



Tether, L., & Busby, K. (2021). Introduction: Rewriting Medieval French Literature. In L. Tether, & K. Busby (Eds.), *Rewriting Medieval French Literature: Studies in Honour of Jane H. M. Taylor* (pp. 1). DeGruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110639032>

Peer reviewed version

Link to published version (if available):
[10.1515/9783110639032](https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110639032)

[Link to publication record on the Bristol Research Portal](#)
PDF-document

This is the author accepted manuscript (AAM). The final published version (version of record) is available online via De Gruyter at <https://www.degruyter.com/document/isbn/9783110639032/html> . Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher.

University of Bristol – Bristol Research Portal

General rights

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the reference above. Full terms of use are available:
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-policy/pure/user-guides/brp-terms/>

Keith Busby and Leah Tether

Introduction: Rewriting Medieval French Literature

During her academic career, Jane H. M. Taylor has produced a world-class research record on French literature of the later Middle Ages. Indeed, tribute has already been paid to the significant influence of Taylor's scholarship by the appearance of a previous *Festschrift* (Dixon 2010), celebrating her life's work on later medieval French literature. Taylor, however, has never been one to rest on her laurels. In the last twenty-five or so years, and perhaps most notably since her retirement, she has foregrounded in her research some of the preoccupations with core processes of medieval literary creation that had partially shaped her earlier work (Taylor 1996, 1998, 2004 *inter alia*), and has developed a profile as one of the world's foremost scholars of medieval "rewriting" (see, as just some examples, Taylor 2007, 2008, 2013a, 2013b, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2017, 2023). Her focus has been on literary works composed and initially transmitted in medieval and Renaissance France, but the practice of rewriting – including modes such as continuation, translation, and adaptation – is a process that lies at the very heart of medieval literary tradition in all vernaculars, as well as in medieval textual traditions more generally. The reinterpretation of narratives across chronological, social, and/or linguistic boundaries represents not only a crucial feature of textual transmission, but also a locus of cultural exchange.

In the last ten years or so, scholarship has seen an exponential rise in interest in the practice of rewriting, perhaps understandably amongst Taylor's own students, who are now setting agendas of their own (for example, Armstrong 2010; Campbell 2017; Tether 2012, 2017), but also amongst a wider community of medievalists and early-modernists, who habitually turn to Taylor's famously lively and always meticulous work for methodological inspiration (amongst the many see, for example, Rockwell 1995; Szkilnik 2005; Kelly 2010; Grimbert and Chase 2011; Bußmann 2011; Edlich-Muth 2014; Moran 2014; Griffin 2015). Surprisingly, however, despite a growing number of studies of rewriting in relation to a given text or group of texts, what has not yet appeared – and thus what makes a volume such as the present one timely –, is an up-to-date collected volume of essays, presented in English, on the rewriting of medieval French literature more broadly. There is, of course, the excellent proceedings volume entitled *The Medieval "opus"*, edited by Douglas Kelly in 1996, but scholarship on medieval rewriting has moved on considerably

in the intervening twenty years, due in no small part to Taylor's contributions. A handful of more recent collections of studies on rewriting do exist, but in other languages. Published in German, but not specific to medieval Ur-Texts, is *Wiedererzählen* (Schumann et al 2015). More focused on literature originating from the medieval period, and France, is *Réécritures* (Kullmann and Lalonde 2015), though presented only in French. Similarly, *Übertragungen* (Bußmann et al 2005) covers rewriting of medieval German and is published in German. The present volume thus hopes to bring the topic of the transhistorical rewriting of medieval French literature to a broader audience, enabling the methodological and theoretical models outlined to be accessible to, and adoptable by, scholars working on rewriting in all vernaculars. That such an approach is warranted is evidenced by similar recently-published endeavours on the Middle English context, such as the *Festschrift* for Helen Cooper, *Romance Rewritten* (Archibald, Leitch, and Saunders 2018), and *The Transmission of Medieval Romance* (Putter and Jefferson 2018). All of these books serve to evidence both the current appetite in scholarship for the subject of rewriting, and the significance of Taylor's contribution to the field thanks to her regular appearances in both the lists of contributors and the bibliographies contained within them.

To put it succinctly, Taylor's research has demonstrated to scholars the world over that the adaptation of material to conform to the expectations, values, or literary tastes of a different audience has the potential to reveal important information regarding the acculturation and reception of medieval texts. Written by Taylor's friends, colleagues, and former students to honour both the considerable platform she has given to the later repackaging and reinterpretation of medieval French literature, and the vim and enthusiasm she herself has injected into its study, this collected volume of sixteen essays is dedicated to examining examples of rewriting practice from the twelfth to the twenty-first centuries. The volume is organized broadly chronologically, to enable the reader to witness rewriting practice as it develops across the ages. It aims to offer not only a fitting tribute to Taylor's remarkable career, but also a timely consolidation of the very latest research in the field, thus creating a go-to volume for scholars of rewriting in all contexts.

