Chaucer Abducted: 
Examining the Conception of Translation 
behind the Canterbury Tales

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ABSTRACT
In his Retraction, Geoffrey Chaucer describes himself as a translator. However, while his texts clearly draw directly from antecedents, they do not easily align to the source-target parallels that are so familiar in translation studies. Using abductive reasoning, this article asks whether the evidence supplied by the constituent stories of the Canterbury Tales suggests that Chaucer’s understanding of translation was fundamentally based on the notion of excogitatio. It observes features of Chaucer’s translation practices that may appear surprising or idiosyncratic to a contemporary observer, and asks, whether an underlying conceptualisation of translation that actively avoids reflecting the source text would make these features a matter of course. The article demonstrates that abductive reasoning is a useful tool for the first stages of analysing a text as a translation, allowing a researcher to ask how the translator may have perceived the act of translation.

KEYWORDS: abductive reasoning, Geoffrey Chaucer, Canterbury Tales, medieval translation, excogitatio.