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HAUNTING AT TROY:
TROY NARRATIVES, TRAUMA, AND DESIRE FOR THE PAST
IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LITERATURE

by

WOO REE HEOR

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York

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APPROVAL

Haunting at Troy:
Troy Narratives, Trauma, and Desire for the Past in Late Medieval English Literature

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in
English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

Haunting at Troy:
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by

Woo Ree Heor

Advisor: Steven Kruger

The mythical city of Troy functioned as an imagined point of origin for many medieval nations, providing a tangible connection to the legendary past and nation-building tools useful for the ruling class. Troy provided a convenient foundation narrative upon which ideas of collective identity could be built for these nations, and England, where construction of a homogeneous past was difficult due to frequent ruptures in its development of communal identity, was an eager producer and consumer of such a legitimizing device. However, the trauma of war and destruction intrinsic in Troy narratives also generates potent political anxiety about the reanimated past. Using trauma theory and spectrality theory as a theoretical framework, this project aims to understand Troy in late medieval English literature as a place where the desires for, and anxieties towards, the classical past converge into a complex display of ontological fantasies. Specifically, this project examines Hector, Criseyde, and the Arthurian descendants of Troy as figures embodying the medieval concept of Trojanness, expressed through narrative attempts to control their political personae and sexuality. The *Troy Book* by John Lydgate depicts Hector as a complex exemplar, who demonstrates desirable and undesirable qualities for an aristocratic male identity, in turn betraying political anxieties about Troy as a traumatic point of

origin fraught with images of destruction. This ontological trauma is translated into the Arthurian Britain in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where Trojan heritage is as much an ominous sign of treachery and ruin as a foundation of collective identity. The dichotomy of fascination and revulsion towards Troy, a common thread in these texts, is epitomized by the figure of Criseyde as seen in the works of Geoffrey Chaucer and Robert Henryson, who signifies the repeated theme of loss and treachery inherent in the medieval concept of Trojanness.

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Introduction: Specters of Troy

The collective imagination of secular history in medieval Europe starts with an image of a burning city and distraught refugees. Ever since Virgil's Aeneas set an example by founding a second Troy on the Italian peninsula, Troy has played an integral role in shaping western Europe's sense of nationhood and origin. As the legendary point of origin for many European nations, the Troy legend continued to serve the fantasy of a glorious past and coherent nationhood, being especially potent in medieval England where a stable, homogeneous genealogy was difficult to establish due to a history fraught with foreign invasions and ruptures in royal succession. However, Troy narratives were also the source of profound anxiety since they perpetuated the nightmarish trauma, or omen, of war and destruction. The hopeful vision of *translatio imperii*, a concept of linear succession of sovereignty moving from empire to empire (and progressively from east to west), is thus frequently interrupted and challenged as late medieval English authors, often presenting their works as truthful accounts of historical events, attempted their own take on the collective nostalgia for Troy.

Barring the well-studied subset of narratives on the legend of Troilus, scholarly discussion of the medieval Troy narratives has been fruitful but lacking in varied perspectives and theoretical frameworks. Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, in particular, boasts a rich body of critical literature exploring the poem's complex understanding of Trojan history, with Lee Patterson championing New Historicist readings of the Chaucerian canon through important monographs such as *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* and *Chaucer and the Subject of History*. To be sure, the reception of classics in medieval Europe has continued to be examined and studied, yet the specific interrelation of medieval English

literary tradition and Trojan historiography¹ has been rather sparse. C. David Benson's *The History of Troy in Middle English Literature: Guido delle Colonne's Historia Destructionis Troiae in Medieval England*, which examines Guido's often moralistic Trojan historiography and the derivative works, has been a crucial study in this regard. Barbara Nolan's *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique*, although focused on more generally defined classical material as used by courtly romances, proves to be another important study on the practical functions of classical history in medieval literature. Insightful essays focusing on the reception of Trojan material by Geoffrey of Monmouth or Guido delle Colonne have also been published by scholars including Francis Ingledew and James Simpson. However, despite the existence of illuminating works such as these, medieval Troy narratives have received surprisingly little monographic interest until the advent of the twenty-first century.

As one of the monographs on medieval Troy narratives published during the early twenty-first century which not only reinvigorated scholarly interest in the topic but also informed much of the more recent critical discourse, Sylvia Federico's *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages* is highly important to my project. In her study, Federico explores Ricardian and Lancastrian use of Trojan ancestry for the establishment of legitimacy and nascent ideas of national identity. Closely following Federico's book, *Fantasies of Troy: Classical Tales and the Social Imaginary in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, edited by Alan Sheperd and Stephen D. Powell, collects works presented at the 2002 conference at University of Toronto themed around "Troy in the Renaissance." Among newer works, *Translating Troy: Provincial*

¹ "Trojan historiography" is used as an umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of written works such as Latin chronicles, poems, and romances with the Trojan theme as the common denominator. Although some of these works may seem more "fictional" than others due to the perceived genre or style, it should be noted that medieval chroniclers and poets regarded the Trojan war as an empirical incident firmly rooted in secular history.

Politics in Alliterative Romance by Alex Mueller is prominent for offering an examination of medieval Trojan historiography encompassing not only familiar Troy narratives but also texts with no overt Trojan identity such as the *Siege of Jerusalem*. Although not vast in terms of volume, the scholarship on the medieval reception of Troy narratives thus provides valuable insight into how the image of the ancient past was appropriated by eager, but often ambivalent or even critical, authors.

While acknowledging the existing scholarship's focus on the medieval use of Troy narratives for constructing national identity and aristocratic code of conduct, I aim to shift attention to the ambivalences inherent in these instances of heavily politicized historiography. David Quint's influential *Epic and Empire*, although concentrated on the larger tradition of Western epics, has provided a helpful framework for my reading of Troy narratives as fundamentally traumatic and recursive; as Quint showcases in his book, the legendary past is romanticized, and thus politicized, closely reflecting the interests of the ruling class by whom the past is revived. The desire and anxiety directed towards Troy, which will be at the center of my project, are deeply implicated in the way Troy narratives were consumed by medieval audiences, with conflicting stances towards the past often emerging as disturbing ambiguities. Theories on trauma and spectrality have been particularly useful in this regard, due to their approach to the past as at once desirable and uncanny. I argue that, rather than regarding trauma and spectrality as completely separate concepts, medieval Troy narratives play with the symbiotic relationship of the two; trauma *as* spectrality. Although that description may seem almost tautological, given the fact that psychoanalysts going back as far as Freud have understood trauma as something that *haunts* the subject, the interrelation of the two concepts helpfully informs the development of Trojan historiography in medieval Europe. In other words, the understanding of the past as

something that refuses to fade away, dead and buried, renders said past a traumatic and spectral object.

Freudian ideas of trauma and repetition compulsion have been immensely important in the field of psychoanalytic theory, and Derrida's coinage of the concept of hauntology cannot be ignored in discussions on spectrality. With regards to the haunting in medieval Troy narratives, they provide useful conceptual frameworks in which the classical past can be seen as alluring yet disturbing. Freudian concepts of trauma, the repressed, and repetition compulsion have been especially helpful for my project. Derrida's proposition of the "specter" of Marx, a source of radical possibilities opposing an emerging New World Order as expressed in *Specters of Marx*, also provides the foundational concept of the specter as a symbolic reflection of sociocultural politics. Here, the interconnection of psychoanalysis and spectrality has been noted by Derrida himself, who marries thematically adjacent Freudian concepts such as mourning to his own Marxist formulations about the specter. The subsequent discussions which materialized from these groundworks examine the interconnection of trauma, haunting, and identity from more diverse perspectives. *Writing History, Writing Trauma* by Dominick LaCapra and *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* by Kali Tal are compelling examples of studies on the representation and articulation of trauma. My project is especially indebted to the works of Cathy Caruth, whose enlightening observations in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* and *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* inform my "traumatic" reading of medieval Troy narratives. In these works, Caruth identifies traumatic experience as an event which cannot be properly processed by a subject's psyche, resulting in a haunting continuation of the trauma enabled through repetitive reliving. In this sense, the Trojan past which refuses to remain dead

and buried transforms into a recurring trauma, simultaneously embodying a glorious legacy and a disturbing omen of loss.

Of special note for my reading of medieval Troy narratives as a reflection of ontological desire and anxiety is the function of trauma in the construction of collective identity.² The concept of the repeating, undead past is further corroborated by studies in spectrality theory, such as Colin Davis's *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the Dead* and Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. As works on spectrality with particular focus on the topic of history, the collection *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* edited by Peter Buse and Andrew Scott and *Haunting History: For a Deconstructive Approach to the Past* by Ethan Kleinberg have also been helpful for my project. These works often locate ghostly elements within the unrepresented, excluded space of textual margins. The diagram of cultural hegemony versus marginalized ghosts becomes curiously subverted in the context of medieval Troy narratives, in that a master narrative ends up undermining its own project. Trojan historiography understood as a literary mode of conjuring up the classical past, while being complicit in the propagation of an illustrious lineage continuing from antiquity, is never successful in bringing back a comforting vision of Troy entirely free of narrative ambivalence.

Psychoanalytic readings of late medieval English literature, as an intersection of two fields deeply relevant to my project, have been a fruitful ground of useful theoretical discourse

² For instance, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* by Alexander et al. and *Memory, Trauma, and Identity* by Ron Eyerman explore the concept of cultural trauma, building upon the theoretical basis provided by scholars such as Caruth. Trauma haunts the survivors by transforming into narratives which fuel the notion of group identity, granting them an identity based on shared notion of trauma and memories of suffering.

and tangible frameworks for my traumatic reading of Troy narratives. The theoretical approach in *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* by L. O. Aranye Fradenburg, where the converging points of trauma, desire, and sacrificial enjoyment in the Chaucerian *corpus* are explored in a compelling analysis, has been especially helpful for my own reading of medieval texts. For a study more thematically adjacent to my project, I find Patricia Ingham's article "Chaucer's Haunted Aesthetics: Mimesis and Trauma in *Troilus and Criseyde*" to be particularly illuminating. Ingham argues that voicing as a mode of representation for trauma is made ambiguous, complicated, and thus mobilized, in Chaucer's poem, in turn pointing to a blind spot in the current psychoanalytic discourses on wounded voicing in sociocultural context. Trauma as an integral element of the cultural milieu surrounding it is crucial for my understanding of the concept of medieval Trojanness, since the significance of Trojan history in the middle ages was located precisely in such interactions between perceived historical trauma and larger cultural movements. Perhaps expectedly, this is expressed most strikingly in medieval foundation narratives rooted in the myth of Trojan heritage.

As a site for imagining origins, foundation narratives are intrinsically connected to physical and symbolic concept of death as a state before life. In the case of the medieval Troy narratives, the repeated reanimation of the past is tantamount to obsessive return to a traumatic moment, which introduces a conceptually necromantic aspect to the practice of historiography. The re-enactment of Trojan history, always already ending with military defeat and civic destruction, provides an unending source of ontological anxiety while pointing to the artificial nature of historical narratives. Although foundation narratives serve as the root of collective identity for a given group, the reassuring presence of a stable and authoritative master narrative is often undermined, if not outright damaged, by irregularities inherent in historical materials.

The repeated iterations of Trojan history inevitably fragment and distort the very narrative they are supposed to legitimize. The threads of historiography are often disrupted and dissolve into chaotic fragments, allowing ontological trauma to propagate further, and an authoritative discourse by which one can regain balance is always lacking. Hence the importance of trauma as an essential building block of collective—especially national—identity, and the painful yet vital function of haunting in foundation narratives.

As a tantalizing yet disturbing site of origins, Troy in medieval literature is often subject to processes of objectification and fetishization, which is remarkably paralleled by the gendered identities of legendary figures in said texts. It is due to the curious coexistence of a fetishizing gaze and apprehensive aversion in medieval Troy narratives that I find gender and sexuality studies to be another helpful set of tools for my project. In this, my observation aligns with Federico's assessment where women and their Otherness function as a linchpin that unravel the fantasies of *translatio imperii* and historical truth attached to the medieval Troy. However, whereas Federico focuses on a generalized concept of women's role as "a guarantor of masculine historical fantasy that nevertheless fails to guarantee that fantasy" (144) in her discussion of gender politics in Troy narratives, I am more interested in examining the workings of such roles expressed in the more localized interpersonal dynamics these women participate in. As such, my reading of women in Troy narratives concentrates on their interactions with others—mostly men—and their implications for the larger cultural and social contexts enveloping these figures.

The nexus of heterosexual power structures governing the medieval Troy is most explicitly discussed in my reading of the medieval Criseida figure, who exposes the politics of gendered identity and heteroerotic power dynamics informing her personal history. The premise of the Trojan war, in which a series of thefts of women causes political and martial unrest across

multiple generations, points to a deep-rooted anxiety over the control of female sexuality. Medieval Trojan historiography identified the rape of Helen as a hostile response to a preceding rape of the Trojan princess Hesione, which is in turn preceded by the tale of Medea, another woman displaced from her homeland. Even as the medieval depiction of Helen is often accused of being unremarkable compared to her Homeric counterpart by modern readers, she bequeaths her role as the epitome of feminine treachery to her literary sister Criseyde, by whom the destruction of Troy the city and the destruction of Troilus the knight—whose name means “Little Troy”—are merged into a single, distinctly medieval narrative of loss. Chaucer’s version of the heroine has been much loved and studied, with feminist readings by prominent scholars such as Carolyn Dinshaw and Holly Crocker illuminating the system of sexual trafficking and manipulation governing Criseyde’s history. Criseyde, together with other women of Trojan history, disrupts the foundation of sexual economy crucial for patriarchal power structure through her infamous changeableness. As valuable conduits of dynastic legitimacy and a point of convergence for desire and anxiety, these women have variously been pitied, glorified, and demonized by male figures and authors telling their stories.

On the opposite axis of the objectified femininity stands objectified masculinity, showcasing curious venues of fetishization of legendary figures construed as models of virtue or examples of vice—both of which Trojan history have no shortage of. Along with Criseyde, I identify the medieval representation of Hector as a complex epitomization of gendered nuances present in Trojan history. The beautiful, perfectly preserved corpse of Hector in medieval Troy narratives, first introduced by Benoit de Saint-Maure’s *Roman de Troie* and readily adopted by numerous translators and rewriters, functions as a microcosm of the fetishized past. Prepared at the behest of a grieving Priam and displayed within Hector’s own tomb, the corpse is not only a

monument commemorating a crucial moment in the history of Trojan war, but also an object of desire itself attracting longing gazes from Trojans and Greeks alike. The carnality shared by war and sexual love is intricately underlined when Achilles happens to look upon Polyxena at Hector's tomb and instantly becomes consumed with amorous passions. Perhaps it is only appropriate that Hector, the symbol of idealized Trojanness and the forefather of the contemporary ruling class as understood by medieval European historiographers, embodies the desire for the city which he championed in life. The hero's corpse is the locus of interjoining desires, different in forms but all directed towards Troy.

By understanding Trojanness as a traumatic yet alluring specter, a rich interpretive model for understanding the reception and propagation of the Troy narratives in medieval historiography in English can be developed. Plagued by frequent invasions, internal conflicts and disrupted successions, medieval England was in dire need of a homogeneous past with which to construct a sense of collective identity and legitimized governance. Indeed, the Trojan past, along with the Arthurian past, forms a body of foundation narratives designed to combat such political concerns. Yet as the theory of hauntology suggests, exploration of identity comes with unresolved trauma; pride and anxiety over the proclaimed Trojan heritage maintain an uneasy balance in these texts, coexisting but never truly reconciled. The exploits of Arthur and his knights, admirable yet doomed to a tragic fate of internal conflict and societal collapse, mirrors the images of treachery and destruction which haunt Trojan history. With the threatening presence of Morgan le Fay and Guinevere testifying to the continued relevance of female sexuality as a crucial, but dangerous, component of masculine power structures, the Arthurian project of political legitimacy and coherent chivalric identity is ultimately proven to be

inherently flawed and unstable. In this sense, the Arthurian Britain—with its inheritance of the Trojan name and the Trojan trauma—is undoubtedly a recursive repeating of Troy.

The questions about medieval Troy surrounding topics of political legitimacy, aristocratic identity, and gendered power dynamics run through Troy narratives as recurring themes, doggedly tackled by medieval authors but never reaching a satisfying answer. The theoretical apparatus of trauma, spectrality, and gender and sexuality studies, as tools for locating and identifying the interconnected chains of heterogeneous affective values attached to Troy, helpfully inform my analysis of these topics as they are addressed by late medieval English texts. In the following three chapters, I examine the expressions and representations of these common threads in said texts, which I argue to be all traumatic in nature when read with their shared Trojan lineage in mind.

Chapter 1 of my project, “‘As freshe as any rose newe’: Imperfection, Fetishization, and the Symbolic Significance of Hector in the *Troy Book*,” discusses the depiction of Hector in the *Troy Book* by John Lydgate, who examines the surprisingly complex array of moral values and political mores attached to the Trojan prince. Although being the epitome of idealized chivalry as imagined by courtly society, Hector in the *Troy Book* often displays traits inconsistent with the impeccable image. To be sure, Hector maintains a mostly exemplary image in medieval Trojan historiography; Benoit, Guido, and the English translators of continental history of Troy seemingly present a suitably honorable portrayal of the hero at a glance. Yet even some of these accounts address Hector’s more problematic aspects, especially his volatile anger and covetousness. Notably, Guido’s clerkly criticism of martial valor is succeeded by Lydgate, who intermixes adulation of Hector and Trojanness with stark descriptions of Hector’s moral shortcomings and flawed decisions. The concept of the medieval Hector as an imperfect object

of desire is most clearly demonstrated when his corpse is preserved and displayed within his tomb as an organic monument to Hector's life and the Trojan war itself. The beautiful, dead Hector, juxtaposed with the beautiful, alive Polyxena in mourning, underlines the objectification and fetishization of the Trojan past in medieval historiography, with Achilles's connection to both Hector and Polyxena testifying to the morbid attraction of Troy as a haunting entity. Lydgate, although often accused of triumphalist valorization of Lancastrian regime in his writings, displays a nuanced understanding of Trojan history through narrative ambiguity in Hector's portrayal and edifying moralization directed towards his royal patron. Although Lydgate's attempt to construct a consistent political advice out of Trojan history is arguably a frustrated one, the *Troy Book* uncovers intrinsic anxieties within the political discourse of late medieval England by imagining Hector's Troy as a Lancastrian space.

