



fol. LXXI^r: *Of foolish beggers, and of their vanities.*

*("For though that neede them greuously do bite,
Yet is their minde for all their povertie,
To keep with them of children great plentie."
—trans. Alex. Barclay, fol. 118^v.)*

Foreword and Note on the Illustrations

It was the former editor, Mr. McRobbie, who first came up with the idea of a special issue *On the rise of the vernacular literatures*, and in fact not long before his resignation, he put out a preliminary call for papers and suggestions. His successor, who also chanced to be a medievalist, took up this beginning with enthusiasm, much encouraged by the response to Mr. McRobbie's letter. Clearly the idea was widely applauded; the phenomenon deserved investigation, and those who had anything to say on the subject should be given the opportunity of saying it. There were, though, woefully few offers of papers, and knowing how many offers go unfulfilled, the editor became cautious. Direct appeals to many worthy scholars tended to elicit a uniform response: a worthy idea, but no paper forthcoming in the time available; *similiter autem et omnes dicebant*. So the deadline was retarded by several months, and a second general appeal launched; then the papers began to arrive. The response was not overwhelming but it was very substantial, and on the whole

the quality of the workmanship was superior to that which normally flows across the editor's desk.

Unfortunately, as the papers came in, it became increasingly clear that not all the would-be contributors shared the editor's idea of what the issue—or the Journal—were about. There were some admirable papers on medieval subjects which bore no, or at best tenuous, relationship to the emergence of vernacular literatures, and there were some meticulous essays which were far too specialised for inclusion in "A Journal for the Comparative Study of Literature and Ideas," and, in the final analysis, the vast majority of the papers received tended to one or the other of these extremes. In making the final selection, the editor gave first preference to those articles which were least prone to these tendencies, and then proceeded to those which were less so. The remainder were then regretfully returned to their authors, thanking them for their interest, and assuring them that in the light of the response to the proposal for this issue, there was little doubt but that at some future date, the editorial board would give serious thought to the possibility of another medieval issue. (Incidentally, it was recently suggested that an issue on "pseudo-medievalia" might be a good idea. The editor would very much like to hear from Hobbit-fanciers and anybody else who is interested in such a project.)

The final selection is here presented, somewhat later than anticipated, but complete at last. In spite of the selection method outlined above, general readers may find a rather higher level of indigestible matter than usual, and for this we apologise. Authors were encouraged to supply translations of their quotations in the remoter tongues, and most complied. There is also a greater proportion of articles in French than we usually include. This of course needs no apology in Canada, but we would crave the indulgence of readers in other countries who are inconvenienced by this. They will doubtless realise that where medieval studies are being conducted, there French language and scholarship will inevitably be much in evidence.

In conclusion, the editor would like to acknowledge the unstinting and meticulous help which he received throughout the preparation of this issue (particularly in the assessment of the manuscripts) from Professor Margaret Allen of St. John's College at this University, and also the counsel and aid of Professor John Allen (no relation to the former), also of this University, and of Dr. Gertrude Gecewicz, sometime professor at le Collège de Saint-Boniface.

A Note on the Illustrations

The illustrations which accompany this issue have been taken from a book which fully deserves to be mentioned (as indeed it is, in Mr. Batt's article below)¹ in a collection of essays dealing with a subject in which it played a

¹vide p. *infra*.

by no means insignificant role, the rise of vernacular literatures. Moreover, they provide the editor with the opportunity of supplying some small compensation for the otherwise yawning gap in these essays where nothing is said about the effects of printing on the subject in question,—a gap which would otherwise have to be excused by the observation that the rise of the press is often taken to mark the end of the Middle Ages, thus placing its products beyond the scope of these essays.