Editors' Personal Tributes to Jane H. M. Taylor

I can't remember when I first met Jane Taylor, and I don't expect she can, either. It must have been at an Arthurian Congress (Regensburg in 1979?) or one of the British Branch weekends in

the late 1970s or early 1980s. That I can't remember the time or place doesn't mean that the meeting didn't make an impression on me (I can't speak for Jane). On the contrary, I remember being at once intimidated by Jane and doubtful whether her work on what I (as a Chrétien man) foolishly considered degenerate and corrupt fifteenth-century prose was of any interest to me. How wrong I was on both counts. I am no longer intimidated, albeit still in awe, and avidly read everything she writes as a matter of course. When we met, Jane was still in the immediate aftermath of personal tragedy, but her strength of purpose and devotion to teaching and scholarship enabled her to overcome her loss. Over the years, our encounters became more and more frequent, and I sought them out, not only during conferences. Visits to Circular Road in Manchester and St Hilda's College in Oxford, pints in pubs and dinners in Thai and Indian restaurants cemented a friendship which continues to be one of the joys of my life. I also stayed in her Paris apartment on the Rue Raynouard. As a friend, scholar, and teacher, Jane is open and forthright. She doesn't always tell you what you may want to hear, a quality that has also stood her in good stead dealing with both students and colleagues as Dean of St Hilda's and Principal of Collingwood College in Durham. You don't mess with Jane, but why would you want to? As Dean and Principal, Jane willingly shouldered her part of the administrative burden, knowing that if you want something done properly, it is sometimes best to do it yourself. Yet these tasks she undertook not just from a sense of duty, but also from a desire to improve the lives of others. Jane is one of those rare scholars who writes beautifully and clearly, even on complex theoretical matters. You receive the impression that each sentence is carefully weighed before becoming part of a chapter, article, or conference presentation, yet there is nothing contrived about Jane's writing. Whether it be Villon, fourteenth- and fifteenth-century prose romance, or late medieval *recueils*, Jane is my "go-to" person, as she is for many of us and our students. If I am unfamiliar with a text she is commenting on, I want to go and read it; if I do know the text, I always wonder "why did I never think of that?" The question is rhetorical, of course. Jane's scholarship is always perfectly balanced between sound textual analysis and historical contextualization, often grounded in ideas of influential thinkers such as Pierre Bourdieu, yet without losing sight of the medieval text. In Oxford, Manchester, and Durham, Jane has been variously student and colleague of Elspeth Kennedy, Eugène Vinaver, and Fanni Bogdanow, to name but a few. If her institutional career has been a traditional British one, her scholarly activity has earned her the respect and admiration of the medievalist community on both sides of the Channel and both sides

of the Atlantic. This collection of essays, commissioned to pay tribute to Jane by exploring one of the defining themes of her scholarship, shows how wide her reach has been and how much we are all in her debt in so many ways.

Keith Busby

Unlike Keith, I remember the exact moment that I first encountered Jane Taylor, though it will probably have been of little consequence to her. As a third-year undergraduate at Durham, I was coming towards the end of my year abroad as a *Klassenassistentin* in Germany. I had selected some options for my final year, amongst them one that I thought sounded fun: “The Romance of the Grail”. The module was to be led by a new member of staff and, I’ll confess, selecting it had been far less about its focus on medieval literature, and far more because it promised to cover some cinema, including *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* and *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. A bit of light relief at the end of my degree, I thought. I’d had the privilege of having been taught by fine medievalists, such as Jenny Britnell, Ann Moss, and Neil Thomas, but it’s fair to say my fondness for medieval literature had not yet formed. In fact, I’d already drafted a proposal for an MA by Research on modern Austrian literature. Whilst in Germany, I received a bundle from the School Office, confirming my choices and offering pre-reading lists so I could prepare for the return to study. For “The Romance of the Grail”, the documentation also included a letter – yes, a letter – from its convenor, one Dr Jane Taylor. So enthusiastic and positive was this letter, I remember to this day telling my mum that this must be a freshly-minted academic, barely out of a PhD.