I locate another expression of Trojan identity in Arthurian Britain in Chapter 2, titled "Memories of 'rewth works' and 'þe token of vntrawþe': Remembering and Repeating Troy in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*." Although chronologically situated after the fall of Troy, the legend of Brutus—as the founder of Britain—marks an important starting point for English appropriation of Trojan identity. Following the accounts of Geoffrey of Monmouth, the late medieval *Alliterative Morte Arthure* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* use the fallen Troy as a framing structure encircling the Arthurian narrative. Yet the ghost of Troy is not the only specter haunting the exploits of Arthur and Gawain; the prophesied deaths of Brutus's parents look forward to the ruptures within the family of Arthur, hinted at by the subversive presence of Morgan le Fay and realized by Mordred's usurpation of the throne. Mordred himself is a surprising indicator of historical awareness in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, as seen in his brief but potent moment of remorse which provides a veiled

commentary on his existence as a product of literary tradition. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the confused distinction between Aeneas and an ambiguous Trojan traitor prefaces Gawain's troubled, and ultimately questionable, journey to honorable knighthood. The chain of generational violence and family disputes in these nation-building narratives casts an ominous shadow over Britain, a nation already struggling with disrupted successions and dubious legitimacy present in its political history. If historiography as a genre can be seen as continuous repetitions of past events, the traumatic disruptions in royal genealogy contributes to the spectrality of such past by denying the moments of damage and fragmentation a silent burial by oblivion. The two Arthurian texts locate ambivalence and anxiety within their inherited Trojanness, complicating the picture of seamlessly translated empires continuing from Troy to Britain.

Having identified the themes of gender and sexuality—especially as these concepts pertain to women—as the common denominators of Troy narratives, I move on to Chapter 3, “‘Rolled shal I been on many a tonge’: Criseyde as the Medieval Helen.” The heavily gendered premise of the Trojan war, combined with medieval courtly society's interest in the control of heterosexual activities, identifies sexual relations as foundational elements in medieval Troy narratives. As the quintessential example of medievalized Trojan history, Criseyde exposes the underlying system of sexual economy supporting the patriarchal power structure of her society. Similar to Helen and other “stolen” women in and surrounding the Trojan war, Criseyde is doubly objectified as a figure of Trojan history and as a conduit of heterosexual desires as dictated by masculine community. In this sense, Criseyde repeats and recreates Helen's most dangerous traits, reanimating her essence as an epitome of feminine treachery and changeableness. While Criseyde is continuously victimized by the men attempting to assert

control over her desires and sexuality, she disrupts the dynamics of male-authored heterosexual relations governing both Trojan and Greek societies through troubling ambivalence and narrative ambiguity. While acknowledging the contribution by Benoit and Boccaccio to the development of the medieval “Criseida figure,” I concentrate on the version of the heroine as depicted by Geoffrey Chaucer and Robert Henryson. The Chaucerian Criseyde and Henrysonian Cresseid illuminate the patterns of desire emerging throughout their histories in differing ways, bearing witness to the narrative control of their experience attempted by male characters and authors alike. Criseyde’s lament that books will ruin her reputation is perhaps apt in this regard; her infamy becomes her body, with the (male) desire to continue in retelling of Trojan history keeping her alive as a literary specter.

I finish my project with a concluding chapter titled “Shadows of Thebes,” in which I argue that the medieval Thebes serves as the “other,” alternate version of Troy, in which somber warnings of moral corruption and anti-war messages find more explicit expression. Since no medieval royal family claimed descent from Thebes, the ancient city famous for Oedipus and his family’s downfall was depicted in a noticeably darker light in medieval historiography, with much emphasis placed on the contaminating effect of incest and destructive nature of war. As showcased by Lydgate’s *Siege of Thebes*, medieval Thebes becomes a site for imagining societal collapse brought on by genealogical irregularities and accompanying moral decay, demonstrated through generational conflict and internecine violence—a project too unsettling to envision with Troy. Yet the political anxieties revealed in Theban narratives are already present in the Trojan ones; Troy and Thebes are mirror images of each other, bespeaking what should and should not be done for an empire to persist.

Troy's significance as a traumatic object provided these poets structural modes of exploring the vexed concept of English identity through a frame of shared origins and collective implication in the larger script of *translatio imperii*. Due to the intrinsic ambiguity and instability present in Troy itself—whether concerning the moral reputation of certain figures or the construction of Trojanness in historical tradition—the narrative attempts to tell a coherent, satisfying, and comforting story about Troy inevitably end with frustration and anxiety. Yet such exasperation often engenders sites for rich cultural and political discourse on the power structures governing the contemporary society, as can be witnessed in these texts. Troy was, and still is, a crucial interpretive tool for understanding the intricate workings of literary history and cultural identity in late medieval England.

“As freshe as any rose newe”:

Imperfection, Fetishization, and the Symbolic Significance of Hector in the *Troy Book*

John Lydgate's *Troy Book*, commissioned by the future Henry V with keen political ambitions, eagerly tackles the relationship between the legendary Troy and contemporary England in the context of *translatio imperii*. Although the majority of the text is a close translation of *Historia destructionis Troiae* by Guido delle Colonne, Lydgate's faithfulness to the Latin history of Troy, combined with the embellishments provided by various mythographic details, implies a keen interest in the construction of a dynastic narrative establishing Lancastrian England as the true heir of Trojan identity. Lydgate's attempt at a faithful retelling of the Trojan war is preceded by a long line of works by numerous *auctours* who denounced the fanciful accounts of Homer while legitimizing the purportedly eyewitness accounts of Dares and Dictys—and their derivatives, including the work of Guido—as the only truthful account of the Trojan war. These authors, as emphasized by Lydgate in the prologue to the *Troy Book*, painstakingly picked out “the verreie trewe corn . . . seuerid from the chaf” (150-51), measured by “The trouthe only” (153). Boosting his own authority by extension as another addition to the tradition of “truthful” Trojan historiography, Lydgate thus seemingly prepares the ground for a triumphalist appropriation of Troy in the service of “The eldest sone of the noble kyng, / Henri the firþe” (95-96). However, a close examination of the *Troy Book* reveals the poem to be a surprisingly ambivalent, if not anxious, contemplation of exemplary kingship and governance. The portrayal of Hector as an idealized yet flawed figure, while consistent with Lydgate's professed allegiance to Henry, enables a complex commentary on the image of Hector and Troy as a deeply unsettling precedent for the contemporary English ruling class. For Lydgate, the dead

city and its champion is at once desirable and disturbing due to their moral ambiguity and eventual demise.

Lydgate has often been accused of being a blatant propagandist by critics who note the explicitly stated Lancastrian sympathy in his works, and this conviction has not encountered major opposition until the past few decades. The early verdict by V. J. Scattergood that Lydgate “had assumed a sort of unofficial laureateship” as a royal propagandist to the Lancastrian dynasty (73) suggests that Lydgate operated as a very specific kind of poet, and nothing more. Although Derek Pearsall’s biography of Lydgate ushered in increased scholarly interest in the poet’s works, Pearsall’s concentration on Lydgate’s so-called laureate status committed to the Lancastrian regime, along with his understanding of Lydgate as mainly “a Lancastrian apologist” expressed in a later study (“Lydgate as Innovator” 15), was echoed by many scholars. The *Troy Book* especially has been read as a royalist attempt to establish political legitimacy through the invocation of a prestigious Trojan heritage, due in no small part to its overt connection to Henry. Ambrisco and Strohm, for instance, identify “an attempt to grapple with the problem of how the broken series [of textual and royal legitimacy] is secured and guaranteed” in the *Troy Book*’s Prologue (40), while Christopher Baswell sees “another kind of national contest that is parallel with the militant national contests of Trojans and Greeks” in Lydgate’s ambitious vernacular translation of the Latin *Historia* (“Troy Book: How Lydgate Translates Chaucer into Latin” 226). Studies by Sylvia Federico and Alex Mueller on the *Troy Book* also interpret Lydgate as largely committed to the project of *translatio imperii*, although Federico is relatively more attentive in

her examination of the assumed connection between Trojan identity and Lancastrian legitimacy, the latter of which is ultimately undermined by the lingering presence of the Ricardian past.¹

However, there have been numerous attempts since these earlier works to redeem the authorial competence of Lydgate, providing more nuanced analysis of the poet's close engagement with history and contemporary politics. Among notable studies in this regard are Maura Nolan's *John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture*, Mary Flannery's *John Lydgate and the Poetics of Fame*, and Larry Scanlon and James Simpson's essay collection *John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England*. Of special note is Scott-Morgan Straker's chapter in Scanlon and Simpson's collection, in which he argues that assumptions about the concept of propaganda are often anachronistic and reductive when it comes to Lydgate criticism, especially when one considers the tonal discrepancies present within Lydgate's supposed propagandist tendencies. Rather, Straker finds the genre of public poetry—attributed to the work of Anne Middleton—more appropriate to describe Lydgate's method. According to Straker, public poetry, “with its devotion to the common weal and its mandate to offer advice to princes, enables Lydgate to balance the roles of loyal subject and political critic” (121-22). Straker has expressed a similar argument in an earlier article, identifying “a firm admonition cloaked in eulogy” directed towards Henry's militaristic agenda (“Rivalry and Reciprocity in Lydgate's *Troy Book*” 146) within the seemingly royalist sentiment of the *Troy Book*. My reading shares a similar understanding of Lydgate as a poet whose self-identification of a “loyal subject and

¹ Specifically, Federico contends that Lydgate's effort to establish the Lancastrians as legitimate successors of Troy, while repressing the destructive nature and sexual deviance associated with Troy “allowed Trojanness to become Ricardian—and Ricardianism to define the Lancastrians—in the early fifteenth century” (128). According to Federico's analysis, the Lancastrian political discourse exploited undesirable elements in Trojan identity by connecting them to the dethroned Richard II, but this in turn made their own Trojanness questionable and unsettling in nature.

political critic” often leads to ambivalent or disruptive textual elements, with the inherently destructive nature of Troy narratives further undermining the royalist purpose in the case of the *Troy Book*.

Despite the explicit royalist sympathy, the *Troy Book* handles Trojan historiography, and mainly the figure of Hector, in ambivalent and often upsetting ways that do not conform to the structure of simple propaganda in any convenient manner. Lydgate’s depiction of Hector, the paragon of Trojan chivalry as imagined by medieval authors and the forefather of legitimized Trojan identity, betrays a complex understanding of the contemporary English desire for Troy and its legacy. Hector in the *Troy Book* is an admirable yet deeply compromised figure, criticized for faulty military decisions and moral failures in life and fetishized through an objectifying monument in death. Of special interest to me is the meticulous description given for the magnificent tomb built for Hector, and the attention to the lifelike and beautiful countenance of his preserved corpse. I argue that Hector’s corpse as depicted by Lydgate, combined with the image of Hector as a flawed exemplar, enables an exploration of the Lancastrian desire for Trojanness through which frustration and anxiety towards ambiguous elements within Trojan history are revealed. The Trojan prince is kept in a state of stasis, dead but unburied, attracting desirous gazes from audience within and outside the text alike.

As the chosen hero of Troy, Hector held a special place in medieval Troy narratives. He was counted, along with Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar, among the three virtuous pagans, which was a subset of the Nine Worthies. First conceived by Jacques de Longuyon in *Les Voeux du Paon*, a romance composed in the early fourteenth century, the concept of nine historical figures famous for their virtues and martial prowess gained popularity during the remainder of the middle ages as a useful framework for exemplary literature. For instance, the

Parlement of the Thre Ages and the *Balletis of the Nine Nobles* are late medieval English works that utilize the Nine Worthies as crucial elements, recounting the history of each hero with Hector featuring prominently as one of the nine. Being introduced as “The firste . . . and aldeste of tyme” (300) of the Worthies in the *Parlement*, Hector’s achievements in battle are expressed through tangible numbers of Greek kings and warriors killed by him (“Nowmbron thaym to nynetene and nyne mo by tale / Of kynges with crounes he killede with his handes, / And full fele other folke, als ferly were ellis”; 308-10). The *Balletis* adopts the same formula, introducing Hector as the first Worthy famous for killing a remarkable number of enemies in battle (“In half thrid yeris slew xix kingis, / And ammirallis a hunder and mare, / With smal folk at unrekkynt war”; 2-4). Exemplary in martial prowess, statecraft, and princely conduct, Hector and the other Worthies achieved the status of “a common cultural currency” (Karras 6) in the middle ages, frequently depicted not only in literature but in visual artworks such as tapestries and woodcuts. Combined with the effort to establish Troy as the forefather of medieval nations, it is not surprising that Hector, fueled by the popular tradition of the Nine Worthies, was often heralded as the embodiment of idealized chivalry and aristocratic masculinity.

Similarly, Hector’s figure looms large in late medieval chronicles of the Trojan war written in English. The *Troy Book* by Lydgate, the anonymous *Laud Troy Book*, and the alliterative *Gest Historiale of the Destruction of Troy* by John Clerk of Whalley are near contemporaries that all purport to be authentic translations of Guido delle Colonne’s *Historia Destructionis Troiae*. While Clerk’s faithfulness to Guido fashions the *Gest* into a nearly word-for-word translation of the original Latin text,² the *Laud* and Lydgate’s *Troy Book* present more

² Although the *Gest* is sometimes considered to lack originality due to how close a literal translation it is compared to the *Troy Book* and *Laud*, it is possible that the very faithfulness to Guido testifies to Clerk’s ambivalence toward England’s prestigious Trojan lineage. Mueller

discernible authorial direction in terms of Hector's representation. Namely, the *Laud* actively reimagines Hector as an idealized epitome of chivalric masculinity, while the *Troy Book* showcases a more complicated image of the Trojan prince in terms of moral codes and decision-making ability. L. Staley Johnson has noted the discrepancies present across different representations of Hector in medieval Troy narratives, possessing "a double potential—as a figure of chivalry, he was an inspiration for knighthood; as an imprudent knight, he was a warning" (171), which she finds mirrored in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. However, close examination of the *Troy Book* reveals that Chaucer may not be the only English poet with an ambivalent outlook on Hector.

As noted above, Lydgate's explicit Lancastrian sympathy has often resulted in readings in which his works are viewed as nothing more than simple royalist propaganda. While it is true that the Lydgatean *corpus* is deeply implicated in the nationalistic project envisioned by the Lancastrian regime, the surprising ambivalence in said texts also betrays more a complex understanding of political discourses on legitimacy and morality. To be sure, Lydgate as a monk would have been arguably disposed to share Guido's ambivalence towards worldly fame as represented by Troy, but what grants a distinct thematic identity to his *Troy Book* is the complication of his political and moral allegiance expressed through the figure of Hector. Hector's personal flaws, often considered to be a simple extension of Lydgate's moralization, do not result in a facile instance of didactic literature. On the contrary, Lydgate's imprudent, covetous, and often wrathful Hector makes the entire project behind the composition of the *Troy*

finds veiled criticism of the English claim to the Trojan past in late medieval alliterative romances composed in northern England, including the *Gest* (4). As such, Clerk inherits Guido's often less than enthusiastic attitude towards the secular, ephemeral prosperity represented by Troy.

Book questionable, jeopardizing the triumphalism Lydgate is often accused of. The image of Hector in the *Troy Book* is further problematized by the reworking of the details surrounding the building of his tomb and display of his preserved corpse. The juxtaposition of Hector's corpse and Polyxena in mourning, equally described as beautiful and desirable, indicates the significance of the Trojan past as the object of desire through the point of view of Achilles. This diagram of one corpse and two live persons in turn merges interests in political legitimacy, fetishizing gaze towards material bodies, and anxiety about the ever-present death/civic destruction into a single concept. Despite a preserved, physical body still existing unburied within the text, Hector thus becomes a spectral cypher marking Trojanness itself. The *Troy Book* encourages the reader to envision Hector as a ghost of idealized heritage and memories of original loss, one that continues to haunt Troy narratives throughout their long tradition.

Living Hector: Imprudent and Covetous

Working with the established image of the medieval Hector as a paragon of chivalry and an example to be followed by contemporary rulers, Lydgate complicates his portrayal of the Trojan prince by intermixing his flaws with more familiar, admirable qualities. On multiple occasions, Lydgate emphasizes and embellishes Hector's undesirable traits that are less apparent in his source material. Specifically, lack of prudence and excessive greed are identified as the fatal flaws that ultimately doom Hector, and consequently, Troy.

Lack of prudence as one of Hector's defining flaws is first noted in Book 3 of the *Troy Book*, where Hector pursues the fleeing Greeks to their camp and encounters Ajax. Through a mysterious working "of cas or of fortune, / Tokne or signe, or som apparence, / Or by Naturis

kyndly influence” (3.2060-62), the two warriors recognize themselves to be blood-related cousins; Ajax is the son of Exioun (Hesione), Priam’s sister who was carried off by the Greeks during their previous war with Troy. When Hector cordially proposes to Ajax that he come to Troy, Ajax refuses on the ground of loyalty to the Greeks, acknowledging them as his adoptive family and comrades in arms. Instead, the half-Trojan warrior opts to make a request of his own: “make hem þat wer of Troye toun / Only with-drawe Grekis to pursewe, / And fro her tentis make hem to remewe, / And resorte ageyn vn-to þe toun” (3.2110-13). The scene is charged with language of chivalric and aristocratic virtue, with Hector observing that “To gentil herte sith no þing is so good / As be confederid with his owne blood” (3.2089-90), effectively uniting the two knights in a shared bond of noble bloodline, while Ajax appeals to Hector’s “knyȝthood and . . . worþines” (3.2108) and “knyȝtly routhe and compassioun” (3.2114) with the hope that he will spare the cornered Greeks. Hector, as expected, accepts his cousin’s request, ending the battle for the day. Thus the Trojans, who were in the process of pillaging the Greek camp and even close to setting fire to the ships, retreat and allow the Greeks to recover.