The book in question is *Das Narren Schyff* (Basle, 1494),² *The Ship of Fools*, by Sebastian Brant (1458-1521), son of a Strasbourg innkeeper who died in the boy's childhood, leaving him to be raised by the widowed mother. In 1475 he went to the University of Basle where he read philosophy and law, and seven years later we find him teaching, practising, and married. In 1489 he graduated *doctor utriusque juris*, then came his years of greatest literary activity. In 1501 he returned to Strasbourg, first as municipal syndic, then (in 1503) as chancellor (*Stadtschreiber*), where until the end of his life he distinguished himself in both the political and cultural life of that city. He was visited—and praised—by Erasmus in 1514, and several times attended the Court of the Emperor Maximilian, on whose death in 1519 he went to do homage on behalf of his city to Charles V at Ghent. It may have been on the way back from this visit that he met and was painted by Albrecht Dürer at Antwerp. Afflicted by doubt and disease, he died two years later.

As a writer, Brant stands in the mainstream of the northern humanist movement. His consummate latinity, employed with such eloquence in praise of his beloved Emperor,³ well illustrates that balance of sound learning and conservatism which goes so far to explain the humanist abhorrence of the Lutheran protest. It was by experimenting with translations from the latin that he gradually trained himself in the art of composing German verse, the medium he used so effectively in *Das Narren Schyff*.

Of the work itself there is not room to speak here; over one hundred examples of "foolishness" such as those portrayed by the illustrations contained in this volume are stigmatised in thirty or so lines of verse. Foolishness is a misleading work; more correctly, the work deals with all manner of abuse and disorder, and with the symptoms not only of his folly, but also of man's more

²For a critical text the best work is still thought to be Friedrich Zarncke, *Sebastian Brants Narrenschiff* (Leipzig, 1854/Hildesheim, 1961). There is a modern English translation by Edwin H. Zeydel, *The Ship of Fools by Sebastian Brant translated into rhyming couplets with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, 1944). The *Introduction* is commendably laconic (the present *Note* is much indebted to it) and it contains a useful bibliography (pp. 45-54) which needs the addition of the following to bring it up to date: Ulrich Gaier, *Studien zu Sebastian Brants Narrenschiff*, (Tübingen, 1966) and Barbara Könniker, *Wesen und Wandlung der Narrenidee im Zeitalter des Humanismus* (Wiesbaden, 1966).

³For examples *vide* Zarncke, *op. cit.*, *Anhang V*: "Auswahl aus den lateinischen gedichten Seb. Brants," pp. 174-199.

serious faults.⁴ The work stands in a continuous tradition, of which its successor, Erasmus' *Morias Egkomiön* (1509) is probably the most famous example. Whilst Erasmus undoubtedly read Brant, it is by no means certain that Brant knew anything of his predecessor, the English monk Nigel Wireker (or de Longchamp; fl. 1190), although he certainly could have done. Nigel's *Speculum Stultorum* appears to have been printed at Utrecht ca. 1473, again at Paris ca. 1485, and subsequently at Leipsig (1495?) and Cologne (1499).⁵

It need hardly be said that the language in which Brant wrote was by no means a European *lingua franca*, not even within the borders of what might be called Austrasia. Consequently, translations of the original into other Germanic tongues were made, and appear to have enjoyed considerable success. A Low German translation (possibly by Hans van Ghetelen) was published at Lübeck in 1497, and a revision of it at Rostock in 1519.⁶ A Flemish version first appeared at Paris in 1500 (subsequently at Antwerp in 1548⁷) and a Dutch version at Amsterdam in 1635,⁸ but this may have a history going back to a Brussels edition of 1548. However, the work was not only known in its Germanic versions; Latin was still very much the common tongue of the literate world, and it was to this language that the work was committed and thus disseminated throughout the rest of Europe, though it appears to have lost some of its sparkle in the translating.⁹ The work was done by the author's

⁴No. 93 for instance is in fact concerned with problems arising from man's greed rather than his foolishness. Like many other sections, it has a remarkably contemporary ring:

Usury and profiteering (*wucher vnd furkouff*):

We'd punish him for all his tricks
From him we must remove the ticks
And pluck his pinions with elation
Who buys up goods on speculation,
The wine and corn in all the land,
No sin, Dishonour stays his hand,
So that a poor man cannot flee
Starvation with his family.
Thus prices mount, it must be clear,
They're higher now than those last year,
If wine now costs a scant ten pound,
Next month 'twill certainly be found
You'll pay full thirty when you buy.
The same is true of wheat, spelt, rye.

