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NOTE

This contribution is part of a larger dialogue of three articles and one responding piece that form the current issue of *JOLCEL*. The other contributions are “Controversial Topics in Literature and Education: Hrotswitha and Donatus on Terence’s Rapes” by Chrysanthi Demetriou (pp. 2–22) and “*Introite, pueri!* The School-Room Performance of George Buchanan’s Latin *Medea* in Bordeaux” by Lucy C.M.M. Jackson (pp. 43–61). The response piece is “Latin Education and Classical Reception: the Minor Genres” by Rita Copeland (pp. 62–66).

The Meaning and Use of *fabula* in the *Dialogus creaturarum moralizatus*

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ABSTRACT

The first book printed in Sweden in 1483 was the North-Italian compilation *Dialogus creaturarum moralizatus*, usually dated to the middle of the fourteenth century and attributed to Nicolaus of Bergamo in some manuscripts and to Mayno di Mayneri of Milano in others. In his preface the author uses the practise of Jesus to justify his intentions, since “Jesus once used *fabulis Palestinorum more* to lead human beings to the road of truth through parables.” Claiming that his book might prove useful to preachers against spiritual fatigue, the author will “introduce moral teaching in an entertaining way to exterminate vices and promote virtues,” a view that reflects Phaedrus’ motto *risum movere et vitam docere* in the prologue to his first Book of fables as well as e.g. Gregory the Great’s use of exempla, “The examples of the faithful sometimes convert the minds of the listeners better than the words of the teachers.”

The main subject of this paper is the first book printed in Sweden, Johan Snell’s publication of the North-Italian compilation of exempla and fables in 122 chapters, entitled *Dialogus creaturarum moralizatus* (hereafter *DCM*). In the early 1480s, the archbishop Jacob Ulfeson of Uppsala invited the German printer Johan Snell to continue his activities in Sweden and print the missal for the archbishopric, after Snell had printed a prayer book in Odense as the first Danish book in 1482. While preparing the practical aspects of the publication of the liturgical *Missale Upsalense*—a huge and complicated production which then appeared in 1484—Snell took the initiative to print the above-mentioned non-liturgical *DCM* at his own expenses. The printing process was completed on the vigil of the apostle Thomas, i.e., on December 20, 1483, as expressed in the colophon of the book, which also presents the title of the book and an indication of some of its contents.¹

¹ *Dyalogus Creaturarum Moralizatus 1483 – Skapelsens sedelärande samtal 1483*, commentary by Johan Bernström, translation by Monica Hedlund (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1983), (hereafter *DCM 1483*). The book is a facsimile edition of Johan Snell’s edition including a modern Swedish translation, which was published to celebrate the 500 years jubilee of the first printed book in Sweden.

“Presens liber dialogus creaturarum appellatus, iocundis fabulis plenus, impressus per Johannem Snell artis impressorie magistrum, in Stockholm inceptus et munere dei finitus est, anno domini mcccclxxxiii, mensis decembris in vigilia Thome.”² Snell was most certainly inspired by the Dutch printer Gheraert Leeu, who had published the *editio princeps* of the Latin text in Gouda in 1480. Comparing the two editions, it seems quite evident that Snell copied or imitated the woodcuts which decorated each of the 122 chapters in Leeu’s edition, representing the creatures of the chapter. Moreover, Leeu had published reprints of his edition in 1481 and 1482, also in Gouda, and later in Antwerp in 1486 and 1491, as well as four editions of the fourteenth-century Dutch translation of *DCM* in the 1480s.³ Judging from the sheer number of editions and translations in the 1480s, the *DCM* appears to have been a popular work and the book market both promising and lucrative at the time when Snell decided to publish his edition of the work. Otherwise, he probably would not even have considered investing his own money in printing the *DCM* as the first book in Sweden.⁴

The title of my paper is partly inspired by the formula “iocundis fabulis plenus” in the above-mentioned colophon at the end of the book, and by the meaning of the phrase “salvator noster [...] fabulis Palestinorum more usus est” in the prologue of Leeu’s and Snell’s editions quoted below.⁵ In this text, which is missing in the medieval manuscripts transmitting *DCM*,⁶ the editors present the aim and purpose of the book with a direct reference to the didactic practice used by Jesus Christ, “praedicatorum perfecta forma” (“the perfect model for preachers”), because he in the Gospels “fabulis Palestinorum more usus est, ut rerum similitudine ad viam veritatis perduceret.”⁷

Leaving aside the expression *Palestinorum more*, a term which according to the medieval contexts in which the phrase occurs seems to indicate aspects of Christ’s use of *similitudes* in his preaching,⁸ the word *fabulis* appears in both the above cases to have a more general significance such as ‘tale’ or ‘story’ similar to the rather pejorative meaning of the verb *fabuletur* in the leonine hexameter “meretrices propulsentur nec cum ipsis fabuletur” in *DCM* 31 (*De mandragora et Venere*, “About the mandrake and Venus”),⁹ and the adjective

² “The present book is entitled *Dialogus creaturarum*, full of joyful stories, printed by Johan Schell, master of printing, undertaken in Stockholm and finished with the help of God on the vigil of St Thomas in December 1483.” Unless otherwise indicated, the translations in this study are my own.

³ See the information in Carmen Cardelle de Hartmann, *Lateinische Dialoge 1200–1400: Literaturhistorische Studie und Repertorium*, *Mittellateinische Studien und Texte* 37 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007), 524–29.

⁴ A non-critical edition of the Latin text of the incunables is included in Johann Georg Theodor Grässe, *Die beiden ältesten lateinischen Fabelbücher des Mittelalters: des Bischofs Cyrillus Speculum Sapientiae und des Nicolaus Pergamenus Dialogus Creaturarum* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, [1880] 1965).

⁵ “[F]ull of joyful stories”; “our Saviour [...] used fables/told stories according to the Palestinian/Eastern tradition”

⁶ See Gregory Kratzman and Elizabeth Gee, *The Dialogues of Creatures Moralyzed: A Critical Edition*, *Medieval and Renaissance Texts* 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 9.

⁷ “Salvator enim noster olim, praedicatorum perfecta forma, fabulis Palestinorum more usus est, ut rerum similitudine ad viam veritatis perduceret.” / “Once our Saviour, the perfect model for preachers, used fables/told stories according to the Palestinian/Eastern tradition in order to lead people to the road of truth through parables.”

⁸ According to the database Library of Latin Texts, the expression appears in only two ninth-century texts: the anonymous Irish (?) commentary *Anonymi in Mattheum*, ed. Bengt Löfstedt, *CC CM* 153 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 18:23, 232: “Secundum historiam more Palestinorum loquitur euangelista,” and the glosses of the German Benedictine Otfrid von Weissenburg, *Glossae in Matthaum*, ed. Cesare Grifoni (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 18:23, 232: “Iuxta morem Syrorum et maxime Palestinorum parabolam posuit, ut quod per simplex praeceptum teneri ab auditoribus non potest, per similitudinem teneatur.”