Yet surprisingly, Lydgate frames this anecdote of admirable chivalry with overt criticism and lamentation directed towards what is perceived to be the loss of a crucial opportunity to gain decisive victory against the Greeks. The meeting of Hector and Ajax is introduced with information on the disastrous outcome of Hector’s mercy, where Fate and Fortune are blamed for blinding the judgement of Hector and his comrades:

þe cause was dymmed wiþ dirknesse,
 þat hath Troyens þoruȝ false oppinioun
 I-blended so in her discesioun,
 And specially fordirked so þe siȝt

Of worþi Hector, þe prudent manly knyzt,
To sen a-forn what schuld after swe,
Be good avis þe meschef to eschewe
þat folwid hem at þe bak be-hynde. (3.1984-91)

Although prudence, along with manliness, is named as one of Hector's defining traits, his inability to predict the consequences of his action effectively causes him to display the exact opposite quality of said virtue. The Trojans are unable to see the implication of their retreat for the war due to their "lak of resoun and of hize prudence" (3.1998), sealing their own destruction in the future. In a typical fashion, Lydgate inflates Guido's comment on the deceptive nature of Fate framing the scene, which was in turn expanded from Benoit's original presentation. While the report of this incident is common across major English translations of Guido's *Historia*, Lydgate's emphasis on the loss of prudent judgement stands out when compared to the other two English texts. Clerk's denouncing of the "wirdis, þat is wicked" (7051) which blinds Hector's judgment in *Gest Historyale* reads as a largely faithful translation of the *Historia*, while the Laud poet places the blame solely on the fickleness of fortune, which has ruined many others besides Hector ("Many a body hath sche a-mayed / And many a man hath sche be-trayed"; 5911-12) including great men such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and king Arthur. In this passage, imprudence is marked by Lydgate as a debilitating flaw which facilitates the eventual destruction of Troy, with Hector's embodiment of it at a crucial point of the war singled out to be the figurative nail in the coffin.

In fact, caution against imprudence is one of the most important arguments on morality in the *Troy Book*, with its first introduction situated in the beginning of the war.³ After recovering from the previous war with Greece and a failed attempt at negotiation regarding Hesioné's return, the vengeful Priam discusses with his court the possibility of paying retribution to the Greeks. While the arguments for and against a new war are both deliberated, it is ultimately the invasion scheme of Paris that wins Priam's approval; the prince discloses his encounter with the three goddesses as a dream, suggesting the plan to "rauysche som lady of þat lond, / Of heyze estat" (2.2342-43) as part of a surprise attack on Greece. A brutally concise comment made by Shakespeare's Troilus is applicable here: "Why keep we [Helen]? The Grecians keep our aunt" (*Troilus and Cressida* 2.2.79). The premise of the war is based on an eye-for-an-eye approach towards a perceived theft of a woman; namely, the act of *raptus* makes for a fit beginning to a second Trojan war, with the trail of stolen women marking the history of enmity between Troy and Greece. But what is relevant for the current argument is Lydgate's pronounced criticism of imprudence on Priam's part. By sanctioning Paris's plan, Priam acts in a manner "travailed with wilful mocions, / Ouermaystred with [his] passious, / For lak of resoun and of hize prudence, / Dirked & blind from al prouidence" (2.1809-12, italics mine). As seen previously, the unfortunate lack of reason and prudence in Priam's decision will again be identified as the reason for Hector's rash decision to retreat in Book 3. Predicting the eventual fall of Troy which will come to pass due to this fatal decision, Lydgate exasperatedly asks Priam: "Wher was þi guyde,

³ Other instances in the *Troy Book* where the lack of prudence is identified as the instigator of unfortunate incidents include: Laomedon attacking Jason and his companions instead of showing hospitality to them (1.957, 2.99), Cethes ordering his daughter Medea to sit with Jason at a feast, causing her to fall in love with him (1.1823-26), and Achilles going to Troy coaxed by the promise of Polyxena's hand in marriage, which turns out to be a scheme to ambush and kill him (4.3157-59).

wher was þi maistres, / Discrecioun, so prudent and so sad, / Avisely þat schulde þe haue lad /
From þe traxis of sensualite” (2.1820-23). The lack of prudence is not solely attributed to the
Trojan side, however, as Helen is similarly accused of being “to wilful & rakil in þis cas / To sen
aforne what schuld after swe” (2.3598-99) when she leaves her house to see Paris, later to be
carried off by him. Careless decisions brought on by imprudence signal the beginning of the end
for Troy, with the same flaw accompanying Hector, its champion, throughout the course of the
war.

While prudence as opposed to hastiness was a popular subject in medieval moralizing
narratives and thus a convenient trope for Lydgate to incorporate, it emerges as a linchpin of
aristocratic virtue when considered in relation to Hector in the *Troy Book*. According to Colin
Fewer, prudence as understood by Lydgate is “not only a virtue complementing aristocratic
deliberation . . . but a principle of self-governance” (230) that is integral to the social relations
and self-fashioning of the ruling class, serving as a reminder of human agency to shape history as
opposed to subservience to an arbitrary fortune. Remarkably, Hector’s introduction at Priam’s
war counsel presents him as a discerning figure advising his father to consider the cost of
vengeance. Hector directly invokes prudence as the value needed for such a momentous
decision, with the defining quality of it named as the ability to consider every stage of the
potential outcome before executing the plan: he implores his father, “prudently consyderen in
3our herte / Al, only nat þe gynnyng but þe ende, / And þe myddes, what weie þei wil wende, /
And to what fyn Fortune wil hem lede” (2.2232-35). Hector’s possession and abandonment of
prudence, then, serve as a warning tale for the Lancastrians whom Lydgate writes for. By
underlining the disastrous loss of prudence in Hector, Lydgate communicates the importance of
shunning *wilfulness* and practicing *discrecioun* to his royal patron. As will be explored later in

this chapter, the precarious legitimacy of the newly throned Lancastrians made such advice on political virtues very much a pressing concern.

The other axis of Hector's dual flaws is defined as covetousness, expressed through multiple instances of the hero showing strong desire to loot the corpses of his vanquished enemies. The most conspicuous example of Hector's greed, however, would be the scene which follows after his battle with and killing of Patroclus. The armor of Patroclus, prominently adorned with precious gemstones, immediately catches Hector's attention as the lifeless wearer falls to the ground:

And, sothly, Hector, whan he first gan se
þe multitude of stonys and perre
On Patroclus, so orient and schene,
Vp-on his arme he hynged his horse rene,
þe mene while, whil he of hool entent
To cacche his praye was so dilligent,
Of couetyse, in þer alder siztes. (3.805-11)

Consumed by "couetyse", Hector turns his attention from the battle and focuses on attempting to strip the armor off the corpse. The direction of Hector's emotions in the scene is wholly defined by greed; the intense desire for the armor is the only essential motivation that drives his actions, and the Greek endeavor to protect the corpse makes Hector "in anger for to boille" (3.818).

Hector continues in his tenacious pursuit of the armor before finally being thwarted by the Greek reinforcement, through which he loses his horse; this turn of events appears to purge the greed from Hector's mind for the moment, "And of kny3thod his herte he reswmed" (3.881). The anger at the Greeks inhibiting his plunder thus switches into a martial furor that allows him to

slaughter many enemies. Yet the explicit display of actions contrary to the concept of conventional “knyȝthod” diminishes the integrity of Hector’s character in the scene.

The corrupting effect of covetousness on Hector’s character is further reflected by savage, dehumanizing imagery attributed to the Trojan prince. It is notable that the armor of Patroclus (and by extension, Patroclus himself) is referred to as Hector’s “praye”, a living prize to be claimed and consumed by him; accordingly, Hector charging towards the Greeks at the start of the battle is likened to “a lyoun in his hungri rage” (3.749). The bestial allusion is picked up in the ensuing rebuke from Merioun, a Greek warrior who arrives with three thousand knights to drive Hector away from Patroclus’s corpse. Merioun’s words of reproach are full of savage imagery that compares Hector to bloodthirsty predators: “O gredy lyoun, o wolfe most rauenous, / O hatful tygre, passyng envious, / Of avarice, o beste in-saturable, / And of desire, sothly vnstaunchable,” the angered Merioun exclaims, “Vp-on þis pray þou schalt þe nat now fede, / Go ellis-where to swe for þi mede” (3.821-26). The allusions to ferocious animals are greatly extended and amplified from Guido’s *Historia*, where Hector is called “Rapacious and insatiable wolf” (“Lupe rapax et insaturabilis”; 15.222, trans. Meek) in the corresponding scene.⁴ The lion imagery, specifically, is recalled later when Hector angrily ignores Andromache’s pleas to heed her ominous dream and refrain from fighting, and departs to what would be his final battle, “indurat, and hertid as lyoun” (3.5102). Avarice transforms the noble Hector into a ravenous beast, hungering for riches, martial glory, and violence, presenting an almost caricature-like portrait of the bellicose masculinity required of knights.

⁴ Translation of the *Historia* follows Meek’s 1974 edition.

The theme of covetousness as a fatal flaw continues to haunt Hector to the moment of his death, where he casts away his shield to despoil a fallen enemy, letting his guard down against a surprise attack by Achilles. Lydgate laments how “fals couetyse” (3.5354) had consumed and eventually killed Hector, that “couetyse and kny3thod, as [he] lere, / In o cheyne may nat be knet y-fere” (3.5365-66). Indeed, the impossibility of greed and chivalry coexisting indirectly denies Hector’s emblematic chivalry which makes him recognizable as the champion of Troy and forefather of Western European aristocracy. Lydgate stops short of explicitly delivering such a devastating criticism, however, since he comes to understand Hector as another case of a worthy man undone by “swiche ravyne” (3.5367). Thus the Trojan hero maintains his symbolic value, gaining a function as an exemplar with both positive and negative attributes to learn from. In an act consistent with the overarching effort to edify his royal patron observable throughout the *Troy Book*, Lydgate does not challenge Hector’s symbolic status but restructures the values assigned to him. As if to further drive the point home, it is at this point that Lydgate proceeds to describe how Hector “sodeinly was brou3t to his endynge / Only for spoillynge of þis riche kyng” (3.5371-72), firmly identifying greed as the sole cause of Hector’s untimely demise. While this sort of moralizing is consistent with Lydgate’s general tendency to expand on his source material, the preoccupation with “couetyse” showcases the main focus of his moralizing account of Hector’s death.

Interestingly, a comparative reading with Guido’s *Historia* reveals that the emphasis on Hector’s covetousness is Lydgate’s own addition, suggesting a conscious reworking of narrative direction towards the admonition of moral failure and tacit encouragement of better conduct. Guido does not mention Hector attempting to despoil his enemy at all at the moment of his death, only that he was ambushed and killed while leading away a prisoner:

Hector uero interim in quendam Grecorum regem irruerat, ipsum ceperat, et captum conabatur ipsum a turmis extrahere, scuto sibi suo post terga reiecto ut habilis regem ipsum a turmis eripere potuisset. Quare pectus suum discoopertum tunc gerebat in bello, scuti sui defensione destitutus. Achilles dum persensit Hectorem ante pectus scuti sui subsidium non habere, accepta quadam lancea ualde forti, non aduertente Hectore, in ipsum irruit et letaliter uulnerauit in ventre sic quod eum mortuum deiecit ab equo.

Hector in the meantime had rushed upon a certain Greek king, had seized him and was trying to drag him in captivity away from the troops. He had cast his shield over his back so that he might more easily snatch the king away from the troops. For this reason he displayed his unprotected chest in battle since he lacked the defense of his shield. When Achilles realized that Hector did not have the protection of his shield over his chest, he took a very strong lance, which Hector did not observe, and rushed upon him and wounded him mortally in the abdomen, so that he fell dead from his horse. (21.165-73)

Thus, Guido's Hector demonstrates only one instance of covetous action when attempting to strip off the armor of Patroclus, and the flaw of avarice has no relation to his death. Other major English translations of the *Historia*, the *Gest Historyale of the Destruction of Troy* and the *Laud Troy Book*, follow Guido's account in their respective description of Hector's death. This would indicate that Hector meeting his untimely end due to his covetous indulgence in plunder is a deliberate authorial choice by Lydgate. As a construct of tradition, the medieval Hector becomes a historical object open to differing interpretations, the concept of which Lydgate explores by bringing Hector's more questionable traits into attention.

Hector's undesirable traits as portrayed by Lydgate, while ostensibly conflicting with the image of an idealized epitome of chivalrous nobility expected of the medieval Hector, are

ultimately consistent with the didactic principle that governs the *Troy Book*. Medieval Troy narratives, especially ones composed for an aristocratic audience, aimed to provide a reference point not only for the budding concept of nationhood but also for shared values and mores. Barbara Nolan, in examining the differing takes on *romans antiques* by Chaucer and the continental poets, demonstrates how these poets conveyed “systematic, but often indirectly presented, moral arguments” (2) geared towards the ruling class through heavily medievalized retellings of classical history and legends. More recently, Władysław Witalisz presented a comprehensive reading of medieval English Troy narratives as “a specific sub-genre of didactic historiography, a kind of *speculum historiae*, which in effect becomes a *speculum principis*” (35), while noting the concentration of medieval historiography on the value of the past as an edifying model for the present. Of special interest for the my argument is the treatment of Hector as an exemplar for medieval princes. One example of medieval didactic literature prominently featuring Hector is the *Epistle of Othea to Hector* by Christine de Pizan, composed approximately in the early fifteenth century. Christine’s epistolary advice on courtly behavior, in which the goddess Othea teaches Hector aristocratic virtues and desirable conduct for a worthy knight through moralized retellings of classical tales, was available to English audiences via multiple translations. Stephen Scrope’s version, which emerged in the mid-fifteenth century, proudly identifies itself as a “Book of Knyghthode”, full of exemplary lectures “the whiche teche and counesell how a man schuld be a knyght for the world prynspally” (Pref. 30-35). Lydgate himself invokes “Othea, goddesse of prudence” (38) in the Prologue to the *Troy Book*, showing familiarity with the precedent set by Christine.

Although medieval Troy narratives generally acknowledge the fickleness of Fortune and Achilles’s treacherous nature as major factors in Hector’s death, Lydgate’s account deliberately

underlines the consistent, debilitating presence of Hector's moral failures on top of those factors. This overt moralization reads as Lydgate's attempt to provide princely advice for his audience, perhaps specifically with Henry, the patron of the *Troy Book*, in mind. Witalisz's understanding of the medieval Hector as "a hero equipped with all the qualities of a perfect prince and yet a hero that falls" (97) is apt here. The Lydgian Hector, an admirable paragon of virtues who still showcases definable flaws, is a complex mirror for princes that can inspire and warn at the same time.

Dead Hector: The Fresh Rose

The symbolic status of Hector as a Trojan hero is further complicated when Lydgate arrives at the description of Hector's lifelike, beautiful corpse. Flawlessly preserved and displayed as the centerpiece of Hector's own tomb, the corpse becomes the locus of mourning and desire generated by Troy—a microcosm of Trojan historiography itself. Yet the curious course of objectification undergone by Hector's lifeless body does not start immediately after his death, since the infamous dragging of Hector's body perpetrated by a furious Achilles is absent in medieval accounts of the Trojan war. Although the dragging is described in Dictys's account, Benoit and Guido follow Dares's version, where Achilles is soon attacked by Memnon after killing Hector, sustaining heavy injuries and being carried away from the battlefield himself. Recovering the fallen Hector without incident, the Trojans start the process of lengthy mourning, during which they are almost transformed into near-corpses themselves by the excessive sorrow. In the *Troy Book*, Priam turns "cold as any stoon" (3.5533) as he faints on the corpse, Hector's brothers become "Trist and pale, for sorwe wer nyȝe ded" (3.5538), and the wailing women are seen "Hem silfe diffacynge in her compleynyng" (3.5568). As Sarah Salih points out, the corpse

is envisioned to be an “effective affect-machine” (67) approximating a relic even before its preservation is completed; turning pale, nearly dying and wishing for death, the mourners engage in a shared mimicry of death through which they process the trauma collectively.

The drastic revivification of Hector’s body is planned amidst the mourning process, seemingly addressed before any mention of the plans for constructing the tomb which will house the body. Priam, wishing to keep the corpse from decomposition, employs the most skillful masters in Troy to devise an elaborate system of preservation. Noting how an untended body left on the ground is naturally destined to putrefy, Lydgate asserts that the course of decomposition can be avoided “ȝif crafte be a-boue nature” (3.5589), underlining the incredible level of technical ingenuity involved in the schemes for preservation. The fruits of this almost supernatural labor manifest in an elaborate tomb for the fallen Trojan prince, situating his perfectly preserved corpse as the centerpiece. Along with the corpse, a golden statue “havyng e þe liknes / Of worþi Hector, þat gan his face dresse / Toward Grekis, where he dide stonde, / Ay þretyng hem with his swerd on honde” (3.5649-52) is placed somewhat redundantly within the tomb, providing another means to situate Hector in a temporal suspension immortalizing his idealized image.