(trans. Zeydel, *op. cit.*, pp. 302-303).

⁵On Nigel see A. Boutémy, *Nigellus de Longchamp dit Wireker* tome premier (Paris, 1959) pp. 1-75, especially pp. 70-73, and *Speculum Stultorum edited with Introduction and Notes* by J. H. Mozley and R. R. Raymo (Berkeley, 1960). There are some later versions of Brant's work whose titles may suggest that they had been influenced by Nigel's, e.g. *Der Narren Spiegel* (Strasbourg, 1545) and *Welt Spiegel, oder Narren Schiff* (Basle, 1547).

⁶*Dat narren schyp* (Lübeck, 1497); *Dat nye schip van narragonien* (Rostock, 1519).

⁷*Der sotten schip* (Antwerp, 1548).

⁸*Aff-ghebeede narren speel-schuyt &c* (Amsterdam, 1635).

⁹*Stultifera Navis, qua omnium mortalium narratur stultitia*.

pupil and friend Jacob Locher, and it was published at Basle in 1497 under the title *Stultifera Navis*. At least seven official or illicit versions of this book appeared even before the end of the century.

As the fame of Brant's work spread in its Latin guise, further translations appeared, though in fact these were translations of a Locher's translation; and since each translator seemed free to revise and interpolate, some of the later versions strayed far from the original. There were at least two such French translations¹⁰ (a verse paraphrase and a prose version), and two English versions, one of which (1509) itself underwent a thorough revision later in the sixteenth century.¹¹ The other was the edition published by Wynkyn de Worde in 1509 and 1517; this was a translation twice removed, for it seems to have been an English adaptation of one of the French versions, made by Thomas (or Henry) Watson.

In addition to (and probably partly accounting for) its popularity, *Das Narren Schyff* is distinguished by being one of the first early printed books to have been heavily, and one of the very few ever to have been so well illustrated. The work contains over one hundred woodcuts, some of which are reproduced in the present volume from a copy of the 1498 Locher edition now in the Dysart Memorial Collection of Rare Books and Manuscripts at the University of Manitoba.¹² There has been a good deal of controversy about the origin of these woodcuts, arising from a suggestion made in 1892 by Daniel Burckhardt that at least some of them may have been the work of Albrecht Dürer, who apparently lived in Basle 1492-94 when he was in his early twenties. It may never be possible to know whether there is any truth in this suggestion, but that will not lessen the appeal of the pictures themselves, with their Janus-like quality of being at once the products of the medieval and the modern worlds. They are presented here primarily for the reader's delight, but no less as a reminder of a brief and exciting moment in the past when two, if not three, aeons overlapped each other. The pictures are accompanied here by the chapter headings and in some cases a few verses from the 1570 English version, also from the Dysart Collection.

J.W.

¹⁰*La nef des folz du monde* ("translatée de latin en francoys"—fol. 127r.) (Paris, 1497, 1499; Lyon, 1499.)

¹¹"This present Boke named the Shyp of folys of the worlde was translated in the College of Saynt Mary Otery in the counte of Deuonshyre: out of Laten, Frenche, and Doche into Englysshe tonge by Alexander Barclay Preste... the yere... M.CCCC.VIII..."

¹²See *The Dysart Memorial Collection of Rare Books and Manuscripts* (Winnipeg, 1973), items 22-24. The gracious cooperation of the University of Manitoba Librarians is gratefully acknowledged.