Needless to say, I was in for a surprise. Not because Jane was not the epitome of how she came across in her letter, but because she was a well-established academic, a College Principal and a past President of the International Arthurian Society no less, whose enthusiasm for the work she did seemed not to have gone the way of that of a few other senior staff members at Durham. She was inspirational in the classroom, and barely two weeks of our module went by before I had become a convert to Old French. But again, now I look back, perhaps it was less the content than the delivery. I’d always struggled to get more than “very good” grades at university, but just one tutorial with Jane was revelatory. She put her finger on what I was doing wrong immediately, and with that transformed my marks profile. The issue was a basic one, but it had taken Jane to see it. I knew then that she was someone that I needed as a mentor and as a role

model, and so – much to my German tutor’s dismay – I withdrew my MA application and wrote a new one to work with Jane. And the rest, as they say is history.

But I don’t want to give the impression that Jane was “just” an excellent tutor. It’s true that throughout my research degrees, and well beyond, Jane – as any good tutor – continued to fill up the margins of my draft work with helpful, considered advice for improvement (though I will say, in terms of volume, I think she is unsurpassed: ask any of her students just how averse to white space Jane is, with her sometimes even turning the page over to fill up the all-too-blank reverse side...). Much more important than this, though, is the friendship I enjoy with her – as well as the other relationships that our initial connection as supervisor/supervisee allowed me to develop. For instance, were it not for Jane, I’d not have met Keith so early in my career, and been so lucky as to have his help and support since that fateful day in Kalamazoo (admittedly, the price for such support is always the promise of curry, but this still strikes me as a fair exchange). There’s also the global family of “Jane-ites” (Jane’s supervisees), with whom you seem automatically to form an immediate, life-long connection, just by virtue of knowing what it is to receive a “Jane letter” (a mildly terrifying device Jane uses to tell you politely, but also firmly, that you need to sort something out in your work, and sharpish!).

These days, as well as still turning to Jane for research advice, I feel lucky to have had many opportunities for long, surprisingly strenuous(!), walks in her Lakeland surrounds, accompanied by her perfect-borrowed dog, Tess, and always followed by an amazing home-cooked dinner and just a bit too much wine in her hilltop home (my husband, a German, claims Jane’s cabbage salad is “erst-klassig” – praise indeed). Out in the wilds of Cumbria, usually dealing with last night’s hangover whilst Jane appears entirely unaffected, I’ve lost count of the times she’s said “it’ll just be a bit of a scramble, honey”, only to be faced with a vertical rock face up which Jane seems to glide with ease whilst I, on hands and knees, do my best to keep up. In a sense, though, I’ve always had that feeling of following in her wake, and the contributions to this volume give the impression that most of us feel that way. This is probably why I genuinely felt I’d finally made it when Jane asked, not all that long ago, if I might like to write an article together. I’m as proud of this article, which will eventually appear in *Arthurian Literature* (Taylor and Tether 2023), as I am of anything else I’ve written. Standing on the shoulders of giants, indeed.

Leah Tether

References

- Archibald, Elizabeth, Megan Leitch, and Corinne Saunders, eds. *Romance Rewritten: The Evolution of Middle English Romance*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2018.
- Armstrong, Adrian. "Printing and Metrical Naturalisation: Jean Molinet's *Neuf Preux de Gourmandise*." *Essays in Later Medieval French Literature: The Legacy of Jane Taylor*. Ed. Rebecca Dixon. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010. 143–59.
- Bußmann, Britta. *Wiedererzählen, Weitererzählen und Beschreiben: der jüngere Titurel als ekphrastischer Roman*. Heidelberg: Winter, 2011.
- Bußmann, Britta, Albrecht Hausmann, Annelie Kreft, and Cornelia Logemann, eds. *Übertragungen: Formen und Konzepte von Reproduktion in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit: Formen und Konzepte von Reproduktion in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*. Berlin: DeGruyter, 2005.
- Campbell, Laura Chuhan, *The Medieval Merlin Tradition in France and Italy: Prophecy, Paradox, and Translatio*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017.
- Dixon, Rebecca, ed. *Essays in Later Medieval French Literature: The Legacy of Jane Taylor*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010.
- Edlich-Muth, Miriam. *Malory and his European Contemporaries: Adapting Late Medieval Arthurian Romance Collections*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014.
- Griffin, Miranda. *Transforming Tales: Rewriting Metamorphosis in Medieval French Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Grimbert, Joan Tasker, and Carol J. Chase, trans. *Chrétien de Troyes in Prose: The Burgundian Erec et Cligés*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011.
- Kelly, Douglas. "Fictio personae and subtle rewriting in later medieval French poetry." *Essays in Later Medieval French Literature: The Legacy of Jane Taylor*. Ed. Rebecca Dixon. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010. 91–106.
- Kelly, Douglas, ed. *The Medieval "opus": Imitation, Rewriting and Transmission in the French Tradition: Proceedings of the Symposium Held at the Institute for Research in the*

Commented [LE1]: Is this comma correct? For other titles (Bußmann et al. 2005) you have no comma in front of the "and".