⁹ “Prostitutes should be repelled and one should not share gossip with them.” *DCM* 1483, fol. 67v.

fabulosus in the phrase *verba fabulosa* (“fictive, false, empty words”) in, for example, *DCM* 51 (*De herodio et milvo*, “About the bird herodius and the kite”) and 86 (*De leone qui uxora vit duos catulos*, “About the lion who married off two sons”).¹⁰ Elsewhere, in the seven cases where *fabula* appears in the compilation itself, the word signifies the specific literary term ‘fable,’ which is also the basic meaning of the noun *fabulator* (“fable author”) in *DCM* 58 (*De carflancho, qui voluit se regulari*, “About the gerfalcon who wanted to live as a monk”)¹¹ and the five cases of the verb *fabulatur* (“to tell a fable”) in *DCM* 46, 76, 86, 100, and 117.¹²

But before we turn to the analysis of the actual use of fables in the single chapters, let me start with a short presentation of the compilatory character of the *Dialogus creaturarum moralizatus*. Transmitted in a dozen of manuscripts and attributed in one manuscript to Nicolaus of Bergamo and in others to the Milanese physician Mayno de Mayneriis,¹³ *DCM* is a compilation of biblical, Christian and classical exempla, stories, and moral sentences, and it is usually dated to the middle of the fourteenth century. The manuscripts reveal that there are two versions of the compilation, a *versio longa* and a *versio brevia*,¹⁴ but only a few of these manuscripts include a short prologue, the contents of which are similar to the contents of the prologues in Leeu’s and Snell’s editions, as can be seen in the following transcription of the prologue in Milano, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, ms. I 64 Inf.:¹⁵

Sicut de palea granum et de saxo extrahimus aquam, sic ex verbis similitudinariis et fabulosis extrahere possimus et aluere nos pane vite et intellectus et aquam sapientie salutaris potare. Idcirco nullus nostris fabulis deroget, sed ad utilitatem earum attendat, quia dicit apostolus ad Romanos: Quaecumque scripta sunt ad nostram doctrinam scripta sunt. Nullus autem ignoret hoc esse Domini de divinis scripturis. Verumtamen quaeque scribuntur per similitudinem narrantur ea quae legentibus sunt utilia et audientibus delectabilia, sicut ex terra colligimus aurum et de spinis rosam et de apibus etiam extrahimus etiam.¹⁶

The length of the text in some chapters varies in the two versions of *DCM*, but both contain 122 *dialogi* and have structured them in the same sequence. The 122 chapters can be divided in seven parts according to the subject(s) of each chapter in the following manner: Planets and stars (1–12), gems and metals (13–24), herbs and trees (25–36), fish, reptiles, and sea

¹⁰ *DCM* 1483, fol. 70r and fol. 105v.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 77v.

¹² *Ibid.*, fols. 54r, 96v, 109r, 125v, 143r. See also the various meanings of these words in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. P. G. W. Glare (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1982, 665.

¹³ See the detailed discussion on the authorship of *DCM* in Pio Rajna, *Intorno al cosiddetto Dialogus creaturarum ed al suo autore* (Torino: Loescher, 1888).

¹⁴ Regarding the manuscripts, see Carmen Cardelle de Hartmann and Estrella Pérez Rodríguez, “Text im Wandel und editorische Praxis: Der lateinische *Contemptus sublimitatis* (*Dialogus creaturarum*) in der handschriftlichen Überlieferung,” in *Didaktisches Erzählen. Formen literarischer Belehrung in Orient und Okzident*, ed. Regula Forster and Romy Günthart (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010), 28–29.

¹⁵ My transcription of the prologue in Milano, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, ms. I 64 Inf., fol. 1.

¹⁶ “Just like we extract grain from the chaff and water from the stone, so we should be able to extract and nourish ourselves with the bread of life and knowledge from the words of similitudes and fables and drink the healthy water of wisdom. Therefore, no one shall detract from our fables but attend to their usefulness, since the apostle says in his letter to the Romans (15:4): ‘For what things so ever were written, were written for our learning.’ And no one shall ignore that this is the Lord’s words about the Holy Script. However, whatsoever is written, through similitudes are told the things which are useful for those who read and pleasant for those who listen, just like we gather gold from the earth and extract the rose from the thorns as well as honey from the bees.”

monsters (37–48), birds and winged creatures (49–84), animals and human beings (85–120), and the life of mankind (121–22).

In order to give some impression of the general structure and the various elements of the single *dialogi* of the compilation, I have chosen to present and analyse *Dialogus 54 (De strutione et chirurgico)*, the main characters of which are an ostrich and a physician. In order to facilitate the analysis of the single elements of this particular *dialogus*, I have added a rubric in bold to indicate the significance of these elements.

De strutione et chirurgico, dialogus LIIII.

[Definition:] Strutio est avis magna et potens, pennata et alata, tamen in astra elevare se non potest propter imbecillitatem alarum suarum.

[Dialogus:] Erat enim strutio quidam satis pulcher et decorus, qui alas habebat fortissimas et venustas, tamen in alis pennas duas baiulabat retortas, de quibus plurimum tristabatur. Quapropter ad chirurgicum perrexit dicens: Satis egregius sum et venustus, sed pennas istas retortas, volo, quod amputes mihi, quoniam aliquantum me deturbant. Chirurgicus autem pennas retortas illi amputavit et cum tali unguento ei alas unxit, quod aliae pennae alarum ceciderunt. Propter quod semper impotens fuit ad volandum. Strutio vero amaricatus usque ad mortem ploravit dicens: Sicut nos plasmavit, stemus, Deus, nunquam nos immutemus.

[Author’s comment:] Sic enim nonnulli curiosi et vani dum a conditore suo satis sunt bene formati, non referunt gratiam conditori, immo si aliquam maculam haberent in corpore, student modis omnibus eam mederi, de maculis quoque animae nihil mederi procurant.

[Arguments 1–3:] Sed sicut dicit Augustinus: Non enim exteriorem pulchritudinem requirit invisibilis sponsus. Ideo dicitur Proverbiorum XXXI: Fallax gratia et vana est pulchritudo. De talibus ait Augustinus: Ecce omnia pulchra sunt cum hominibus et ipsi sunt turpes.

[Argument 4:] Unde quidam rex fecit convivium principibus suis, et cum non esset aliquis angulus in domo eius, qui non esset coopertus purpura et aliis rebus preciosis, affuit quidam philosophus, qui cum vellet exspuere, exspuit in faciem regis. Et cum ministri propter hoc vellet eum ducere ad suspendendum, non permisit rex, sed quaesivit a philosopho, quare hoc fecisset. Cui respondit: Vidi alia loca plena argento et auro et gemmis et purpuris pretiosis, et ideo in barbam regis incrassatam et ex pinguedine et cibo immundam exspui, non enim vidi locum minus nitidum. Quod audiens rex compunctus est et humiliatus. Illi vero, qui se decorant et ornant ex auro vel alio ornamento, cito exspoliantur.

[Argument 5:] Prout refert Esopus, quod quaedam cornix deformis et nigra, perrexit ad nuptias, sed antequam ad nuptias intraret, a qualibet ave accepit plumam unam et ornavit se. Erat itaque pulchra valde non natura, sed arte. Et dum intraret domum nuptiarum, mirabantur ceterae aves, quae illic convenerant, pulchritudinem illius. Venerunt autem aves illae, quarum plumas furata erat, et acceperunt singulae plumas suas et sic cornix remansit nigra et deformis ut prius.