The marvel of the preserved corpse, however, is undoubtedly the focus of the tomb. Through the incredible works of the masters recruited by Priam, the corpse maintains a lifelike countenance full of beauty and vitality. The corpse, asserting itself as the occupant of the tomb, is presented for all visitors to see rather than being concealed and buried in a coffin:

And amyddes al þis grete richesse,
Þei han y-set, by good avisenesse,
Þe dede cors of þis worþi knyzt,

To sizt of man stondyng as vp-ri3t,
By sotil crafte, as he were lyvyng,
Of face & chere, & of quyk lokyng,
And of colour, sothly, and of hewe,
Beinge as freshe as any rose newe,
And like in al, as be supposaille,
As he lyuede in his apparaille: (3.5653-62)

Hector's extremely lifelike corpse channels the Freudian concept of the uncanny in a surprisingly literal sense: something once familiar but not anymore, originally meant to be hidden (within a house in Freud's etymological analysis, buried in a coffin in this scene) but disturbingly exposed. E. R. Truitt, examining similar instances of preserved corpses including that of Hector in medieval French and English narratives,⁵ has noted the unnatural character of such objects: "Embalmed bodies are clearly natural objects, but are also the product of artificial intervention. The efforts to duplicate exactly particular people or to keep them from putrefaction result in automata that are simultaneously impressive and monstrous, and produce a frisson of the uncanny" (98). However, whereas the uncanny object envisioned by Freud is unsettling due to its connection with repressed infantile desires, Hector's uncanny corpse is an attempt to actively conjure up the past. Lydgate's Trojan history thus contains within itself a snippet of a preserved, resurrected past embodied by Hector's corpse. In this sense, the corpse as an "affect machine"

⁵ Truitt discusses a variety of lifelike corpses comparable to Hector's corpse, ranging from Camille in *Roman d'Eneas* to historical figures such as Alexander the Great and Charlemagne. She views them mainly as marvels which marry ingenuous human artificiality with natural agents of preservation, with the description of Hector's corpse across centuries reflecting "shifts from magical to mechanical [that] mirrors technological developments that began in the early fourteenth century, which allowed for the creation of more complex machines, including automata" (115).

exerts its effect not only in generating a collective mourning as Salih notes, but also in the stimulation of a historiographical impulse to propagate the story of Troy. Similar to the uncanny display of Hector's corpse, the Trojan past as related by medieval authors always returns, but is never repressed.

The beautiful but uncanny corpse of Hector is also reminiscent of Lydgate's stance towards Trojan history, which is complicated by surprising moments of ambiguity not harmonious with his apparent objective of eulogizing the Lancastrians' Trojan descent. As evidenced by the survey of prior scholarship on Lydgate and the *Troy Book*, there has been notable disagreement regarding the level of criticism the poet shows towards Henry and his aggressive foreign politics. Noting the ongoing critical divide, Robert J. Meyer-Lee suggests that ambiguity is precisely what Lydgate aims to deliver, identifying a connection between the ambivalence noted in war memorials such as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the *Troy Book's* treatment of legendary history. To illustrate this connection, Meyer-Lee summarizes what he perceives to be the modus operandi for this brand of memorials:

[Memorial monuments] are strategically designed signifying edifices that seek to impel negotiations between the present and a typically violent, deadly, traumatic moment in the past. They usually have didactic intentions, serving as interpretive gateways that aim to direct the viewing individual's negotiation with the past toward civic and ethical ends, as these were conceived by the memorial's builders; and yet, especially when the memorialized events were disastrous rather than victorious, a memorial's didactic intentions can be acutely polysemic, underdetermined, and ambivalent. Memorials stand at once as a claim to have transcended the trauma that they memorialize, evidence that

the polity in which they exist continues to thrive, and a warning of the ongoing possibility of like trauma. (285)

Reading the *Troy Book* as an intentionally ambivalent memorial for a perceived historical trauma, Meyer-Lee ultimately argues that Lydgate's aim in tackling Trojan history is "to forge community and hence renew the possibility of civilization by means of the public, shared experience of the renegotiation of that trauma" (287). However, his analysis mostly centers around physical monuments described in the poem, with Hector's corpse serving as a constituent to the much larger tomb; a traumatic reminder placed within an otherwise eulogistic memorial, rather than being an ambivalent memorial in itself. Rather, the affective values attached to the corpse, as seen in the mourning process and the excessive attention to its physical integrity, suggests that it is in fact an object potent enough to function as an independent monument to the personal history of Hector. The mourning, technical marvels, and objectifying fantasies surrounding the corpse grant it a rich equivocality created by the idealized visage of the fallen hero and the grim reminder of his death which, by extension, leads to Troy's eventual fall.

The elaborate method by which the corpse is preserved imbues this marvel with further tangibility. A system of golden pipes connected to the urn at Hector's head delivers preserving balm throughout the body, with the liquid mixture gathered in a vial at the feet emitting an ever-increasingly pleasant odor.⁶ Ever diligent to details, Lydgate dedicates approximately 40 lines to the description of this network; starting with the entry point in the "crown", to "eche party and extremyte" and "nerfe & synwe", taking note of the golden urn at the head and the vial at the feet

⁶ For an illuminating discussion on the relationship between the urban planning of Lydgate's Troy and the interest in civic hygiene in contemporary London, which also informs the description of elaborate piping within Hector's corpse, see "Sovereignty and Sewage" by Paul Strohm in *Lydgate Matters*.

which enable the circulation of the liquid, he essentially outlines a literary schematic of the system (3.5663-704). Within the static, contained space of the tomb, artificial ingenuity succeeds in halting the destructive process of nature. The diagram of pipes and containers revivifies the memory of Troy embodied by Hector, reproducing the historiographic project of the *Troy Book* at large in a microcosmic scale.

Of course, Lydgate is hardly the first author to describe this intricate system in detail. As with many other elements of medieval Troy narratives, Benoit de Saint-Maure's *Roman de Troie*, the source of this episode, sets a precedent by meticulously describing the process of cleansing and shrouding of the body, finishing off with a verdict that "When they had clothed him with it, you would have thought him to be still alive" ("E quant il li orent vestue, / Semblant vos fust que toz fust vis"; 16526-27).⁷ The system of golden pipes and vessels at the feet also originates in Benoit (16764-83), which Guido slightly revises to produce a description which almost reads like a gradually articulated diagram, following the movement of the balsam from the head, to the torso, the limbs, and the extremities (22.66-84). English translators of Guido, of which Lydgate is one, closely follow this template. The corporeal, ephemeral materiality of the human body is ironically recalled by the elaborate method of preservation, which in turn attaches the foreboding signification of inevitable destruction to Hector's body. The corpse, although envisioned as an idealized symbol of Trojanness, is a grim reminder of death awaiting for all secular beings—humans and empires alike—as potent to the medieval audience as to the Trojans and Greeks gazing upon it in-text.

⁷ Translation of the *Roman de Troie* follows Burgess and Kelly's 2017 edition.

Lydgate's true originality in retelling this scene, however, expresses itself in the subtle embellishment on the desirable attributes of Hector's corpse. Specifically, the beauty of the corpse is described to be "as freshe as any rose newe", not only preserving a lifelike complexion but achieving incredible beauty. Indeed, physical beauty and lifelike quality seem to be the dual constituents of the marvel of the revived Hector, as the description of rose-like "colour . . . and . . . hewe" of the corpse is immediately followed by the assurance that he looked exactly "As he lyuede in his apparaille". The rose metaphor is especially significant since roses in the *Troy Book*, often in conjunction with lilies, are otherwise used exclusively as a metaphor for female beauty; Medea (1.1949-63, 1.2974), Helen (2.3667-68), Criseyde (3.4127-34), and female saints (3.4376-80) are all compared to roses in some way.⁸ In another instance, the passion of young lovers and its deterioration during old age are likened to roses that bloom and wither according to seasonal change (2.2531-41), underpinning the symbolic connection between roses, beauty, and amorous passion. Lydgate is, of course, using floral imagery as a conventional expression conveying the sense of physical beauty in these scenes. However, Hector's dead male body is perplexingly yet discernably bound together with alive female bodies by the metaphor of the fresh rose, causing the desires directed towards them to intermingle. As roses represent the ephemeral beauty and martyred virtues of women, so do they signify the always already dead glory of Troy as epitomized by Hector's beautiful corpse.

⁸ Respectively these scenes refer to: the lovesick Medea's changing complexion being compared to roses and lilies, Jason calling Medea "goodly fresche rose", Helen's beauty observed by Paris for the first time (roses in conjunction with lilies), Criseyde's beauty which is tarnished due to her weeping over her encroaching departure from Troy (again, roses with lilies), and finally "þe rosen hew / Of martirdom . . . With þe lillye of virginite / And violettis of parfit chastite" that were earned by female saints, whom Lydgate contrasts with false women like Criseyde.

The botanical metaphor continues with the intrinsically vegetative quality identified in the revivification process. The corpse is “lifly of colour, / Fresche of hewe, quyke & no þinge pale” (3.5682-83) by virtue of the preserving balsam infusing it, which Lydgate compares to “a sowle þat were vegetable, / Þe whiche, with-oute sensibilite / Mynystreth lyf in herbe, flour, and tre” (3.5686-88). That is to say, the corpse is tantamount to a plant life in its apparent vitality combined with the lack of mobility, emotions, and rational thinking. It is almost as if Hector’s corpse is technically alive again; revived, but not reanimated. Seen from this angle, the tomb itself serves as a space situated outside of the standard flow of time due to its function as a repository of stationary memory. The environmental features inside the tomb, such as the perpetually burning lamps (3.5705-11), also support the notion that the burial space encircling the corpse exists in a sort of suspended motion. Much like the preserved corpse, the tomb contains and preserves the memory of Hector.

The desirability of Hector’s body, expressed through the rose metaphor, is simultaneously reinforced and problematized by its juxtaposition with the desirability of another Trojan royalty possessing rose-like qualities, Polyxena. During Hector’s funeral feast, held over a fortnight during the anniversary of his death, both Trojans and Greeks are allowed liberty to visit each other in a relatively cordial atmosphere. Accordingly, Achilles acts on his desire to visit Troy and “to se / Hooly þe maner of þis solempnyte” (4.549-50). Formally displayed for the feast for all to see, Hector’s corpse is still maintaining its visage which is “*As freshe* of colour kepte vn-to þe sizt, / As lifly eke, and as quik of hewe / To be-holde *as any rose newe*” (4.566-68, italics mine), continuing and further cementing the floral imagery established in the introduction of the corpse. Incidentally, Hecuba and Polyxena attend the feast with a group of noble Trojans at the same time as Achilles is visiting the scene, with Polyxena standing out

among the crowd due to her exceptional beauty. Describing the Trojan princess deep in grief, Lydgate calls for the reader's imagination:

But trowe ȝe (as Guydo list to telle)
Pat Polycene, in al hir woful rage
I-chaungid hath vp-on hir visage
Hir natif colour, *as fresche to þe sizt*
As is þe rose or þe lillye whizt?
Ouþer þe freshenes of hir lippes rede,
For al þe terys þat she gan to shede
On hir chekis, as any cristal clere? (4.582-89, italics mine)

Even as he comments on Polyxena's pale complexion and disheveled hair, Lydgate cannot help but emphasize her flower-like "natif colour", which seems almost enhanced by her pitiable state. The rose metaphor, functioning as isolated analogies of female beauty in the *Troy Book*, finds an unexpected doubling in this passage due to the close textual proximity between Hector's corpse and Polyxena. Once again, the dead male body and the alive female body are equated by the image of fresh flowers which denote their physical desirability. Hector and Polyxena, similar and complementary in their beauty, are fully exposed to the fetishizing gaze from the visitors, the narration, and the historiographical imagination surrounding medieval Troy at large.

Achilles is another common denominator for the two Trojan royal siblings, being the killer of one and the admirer of the other. Gazing upon the beautiful Polyxena in mourning, the Greek hero immediately becomes smitten with love. What follows is the conventional languishing of a lover pining for his unavailable beloved, substantiated by the fact that Polyxena surely hates Achilles due to his slaying of her brother. But Hector's presence in this newly

established romance plot is not limited to the implication of his death. The lovesick Achilles laments that, even though no man including “Hector . . . Of Polycene þat was þe worþi broþer” has ever bested him in battle, the tender-aged Polyxena thoroughly conquered him (4.660-76). As this observation by Achilles insinuates, Polyxena’s status as a Trojan princess inevitably carries political implications for a Greek suitor, with her kinship with Hector becoming another factor contributing to her value as an object of conquest. As Lynn Shutters notes, women in the *Troy Book* behave like translatable texts with varying placements on “opposing lines of truthfulness and falsehood”, reflecting the contemporary concern over literary and political legitimacy (70).⁹ Interestingly enough, when providing a list of good women as a counterpoint against Guido’s vilifying account of female inconstancy, Lydgate counts “þe maydenhed of þonge Policene” (5.2209) along with the virtues of Penelope and Hecuba, with women such as Helen and Criseyde standing as prime examples of false women on the other axis. The virginity of Polyxena is not only her most valuable asset but her defining quality, and as Shutters observes, she “remains unvaryingly true to both her nation and her feminine ideals of chastity” by accepting her fate as a sacrifice (86). With Hector established as a valorous, if flawed, model of chivalry, Polyxena signifies herself as a model of chaste and loyal femininity. Achilles acknowledging the worthiness of both siblings is thus significant; Polyxena’s corporeal desirability is intrinsically connected with her brother’s already conquered, but still desirable, corpse. As Achilles gazes upon Polyxena, so does the medieval reader the lifelike corpse of Hector. The objectifying gazes issuing from the destroyer of Troy and the purported descendants

⁹ Shutters further suggests a connection between the *Troy Book*’s interest in feminine (in)constancy and the contemporary anxiety over foreign queens, especially Katharine of Valois. Although Lydgate strives to present the marriage of Henry and Katharine as a unifying event which will solidify the Lancastrian rule over England and France, Shutters regards the repeated appearance of false women in his Trojan history as symptomatic of unresolved political anxiety.

of Troy merge into one within the walls of Hector's tomb, as their desires for the beautiful Trojan body find expression in the image of roses.

As the juxtaposition with Hector's corpse introduces an unexpectedly disturbing quality to Polyxena's idealized beauty, so does Achilles's desire for Polyxena inform his relationship with Hector retrospectively. The fetishization of Hector's corporeal body finds an unexpected expression in the enmity between Hector and Achilles, in which hostile interactions are charged with carnal undertones. During a three-months truce in Book 3, a richly dressed Hector visits the Greek camp, going straight to the tent of Achilles. Achilles, who is revealed to harbor "gret affeccioun / In his herte, boþe day and nyȝt, / Of worþi Hector for to han a siȝt"¹⁰ (3.3772-74),¹⁰ welcomes the Trojan prince. This encounter is introduced between the Trojan council's decision to exchange Criseyde (along with the Greek prisoner Thoas) for Antenor and the ensuing anguish of Troilus, discreetly foregrounding the context of sexual traffic before and after the scene. The conversation between the two men is mostly civil, if somewhat belligerent. Although Achilles remains largely composed—compared to his Homeric counterpart, that is—in his anger for the death of Patroclus by Hector, he still vows revenge for his fallen companion.¹¹ Pleased at seeing Hector unarmored and desirous of killing him, Achilles communicates hatred and fixation as psychological phenomena sharing the same affective wavelength, resulting in a curious expression of hostility expressed in terms of physical intimacy. His recollection of past

¹⁰ This longing to see Hector is supported by the fact that Achilles has never had a good opportunity to inspect him at leisure, "For vnarmyd he myȝt him neuer se" (3.3778). The emphasis on unarmed body perhaps adds even more physical, and personal, nuance.

¹¹ Medieval Troy narratives concur with their classical sources in having the death of Patroclus be a major cause of enmity between Achilles and Hector. However, quite unlike the heavily homosocial (and arguably homoerotic) bond the classical Achilles shares with Patroclus, the attachment Achilles bears for Patroclus is largely eclipsed by his newly emphasized desire for Polyxena in medieval accounts.

encounters with Hector in battle effectively captures this complex sentiment with language heavily saturated with physicality:

For I ful ofte, in werre & eke in fiȝt,
Haue felt þe vertu & þe grete myȝt
Of þi force, þoruȝ many woundis kene,
Pat vp-on me be ful fresche & grene
In many place, be shedyng of my blood—
Pou were on me so furious and wood,
Ay compassyng to my distruccioun;
For many a mail of myn haberion
Pi sharpe swerd racid haþe a-sonder,
And cruelly seuered here and ȝonder,
And mortally, as I can signes shewe,
My platis stronge percid & I-hewe,
And myn harneis, forgid briȝt of stele,
Miȝt neuere assured ben so wele,
In þin Ire whan þou liste to smyte,
Pat þi swerd wolde kerue & bite
In-to my fleshe, ful depe & ful profounde,
As shewiþ ȝit be many mortal wounde
On my body, large, longe, and wyde,
Pat ȝit appere vppon euery syde,
And day be day ful sore ake and smerte. (3.3795-815)

Achilles receives Hector's formidable might through his bleeding wounds, with the furious blows penetrating the armor and leaving deep scars on the flesh. The wounds bring pains on a daily basis as a collection of physical trauma, reminding Achilles of the intimidation posed by Hector and his own burning desire for a bloody vengeance. Achilles's desire to slay Hector personally and directly, expressed by phrases such as "with myn hondis tweyne" (3.3792) and "with myn owne hond" (3.3850), is reciprocated by Hector, who vows to conquer the pride of the Greeks "with [his] hondis two" (3.3931). Indeed, reciprocity seems to be a crucial component of the dynamics between the two men, as the acknowledgement of mutual desire to kill joins them in shared enmity. The violent and strangely carnal union of Achilles and Hector adds another layer of objectified physicality experienced by Hector's body in the *Troy Book*.

The fetishization of Hector in the *Troy Book* is consistent and multifaceted, whether the objectification takes the route of presenting a portrait of a flawed hero or a living-dead simulacrum. While the vices of imprudence and covetousness mar the image of the idealized Trojanness personified in Hector, the metonymic connection established with Polyxena's highly desirable femininity exposes his corpse to fetishizing gazes from within and without the text. Yet the multiple layers of objectification are further expanded by the contemporary dynastic concerns of the Lancastrian regime dictating Lydgate's Trojan history. Lydgate's public identity as a poet closely aligned with courtly interests informs, and provides guidance to, the politically charged narrative of the *Troy Book*.

