forvalterens Fortælling," trans. Jørgen Sonne, illustrations by Spang Olsen, *Cavalcade*, no. 4 (1947), pp. 44-51. Geoffrey Chaucer, "Geoffrey

Chaucer, De sorte klipper,” trans. Jørgen Sonne, illustrations by Ib Spang Olsen, *Cavalcade*, no. 6 (1948), pp. 10-16.

²⁵ Geoffrey Chaucer, “Geoffrey Chaucer, En ung piges hoved,” trans. Jørgen Sonne, illustrations by Ib Spang Olsen, *Cavalcade*, no. 2 (1949), pp. 46-8; Geoffrey Chaucer, “Geoffrey Chaucer, Den syngende hvide ravn og Føbus,” trans. Jørgen Sonne, illustrations by Ib Spang Olsen, *Cavalcade*, no. 4 (1949), pp. 77-80.

²⁶ Revised editions in *Humor fra hele verden*, eds. Mogens Knudsen and Orla Lundbo (Copenhagen: Carit Andersens Forlag, 1952/1967), pp. 330-38, 2nd ed., pp. 299-307.

²⁷ Geoffrey Chaucer, “Den syngende hvide ravn og Føbus,” trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 78.

²⁸ Geoffrey Chaucer, “Den syngende hvide ravn og Føbus,” trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 78.

²⁹ Geoffrey Chaucer, “Den syngende hvide ravn og Føbus,” trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 78.

³⁰ Geoffrey Chaucer, “Geoffrey Chaucer, En ung piges hoved,” trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 48.

³¹ Geoffrey Chaucer, “Geoffrey Chaucer, De sorte klipper,” trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 10 and Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury Fortællinger*, trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 23.

³² Geoffrey Chaucer, “Geoffrey Chaucer, De sorte klipper,” trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 16 and Geoffrey Chaucer, *Geoffrey Chaucer: Canterbury Fortællinger*, trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 32.

³³ The lines quoted are translated on pp. 21, 24, 27, 30 of Geoffrey Chaucer, *Geoffrey Chaucer: Canterbury Fortællinger*, trans. Jørgen Sonne.

³⁴ Iver Kjær, “Lucidarius,” in *Den Store Danske Encyklopædi*, ed. Jørn Lund, vol. 12 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1998), p. 304. Geoffrey Chaucer, *Geoffrey Chaucer: Canterbury Fortællinger*, trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 46.

³⁵ Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London, Routledge: 1995, 2nd edition 2008).

³⁶ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Geoffrey Chaucer: Canterbury Fortællinger*, trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 45.

³⁷ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Geoffrey Chaucer: Canterbury Fortællinger*, trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 46.

³⁸ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Geoffrey Chaucer: Canterbury Fortællinger*, trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 39.

³⁹ Geoffrey Chaucer, “Geoffrey Chaucer, Forvalterens Fortælling,” trans. Jørgen Sonne, *Cavalcade*, no. 4 (1947), p. 53. Geoffrey Chaucer, *Geoffrey Chaucer: Canterbury Fortællinger*, trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 19. “Geoffrey Chaucer, Forvalterens Fortælling,” trans. Jørgen Sonne, *Humor fra hele verden*, p. 307.

⁴⁰ “Geoffrey Chaucer, Forvalterens Fortælling,” trans. Jørgen Sonne, *Humor fra hele verden*. Page number?

⁴¹ Geoffrey Chaucer, “Geoffrey Chaucer, Forvalterens Fortælling,” trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 44; Geoffrey Chaucer, *Geoffrey Chaucer: Canterbury Fortællinger*, trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 9; Geoffrey Chaucer, “Geoffrey Chaucer, Forvalterens Fortælling,” trans. Jørgen Sonne, *Humor fra hele verden*, p. 299.

⁴² Geoffrey Chaucer, “Geoffrey Chaucer, Forvalterens Fortælling,” trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 50. Geoffrey Chaucer, *Geoffrey Chaucer: Canterbury Fortællinger*, trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 15. “Geoffrey Chaucer, Forvalterens Fortælling,” trans. Jørgen Sonne, *Humor fra hele verden*, 1st ed., p. 334, 2nd ed., p. 304.

⁴³ Geoffrey Chaucer, “Geoffrey Chaucer, Forvalterens Fortælling,” trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 47; Geoffrey Chaucer, *Geoffrey Chaucer: Canterbury Fortællinger*, trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 12; Geoffrey Chaucer, “Geoffrey Chaucer, Forvalterens Fortælling,” trans. Jørgen Sonne, *Humor fra hele verden*, 1st ed., p. 332, 2nd ed., p. 301.

⁴⁴ Geoffrey Chaucer, “Geoffrey Chaucer, Forvalterens Fortælling,” trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 44; Geoffrey Chaucer, *Geoffrey Chaucer: Canterbury Fortællinger*, trans. Jørgen Sonne, (Copenhagen: L. Ihrich, 1949-1950), p. 9.

⁴⁵ Geoffrey Chaucer, "Geoffrey Chaucer, Forvalterens Fortælling," trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 45; Geoffrey Chaucer, *Geoffrey Chaucer: Canterbury Fortællinger*, trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 11.

⁴⁶ Geoffrey Chaucer, "Geoffrey Chaucer, Forvalterens Fortælling," trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 51; Geoffrey Chaucer, *Geoffrey Chaucer: Canterbury Fortællinger*, trans. Jørgen Sonne, p. 16. Geoffrey Chaucer, "Geoffrey Chaucer, Forvalterens Fortælling," trans. Jørgen Sonne, *Humor fra hele verden*, 1st ed., p. 335, 2nd ed., p. 305.

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_____. "Geoffrey Chaucer, Konen fra Bath." Trans. Lis Thorbjørnsen. *Cavalcade*, no. 3 (1947): 32-5.

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