Commented [LT2R1]: Yes - it's the serial or Oxford comma, used before 'and' in lists of three or more things. It *should* be consistent throughout...

Humanities, October 5–7 1995, the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996.

Kullmann, Dorothea, and Shaun Lalonde, eds. *Réécritures: Regards nouveaux sur la reprise et le remaniement de textes, dans la littérature française et au-delà, du Moyen Âge à la Renaissance*. Toronto: PIMS, 2015.

Moran, Patrick. *Lectures cycliques: Le réseau inter-romanesque dans les cycles du Graal du XIIIe siècle*. Paris: Champion, 2016.

Putter, Ad, and Judith A. Jefferson, eds. *The Transmission of Medieval Romance: Metre, Manuscripts and Early Prints*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2018.

Rockwell, Paul Vincent. *Rewriting Resemblance in Medieval French Romance: Ceci n'est pas un graal*. New York, NY and London: Garland, 1995.

Schumann, Elke, Elisabeth Güllich, Gabriele Lucius-Hoene, and Stefan Pfänder, eds. *Wiedererzählen: Formen und Funktionen einer kulturellen Praxis*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015.

Szkilnik, Michelle. "Medieval Adaptations and Translations of Chrétien's Works." *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*. Ed. Norris J. Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimbert. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005. 202–13.

Taylor, Jane H. M. "Rewriting: Translation, Continuation and Adaptation." *Handbook of Arthurian Romance: King Arthur's Court in Medieval European Literature*. Ed. Leah Tether and Johnny McFadyen. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017. 162–82.

Taylor, Jane H. M. "Experiments in Fiction: Framing and Reframing Romance at the End of the Middle Ages." *Cahiers de Recherches Médiévales et Humanistes* 30 (2015a). 287–95.

Taylor, Jane H. M. "From courtoisie to galanterie: What Becomes of Tristan in the Renaissance?" *Réécritures: Regards nouveaux sur la reprise et le remaniement de textes, dans la littérature française et au-delà, du Moyen Âge à la Renaissance*. Ed. Dorothea Kullmann and Shaun Lalonde. Toronto: PIMS, 2015b. 83–94.

Taylor, Jane H. M. *Rewriting Arthurian Romance in Renaissance France: From Manuscript to Printed Book*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014.

- Taylor, Jane H. M. "Arthur in Manuscript in Renaissance France: The case of *Ysaïe le Triste*, Gotha, MS A 688." *Journal of the International Arthurian Society* 1 (2013a): 140–160.
- Taylor, Jane H. M. "Rewriting Chrétien Three Centuries Later or More..." *Chrétien de Troyes et la tradition du roman arthurien en vers*. Ed. Annie Combes, Patrizia Serra, Richard Trachsler and Maurizio Viridis. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013b. 329–341.
- Taylor, Jane H. M. "'Minds of the Vulgar Sort': The Arthur of the Renaissance and the Anxiety of Reception." 22^e Congrès de la Société Internationale Arthurienne, Rennes 2008. Formerly available at <<http://www.uhb.fr/alc/ias/actes/pdf/taylor.pdf>>.
- Taylor, Jane H. M. "Antiquarian Arthur: Publishing the Round Table in Sixteenth-Century France." *L'Héritage de Chrétien de Troyes*. Ed. William W. Kibler. *Cahiers de recherche médiévales et humanistes* 14 (2007): 127–42.
- Taylor, Jane H. M. "La Reine-Fée in the *Roman de Perceforest*: Rewriting, Rethinking." *Arthurian Studies in Honor of P. J. C. Field*. Ed. Bonnie Wheeler. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004. 81–91.
- Taylor, Jane H. M. "The Significance of the Insignificant: Reading Reception in the Burgundian Prose *Cligès*." *Fifteenth-Century Studies*. 24 (1998). 183–97.
- Taylor, Jane H. M. "The Sense of a Beginning: Genealogy and Plenitude in Late Medieval Narrative Cycles." *Transsexualities: Of Cycles and Cyclicity in Medieval French Literature*. Ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox. Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1996. 93–123.
- Taylor, Jane H. M., and Leah Tether. "Navigating and Indexing Arthurian Romance in Benoît Rigaud's edition of *Lancelot du Lac* (1591)." *Arthurian Literature* 38 (forthcoming 2023).
- Tether, Leah. *Publishing the Grail in Medieval and Renaissance France*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017.
- Tether, Leah. *The Continuations of Chrétien's Perceval: Content and Construction, Extension and Ending*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012.