The Lancastrian Mirror of Troy

Lydgate's Troy maintains a close symbolic relationship with Lancastrian England through parallels informed by the authorial concerns over contemporary politics and a highly motivated desire to edify the royal audience. The Prologue to the *Troy Book*, where Lydgate explains Henry's intent behind commissioning an English history of Troy, expresses these ideas in emphatic terms. According to Lydgate, his patron was specifically interested in disseminating Trojan history in English as opposed to Latin or French, thereby granting England an equal cultural footing on which to stand with the continental nations:

By-cause he wolde that to hyze and lowe
The noble story openly wer knowe
In oure tonge, aboute in euery age,
And y-writen as wel in oure langage
As in latyn and in frensche it is;
That of the story þe trouthe we nat mys
No more than doth eche other nacioun:
This was the fyn of his entencioun. (111-18)

The conscious invocation of English national identity, corroborated by an earlier invocation of "Brutys Albyoun" (104) as Henry's future realm, is intrinsically linked to the consciousness of Trojan lineage claimed by the English. As such, transmission of Trojan history shifts into solidification of Englishness defined by and unified under the Lancastrian kings. Moreover, the English composition of Trojan history is motivated by the desire to elevate the status of English—proudly acknowledged as "oure tonge"—as a literary language, to the level of learned

languages such as Latin and French.¹² It is reasonable to assume that the elevation of English, encouraging of nationalistic sentiments, and promotion of Lancastrian legitimacy were deeply interconnected concepts in Henry's mind. Henry, being the second king of a relatively new dynasty with dubious claim to the throne, had ample reason to present himself as a champion of Englishness. John H. Fisher hypothesizes that the "sudden burst of production in English after 1400 . . . was encouraged by Henry IV, and even more by Henry V, as a deliberate policy intended to engage the support of Parliament and the English citizenry for a questionable usurpation of the throne" (1170). More prospectively, cementing the kingship in England would also mean strengthening the claim to the French throne, which Henry relentlessly pursued until his death in 1422.

Chaucer's contribution to the advancement of English as a learned language is similarly noted by Lydgate, who credits his *mayster* as the first poet to ever endow the uncouth language with literary eloquence. The inclusion of Chaucer in the list of prominent authors on Trojan history referenced in the *Troy Book* is not solely prompted by his authorship of the influential *Troilus and Criseyde*. Famous for his admiration for *mayster Chaucer*, Lydgate lavishes unequivocal praise on his literary predecessor specifically for refining the English language in Book 3:

For he owre englishe gilte with his sawes,

Rude and boistous firste be olde dawes,

Pat was ful fer from al perfeccioun,

¹² Ardis Butterfield offers a comprehensive and compelling analysis of the complex relationship between English and French languages during the Hundred Years War, which ranged from co-development to nationalist rivalry, in her monograph *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Years War*.

And but of litel reputacioun,
Til þat he cam, & þoruȝ his poetrie,
Gan oure tonge firste to magnifie,
And adourne it with his elloquence— (3.4237-43)

Given the emphasis placed on English as a constitutive element of English identity, the perceived importance of Chaucer's role is hardly surprising; being the holder of "þe laurer of oure englishe tonge" (3.4246) is tantamount to being a birthfather to Englishness itself. The literary reputation of Chaucer, in other words, finds a connection to the political project of the Lancastrian England in a specified context of Trojan historiography in English. It is in moments such as this one where Lydgate appears to express his Lancastrian sympathy without any complication or equivocation, earning him, as can be seen in the readings of Pearsall and many others, a reputation as a simple apologist for the regime in power.

Yet as examined up to this point, the ambivalence present in the *Troy Book* undermines its eulogizing mission to present a celebratory account of Trojan history for an aristocratic English audience. As Lydgate himself acknowledges in the Prologue, the history he is about to relate is of "the dreȝy pitus fate / Of hem of Troye . . . / The sege also, and the destruccioun" (105-07), which is nothing short of a disturbing tonal shift from the otherwise exultant Prologue. To better understand this narrative conflict, characterized by the coexistence of desire for and anxiety towards Troy, I now turn to the concept of conjuring presented by Derrida. Superficially, the assertion of Englishness (and Henry's claim to that Englishness) is substantiated by propagating the master narrative of Trojan ancestry inherited by England. However, the act of narrating the traumatic history conjures up the disturbing possibility of destruction and exile once experienced by the Trojans as well. In other words, to succeed Troy is to inherit its trauma.

Similar to the affective milieu surrounding the beautiful but uncanny corpse of Hector, the hope to preserve the past in its most idealized form perseveres, yet that attempt is marred by the painful nature of said past in the process of its being conjured up. What results from this clash of desire and anxiety is twofold: a profound ambivalence towards Trojan history expressed in many medieval Troy narratives including the *Troy Book*, and repeated, almost obsessive conjurings of the traumatic yet alluring Trojan past. Neil J. Smelser's chapter in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* notes the repeated cycle of remembering and forgetting seen in instances of cultural trauma and summarizes its effect to be precisely such an ambivalence.¹³ The continued reliving of the perceived cultural trauma, Smelser observes, results in "a reservoir of hundreds of different renditions of the memory . . . a nonending, always-expanding repository consisting of multiple precipitates (both negative and positive) of a continuous and pulsating process of remembering, coping, negotiating, and engaging in conflict" (54).

Following increased scholarly interest in Lydgate in recent years, there have been attempts to reconcile the professed Lancastrian sympathy and disturbing tonal lapses coexisting in Lydgate's works. Taylor Cowdery, for instance, argues that Lydgate's tendency to leave frustrating narrative gaps in his works is the product of deliberate authorial decision. According to Cowdery, Lydgate cannot help but betray his perception of the perpetual discrepancy between historical matter and poetic form, which is in turn reflected in his poetics that "tend at once to fixate upon the discontinuity of the matter of history with poetic form and to draw attention to

¹³ Smelser and others contributing in the collection admittedly concentrate on cultural trauma based on tangible historical events such as the Holocaust and slavery, yet they acknowledge that the traumatic events in question do not have to "exist" in an empirical sense. Jeffery C. Alexander, for instance, points out how "events that are deeply traumatizing may not actually have occurred at all; such imagined events, however, can be as traumatizing as events that have actually occurred" (8).

whatever aspects of history remain beyond or in excess of form” (568). In this line of interpretation, Lydgate is not only aware of the tonal discrepancies present in his historical works, but attempts to comment upon the impossibility of telling a perfectly stable, homogeneous account of the past for the benefit of the present.¹⁴ It also makes sense, then, that the vigorous movements to establish literary and national identity in contemporary England come with the self-conscious anxiety over the artificial nature of such an identity. As Lee Patterson puts it, the very “intensity” with which the Lancastrian regime utilized this rhetoric of legitimization “was a symptom of anxiety rather than certainty, both a reflexive dependence on old modes of persuasion and a doubt about their effectiveness” (“Making Identities” 72). This anxiety in turn undercuts the apparently genuine expressions of Lancastrian sympathy throughout the Lydgatian *corpus*, rendering the end results ambivalent at best.

However, the troubling ambivalence is what ultimately grants the *Troy Book* its political pertinence, since Lydgate’s understanding of himself as an advisor to Henry strongly informs both his optimistic and pessimistic projections for the future of a Lancastrian England. Paul Strohm provides an insightful observation about the precarious balance which Henry IV and V struggled to maintain, which Lydgate as a pseudo-court poet would have felt keenly. Channeling Lacan’s concept of the two deaths and the space in-between, Strohm sees in the body politic of the deceased Richard II “a recurrent reminder, not just of its own discontent, but of all the

¹⁴ Andrew Lynch’s chapter in *Representing War and Violence, 1250-1600* rejects speculation about Lydgate’s authorial intent as unverifiable, but his reading of the *Troy Book* and *Siege of Thebes* is consistent with my own. Namely, Lynch argues that while Lydgate’s Trojan history employs and problematizes “both chivalric and clerkly discourses of war”, his Theban history utilizes “a summary clerical mode” more overtly critical of war, making both poems depict warfare as “an envious, irrational and ultimately insane activity, old and cold, ungenerative of good” (81-80). This difference in poetic approach between Trojan and Theban historiography is a point I will return to in the Conclusion.

problems generated by an imposter succession and the extent to which they lie beyond the powers of the new incumbent to resolve” (103). Strohm agrees with Patterson in that he regards Lydgate’s works to be fundamentally ambivalent, sincere in their alignment with their patrons’ political interests yet unable to break free from the internal ambiguity and discrepancy inherent in historical material. His image of Lydgate is one of loyal but troubled poet-subject, whose self-professed loyalty to the Lancastrians is constantly at odds with the textual impulse to point towards unsettling gaps in his own legitimizing narratives. What Strohm argues for Lancastrian texts at large is readily applicable to the authorial struggles identified in the *Troy Book*: “a hardworking text, always striving but never succeeding in reconciling its placid surface with its external entanglements and its internal contradictions” (195). As such, tonal discrepancies in the *Troy Book* are not to be dismissed as simple imperfections on the textual surface; rather, they are the core elements of a Lancastrian literary identity.

The wish to provide guidance to the young monarch in such a turbulent political climate finds expression in anxious glances to, and overt moralization of, disturbing aspects of history in the *Troy Book*. The emphasis on prudent and reasonable governance, exemplified by the figure of Hector in both positive (when he behaves as the valiant paragon of idealized Trojanness) and negative (when he acts with imprudence or greed) portrayals, can be read as an advice on desirable royal conduct for the young Prince of Wales. Straker’s reading of the Lydgatian texts, in which the poet unabashedly celebrates England under the Lancastrian rule but delivers veiled critique of Henry’s militant foreign policies, is apt here. As if to comment on the unstable present and nebulous future Henry is facing, the Envoy to the *Troy Book* implores the prince to hold “The sword of knyghthod and the scepter also” (52) in his hands, marrying military power needed for conquering his enemies and effective statecraft needed for governing his subjects into

a singular picture of ideal kingship.¹⁵ For Lydgate, the ghost of Troy has a clear purpose for returning: motivating and edifying the future king of England.

However, the shrine of Hector which houses the preserved corpse lingers on throughout medieval histories of the Trojan war like a specter linked to a memory that is neither forgotten nor resolved. In a sense, medieval Troy narratives are an exercise in historiography as a restorative gesture in that they claim aspects of a traumatic past and allow them to be represented, if only in highly controlled and often self-contradicting ways. The immutable relevance of Troy makes possible its continuing return of the un-repressed within the sociocultural milieu of medieval England, one of its purported descendants, even as the trauma of death and destruction haunts the project of national self-making. Moreover, England's legendary past is pluralistic in nature. The anonymous late medieval Arthurian romances discussed in the next chapter cast an ambivalent glance towards the distant Trojan past while recounting another traumatic past that is temporally and spatially nearer to contemporary England, arriving at a sort of troubled double-conjuring.

¹⁵ On the implication of contemporary military culture in late medieval texts including those of Lydgate, see Catherine Nall.

Memories of “rewth works” and “þe token of vntrawþe”:

Remembering and Repeating Troy in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

The Alliterative *Morte Arthure* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* explore the fantasies of homogeneous past and nationhood, grappling with the disturbing presence of an unsavory, post-Trojan past. Being a crucial foundation narrative for Western European nations, the myth of Trojan origins was especially potent in medieval England where a stable, homogeneous genealogy was difficult to establish due to a history fraught with foreign invasions and ruptures in royal succession.¹ However, Troy narratives were also the source of profound anxiety since they perpetuated the nightmarish trauma, or omen, of war and destruction. Even as Troy transfers the disturbing visions of a burning city and distraught refugees to its purported descendants, these founding narratives attempt to utilize Troy as a crucial building block for the construction of collective identity. Ironically, the effort to reclaim and redeem the traumatic past results in repetitions of disruptive elements throughout various points of narrated history.

The troubled relationship between these two Arthurian romances and the issue of legitimacy testifies to this inherited anxiety towards origins. Mordred’s surprisingly self-aware moment of remorse in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* providing a veiled commentary on their existence as products of literary tradition, and the supposed existence of a Trojan traitor

¹ On the development of nationhood in medieval England, especially as it pertains to historiography and poetic tradition, see *Imagining a Medieval English Nation* edited by Kathy Lavezzo.

juxtaposed with Aeneas prefacing Gawain's troubled, and ultimately questionable, journey to knighthood in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Curiously enough, the anxiety over unstable origins expressed through fractures in family structures also finds echoes in the early Brutus of Troy narratives composed by Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace and Layamon, in which the forefather of Britain starts his journey with the death of his parents inadvertently caused by himself. The chain of generational violence in these nation-building narratives casts an ominous shadow over Britain, a nation that will struggle with political implications of disrupted legitimacy throughout its recorded history. The very nature of historiography, however, makes the continued return of the traumatic past across different versions of narrated history unavoidable, with the scars left by internal conflicts and familial violence contributing to the spectral presence of Troy and its remnants.²

Narrative repeatings of the past enabled by historiography can render the past traumatic according to the psychoanalytic understanding of trauma, regardless of whether the events being narrated are actually damaging in some sense or not. Chaucer's use of Virgilian material, particularly the Dido episode in the *Aeneid*, has been read as an instance of such repeatings, in which the poet "wrestles with the great problem of Virgilian authority in the face of competing versions and conflicting interpretations" as noted by Baswell (*Virgil in Medieval England* 221). Yet it is precisely the act of literary repeating, enacted by countless authors of chronicles and historical romances, that instigates the heterogeneity of such competing narratives which troubled Chaucer. Freud's "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through" compares the act

² On Arthurian tradition's implication in the construction of British sovereignty, see Patricia Ingham's *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain*. Ingham's concentration on the persistent theme of loss in Arthurian narratives is particularly relevant to my reading.

of pathological repeating to “conjuring up a piece of real life” (152). More specifically, the patient under analytic (as opposed to hypnotic) treatment “does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but *acts* it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he *repeats* it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it” (150). In this sense, the past is not allowed a death by oblivion, but granted a lingering spectral presence within the patient’s psyche.

Understanding historiography as a genre intimately associated with the concept of traumatic repeatings enables a reading of Trojan historiography as continuous reliving of an originary loss and desire. Repetition compulsion as an endemic quality of trauma, first conjectured by Freud, helpfully illustrates the relationship between a single moment in the past and the act of repetition which produces the trauma in effect. Although the traumatic moment itself is located in the past, it is the delayed and repeated re-living of the moment that truly makes it traumatic. The Trojan trauma, as it were, maintains a sort of spectral presence in the foundation narratives employing it as a key element. Caruth’s phrasing in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* aptly repeats the spectral language used by Freud: “To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (5). Yet even as the past haunts the present, trauma can only be perceived as something located on the margins of the legible memory. Caruth further elaborates on the matter:

The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all. And it is this inherent latency of the event that paradoxically explains the peculiar, temporal structure, the belatedness, of historical experience:

since the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time. If repression, in trauma, is replaced by latency, this is significant in so far as its blankness—the space of unconsciousness—is paradoxically what precisely preserves the event in its literality. For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence. (8)

Granted, Caruth discusses history as a series of tangible, lived experiences with empirical presence, but the collective literary imagination propagating historical narratives undergoes much the same process. Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience* further explores the temporal dislocation immanent in trauma, by which “survival becomes for the human being, paradoxically, an endless testimony to the impossibility of living” (62). When understood in the vein of trauma studies, medieval Troy narratives are uncanny repetitions of an imagined originary moment—distinctly painful in nature but integral to the construction of a perceived collective identity.

Brutus of Troy: Lost Identity and Familial Violence

Before moving on to the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, I wish to discuss the early Brutus of Troy narratives, since they establish an important thematic precedent reproduced by the Arthurian works; namely, the ruptures in kinship ties juxtaposed with the memory of Troy.

The founding of Britain by Brutus of Troy, reported first by Geoffrey of Monmouth and widely adapted by subsequent authors, is essentially a restructured variation of his great-grandfather Aeneas's exploits. As mimicked by Brutus, Aeneas and his followers, by foregoing their Trojan heritage and constructing a new identity centered around Rome, successfully commence the birth of a new empire. Responding to David Quint's insightful reading of the theme of trauma and repetition compulsion in the *Aeneid*, Marilyn Skinner applies the same approach to the latter half of Virgil's epic, focusing specifically on the divine intervention by Venus and the problematic furor expressed by Aeneas when initiating a battle against Latium. Although Venus envisions Aeneas's Rome as a continuation of the lost Troy, "a substitute for the vanished mother city" (41), Skinner points out that per Juno's request, the name of Troy disappears in time as it is integrated into the Latin identity. That is, Troy has already been a traumatic past in Aeneas's time, fading into nebulous margins of history but always present as an unburied proto-memory.

Skinner's vision of Troy as "a phantom settlement materializing over and over, trailing oppressive memories with it" (48) finds strange echoes in Brutus's settlement in Albion. Wace's account of New Troy slowly becoming London in the *Roman de Brut* is juxtaposed with a blunt report that the Britons/Trojans eventually lost the rule over the island ("And all the Britons disappeared / And never after got redress"; 1199-1200).³ According to Wace, the loss of Trojan ethnic and linguistic identity is specifically due to foreign invasions, London (and possibly Britain at large) being "A land so often seized and lost" (1242). Similarly, Layamon's *Brut* considers the changing names of Brutus's New Troy to be symptomatic of cultural destruction.

³ Translation of *Roman de Brut* follows Arthur Wayne Glowka.

The cities built by Brutus, along with their good names, are “fallen” due to the changes in people connected to their identity:

Ʒus is Ʒas burh i-uaren; seððen heo ærest wes a-reræd.

Ʒus is Ʒis eit-lond; i-gon from honde to hond.

Ʒet alle Ʒa burhƷes; Ʒe Brutus iwrohte.

& heora noma gode; Ʒa on Brutus dæi stode.

beoð swiðe afelled; Ʒurh warf of Ʒon folke. (1032-36)

Thus has the city fared since it was first founded,

Thus was this island went from hand to hand

So that all the burghs that Brutus built

And their good name that existed during Brutus’ day

Were greatly diminished due to change of the peoples.⁴

The loss of Trojan identity, once recognized, forges a symbolic connection between Rome and Britain as fellow inheritors of the renounced Trojanness. For Brutus, who not only boasts a direct lineage from Aeneas but also symbolically retraces his forefather’s steps through his own nation-building journey, Troy becomes doubly spectral. The lost Trojan past persists within the bloodline of Aeneas and Brutus, expressed through repeated themes of exile and resettlement, and further reinforcement of Trojan spectrality by continued re-namings and re-identifications.