[Argument 6:] Accidit Parisiis, in generali processione, quod quaedam simea cuiusdam dominae trecias alienis crinibus, quas deferebat, coram omni populo abstraxit, et turpis ac decapillata ad modum cornicis depositis alienis plumis remansit, et iudicio Dei hoc accidit.¹⁷

¹⁷ DCM 1483, fols. 72r–73r. “[Definition:] The ostrich is a large and powerful bird, with feathers and wings, but it cannot lift itself to the stars because of the weakness of its wings. [Dialogus:] Once there was

Almost every chapter begins with a brief presentation or definition of the creature(s) mentioned in the headline. In this chapter, the ostrich is described as a large and powerful bird equipped with both feathers and wings. However, it is said to be unable to fly “propter imbecillitatem alarum suarum,” a rather peculiar expression. The meaning of *imbecillitas* is ‘weakness’ and ‘feebleness,’ and this significance is valid with regard to both body and mind, as well as ‘helplessness,’ ‘lack of power’ and ‘imbecility,’ concerning personal skills and abilities. Although only the ostrich’s bodily weakness is described in the initial presentation, its lack of mental power is manifest in the subsequent interaction with the physician, who agrees to operate the bird according to its demands but fails to fulfil its desire. The ostrich’s self-conscious words when approaching the physician for his help, “satis egregius sum et venustus, sed [...],” might be interpreted as a sign of the mental ‘imbecility’ which compelled it to deliberate an operation at all and think that the physician would be able to solve its problem. The adversative conjunction *sed* is important in this context and carries momentum and significance. Comparing the self-presentation of the opening to the concluding *sens moral*, which the ostrich expresses in its leonine hexameter as the end of the *dialogus*, we may observe that although the operation failed to cure the presumed bodily weakness, it did none the less prove to be a more successful cure with regard to the ostrich’s mental imbecility.

In this specific case, the author only mentions the ostrich’s lack of wings and its inability to fly as the prelude to the subsequent dialogue between the bird and the physician, without indicating his source of information. However, he does in a number of cases quote and/or refer to classical, Christian and medieval authorities, for instance to the medieval authors Radolphus Brito and Papias of Hierapolis with regard to the green colour of the emerald in

an ostrich, rather beautiful and fair, and she had very strong and comely wings, but she did not like two backwards-turned feathers in the wings, which made her very sad. Therefore, she went to the physician and said: ‘I am sufficiently honourable and beautiful, but I want you to amputate these backwards-turned feathers,’ because they frustrated her somewhat. Then the physician amputated the feathers for her and anointed her wings with such an ointment that the other feathers on the wings fell off. Because of that she was forever unable to fly. The ostrich was very bitter and cried till she died while saying: ‘Let us remain as God formed us, and let us never change.’ **[Author’s comment:]** Likewise some curious and vain people, although they are sufficiently well-equipped by their creator, do not give him due honor, but rather if they have some defect on their body, they are eager to remedy it by any means, but they seek no remedy for the defects of their souls. **[Arguments 1–3:]** But like Augustine says: The invisible spouse requires no external beauty. Therefor it says in Proverbs 31: Favor is deceitful and vain is beauty. About these things Augustine says: Look, everything is beautiful about human beings, but they are themselves vile. **[Arguments 4:]** Likewise, some king held a feast for his leaders, and since there was not any corner in his house that was not covered with purple and other precious things, some philosopher, who was present, spat the king in his face when he wanted to spit. When the servants wanted to drag him away in order to hang him, the king did not allow it but instead asked the philosopher why he had done that. He responded: I saw all other places full of silver and gold, gems and purple and precious clothes, and therefore I spat in the king’s stout beard, which is filled with fatness and food, because I did not see any place less glittering. When the king heard that, he felt compunction and humiliation. Thus, those who decorate and ornate themselves with gold or other kinds of ornamentation are quickly undressed. **[Arguments 5:]** Likewise, Aesop tells us that some deformed and black crow went to a wedding, but before it entered the festivities, it took a feather from any other bird and dressed itself with them. Consequently, it was beautiful, not in a natural but in an artificial way. When it entered the house of the wedding, the other birds that had come together there admired its beauty. Then came the birds, whose feathers she had stolen, and each single bird took back their feathers, and so the crow remained black and deformed as it was before. **[Arguments 6:]** It happened in Paris, in a secular procession that a monkey pulled off the fake plaits, which some lady was wearing, in front of all people. And she was left standing ugly and without hair like the crow, having lost its feathers. And it happened through the will of God.”

DCM 14 (*De smaragdo et anulo*, “About the emerald and the ring”),¹⁸ to the Roman poet Horace concerning the substance and medical use of the wormwood plant in *DCM* 28 (*De abrotano et Lepore*, “About the wormwood plant and the hare”)¹⁹ and to the late antique or early medieval Christian authors Isidore of Sevilla and Ambrose of Milan in order to describe the deceitful and fraudulent character of the thievish partridge in *DCM* 79 (*De perdice fure*).²⁰

The second part of the *dialogus* contains the dialogue and/or interaction of the creatures involved, and although this part of the chapters is never described or defined as *fabula*, its literary elements are comparable to similar stories in medieval bestiaries and collections of fables.²¹ This section of the chapters normally concludes with a leonine hexameter (or two) expressed by one of the characters to present the *sens moral* of the story. As mentioned above, the ostrich in the present case deplored the bodily consequences of its attempt to change the natural form and characteristics of its body through an operation, and subsequently exclaims: “Sicut nos plasmavit, stemus, / Deus, nunquam nos mutemus,”²² which in the early modern English translation of *DCM* from ca. 1530 becomes: “As Godde hath ordeynyd vs in euery pointe, /let vs continewe and not owre self disioynte.”²³

Considering the very title of my paper, the second parts of the 122 chapters appear the more interesting from a literary point of view. In this often larger part of the *dialogi*, the author not only offers his own analysis of the moral of the dialogue and its concluding leonine hexameter(s) but also illustrates and expands it with quotations from and references to the vast arsenal of antique and medieval Latin and Greek literature, often with a quotation from the Bible as his first example or argument.

If we then apply to our analysis of *DCM* the prevailing medieval hermeneutic model of the four senses, which originated in Late Antiquity and soon became the model to read and interpret the books of the Bible, and which later on was applied as the primary model to interpret Christian texts, we should read the first part of each chapter according to the *sensus literalis* or *historicus*, while the second part should be read according to the *sensus spiritualis*. The latter might be divided further into the *sensus allegoricus* or *typologicus*, the *sensus moralis* or *tropologicus* and the *sensus anagogicus*, as it is expressed in a short epigram quoted by the Franciscan friar Nicolas of Lyra in his *Postilla in Galatas* (4, 3) and sometimes attributed to the Dominican monk Augustinus de Dacia:²⁴

Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria,
Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia.²⁵

Let us continue the analysis of the second part of *DCM* 54 and apply this hermeneutic model to the various elements of this section. In his own reflection upon the *sensus spiritualis* or figurative meaning of the ostrich’s fate and the lesson learned, as it is expressed in its

¹⁸ *DCM* 1483, fol. 27r.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, fol. 46v.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 99r.