The theme of lost and fractured origins is further echoed in the destruction of familial ties present in Brutus’s own origin. In a strange similarity with classical Theban history, the

⁴ Translation of the *Brut* is my own.

descendants of Aeneas in Rome and Britain display an unsettling habit of killing, or causing death of, their own kin.⁵ In Geoffrey of Monmouth's account, Brutus's parents are identified as a grandson of Aeneas named Sylvius and a niece of Lavinia, Aeneas's Latin wife. When the couple conceives and court magicians are consulted about the sex of the child, a surprisingly ominous prophecy is delivered: "[the mother] would give birth to a boy, who would kill his father and mother, and after travelling over many countries in banishment, would at last arrive at the highest pitch of glory" (4).⁶ Indeed, the inadvertent deaths of the parents would become an indirect catalyst for the fated founding of Britain by their son; the mother dies giving birth to Brutus, who later kills the father in a hunting accident. Brutus is then exiled from his homeland, collecting Trojan refugees on the way and eventually founding a settlement bearing his name on the island of Albion. Even as he reenacts the exploits of his forefather Aeneas and transmits his Trojan—and Roman—heritage to his own kingdom, Brutus essentially begins his legendary career by denying himself a right to succeed his birth father. And as if commenting on the vexed issue of legitimate succession in Brutus's origin, Geoffrey reports that the Roman prince was not the first one to settle in Albion; after being informed by Diana that his future home will be "An island which the western sea surrounds, / By giants once possessed" (14), Brutus discovers the island still occupied by a small number of giants, and a ruthless conquest of the native population marks the beginning of Brutus's New Troy.

⁵ The sons of Oedipus, Eteocles and Polynices, cause a bloody civil war due to a dispute over the throne of Thebes. In medieval retellings of Theban history, their moral failures are often attributed to their unnatural birth; being the result of the incestuous union of Oedipus and his mother Jocasta, the brothers are considered to have been naturally violent and cruel. More discussions on the medieval Theban historiography, and its intrinsic connection with Trojan historiography, will follow in the Conclusion.

⁶ Translation of *Historia Regum Britanniae* follows Aaron Thompson and J. A. Giles.

This juxtaposition of a foundation myth with ruptures in kinship ties is not an isolated incident in the house of Aeneas; the members of the Roman branch of Aeneas's descendants, Romulus and Remus, start their empire with a fratricide. A disagreement over the location of their new city—and in some versions, kingship of the city—leads to a falling-out between the brothers, with Remus eventually getting killed and Romulus being crowned as the king. Although the story of the Roman twins does not fall within the purview of British chronicles on insular history, it was accessible to learned readers through Latin accounts such as the works of Ovid and Livy. For an instance of medieval chronicles compiling universal history, John Trevisa's translation of the influential *Polychronicon* by Ranulf Higden provides a comprehensive account of how “Remus was i-slawe in þat strif” (2.57). Indeed, the opening lines for *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* invoke Romulus among other Trojan founders scattered throughout Western Europe, including Brutus. The conscious gesture towards Roman lineage in the British foundation narrative results in a conspicuous doubling of family killings which signal the birth of new empire. Familial violence located in the originary moment is ultimately a reflection of tension caused by frequent invasions, internal conflicts, and resulting fractures in the narratives of legitimate kingship and harmonious communal identity, all of which have plagued Britain from its very inception.

The Alliterative *Morte Arthure*: Remembering and Working Through the Troubled Past

The motif of familial violence is further repeated and underscored in Arthurian narratives, where family disputes and murders emerge as foundational elements present from the early accounts on Arthur's history rather than appearing with the later romance tradition. Despite

being a significant moment in English romantic historiography and thus a major component of collective English identity, Arthur's reign is nevertheless fraught with anxieties regarding legitimacy and rightful succession. An example of such anxieties can be found in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, which provides an early Arthurian history untouched by the French tradition surrounding Lancelot and the genre of courtly romance represented by him. This Arthur is much more preoccupied with conquering foreign realms than festive jousts or banquets, with his knights primarily behaving as warriors rather than lovers. Accordingly, Lancelot is merely one of many valiant knights who comprise Arthur's court, and Guinevere is mostly associated with her sudden marriage to the traitorous Mordred during the tumult of Arthurian civil war. Instead, the poem establishes firmer links with earlier British chronicles championed by Geoffrey; Clegis, one of Arthur's knights, casually mentions Brutus and Troy as integral elements of his ancestry (1694-99), and as will be discussed later, Hector appears along with other Nine Worthies in Arthur's dream.

More importantly, however, the poem provides the context for its historiographical stance by establishing the animosity between Britain and Rome as the prelude to Arthur's empire-building. Following Geoffrey of Monmouth, the war and triumph against Rome has been faithfully adapted by English chroniclers and romance poets, ranging from the *Morte*-poet to Thomas Malory. It is only natural, perhaps, that Rome has emerged as one of the most prominent foreign adversaries of Arthur since the early development of Arthurian tradition; as self-proclaimed descendants of Aeneas, Rome and Britain share a common thread of foundation myth to base communal identity upon. The rivalry is established from the very beginning of the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, where the poet explicitly declares that the subject matter of the poem will be about "How they won with war worshippes many, / Slogh Lucius the lithere that lord

was of Rome, / And conquered that kingrik through craftes of armes” (22-24). This assertion is immediately followed by a list of realms that Arthur has conquered within the British Isles and over in the European continent (26-47), which effectively frames Rome as one final object of conquest which awaits Arthur’s military might. Yet as has been foretold by Geoffrey’s history, Arthur’s victory against Rome is almost concurrent with his downfall heralded by Mordred. As soon as Arthur gains validation as the true ruler of Rome and thus successor to the name of Troy, he is forced to face the end of his own legacy.

The military aggression between Britain and Rome, formally started with a confrontation with Roman ambassadors, provides Arthur with an opportunity to demonstrate the power and splendor of his court in the face of Roman adversity. On New Year’s Day, a Roman senator accompanied by sixteen knights visits Camelot to demand an official acknowledgement of submission and fealty by Arthur to the emperor, Lucius Iberius; Arthur is to see the emperor in person, explaining why he has unlawfully occupied Roman realms and antagonized former rulers, the emperor’s kinsmen. A threat of invasion in the event Arthur chooses to ignore the summon follows, with the senator adding at the end: “Thy fader made fewtee we find in our rolles, / In the regestré of Rome, who-so right lookes” (112-13). Apparently, Arthur’s father acknowledged Rome as a superior body of government overseeing his own court, which would by logic indicate that Arthur is also affected by the same obligation of fealty. According to Arthur, however, those tributes “That teenfully tint was in time of [his] elders” (272) were forcefully collected from commoners when there were no military opposition. In a stroke of aggressive decisiveness which characterizes his actions throughout the poem, Arthur reconstructs the Roman narrative of British submission into the British narrative of Roman trickery and possible cowardice. This reworked script of past injury supplies Arthur’s vassals with

justification for an appropriate expression of outrage and promise of military support for their king, which Arthur eagerly commends.

The Arthurian project of narrative control goes beyond the assertion of rightful vengeance against Roman wrongs and challenges the legitimacy of the current emperor directly. After explaining past servitude under Rome as a temporary, if unfortunate, situation which had no permanent significance on British independence, Arthur further claims that it is in fact the emperor who must pay tributes to him, since his lineage grants him legitimate governance of Rome. The breakdown of genealogical evidence provided by Arthur is full of appropriate name-dropping based on the past British conquests of Rome:

I have title to take tribute of Rome;
Mine auncestres were emperours and ought it themselven,
Belin and Bremin and Bawdewyne the third;
They occupied the empire eight score winters,
Ilkon eier after other, as old men telles;
They covered the Capitol and cast down the walles,
Hanged of their hedesmen by hundrethes at ones;
Senn Constantine, our kinsman, conquered it after,
That eier was of Yngland and emperour of Rome,
He that conquered the cross by craftes of armes,
That Crist was on crucified, that King is of heven.
Thus have we evidence to ask the emperour the same,
That thus regnes at Rome, what right that he claimes. (275-87)

The names of Arthur's predecessors who conquered Rome, derived from Geoffrey of Monmouth's accounts, endows Arthur with the claim to the throne of Rome regardless of historical veracity or the actual degree of kinship shared by him and these figures. While the war against Rome is framed as an act of vengeance against unlawful rule and extortion, the added incentive of reclaiming what is rightfully in British possession further motivates the vassals to rally in vindictive support of their king ("Of this grete vilany I shall be venged ones, / On yon venomous men with valiant knightes!"; 298-99, "Now shall we wreke full well the wrath of our elders!"; 321, "It is our werdes to wreke the wrath of our elders!"; 385). Ultimately, the Arthurian script of retribution and legitimacy shapes the ideological frame of the war in a way that takes the narrative control away from the Roman script. Yet the forced nature of Arthur's claims underlines the instability of mythical genealogy as a tool for political agenda even as it creates the needed momentum for the poem's subject matter. As Randy P. Schiff argues, "Far from merely seeking to reclaim a lost piece of a stable and continuous territory, Arthur betrays, both through his hot-headed response to Lucius's demand and through his initiation of a roving Continental campaign, that he is acting according to the impulses of expansionist empire" (*Revivalist Fantasy* 121). When Arthur declares in front of the counsel that the purpose of the war is "To outraye [his] enemy . . . That occupyes [his] heritage, the empire of Rome" (642-43), he demonstrates that the Arthurian control over the war narrative is fully in effect.

Yet even as the Roman empire establishes itself as the arch-nemesis of Arthurian Britain at the start of the poem, the narrative does not move on to the battles against emperor Lucius or his vassals. Instead, Arthur faces the giant of Mont Saint Michel, an enemy more violent, inhuman, and perhaps interesting than the vilified Roman emperor. When informed of the damage wrought by the giant in the realms subject to him, Arthur's rage is immediate and fierce,

and for good reasons; the giant has cannibalized countless “fauntekins of free-born childer” (845) and taken women to enslave and violate, recently kidnapping the duchess of Brittany, who is revealed to be Guinevere’s kinswoman. As Anne Clark Bartlett notes, “the threat to the Arthurian patriarchal code is doubly underscored by the Duchess’s blood relationship to Arthur (she is both a relative and a subject), and by the Giant’s slaughter of all of the male children in the region, which threatens the stability of the community’s patrilineal social organization” (63). The threat to the continuation of aristocratic bloodlines, caused by the consumption of children and women of noble birth, antagonizes the royal masculinity represented by Arthur in a disturbingly personal and urgent way.

The threat of the giant is further signified by Arthur’s failure to prevent the rape and murder of the duchess. After traveling to the giant’s lair, Arthur learns through the mournful, and gruesome, testimony of the duchess’s nurse that she has already been slain: “He had murdered this mild by mid-day were rungen, / Withouten mercy on molde, I not what it ment; / He has forced her and filed and sho is fey leved; / He slew her unslely and slit her to the navel” (976-79). Noticeably, the corresponding account of the giant and the duchess in Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace, both of which predate the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, have the duchess die from terror before the act of rape can commence. Instead of shielding the duchess from the disgrace, the *Morte* poet reports the violation and mutilation of her body with explicit details, thereby removing the protective ambiguity surrounding violence against desirable women in most chivalric romances. When Arthur arrives at the grave of the kinswoman he could not rescue in time, he is forced to face the implication that his world does not prevent aristocratic women

from being taken, killed, or otherwise made unavailable—an alarming apprehension, to be realized when Mordred usurps Guinevere’s bed along with the throne.⁷

While serving as a foil to Arthur, the giant of Mont Saint Michel also highlights unsavory aspects of Arthur’s regal identity by embodying traits which parallel and twist the idea of kingship. The personal threat that the giant poses to Arthur, suggested by the indirect connection between the raped duchess and the unfaithful Guinevere, is compounded by the giant’s desire for Arthur’s beard. In possession of “a kirtle . . . borderd with the berdes of burlich kings” (998-1002), a symbol of emasculating subjugation for said kings, the giant covets Arthur’s beard to add to the collection; a request that Arthur has seemingly ignored for “all this seven winter” (1009), leading to the giant’s repeated provocation within Arthur’s continental domains. The giant considers Arthur’s beard to be so valuable that he would not accept any other offerings from the king, and finally acquiring the beard would please him more than gaining the control over “Borgoine or Britain the More” (1018). The repeated references to realms as territories possessed by the giant is significant, since he indeed acts as the overlord of the fifteen realms under his control, collecting revenues and amassing “more tresure . . . Than in Troy was . . . that time that it was wonnen” (886-87). The surprising reference to Troy, along with the parodied representation of kingship, transforms the giant into a sort of anti-Arthur similar to Lucius.

⁷ Lucy M. Allen-Goss argues that the rape of the duchess functions as a traumatic subtext which flows under the language of violence and sexuality in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, deeming the poem “not anti-war but anti-rape” (71). Although her use of trauma theory in the reading of the rape and its aftermath is perceptive, she makes no mention of the threatening effect on Arthur’s chivalric masculinity presented by Guinevere, which I will discuss at a later point in this chapter.

The parallels between Arthur and the giant of Mont Saint Michel have been noted in prior scholarship, but the Troy reference highlights their similarities in a way that has not been fully examined yet. “In Arthur’s case, monstrosity and heroism are states not wholly predicated on difference” (153), Jeffrey Jerome Cohen contends in his study of giants in premodern English literature, noting the similarities between the giant’s cannibalistic rule and Arthur’s own ruthless campaign on the continent which continues even after he vanquishes Lucius. Indeed, Arthur subjects a couple of Roman senators to a show of humiliating subservience similar to the giant’s collection of beards when, after the death of Lucius, they visit his camp to formally acknowledge him as the new ruler of Rome and plead for their lives: after allowing the senators to live on the condition that they act as his messengers to Rome, Arthur sends them to barbers to be shaved (They shoven these shalkes shapely thereafter / To reckon these Romanes recreant and yelden / Forthy shove they them to shew for skomfit of Rome; 2333-35). However, as Cohen himself notes, the connection between the giants and Britain extends far beyond the enmity of this specific giant and Arthur. The native giants of the island conquered by Brutus remain as ominous echoes of the origin preceding Troy, with their literary descendants reemerging as formidable enemies of Arthur and his knights. As Anke Bernau argues in relation to the fractures of communal identity seen in the historical writings of early Britain, “the inheritance of the giants cannot be erased entirely and crops up in place names, customs, and the seemingly indefatigable tendency of the British to sinfulness and internecine conflict” (640). The giant of Mont Saint Michel brings with him the shadows of the past before Troy, firmly antagonizing not only Arthur’s identity as a chivalric ruler but also his Trojan lineage.

The anxiety over Arthur’s chivalric masculinity, and by extension genealogical legitimacy conferred by Trojan origins, expresses itself through another facet of royal

succession—female sexuality as a conduit of patrilineal descent. Despite Guinevere’s negligible presence in the poem, her role in the decline of Arthurian empire is acutely noted and commented upon by multiple figures. When Craddock reports the treachery of Mordred to Arthur, he goes over various outrages committed by Mordred and his followers, saving “the worst” (3549) news that “He has wedded Waynor and her his wife holdes . . . And has wrought her with child” (3550-52) for the last. Although it is left unclear whether Guinevere deliberately chose to align herself with Mordred at this point, her complicity is apparently confirmed when Arthur sees Mordred in possession of his sword, Clarent. As the indignant king explains, “Wiste no wye of wonne but Waynor herselven; / Sho had the keeping herself of that kidd wepen, / Of coffers enclosed that to the crown longed” (4204-06). The poet seems to concur with Arthur when he reports that, after being instructed to flee by Mordred, the despondent Guinevere became a nun “all for falshed and fraud and fere of her lord” (3918). And in stark contrast to Arthur’s childless marriage with Guinevere, Mordred fathers multiple children with her during their marriage. To combat this damage done to his patriarchal authority, a dying Arthur after his final battle with Mordred commands his vassals to “merk manly to Mordred children, / That they be slely slain and slongen in waters”, so that “no wicked weed wax ne writhe on this erthe” (4320-22). His brief concern about Guinevere’s well-being after the order to exterminate her progeny with Mordred is almost incidental (If Waynor have well wrought, well her betide!; 4325). The surprising order of infanticide by Arthur, while underlining “the tortuous course of the genealogy of empire that is defined by disruptive and transgressive acts such as Brutus’ accidental patricide” (Mueller 125), also ensures that the bloodline of Arthur will die out just as the one of Brutus did. And although Mordred’s origin as a result of the incestuous union of Arthur and his sister is not explicitly referenced in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, the

unnaturalness of his birth is alluded to, with the poet calling him “Sir Mordred the Malbranche” on two occasions (4062, 4174) and Gawain contemptuously commenting that “Of such a engendure full little joy happens” (3743) regarding Mordred.⁸ The fall of Arthur’s court is occasioned by corrupted lineage, which retroactively calls into question his own claim of legendary heritage.

Of course, the main focus of Arthur’s campaign is placed on emperor Lucius, whose overt claim to Trojan heritage—unlike the subtler connection to Troy held by the giant or Mordred supported by Guinevere—directly challenges the Arthurian prerogative. The Roman army possesses a strikingly heterogeneous identity, even though the British army led by Arthur comes from just as diverse regions and cultures. As if in deliberate contrast with Arthur’s European host, the Roman army is mostly comprised of Oriental and pagan forces. The commanders serving under Lucius are explicitly “hethen kings” (1284) with the Sultan and the Saracens being prominent figures, and giants fight among the ranks of kings and knights, with one particular giant from Genoa being called “that erraunt Jew” (2895)—a derogation specifically pointing towards his alien and hostile nature. Arthur and his knights are very aware of the cultural and religious difference between the two opposing forces, as reflected in Gawain’s speech to his men: “The fekil fey shall fail and falssede be destroyed! . . . They make faith and faye to the Fend selven!” (2860-62) Later, the treasonous Mordred gathers “a sorte of selcouthe berners” (3531) of foreign or pagan origins to assemble an army of his own, whom

⁸ Similar to the incestuous origin of Mordred, the infamous May Day massacre, in which an anxious Arthur abandons all children born on May Day to the sea in an attempt to eliminate the prophesied destroyer of his kingdom, is not referred to in this poem. The account of mass infanticide—which Mordred survives—is largely popularized by Mallory, but it appears to originate from the post-Vulgate *Suite du Merlin*, and the ominous allusions to the biblical Herod has been noted in critical studies.