²¹ See, e.g., Baudoin van den Abeele, “L’allégorie animale dans les encyclopédies latines du Moyen Âge,” in *L’animal exemplaire au Moyen Âge*, ed. Jacques Berlioz and Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1999), 123–43.

²² “Such as God has formed us, let us remain, and let us never change ourselves.”

²³ Kratzman and Gee, *The Dialogues of Creatures Moralized*, 141.

²⁴ See Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: Les quatre sens de l’écriture*, vol. I (Paris: Aubier, 1961), 3.

²⁵ “The letter teaches events, allegory what to believe, morality what to do, anagogy where to aim for.” See Nicolas of Lyra, *Prologus ... de commendatione sacrae Scripturae in generali*, in *Postilla super totam Bibliam* (Migne, *Patrologia cursus completus, series Latina* (hereafter *PL*) 113.28D); and *Ejusdem Nicolai de Lira Prologus*, *ibid.* 113.33D.

leonine hexameter, the author picks up the significance of the ostrich's opening statement about its bodily status compared to its mental imbecility, when he says that many "curiosi et vani" ("curious and vain people") are sufficiently well-built with regard to their bodies. However, in their vainness they fail to thank the Creator for this natural condition and instead do their utmost to remedy even the tiniest bodily defect. But such vain human beings should have cared more about their mental and spiritual defects ("maculae animae nihil mederi procurant"), instead of worrying about some small bodily defect ("aliquam maculam in corpore"), as the author deploras when he applies the *sensus moralis* to the story of the ostrich and the physician.

In order to corroborate his argument, the author introduces six different authorities and stories, which all attest that Christ is looking for the inner and not the exterior beauty. The first three elements are purely quotations, which may serve almost as one-liners presenting Christian values and beliefs. The first one is about Christ, who is described as the invisible bridegroom seeking the inner beauty of his bride, in a quotation attributed to Augustine,²⁶ which is actually an abbreviated quotation from chapter 6 in Hugh of St. Victor's *Expositio in regulam sancti Augustini*.²⁷ The second argument is a quotation from *Proverbs* 31:30 ("Favour is deceitful and vain is beauty"), and the third one a modified quotation of the statement about human beings in Augustine's *Confessiones* 5, 2: "Ecce pulchra sunt cum eis omnia, et ipsi sunt turpes."²⁸

To counterbalance these three short statements, the author presents three stories which serve as exempla in the second part of his analysis. Without indicating the source of his fourth argument, he introduces an exemplum about a rich king who got spat in his face by a philosopher when he was throwing a party in his golden palace. Although the servants immediately caught the culprit in order to hang him, the king himself was eager to learn the reason for this behaviour. When asked by the king, the philosopher told him that he could not find any place less glittering ("non vidi locum minus nitidum"). Once again, we may observe the exterior shallowness in the king's golden palace as opposed to the inner mental strength of the philosopher's reply, an immaterial strength which leaves the king speechless, ashamed, and humiliated in his material wealth. Just like the ostrich, the king learns his lesson the hard way. Although both persons and settings in this story are portrayed as secular, the reaction of the king is described in purely Christian terms, "compunctus et humiliatus" ("remorseful and humiliated"), which underlines the significance of the above-mentioned Christian-tinged one-liners.

As his fifth argument, the author presents the well-known and wide-spread fable about the crow and its borrowed feathers (Barry Index 101).²⁹ In this chapter, it is attributed to Aesop, but it is also known in variant versions in Greek by Aphantius (no. 31) and Babrius (no. 72), and in Latin by Phaedrus (I 3), Adamar of Chabannes (no. 26), Odo of Cheriton (no. 89) and Walter of England (no. 35). In the present prose version, the crow enters a wedding party dressed in coloured feathers, which she had collected from a number of other birds. In her new outfit, the crow is described as beautiful "non natura sed arte" ("not in a natural but in an artificial way"), and once again the adversative *sed* should be observed

²⁶ Regarding the complex question of authenticity and attribution see Francois Dolbeau, "Critique d'attribution, critique d'authenticité. Reflexions préliminaires," *Filologia mediolatina* vi-vii (1999–2000): 33–61.

²⁷ Hugh of St. Victor, *Expositio in regulam sancti Augustini* (Migne, *PL* 176.897, chap. 6).

²⁸ "Behold, everything about them is beautiful, yet they are themselves vile." Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones*, ed. Luc Verheijen, *CC SL* 27 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981), 5, 2, 1.

²⁹ See B.E. Perry, ed., *Babrius and Phaedrus*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1975), 441.

as a specific marker. At first she is admired by the other guests. But when the owners of the borrowed feathers arrive at the wedding party, they begin to retrieve their lost feathers and leave the crow standing “*nigra et deformis ut prius*” (“black and ugly as it was before”), defeathered by the other birds.

Finally, probably as a contemporaneous illustration and parallel to Aesop’s fable, the author concludes the second part of *dialogus* 54 by telling the story of an incident which had taken place in Paris. In the middle of an official, secular procession a monkey pulled off the fake plaits of a certain lady and left her standing “*turpis ac decapillata*” (“ugly and hairless”), just like the crow after it had been stripped off its borrowed feathers (“*ad modum cornicis depositis alienis plumis*”). And this was the will of God, concludes the author, thereby reaffirming the truth formulated in the ostrich’s leonine hexameter.

Turning to the specific use and the figurative and didactic function of the literary fables in *DCM*, the phrase “*refert Esopus*” (“Aesop says”), sometimes with *prout* or *unde*, appears eleven of the seventeen times that the Greek fabulist is mentioned and indicates the introduction of a specific fable. The references are probably to fables included in the late antique or early medieval collection entitled *Aesopus latinus*, which contains a large number of recycled prose versions of the poetic fables of Phaedrus, the Roman fabulist. Besides the name of Aesop, we find the noun *fabula* used five times and *fabulator* once, as indicated above, as well as the verb *fabulatur* five times to introduce the fable that follows.

In general, I have found that the author is quite loyal to the contents of the antique fables in his use and analysis of the examples he has chosen. This is the case, for instance, for Phaedrus I 5 concerning the dangers of forming a *societas leonina* in *DCM* 20 (*De auro et argento*, “About gold and silver”),³⁰ Phaedrus I.24 about the frog that wants to be as large as the cow in *DCM* 42 (*De sturione qui ad mare perrexit*, “About the sturgeon who swam to the sea”),³¹ and the fable about King Midas and his magic touch in *DCM* 87 (*De grife tyranno*, “About the tyrant griffin”).³² In almost all these cases, the function of the selected fables is to illustrate the *sens moral* of the chapters in which they appear, i.e., the *sensus tropologicus/moralis* of the medieval hermeneutic model.

Only in one case do I suspect that the author has misunderstood or misinterpreted one of the included fables of Phaedrus, which I believe is the case regarding the first fable in Phaedrus’ collection about the wolf and the lamb included in the above-mentioned *DCM* 51 (*De herodio et milvo*). In *DCM* 51, two birds of prey are the main characters, the mysterious *herodius* bird and the smaller kite, who keeps offending his stronger opponent. After the kite has ignored all warnings issued by the *herodius* and continued his offensive behaviour, the latter bird attacks and kills the kite. Due to the kite’s provocation and his own reaction in self-defence, the *herodius* then utters his leonine hexameter: “*Qui vult infestare fortem, perit atque quaerit mortem,*” which in the early modern English translation becomes: “He that wyll fight and stryue with the stronge, Perisshith many tymes and sekyth his deth amonge.”³³ Considering the difference in physical power between the two birds of prey as well as the moral aspects of the story, the kite, although being the inferior, is characterized as the offending party, and the retaliation of the stronger and offended *herodius* comes as no surprise to the reader. In order to support this view the author introduces a biblical proverb from *Ecclesiasticus* or *Sirach* 8:1: “*Non litiges cum homine potente, ne forte incidas in manus*

³⁰ *DCM* 1483, fol. 36r.

³¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 50v.

³² *Ibid.*, fol. 110r.

³³ “He who wants to harass someone stronger than himself perishes and seeks death.” Kratzman and Gee, *The Dialogues of Creatures Moralyzed*, 138.

illius” (“Do not strive with a powerful man, lest you fall into his hands”), as well as the above-mentioned fable, which here is attributed to Aesop (“unde refert Aesopus,” “as Aesop notes”), in the following version:

Unde refert Esopus, quod quidam lupus bibebat in flumine et agnus quidam subtus bibebat cum eo simul, levavitque lupus post eum vocem dicens: Turbas tu aquam potus mei. Cui agnus: Domine, non facio vobis iniuriam neque turbo. Et lupus: Mihi dampna minaris? Nescis quid feci patri tuo, nondum sunt sex menses? Cui agnus: Tanto nunc vixi tempore. Tunc clamavit lupus: An loqueris, furcifer (id est, villane)? Ac irruit in eum ac devoravit. Sic faciunt potentes seculi minoribus, quia sine occasione devorant eos et disperdunt.³⁴

Comparing this prose version of the fable with the poetic one by Phaedrus, it seems quite obvious that the latter cannot be used to illustrate and support the story of the *herodius* and the kite, because Phaedrus intentionally characterizes the stronger wolf as the offender and the naïve and innocent lamb as the offended party. This is manifest in the last lines in their dialogue and in the description of the attack as “iniusta nece” (Phaedrus I.10–13):

Ante hos sex menses male, ait, dixisti mihi.
Respondit agnus: Equidem natus non eram.
Pater hercle tuus, ille inquit, male dixit mihi.
Atque ita correptum lacerat iniusta nece.³⁵

Comparing the dialogue of the two animals in *DCM* and in Phaedrus’ text, we can say that the author of *DCM* has changed the order of the dialogue considerably and seems to violate the moral expressed in Phaedrus’ concluding *epimythium* in 14–15 (“Haec propter illos scripta est homines fabula / qui fictis causis innocentes opprimunt”), when he makes the lamb appear as the offending party.³⁶ In retorting the wolf’s initial accusation, the lamb in *DCM* is challenging the natural physical power of his stronger opponent. This offence gets even worse when the lamb fails to listen to the following warning: “Do you threaten me? Don’t you know what I did to your father, not more than six months ago?” But instead of understanding the danger hidden in the wolf’s questions, the lamb replies like a smart street punk: “I have only lived just that long.”

This answer infuriates the wolf and thereby gives him, as the in his opinion offended party, an evident reason to punish the lamb by killing and eating it, while in Phaedrus’ version he does not know how to properly answer the lamb’s truthful answer: “I was not born six month ago,” and instead, as his excuse for killing the lamb, just utters: “But your father did certainly slander me.”³⁷ Perhaps the author of *DCM* had been influenced by earlier medieval versions of the fable like the poetic exemplum 647 under the heading *Potentia* in

³⁴ *DCM* 1483, fol. 70v. “Thus Aesop says that some wolf was drinking in the river and further down some lamb was drinking at the same time. And the wolf raised its voice and said to him: Are you disturbing the water I drink? The lamb answered: My lord, I do not make any harm to you, not do I disturb. And the wolf said: Are you threatening me? Don’t you know what I did to your father, not more than six months ago? The lamb responded: I have barely lived that long. Then the wolf exclaimed: Are you talking back, you rascal (that is, villain)? Then he attacked the lamb and devoured it. This is what the mighty of the world do to their subjects, because they devour them without reason and destroy them.”

³⁵ “The wolf said: You talked evil about me six months ago./ The lamb responded: I was not even born then./ Then your father talked evil about me for sure, said the wolf./ And then he grabbed the lamb and tore it to pieces in an unjust killing,” *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 192

³⁶ “This fable is written because of those who oppress innocent people with fictive charges,” *ibid.*

³⁷ See my analysis of *dialogus* 51 in Brian Møller Jensen, “Fables of Phaedrus Recycled in Medieval Latin

Arnoldus of Serain’s *Alphabetum narrationum*,³⁸ or the version of Vincent of Beauvais which is included among the twenty-nine prosaic fables in his *Speculum doctrinale* III.114 in order to illustrate his definition and description of the literary fable.³⁹ In Vincent’s version, the lamb is less timid and the wolf obviously more inclined to find excuses for his attack and slaughter than in the poetic version of Phaedrus:

Agnus et lupus sitientes ad rivulum e diuerso venerunt, sursum bibebat lupus longeque inferior agnus. Lupus ut agnum vidit, sic ait: Turbasti mihi aquam bibenti. Agnus patiens dixit: Quomodo aquam turbavi tibi; a te ad me decurrit. Cui lupus: Et maledicis mihi, inquit. At ille: Non maledixi. Lupus vero: Pater, inquit, tuus multa mala mihi ostendit. In fine autem altercationis, lupus improba voce dixit: Et adhuc mihi loqueris latro. Statimque in eum direxit, et innocenti vitam eripuit.⁴⁰

Considering the sources to the stories and exempla quoted in the explanatory and allegorical second part of each chapter of *DCM*, the number of fables included makes this genre one of the main contributors to this part of the compilation. Another classical author of exempla is the Roman historian Valerius Maximus, who is quoted as the source of more than thirty stories of antique Greek and Roman heroes and virtuous men, whereas the anonymous medieval collection *Vitae patrum* and John Cassian’s *Collationes patrum* contribute a large number of stories of monks and other Christian exempla intended to illustrate the dialogues and actions in the *dialogi*. In fact, the complete list of references and quotations amounts to more than three hundred, almost half of which are to various books of the Old and the New Testament, and more than 80 classical, late antique and medieval authors and works are quoted or referred to in *DCM*.

Summarizing the contents of the moral aspects of the sentences, stories and exempla in the figurative and allegorical parts of the 122 *dialogi* or chapters, we find a moral philosophy of the more practical and elementary kind. Instead of elaborate arguments in matters of doctrine or allegoric aspects of contemplative mysteries, the author expresses his moral philosophy primarily as proverbs and concise statements.

We find one of the most evident expressions of this view in the long and complex *DCM* 105 (*De lepore iurista*, “About the hare as a lawyer”), about the hare that had studied law in Paris and then is employed as a legal expert by the lion king.⁴¹ During the job interview, the two animals take a walk in the woods, and at each incident the lion asks the hare to formulate a proverb to match the incident. The hare shows his skills by coining various judicial (and

Literature,” in *Fiction and Figuration in High and Late Medieval Literature*, ed. Marianne Pade et al., Analecta Instituti Danici, Supplementum xlvii (Roma: Edizioni Quasar, 2016), 89–90.