Arthur calls “renayed wretches” (3572). The poem locates the identity of Arthur’s enemies in their illegitimacy and heterogeneity—the usurper, Roman or British, leads an army of cultural and religious Other to antagonize the legitimate king.

Among these chaotic forces of conveniently branded enemies stands Priamus, the polymorphous nature of whose identity denies him a facile definition of otherness. A prince and heir to a foreign kingdom, he boasts a lineage which is an amalgamation of multiple non-Christian heroic traditions, with notable connection to the Nine Worthies. When asked about his identity by Gawain, who defeated him in a fierce joust, Priamus provides a compact summary of his ancestry:

My name is Sir Priamus, a prince is my fader,

...

He is of Alexander blood, overling of kinges;

The uncle of his aiele, Sir Ector of Troy.

And here is the kinreden that I am of come,

Of Judas and Josue, these gentle knightes;

I am apparent his eier, and eldes of other;

Of Alexandere and Afrike and all tho out-landes

I am in possession and plenerly sesed. (2595-2608)

However, even as Priamus locates his lineage in the bloodlines of the Greek, Trojan, and Jewish Worthies, the obvious parallel to Hector’s father Priam seems to finally define his identity to be Trojan, shaping him into another potential rival to the Arthurian claim to Trojan descent. The confrontation between Priamus and Gawain is thus a duel between two potential heirs to the

name of Troy. And as if to legitimize the lineage of Gawain, and by extension Arthur, the defeated Priamus transfers the Greco-Trojan part of his pedigree to Gawain when falsely told that his conqueror is but a lowly knave in Arthur's court: "If his knaves be such, his knightes are noble! / There is no king under Crist may kempe with him one! / He will be Alexander eier that all the world louted, / Abler than ever was Sir Ector of Troy!" (2632-35).

The implied subsumption of Priamus into the Arthurian/Christian milieu completes the legitimizing transference of power from the East to the West.⁹ After the combat, the captive Priamus accompanies Gawain to Arthur's camp, providing a miraculous salve that heals both men and thus ending the encounter in a cordial atmosphere. It is no surprise, then, that the fully assimilated Priamus is later given an opportunity to formally sever his ties with the duke of Lorraine and Rome. Perhaps conveniently, Priamus and his troops have a practical and legitimate reason to break faith; they have worked as *soudeours* under the duke of Lorraine for more than six years, yet the duke has failed to pay them for the past four years (2925-28). As such, the soldiers of fortune collectively leave to join Arthur's army, leaving a sharp message for their parsimonious employer: "Our wages are wered out and thy war ended; / We may with worship wend whither us likes!" (2930-31). While the shared Trojan heritage grants Priamus symbolic proximity to Gawain and Arthur, his status as a mercenary frees him from the obligation of fealty

⁹ The issue of Priamus's faith in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* is left somewhat vague. While the repeated appeal to *thy Crist* implies that he is not a Christian and his request to Gawain "To shew shortly [his] shrift and shape [him] for [his] end" (88) seems to signal his wish to convert, no overt conversion scene presents itself after Priamus joins Arthur's army. Based on his explicit desire to be baptized in Malory's version of the episode, E. V. Gordon and E. Vinaver suggested that a corresponding scene must have been existent in other manuscripts of the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*. Mary Hamel argues that Priamus may have been a schismatic Christian, but Donald L. Hoffman debates whether the issue holds significance at all, pointing out the nebulous distinction between legitimate Christianity and heresies in the middle ages, and concludes that "[i]f he were Christian, he would have been the wrong kind and would still qualify as 'Other'" (46).

to his Roman lords, allowing him to be integrated into the ranks of Arthur's knights. The potentially threatening Other is thus assimilated into the legitimized Arthurian space, providing a reassuring vindication of Arthur's claim to Trojanness.

The leitmotif of Trojan legitimacy continues in Arthur's dream of the Wheel of Fortune, in which a version of the Nine Worthies minus Arthur warns the king of the ephemeral nature of fortune when he is at the peak of secular glory. In this dream, dame Fortune spins a giant wheel which the Worthies are clinging to, with the six classical and Jewish Worthies lamenting their fall from grace and the two Christian Worthies (who would chronologically come later than Arthur) striving to climb the wheel to reach the throne at the top. Hector of Troy, the purported ancestor of Arthur, bemoans the loss of royal masculinity also cherished by his British descendant: "On yon see have I sitten als sovereign and lord, / And ladies me loved to lap in their armes, / And now my lordshippes are lost and laid for ever!" (3291-93). Arthur himself is favored by Fortune for a brief while, only to be cast down like the rest of the Worthies, with the disintegration of his flesh coinciding with the loss of his sovereign identity ("About sho whirles the wheel and whirles me under, / Til all my quarters that while were quasht all to peces, / And with that chair my chin was chopped in sonder"; 3388-90). As explained by Arthur's philosopher, the dream ultimately functions as a grim reminder of Arthur's own impending downfall. Arthur will meet his end in five years, with the news of dire trouble at home to arrive in ten days, which is immediately confirmed to be Mordred's treason.

Having succeeded the throne of Rome and thus the rightful claim to Trojan heritage, Arthur now faces the inevitable fall that all secular glory—especially Trojan ones—reaches at the end. To some extent, Arthur's ruin is framed as a result of moral failure distinct from

fickleness of Fortune. The philosopher does not mince words when denouncing the destruction Arthur has wrought throughout Europe during and after the Roman war: “Thou has shed much blood and shalkes destroyed, / Sakeles, in surquidrie, in sere kinges landes” (3398-99). The criticism leveled against Arthur significantly darkens his European campaign, even as his place among the Worthies “to fulfill the number, / Als ninde of the noblest named in erthe” (3438-39) is confirmed. Arthur’s reaction to this is rather ambivalent, in that he does not demonstrate his repentance by confessing or making amends for the ravaged realms as the philosopher implores him to, but he does not express his displeasure at the grim prophecy in an emphatic manner either. Instead, the king silently clads himself in rich clothes and takes to a meadow “with brethe at his herte” (3465), only to receive the news of treason at home almost immediately. Arthur does not repent, but he is not given an opportunity to make his situation better or worse. The Wheel of Fortune, or history, has already begun turning.

Perhaps surprisingly, the nuanced contour of historiography in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* is epitomized by Mordred, the harbinger of end for Arthurian fantasies of legitimacy. Mordred is introduced for the first time in the poem when Arthur, preparing to wage war against Rome, declares that he will entrust his kingdom and queen to Mordred while he is away. Being a son of Arthur’s sister, Mordred is a “sib” (645) of the king, which is enough grounds for trust for Arthur (“Thou has clenly the cure that to my crown longes / Of all my wordles wele and my wife eek”; 673-74). The promise to crown Mordred as the new king if he governs well (676-77) is offered as an added incentive to accept the task. In a surprising twist, however, Mordred humbly asks that Arthur choose another person as his guardian: “For if ye put me in this plitt, your pople is deceived” (682), the knight says to his uncle, both of them unaware of the irony carried by his language. Mordred argues that he is unworthy of managing such a lofty task,

preferring to join Arthur's army instead ("To present a prince estate my power is simple . . . To pass in your presence my purpose is taken / And all my perveance appert for my pris knightes"; 684-88). Yet Arthur is not to be dissuaded: "Thou art my newew full ner, my nurree of old, / That I have chastied and chosen, a child of my chamber; / For the sibreden of me, forsake not this office" (689-91), the king urges, placing stronger emphasis on the duty of kinsman and vassal which Mordred owes to him. Arthur's continued appeal to their kinship seemingly overrules the modest protest of his nephew, and the rest is history; the significance of kinship ties as grounds for political trust is ultimately discredited. Supported by historiographical tradition preceding the poem, Mordred's treachery looms as a foregone conclusion from the very start of Arthurian mythmaking.

Mordred's unexpected clarity happens again after the rupture of royal kinship is made apparent by the sudden and deliberate act of treachery committed by the knight. Near the end of the poem, Arthur returns to Britain to fight Mordred who usurped both the kingdom and the queen in his absence. However, the depiction of Mordred as a consistently villainous "traitour untrew" (4227) wavers in a crucial moment.¹⁰ After killing Gawain, Mordred replies to an allied king's inquiry about the slain knight's identity by unironically praising his chivalric virtues, asserting: "Had thou known him . . . Thou wolde have dole for his dede the dayes of thy life" (3882-85). He then proceeds to display a surprising moment of self-aware remorse on the battlefield:

¹⁰ Prompted by these instances, there have been critical attempts to read Mordred in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* as a sympathetic character whose brief kingship is at least partially validated, often in conjunction with more critical reading of Arthur as a failed or downright tyrannical ruler. See, for example, Steven P. W. Bruso and Gillian Adler.

Yet that traitour als tite teres let he fall,
Turnes him forth tite and talkes no more,
Went weepand away and weryes the stounde
That ever his werdes were wrought such wandreth to work!
When he thought on this thing it thirled his herte;
For sake of his sib-blood sighand he rides;
When that renayed renk remembered himselven
Of reverence and riotes of the Round Table,
He romed and repent him of all his rewth workes,
Rode away with his rout, restes he no lenger,
For rade of our rich king, rive that he sholde. (3886-96)

Mordred, acknowledging the slain Gawain as his “sib-blood”, reminisces over the former glory of the Round Table and appears to present a moral judgment over his own actions. Of course, this brief moment of self-awareness does not alter the course of history, and Mordred departs for the final battle against Arthur in which both of them meet their bloody ends. As seen in Arthur’s unimpeded march to destruction after his dream of the Wheel of Fortune, the momentum of history does not allow any aberrant implication of redemption to bear fruit.

Mordred’s moment of clarity results in a historical awareness transcending the character, in which his existence as a product of literary/historical tradition is acknowledged and commented upon. The tragic “stounde” and “werdes” of predetermined path forces Mordred to *remember* the painful history he participates in, as it unfolds and closes with yet another affirmation of Arthur’s Trojan lineage:

Thus endes King Arthur, as auctors allege,
That was of Ectores blude, the kinge son of Troy
And of Sir Priamous, the prince, praised in erthe;
Fro thethen brought the Bretons all his bold elders
Into Britain the brode, as the Brut telles. (4342-46).

In the grand scheme of history, the rise and fall of Arthurian empire is merely another iteration of ephemeral secular power succumbing to its own mortality. To some extent, Arthur himself acknowledges his place in the cycle of destruction that all empires, especially Troy and its descendants, are subject to. When Arthur blames himself for the death of Gawain (“He is sakless surprised for sin of mine one!”; 3986), he arrives at a moment of historical self-awareness similar to the one reached by Mordred. This awareness, in turn, allows these figures to transcend the temporal and narrative spheres they are situated in, bestowing on them the vision to recognize the traumatic *past* as such. Historiography, in a sense, enables its derivative traditions a simultaneous look at the distant past and the immediate future, granting them a tense of always-already.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: History as Trauma

Although Troy figures as the origin point of secular history in medieval European imagination, it is almost invariably envisioned at the moment of its fall. Consequently, the trauma of treachery, military defeat, and civic destruction associated with the fall of Troy prefigures the founding of nations which claim Trojan descent. Another Arthurian poem from the

late medieval period, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* frames its narrative with precisely this ominous vision of destruction. Similar to the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, which tinges Arthur's ambitious foreign campaigns and eventual downfall with a fatalistic vision of Trojan historiography, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* links the fractures inherent in chivalric identity and courtly gender dynamics to the destructive Trojan legacy inherited by Arthurian empire.

To be sure, the instances in which Troy is clearly invoked in the poem are fairly limited, but Troy's position as a framing device that encircles the entire narrative imbues it with thematic significance in relation to the Arthurian tale. The *Gawain*-poet famously prefaces his Arthurian romance with a Trojan vision, punctuated by the treachery and exodus accompanying the fall of the city:

SIPEN þe sege and þe assaut watz sesed at Troye,
þe borȝ brittened and brent to brondez and askez,
þe tulk þat þe trammes of tresoun þer wroȝt
Watz tried for his tricherie, þe trewest on erþe:
Hit watz Ennias þe athel, and his highe kynde,
þat siþen depreced prouinces, and patrounes bicom
Welneȝe of al þe wele in þe west iles. (1-7)

Since the siege and the assault had ceased at Troy,
The city destroyed and burned to brands and ashes,
The man that wrought the scheme of treason there
Was tried for his treachery, the truest on earth.
It was Aeneas the noble, and his vigorous knights,

That since conquered provinces, and became patrons
Well-nigh of all the wealth in the Western Isles.¹¹

The linguistic structure here makes it conveniently vague whether “Þe tulk þat þe trammes of tresoun þer wrozt” and “Ennias þe athel” are indeed one and the same figure. However, the close juxtaposition of the treachery and the name Aeneas would not fail to remind medieval readers of the tradition made popular by Dares and Dictys, in which Aeneas, along with Antenor, is one of the Trojan traitors who conspired with the Greeks to preserve their own lives. In the accounts of both Dares and Dictys, Aeneas is one of the advocates for peace in the Trojan council who later defects to the Greek side. He is perhaps less culpable than Antenor, who acts as *de facto* leader of the traitors, but continues to be one of the chief actors in the scheme.¹² Modern critical consensus, following the observation of J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon in their influential edition of the poem, generally agrees that the traitor in this passage is supposed to mean Aeneas. This is largely aided by the fact that although Antenor serves as another candidate for said traitor, the relevant significance of Aeneas as the forefather of Britain makes much more thematic sense. For the British especially, who traced their lineage back to Aeneas’s great-grandson Brutus, the Trojan trauma is double-faced; the destruction of the city itself, and the foul reputation of Aeneas.¹³ What Christopher Baswell calls “the troubling penumbra of the counter-

¹¹ Translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is my own.

¹² The specifics regarding the extent of Aeneas’s involvement in the act of treachery and the aftermath somewhat differ. In Dares’s account, Aeneas opens the gate to Troy with Antenor to let in the Greeks, but hides Polyxena in his father’s house during the sack of the city, which earns him Agamemnon’s anger and exile from Troy. Whereas according to Dictys, he remains in Troy after the Greeks depart, only to be banished when his plot to drive out Antenor comes to light.

¹³ It should also be noted that, notwithstanding the image of a pious hero established by Virgil, the Ovidian tradition supplied another source for negative reception of Aeneas in light of his abandonment of Dido. Marilyn Desmond’s monograph on the medieval reception of the Dido episode in the *Aeneid* is a comprehensive study on the topic. Sheila Delany observes that, apart

tradition” (*Virgil in Medieval England* 20) surrounding Aeneas, conferred to medieval authors by Dares and Dictys, continues to haunt Aeneas himself and his Arthurian descendants in defiance of Virgilian tradition.

The brief but complex catalogue of Trojan founders culminating with Brutus that follows is hardly less troubling in its tone. After placing Romulus, a direct descendant of Aeneas, immediately after the ambivalent Trojan opening, the poet moves on to fairly obscure settlers—“Tirius” for Tuscany and “Langaberde” for Lombardy (11-12)—before introducing the celebrated “Felix Brutus” (13). However, Britain is far from a peaceful, prosperous new home for the Trojan refugees. The island is indeed “Where werre and wrake and wonder / Bi syþez hatz wont þerinne, / And oft boþe blysse and blunder / Ful skete hatz skyfted synne” (“Where war and destruction and wonder / at times have existed therein, / And often both bliss and blunder / Full quickly have alternated since”; 16-19), the poet reports, and “Bolde bredden þerinne, baret þat lofdon, / In mony turned tyme tene þat wroʒten” (“Bold men were bred therein, who loved strife, / And in many a difficult times wrought trouble”; 21-22). On the other side of the surface of adventures and wonders lies a picture of frequent strifes and destruction caused by bellicose descendants. The foreboding overtone provided by the Trojan opening, first suggested in the dubious reputation of Aeneas, continues to Brutus and his legacy populating the realm.

from the tragedy of Dido, the medieval understanding of Aeneas was also informed by “the Orientalist tradition about his culture, for Phrygia (Troy) was often represented as the site of debilitating sensuality and, more particularly, of effeminacy” (180). Delany sheds light on multiple instances in classical and medieval texts in which Aeneas is connected with effeminate Trojan figures such as Paris and Ganymede, and in the case of *Roman d’Eneas*, accused of sodomy.

Compounding the disturbing preface of Trojan ruin and ambivalent ancestors, Gawain's story proves to be a tale fraught with troubling fractures in the surface of chivalric masculinity represented by the young knight. Gawain's instability partially originates from his youth and self-professed inexperience, with him functioning as a sort of synecdoche for the poem's specific depiction of Camelot in its early ages. Although the youthful vigor permeating the Arthurian court provides hopeful tones fitting for the Christmas feast—everyone is “in her first age” (“in their first age”; 54) and the king himself is “sumquat childgered” (“somewhat childish”; 86), with “his 3onge blod and his brayn wyldre” (“his young blood and his wild mind”; 89)—it also engenders a sense of uneasiness stemming from the implied immaturity of the chivalric and courtly values of Camelot. So much so that the Green Knight, having arrived to test the worth of the renowned Round Table, scoffs at what he only sees as “berdlez chylder” (“beardless children”; 280) completely immobilized by his threatening presence. This Camelot does not yet know of corruption and ruin, but it is not quite a perfect symbol of chivalric ideals either. His self-fashioning thus incomplete, Gawain locates his innate value in an inherited royal status, which conveniently guarantees an always-already proven attribute of desirable courtesy *post factum*. In a sense, Gawain's demure remark that his worth is merely derivative of his blood ties with Arthur (“Bot for as much as 3e ar myn em I am only to prayse, / No bounté bot your blod I in my bodé knowe”; “Only forasmuch as you are my uncle, I am to be praised, / No virtue but your blood I know in my body”, 356-57) is unintentionally precise. His claims of inadequacy of course contribute to a humility *topos* becoming of a worthy knight, but Gawain in his first appearance in the poem is strikingly defined by his courtesy and nobility, which are in turn corroborated by his royal birth.