³⁸ Arnoldus of Serain, *Alphabetum narrationum*, ed. Elisa Brillì et al., *CC CM* 160 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), exemplum 647, 360: “Agnus et lupus sitientes ad riuulum conuenerunt./ Sursum bibebat lupus, inferius autem agnus./ Dixit autem lupus agno: ‘Tu mihi turbasti aquam.’/Agnus ait: ‘Quomodo turbavi tibi aquam? At te ad me decurrit.’/ Cui lupus: ‘En maledicis mihi!’ Et ille: ‘Non maledixi.’/ Ad hec lupus: ‘Pater tuus multa mala intulit mihi, et me modo uindicabo,’ et insiliens in | eum strangulauit./Hoc etiam ualet ad occasionem et principes.”

³⁹ Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum Doctrinale* (Venice: Hermann Lichtenstein, 1494), III,114, fols. 42–43.

⁴⁰ “A lamb and a wolf were thirsty and came down to a river from opposite directions, the wolf standing higher up the stream and the lamb further below. When the wolf saw the lamb, he said: You trouble the water I am drinking. The patient lamb said: How could I trouble the water for you; it is running down from you towards me. The wolf said to him: And you talk evil about me. But the lamb said: I did not talk evil. The wolf said: You father did many bad things to me. Putting the discussion to an end, the wolf said in an improper voice: And you are calling me a thief! And at once he jumped in the direction of the innocent lamb and ripped his life away.”

⁴¹ *DCM* 1483, fols. 130v–132r.

moral) sayings in leonine hexameters, such as: “valet contra ictum mortis esse sapiens quam fortis” (“against the blow of death it is better to be wise than strong”) and “multum melius tacere est quam male respondere” (“it is much better to be silent than to answer badly”). Like in the other *dialogi*, the hare’s judicial hexameters might be read as expressions or paradigms of the kind of wisdom which the book as a whole promotes and respects so highly.⁴²

Moreover, it is possible to observe two different ways of viewing the world and mankind’s relation to God expressed in *DCM*, namely an optimistic and a pessimistic point of view, which might be compared to the confrontation of opinions and ideas between the ascetic old and blind Benedictine monk Jorge and the pragmatic Franciscan friar William of Baskerville in Umberto Eco’s novel *Il nome della rosa*, published in 1980. According to the pessimistic approach, all worldly and secular activities are regarded from the perspective of the last judgement and the subsequent damnation; therefore, all joyful aspects of God’s creation are considered to be mere distractions from the pursuit of holiness. Such views are expressed in the leonine hexameters in *DCM* 77 about the solitary pelican (*De pelicano solitario*): “Qui vult Deum contemplari, solus debet commorari” (“Whoever wants to contemplate God ought to stay alone”),⁴³ and in *DCM* 84 (*De rustico et apibus*, “About the farmer and the bees”): “Debet dura sustinere, qui de dulci vult habere” (“He ought to sustain hard times, who wants to obtain the sweet fruits”).⁴⁴ In both these chapters we also find some quotations by Bernard of Clairvaux, which express the principal arguments for the necessity of solitude for a person to be able to contemplate God according to the quotation from one of his sermons on *Cantica canticorum* in the above-mentioned *DCM* 77 about the solitary pelican: “O sancta anima, sola esto, ut soli domino omnium serves te ipsam, quem ex omnibus elegisti, fuge creaturas, si creatorem habere desideras, fuge mundum, si vis esse mundus.”⁴⁵

The optimistic world view, on the other hand, which may be associated with the Franciscan way of thinking, represents the respect and the delight in God’s creation as well as a humane way of obtaining knowledge such as it is exemplified in a story from John Cassian’s *Collationes patrum* quoted in the prologue. According to Cassian’s collection, a man is said to have rebuked John the evangelist for playing and enjoying life with his disciples.⁴⁶ Since the man was carrying a bow and some arrows, John asked him to draw his bow. When he had done this a few times, John asked him if he could keep it drawn continuously and got the answer that the bow would then either break in two or there would be less power in the arrow. The man’s response made John conclude that the human mind might likewise be broken if it does not relax once in a while. This bow story is obviously a *fabula vagans*, since we find it told in many and various versions in both antique and medieval literature, e.g., about the Egyptian Pharaoh Amasis in Herodotus II 173, about Aesop among the Athenians in Phaedrus III 14, and about the hermit St. Antonius in chapter 21 of Jacobus de Voragine’s *Legenda aurea*.

⁴² The author obtains a literary effect in combining the similarities of the two words *lepus* (-oris), “hare,” and *lepor/lepos* (-oris), “wit, humor, charm.”

⁴³ *DCM* 1483, fol. 96v.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 105v.

⁴⁵ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones super Cantica canticorum*, in *Bernardi opera I-II*, ed. Jean Leclercq, Charles Hugh Talbot, and Henri Marie Rochais (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957–1958), II, 40, 4, 27: “O holy soul, be alone, that you may keep yourself to the Lord alone, whom you have chosen before all others, flee all things created, if you desire to have the creator of all things, flee the world if you want to be pure.”

⁴⁶ Johannes Cassianus, *Collationes Patrum* (Paris: Cerf, 1959), XXIII 21. Thomas Aquinas’s comments on Cassianus’ version of the story in his *Summa theologiae* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964–1980), II 2, 168, 2.

The Franciscan tone in *DCM* is probably due to one of the sources, which the author of *DCM* used for a number of his stories and exempla. In his detailed study of *Breviloquium de virtutibus*, a collection of exempla on the virtuous activities and statements of ancient rulers, philosophers and other prominent figures by the Franciscan scholar John of Wales (d. ca. 1285), Albrecht Diem states that the *DCM* manifests a not yet recognized dependence on John’s *Breviloquium*, especially with regard to the exempla related to the classical authors and works, e.g., Valerius Maximus’ *Facta et dicta memorabilia*. In his comparison of the ancient exempla, Diem states that the *DCM* author has quoted them often literally from and with exact source references to John of Wales’ collection, and concludes: “The *Dialogus* quotes at least 83 chapters of the *Breviloquium*, about a third of the text. It is clear that the author saw the *Breviloquium* indeed as a *florilegium* of classical material rather than as a treatise on the cardinal virtues.”⁴⁷

Let us return to the didactic aspects of the initial quotation from the prologue in Leeu’s and Snell’s editions: “Our Saviour once used fables according to Palestinian tradition that he might lead people to the road of truth through parables.” Using this reference to the practice of Jesus in his times as their main argument for the edition of the compilation, the two editors proceed to present the didactic aim and explicit moral purpose intended with the book, which is not only to “nos docere nostrosque mores corrigere” (“to teach us to correct our morals”) but even “in extremum vitiorum et uirtutum promotionem” (“to exterminate vices and promote virtues”). With reference to Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae* 2:2, 168 as the primary argument for the use and choice of stories and exempla in the chapters of the *DCM*, the editors present the benefits of the book:

Auctor ergo libri presentis iocundo modo morales doctrinas in extremum vitiorum et virtutum promotionem introducit, quod utique licet et expediens est, ut dicit doctor sanctus [...] si fictio exterior interiori devotioni et dispositioni bonae conveniat. Utilis est ergo presens liber predicatoribus et aliis quibusque intelligentibus contra fatigationem animalem, ut per delectationem iocundae materiae aequaliter intermissa intentione ad insistendum rationis studio simplicium animi ad altiora trahantur.⁴⁸

This didactic approach is in line with Gregory the Great’s argument for using contemporary exempla to illustrate his exegesis of the gospel text. In his *Homilia in euangelia* 38 on Matthew 22: 1–14, which tells the parable about the king arranging the wedding of his son, Gregory concludes his exposition of the often quoted *sens moral* of Jesus’ parable, “Multi sunt vocati, pauci vero electi” (“Many are called, but few are chosen”), by telling the story of the different lives of his father’s three sisters, Tarsilla, Gordiana, and Emiliana: “Omnes tres uno prius ardore conversae sunt, sed non in uno eodemque studio permanserunt.”⁴⁹ Gregory motivates the inclusion of this and similar exempla in other homilies on the gospel texts in the following

⁴⁷ Albrecht Diem, “A Classicising Friar at Work: John of Wales’ *Breviloquium de virtutibus*,” in *Christian Humanism. Essays in Honor of Arjo Vanderjagt*, ed. Alasdair A. Macdonald, Zweder Rudolf Willem Maria von Martels, and Jan Veenstra (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 94.

⁴⁸ *DCM* 1483, fol. 1v: “The author of the present book introduces moral teaching in an entertaining way in order to exterminate vices and promote virtues, which is allowed and expedient according to the holy master’s *Summa*, [...] provided that the exterior fiction matches the inner devotion and good disposition. Therefore, the present book is useful to preachers and other intellectuals against spiritual fatigue, that the simple souls be attracted to reach a higher level of moral reasoning through the pleasures of the entertaining subject.”

⁴⁹ “At first all three converted because of the same passion, but they did not persist in one and the same pursuit.” Gregorius Magnus, *Homilia in euangelia*, ed. Raymond Étaix, *CC SL* 141 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 38, 15, 376.

didactic manner: “Nonnumquam mentes audientium plus exempla fidelium quam docentium verba convertunt.”⁵⁰ Although they avoid the term *fabula*, Gregory’s statement is repeated and reformulated by a number of late medieval authors, who defended the use of fictional exempla to enable preachers to convey the sayings and parables of Christ to a (mainly) illiterate congregation or community.⁵¹ Preaching to this kind of communities, which was among the primary activities of the mendicant orders, the Franciscans and the Dominicans, called for a change from the monastic and scholastic tradition towards a more popular and accessible kind of material, which was intended to instruct as well as to kindle and retain the attention of the listeners. Thus, it is not surprising to find two of the main teachers and important authors of these two orders repeating the words of Gregory in an abbreviated form. The Franciscan Bonaventure places his focus on the moral aspects of preaching: “In moribus enim plus movent exempla quam verba,”⁵² while the Dominican Thomas Aquinas puts the focus on the human activities: “In actibus hominum plus movent exempla quam verba.”⁵³

In addition to these two theologians and authorities we might observe other thirteenth-century authors who defended their use and/or collections of exempla by quoting or referring to Jesus and his teaching in the gospels. Alongside these practical tools for preachers, a great number of more theoretical handbooks appeared, defining and describing the rules and practice of the *ars praedicandi*, some of which James Murphy describes and evaluates in his presentation of this significant genre from the High and Late Middle Ages in the second half of his book entitled *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*.⁵⁴ Among the collections appearing in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries listed by Gregory Kratzmann and Elisabeth Gee in their introduction to the late medieval English translation of *DCM* are, in addition to the ones mentioned above, the works of, e.g., Odo of Cheriton, Jacques de Vitry, Adam of Liège, Jacques de Cessoles and Étienne de Bourbon.⁵⁵

In the prologue to his treatise *Tractatus de diversis materiis praedicabilibus*, the latter author rephrased and extended the arguments of Gregory with reference to the prologue in the church father’s *Dialogi*:⁵⁶

Magis, ut probat beatus Gregorius in Dyalogorum libro, docent facta quam uerba et magis mouent exempla quam predicamenta; ideo summa Dei sapientia, Christus Ihesus primo docuit factis quam uerbis, et subtilitatem predicationis et doctrine grossam quasi corpoream et uisibilem reddidit, muniens et uestiens eam diuersis similitudinibus, parabolis, miraculis et exemplis, ut eius doctrina citius caperetur, facilius cognosceretur, fortius in memoria retineretur et efficacius opere

⁵⁰ “The examples of the faithful quite often convert the minds of the listeners better than the words of the teachers.” Gregorius, *Homilia in euangelia*, 373.

⁵¹ See, e.g., the statement by the Piacenza-born Fulco Scotti (1164–1229), bishop of Piacenza and Pavia, in the prologue to his book of sermons: “Grege qui pastoris uocem moresque sequitur, per exempla melius quam uerba gradiatur.” (“The community that follows the voice and behaviour of its shepherd progresses more through examples than through words.” See Marco Petoletti, “I sermoni di Fulco Scotti, vescovo di Piacenza e Pavia,” in *I misteri della cattedrale. Meraviglie nel labirinto del sapere*, ed. Emma Cavazzini and Elisa Bagnoni (Milano: Skira, 2018), 128.

⁵² “With regard to morals examples move more than words.” Bonaventure, *Sermons de diversis I-II*, ed. Jacques Guy Bougerol (Paris: Les éditions franciscaines, 1993), I.33, 25, 419.

⁵³ “In human actions examples move more than words,” in Thomas Aquinas, *Super euangelium Iohannis reportatio*, in *Opuscula Theologica*, ed. Raphael Cai (Taurini-Rome: Marietti, 1975).

⁵⁴ James Joseph Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

⁵⁵ Kratzman and Gee, *The Dialogues of Creatures Moralized*, 4–6.

⁵⁶ Stephanus de Borbone, *Tractatus de diversis materiis praedicabilibus*, in *CC CM 124*, ed. Jacques Berlioz and Jean-Luc Eichenlaub (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), prologue.

adimpleretur.⁵⁷

Similarly, the English author Odo of Cheriton refers to Gregory’s arguments in the preface to his collection of *Fabulae*, which he published ca. 1219–21: “Et quoniam, ut dicit Gregorius, plus quandoque compungunt exempla quam verba, aperiam in parabolis os meum, et similitudines et exempla que libencius audiuntur, memorie firmiter quam verba commendatur, proponam.”⁵⁸

Although the advantages and subsequent respectability of the use of exempla (and fables) in preaching were presented and defended by the above authorities as obvious consequences of the new religious and social context after the turn of the millennium, we find a more hesitant view with regard to preachers using fables and exempla in their exegesis and preaching expressed by the Dominican encyclopaedist Vincent of Beauvais (1190–1264). In the prologue to his presentation of the fable genre, he admits that the fables of Aesop may give the reader or listener a good laugh as well as sharpen the mind: “Nam etsi legenti vel audienti misceant risum, acuunt tamen ingenium.”⁵⁹ However, the concluding remarks to his selection of the twenty-nine Aesopian fables in both his *Speculum historiale* and his *Speculum doctrinale* clearly point in another direction. While the inclusion of the fable selection in the *Speculum historiale* might seem strange as a part of the events taking place in the reign of the Persian king Cyrus,⁶⁰ the section included in the *Speculum doctrinale* appears both logical and obvious as an illustration of his definition of the *fabula poetica*, and in both his works Vincent concludes the presentation of fables with the following warning:

Hec de fabulis Esopi excerpere volui, quas etsi forte plerumque liceat in sermonibus publicis recitare, quod etiam nonnulli prudentium faciunt propter audientium tedia relevanda, qui talibus delectantur simul, et propter integumenta subiuncta, quae aliquid edificationis habere videntur, numquam tamen nisi caute et parce id estimo faciendum, ne qui verbis sacris ad luctum penitentiae Deique devotionem provocari debent, ipsi per huiusmodi nugas et risum magis atque lasciviam dissolvantur. Simul etiam ne ad narrandas fabulas quasi licenter exemplo predicantium male informetur.⁶¹

⁵⁷ “As Gregory proves in his *Dialogi*, facts teach better than words and exempla move more than allegorical preaching; thus, as the highest wisdom of God, Jesus Christ at first taught through facts rather than words, and he made the simple subtleties of his preaching and teaching almost corporeal and visible, fortifying and dressing them with various similitudes, parables, miracles and exempla, in order that his teaching should be understood faster, be recognized easier, be kept in mind stronger and be more efficiently performed in deeds.”

⁵⁸ “And because exempla always make people feel remorse more than words, according to Gregory, I open my mouth to parables and put forward similitudes and exempla, which are listened to more freely and entrusted to the memory more firmly than words.” See Léopold Hervieux, *Les fabulistes latins* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1896), IV, 173.

⁵⁹ “For even though they [i.e., fables] may cause the reader or listener to laugh, they sharpen the mind as well.” Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum Doctrinale*, III.14.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, III.8.

⁶¹ “These are the stories I wanted to excerpt from the fables of Aesop. Although it should be permitted often to quote them in public sermons, which many intelligent people also do because of their wish to relieve the tediousness of the listeners, who delight in such stories, and because of the underlying coverings, which seem to contain some kind of edifying, I assess however that this should be done only cautiously and rarely in order to avoid that people, who ought to be provoked to grief, penance, and devotion to God through the holy words, might be led astray through this kind of nonsense, laughter, and lasciviousness. Similarly, they should not be instructed to tell fables, as if this were permitted by the badly used examples of some preachers.”

Concerning the character and benefits of fables, Vincent acknowledges their generic gifts as they are indicated by Phaedrus in the prologue to his first book of fables, “risum movere et vitam prudenti consilio monere,” just like Gregory and many of the above-mentioned authors as well as the compiler of *DCM* indirectly do in their selection and use of the genre.⁶² But unlike these writers, whose main focus is on the didactic aspects and moral lessons to be learned in the fables, Vincent appears more concerned with the dangers inherent in bad use of the genre by some preachers, since fables might create laughter, cause distraction from the true subject of the sermon, and thereby prevent the listeners’ understanding of the words of Scripture. Although Vincent admits that fables may be useful in preaching, his view on fables as fictional texts and comparable to *nugae*, *risus*, and *lascivia* (“gossip, laughter, and lascivity”) appears quite in line with the late antique and early medieval view on and scepticism against the poetic *ficta* and *fabula*, which were regarded as equivalent to lies and falsities and therefore should be avoided, as we may observe in Vincent’s quotation of Isidore of Seville in *Speculum doctrinale* I.35:

Isidorus in libro sententiarum: Ideo prohibentur Christianis poetarum figmenta legere, quia per oblectamenta fabularum nimium mentem excitant ad incentiva libidinum. Non enim solum thura offerendo demonibus immolant, sed etiam eorum dicta libentius capiendo.⁶³

Another typical example of this particular Christian view, which even may be compared to Plato’s view on poetic wisdom and knowledge in the *Apologia Socratis* and his relegation of the poets in his description and construction of his ideal state in the last book of his *Res publica*, is formulated by the early medieval author Caesarius of Arles in his *Sermo* 55: “In ecclesia quando venitis, nolite vos fabulis occupare. Qui in ecclesia fabulis agit, per linguam suam poenandus erit.”⁶⁴

Although a friar in the Dominican order, the official name of which is the *Ordo praedicatorum*, Vincent appears to adhere to the ascetic and monastic view on and approach to “scurrilitates vel verba otiosa et risum moventia” (“vulgarity or gossip and words creating laughter”), as stated in chapter six of St Benedict’s *Regula monachorum* and in some of the statements by Bernard of Clairvaux quoted and referred to in *DCM*.⁶⁵

On the other hand, the author or compiler of *DCM* is in line with a number of the authors mentioned above in defending his use of fables and other genres in the classical Latin and Greek literature as well as secular medieval authors with his direct reference to the didactic practise of Jesus Christ to convey his message.

Relying on Christ as the “perfect model for preachers,” the late medieval editors Leeu and Snell emphasize in the prologues to the 122 *dialogi*, with reference to Thomas Aquinas, that

⁶² “To create laughter and to give good advice in life.” See Phaedrus, *Prologus*, I, 3–4: “Duplex libelli dos est, quod risum movet/ et quod prudentiam consilio monet” (“The gift of this little book is twofold: to create laughter and to advise prudence”), *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 190.

⁶³ “Isidore says in his book of *Sententiae*: Therefore, Christians are forbidden to read the fiction of poets, because they excite the mind too much to the incentives of desire through the pleasures of fables/stories. They sacrifice to demons not only by offering incense, but also by accepting their words too willingly.”

⁶⁴ “When you come to the church, do not occupy yourself with fables/fiction. Whoever uses fables/fiction in the church will be punished through his tongue.” Caesarius of Arles, *Sermones*, ed. Germain Morin, *CC SL* 103 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953), 55a, 3.

⁶⁵ See Brian Møller Jensen, “*Tacere et audire discipulum convenit*: Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel, Hildegard of Bingen and Juan de Torquemada comment on chap. 6 *De taciturnitate* in *Regula Benedicti*,” in *Quod ore cantas corde credas: Studi in onore di Giacomo Baroffio*, ed. Leandra Scappaticci (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), 51–63.

the perfect balance between the exterior fiction and the interior devotion and disposition is the main condition to present “moral doctrines in an entertaining way” in order to “exterminate vices and promote virtues.” Considering the apparent need for this kind of books among preachers and the profitable possibilities thanks to the new printing technique, Leeu and Snell published the late medieval compilation, which is entitled *Contemptus sublimitatis* in most manuscripts, and gave it the now usually quoted title *Dialogus creaturarum moralizatus*. Presenting a balanced mixture of fables, exempla and stories from the Bible, from ancient pagan authors and from antique and medieval Christian authors and church fathers, the author of *DCM* compiled a collection which was intended to be edifying and useful for medieval preachers and at the same time to be amusing and entertaining to medieval (and modern) readers. He appears to have learned his lesson and is indeed telling tales out of school!

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