The poet does not, however, attribute all imperfections present within Gawain and his world to youthful inexperience. Chivalric masculinity as explored in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is inherently fragile, specifically in relation to the performance of courtly heterosexuality it supposedly champions. The game of seduction/exchange jointly orchestrated by Bertilak and his wife exposes Gawain's courtly identity to be a nebulous amalgamation of manners and mores, constantly subject to changes and discrepancies in its performance. Cornering Gawain in the bedroom just as her husband corners the hunted animals in the forest, Lady Bertilak proves herself to be an expert in the matters of courtly romance. Furthermore, as Geraldine Heng and Caroline Dinshaw have noted,¹⁴ her active participation in the role of the sexual aggressor deeply disturbs the gendered power dynamics of romantic love that Gawain is supposedly well versed in. Oscillating between approval ("For I wene wel, iwysse, Sir Wowen 3e are"; "For I believe well, indeed, that you are Sir Gawain", 1226) and reproach ("Bot þat 3e be Gawan, hit gotz in mynde"; "But that you are Gawain, it is doubtful in my mind", 1293) directed towards Gawain's chivalric identity, the Lady weaponizes the reputation of Gawain's proficiency in "luf-talkyng" ("love-talking"; 927), leading him into a verbal warfare in the bedroom where she besieges the passive Gawain. Within the inverted structure of Hautdesert's bedroom, the courtly lady is the lover who professes to be a "seruaunt" ("servant"; 1240) of a reluctant beloved.

¹⁴ Heng's influential article "Feminine Knots and the Other *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*" and its companion piece "A Woman Wants: the Lady, *Gawain*, and the Forms of Seduction" locate the driving force of the poem within the undercurrent of feminine desire expressed by the women surrounding Gawain. My reading largely concurs with her observations, in that I find the women, marginalized as they are, constitute a lingering counter-system of unruly femininity which disturbs the chivalric/heterosexual order of the poem. However, I am more interested in exploring the significance that this network of feminine sexuality and implied familial trauma possesses in relation to the Troy narrative enveloping the poem.

Although Bertilak as the Green Knight claims the entire scheme as his (and ultimately, Morgan's) own making, thus dampening the Lady's autonomy in her participation, the Lady represents the visible side of the threatening feminine presence which unsettles chivalric masculinity through de-signification. The Lady insinuates that, if the Gawain in front of her is truly synonymous with his reputation ("ȝif ȝe be Wawen"; "if you are Gawain", 1481), he would somehow be able to reconcile the discordant elements within his chivalric identity—namely, his obligations as a virile lover and a courteous house-guest, which Gawain finds impossible to balance ("He cared for his cortaysye, lest crapayn he were, / And more for his meschef ȝif he schulde make synne, / And be traytor to þat tolke þat þat telde aȝt"; "He cared for his courtesy, lest he was to be boorish, / And more for his own mischief, if he should commit sin, / And be a traitor to that man who owned that dwelling", 1773-75). Interestingly, despite the lack of clear winning or losing scenarios for the games of exchange—for most of the poem the trading of beheadings and winnings is meant to be a zero-sum exchange, with the *trawþe* of both parties being treated as a precondition, and it is only at the end that they are revealed to be a series of trials which Gawain could fail—the Lady is the one who achieves a decisive "winning" score against her opponent. As soon as Gawain accepts the green girdle, his failure of the trial as a whole is sealed. With this single but devastating lapse, the difference between submitting to sexual advances and submitting to the desire for self-preservation is made almost trivial. Under the amorous trials presided over by the Lady, the surface of Gawain's virtuous knighthood begins to disintegrate.

The ever-present erotic tension between Gawain and Bertilak provides another venue of instability which haunts Gawain's chivalric self-making. Bertilak and the Lady both engage in a hunting game, in which the Lady's seduction is ultimately subservient to the larger game/trial of

exchange orchestrated by Bertilak (and Morgan), but in turn, Bertilak's game is distinctly colored by the sexual charge of his wife's bedroom game.¹⁵ Consequently, Gawain's kisses to Bertilak, offered as his part of each day's winning and conducted "comlyly" ("graciously"; 1389), "hendely" ("courteously"; 1639), and "saueryly and sadly" ("firmly and soberly"; 1937), carry unmistakably erotic undertones. When Gawain embraces Bertilak's neck and courteously plants kisses, presumably witnessed by the ladies and Bertilak's hunting companions, the inverted dynamics of the bedroom proudly escape to the hall. However, the narrative refuses to address the apparent feminization of its hero and the persisting homoerotic undertones present in these moments; Gawain leaves Hautdesert, believing his chivalric-heterosexual-masculine selfhood to be intact, the irrevocable shattering of said selfhood still awaiting his arrival at the Green Chapel. Dinshaw's study of the homosexual tension between Gawain and Bertilak has been a crucial work which illuminates the subtle patterns of erasure that heterosexual courtly order employs to render potentially unorthodox sexuality unintelligible. Bertilak-Gawain dynamics as expressed through the kisses play with homosocial bonds encouraged by the masculine order that chivalric and courtly system endorses, but ultimately reject the possibility of undesirable intimacy between men even as it maintains its disturbing presence.¹⁶ As Dinshaw argues, the poem renders homosexuality—or indeed, any forms of desire deemed unorthodox—illegible and out of reach, "[producing] the possibility of homosexual relations only to—in order

¹⁵ Critical analysis of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* has noted the close parallel between hunt and courtship, which finds precedents in continental and English romances. See, for instance, the articles by J. D. Burnley and Gregory W. Gross.

¹⁶ After the earlier studies including those by Heng and Dinshaw, there has been vigorous exploration of the significance of transgressive sexuality and desire in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. For instance, David L. Boyd contends that homosexuality and feminine treachery in the poem are ultimately used as convenient scapegoats on which to place the decline of chivalric ideals, while Gail Ashton views the nonnormative desire, controlled by Morgan, as a powerful undercurrent pervading the poem.

to—preclude it, in order to establish heterosexuality as not just the only sexual legitimacy but a principle of intelligibility itself” (“A Kiss Is Just a Kiss” 206).

Even so, the threatening shift in Gawain’s sexuality remains to be a pivotal component of his trials by infiltrating the very heterosexual order that marginalizes it. In a sense, Gawain’s only viable option in the seduction games of Lady Bertilak is maintaining a sort of deadlock with minimal engagements, which nevertheless jeopardizes the premise of normative masculinity by converting the kisses from the Lady to the kisses to Bertilak. The Lady herself exposes the ambivalence inherent within Gawain’s sexual subjectivity during their third and final tryst. “Bot if 3e haf a lemman, a leuer, þat yow lykez better, / And folden fayth to þat fre, festned so harde / Þat yow lausen ne lyst” (“Unless you have a mistress, a lover, who pleases you better, / And you plighted faith to that noble one so firmly, / That you would not wish to break troth”; 1782-84), the Lady argues towards Gawain, cornering the knight in a logical dead-end in which any sexual venue but heterosexual courtly love is denied; Gawain must either have a paramour already or accept the Lady’s advances. Gawain is thoroughly trapped, and neither falsehood (testifying to his love for a nonexistent beloved) or rudeness (providing the Lady with a clear rejection unobstructed by courtly decorum) is an option. As such, he opts to an answer which removes himself from the heterosexual economy entirely: “In fayth I welde riȝt non, / Ne non wil welde þe quile” (“In faith I have none at all, / And none will I have for a while”; 1790-91). In this moment, Gawain is anything *but* a straight man, and the Lady accordingly withdraws, announcing somewhat despondently: “Þat is a worde, . . . þat worst is of alle, / Bot I am swared for soþe, þat sore me þinkkez” (“That is a word . . . that is wort of all, / But truly I am answered, which seems painful to me”; 1792-93). The object of Gawain’s desire remains nebulous (Is it the Lady or her husband? The Virgin, his divine protectress? The concept of chivalric identity as a

whole?), in turn obscuring his own identity that hinges on the normative system of desire and conduct. In terms of gendered subjectivity, Gawain is already fragmented even before he receives the cut from the Green Knight's axe.

The fractures of selfhood shown in Gawain's journey hearkens back to the anxiety surrounding unsettling origins, in which Trojan ancestry foretells destruction and the bloodline of Aeneas signals treachery. Randy P. Schiff, defining Trojanness in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as a source of communal identity more fraught with treason and violence than comforting sense of legitimization, has noted what he terms "[t]he treacherous bond between Aeneas and Gawain" ("Unstable Kinship" 83) expressed through oath-breaking and courtly amorousness. While my reading generally agrees with Schiff, he mostly focuses on the Trojan frame at the beginning and the exchange games at Hautdesert. I wish to point out that, despite portraying Gawain (and by extension, the Round Table) as a young and unsullied embodiment of the Arthurian knighthood, the *Gawain*-poet makes a curious choice of placing evident accountability to Gawain for his actions at the very beginning of his plot—the Green Knight's challenge at Camelot.

Gawain's beheading blow to the Green Knight is fraught with moral ambiguity, aided by obfuscating advice from Arthur and the ambivalence of Gawain's ensuing action. When granting Gawain permission to deal a blow to the Green Knight in his stead, Arthur remarks to his nephew: "Kepe þe, cosyn . . . þat þou on kyrf sette, / And if þou redez hym ryȝt, redly I trowe / þat þou schal byden þe bur þat he schal bede after" ("Take care, cousin . . . that you apply the cut, / And if you deal with him right, I fully believe, / That you shall survive the blow that he will give later"; 372-74). This advice can be interpreted in two ways. If Gawain gives the Green

Knight only a light cut, then he should receive a light cut in return, ending the game with minimal harm to both parties. Conversely, Gawain could give his opponent a certain death-blow, ensuring that he will “survive” the nonexistent return blow. The latter possibility is jovial in tone, if somewhat grim, and presents itself as the more attractive option for the overeager Gawain. Gawain is further goaded by the Green Knight, who suggests that a full decapitation would be the better choice—if he is killed, he would not be able to disclose his name and abode, ridding Gawain of the obligation to seek him out and follow through his part of the beheading game (“And if I spende no speche, þenne spedez þou þe better, / For þou may leng in þy londe and layt no fyrre”; “And if I utter no speech, then you fare the better, / For you may stay in your land and seek no further”, 410-11). Correspondingly, Gawain takes the bait and seals his own fate. The stress on Gawain’s culpability in his initial conduct, marked by self-interest and perhaps surprising shrewdness, imparts a troubling ambivalence to his character when juxtaposed with the presence of Trojan treachery in the beginning lines. As is the case with medieval Troy narratives, history in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is defined through its recursiveness. The descendant repeats and reperforms the deeds of his ancestors, having inherited not only their pedigree but also their vice and trauma.

Fittingly enough, the unveiled plot surrounding Gawain’s journey places familial trauma and ruptures in kinship ties on the forefront. After dealing two feint blows and a light cut to Gawain, the Green Knight reveals himself to be Bertilak, enacting the schemes of Morgan le Fay to test Gawain and the Round Table. The sudden reveal of Morgan as the instigator of the larger plot, although surprising, provides a different viewpoint with which the Arthurian anxiety

directed towards origins and genealogy can be further explored.¹⁷ By launching a hostile trial for Arthur's court that stops just short of being an actual attack, Morgan retains her ambivalent position in the larger Arthurian mythos, but the significance of her entrance into the plot lies in her relationship with Gawain. As a blood relative to both Gawain and Arthur, Morgan represents the immanent friction already present at the early stage of their history. Indeed, Bertlak affixes Morgan's involvement in the incidents at both Camelot and Hautdesert to her kinship ties with Gawain and Arthur:

Ho wayned me vpon þis wyse to your wynne halle
For to assay þe surquidré, 3if hit soth were
þat rennes of þe grete renoun of þe Rounde Table;
Ho wayned me þis wonder your wyttez to reue,
For to haf greued Gaynour and gart hir to dy3e
With glopnyng of þat ilke gome þat gostlych speked
With his hede in his honde bifore þe hy3e table.
þat is ho þat is at home, þe auncian lady;
Ho is euen þyn aunt, Arþurez half-suster,
þe duches do3ter of Tyntagelle, þat dere Vter after

¹⁷ Morgan's enigmatic presence has sparked much debate among the critical discourse of the poem, with some dismissing it altogether and some regarding it to be a crucial element of the narrative structure. In a reading adjacent to my interest in Troy materials, Michael W. Twomey argues that the poem could be read as an example of *conte morganien*, in which Morgan functions as an obstacle between a knight and his chivalric community. He specifically takes note of the similarity between the Morgan's failed courtship of Lancelot in the Prose *Lancelot* and a brief mention of Morgan as Hector's spurned suitor in some versions of the *Roman de Troie*.

Hade Arþur vpon, þat apel is nowþe. (2456-66)

She sent me in this manner to your delightful hall,
In order to test the pride, if it were true,
That is current about the great renown of the Round Table;
She gave to me this wonder, to deprive you of your wits,
In order to distress Guinevere, and make her die,
With fright of that same man, who spoke like a ghost,
With his head in his hand, before the high table.
That is she that is at my home, the ancient lady;
She is in fact thine aunt, Arthur's half-sister,
The daughter of the duchess of Tintagel, whom dear Uther later
Begot Arthur upon, who is now noble.

Notably, the point of convergence between the origins of Morgan and Arthur also serves to point towards the ambiguity surrounding royal parentage; their mother, Igraine, is first and foremost introduced as the duchess of Tintagel, with her conception of Arthur by Uther coming “after”. The duke of Tintagel, Morgan’s father and Igraine’s first husband, is relegated to the invisible space between lines—unnamed and unacknowledged, but all the more significant due to the narrative refusal to address his existence. This subtle nod to the dubious legitimacy of Arthur, juxtaposed with the discordant genealogical dynamics suggested by his half-sister Morgan, betrays Arthurian anxiety about unstable origins and heritage underlined by the Trojan opening. The Green Knight keenly points towards the intimacy of this reveal through a shift in the genitive determiner, going from denoting Gawain and presumably the rest of the Round Table—

“your wynne halle” and “your wyttez”—to specifically targeting Gawain alone—“þyn aunt”—in a subtle acknowledgment of the familial implication for the young knight. For Gawain, his kinship with Arthur—and Morgan—signals precariousness as well as prestige.¹⁸

Morgan’s presence as the overseer of the plot against Camelot is further complicated by the tension created by the sexual threat she poses for chivalric system. The anxiety towards unruly female sexuality, masked with courtly discourse for the Lady, is fully expressed in the portrayal of Morgan as the tamer of proud men (“Weldez non so hyȝe hawtesse / Þat ho ne con make ful tame”; “None wields such high pride / That she cannot fully make tame”, 2454-55). Indeed, the two women are introduced as polar opposites of each other at Hautdesert, with the colors, shapes, and textures of their bodies and clothing contrasting one another (950-69) like two sides of the same coin. The women operate in each other’s shadow—while the Lady enacts the aggressive female sexuality which unsettles courtly dynamics under Morgan’s presumptive guidance, Morgan challenges Camelot’s chivalric order utilizing strategies permeated by the sexual charge of the Lady’s games. Morgan’s plot to frighten and kill Guinevere, however arbitrary it may seem, directly threatens the sexual politics that support patrilineal succession of Arthurian dynasty by the potential elimination of the legitimizing presence of the king’s consort. Consequently, the infamous misogynistic outburst of Gawain, in which he situates himself as the most recent example of illustrious men deceived by “wyles of wymmen” (“wiles of women”;

¹⁸ Schiff identifies similar concerns in the role of Morgan, but he approaches the poem’s use of Trojan materials through the lens of Anthony D. Smith’s concept of *ethnie*, with Morgan’s position as Arthur’s sister testifying to “the priority of classed ethnicity over any purely ethical, civic society” (“Unstable Kinship” 84) and the ominous nature of Trojan origin narrative. While I identify similar investment in communal identity and nation-building in medieval Troy narratives throughout this project, for this poem, I am more interested in locating the overlap between Trojan identity and precarious dynamics of identity, sexuality, and legitimacy.

2415), hits the mark in a way he fails to fully understand. As Gawain completes his trials with a shattered sense of his chivalric masculinity, so does his Arthurian-Trojan identity suffer ruptures through sexual anxieties and familial trauma represented by the women.

True to the ambivalence first expressed in the Trojan frame, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* refuses to grant its hero a conventionally desirable ending. Gawain is forced to face his own vulnerability when he chooses the protection offered by the Lady's girdle over honor, and the encounter at the Green Chapel is completed in a way that is neither satisfying nor glorious for Gawain. As such, he can accept the girdle only as "syngne of my surfet" ("token of my misdeed"; 2433), a tangible reminder of his failure to complete the Green Knight's challenge with his honor intact. The traumatic girdle remains on Gawain's body even as he leaves the Green Chapel to have many subsequent adventures which are not elaborated upon. As Gawain provides a report of his journey to Arthur, the scar in the neck and the green girdle, given by Bertilak and his wife respectively, form a single trauma that cannot be purged from his chivalric identity: as Gawain says of the girdle, "And I mot nede hit were wyle I may last; / For mon may hyden his harme, bot vnhap ne may hit, / For þer hit onez is tachched twynne wil hit neuer" ("And I must of necessity wear it while I may live, / For man may hide his harm, but he may not dispose of it, For where it is once attached, it will never leave"; 2510-12). Although Arthur and his courtiers provide a comforting reinterpretation of Gawain's experience in which the girdle is transformed into a symbol of honorable chivalry, their ability to replace the memory of failure so expressly voiced by Gawain himself is ultimately questionable.¹⁹ It is a nature of trauma to linger

¹⁹ The phrase *Hony Soyt Qui Mal Pence* ending the poem is famously the motto of the order of the Garter, but whether the postscript was added by the poet himself, and if the poem was indeed connected to a specific order of knights, have been disputed. It is, at least, a textual evidence suggesting that the poem has been received in the contexts of contemporary chivalric politics.

on in ambiguous, mutable forms, after all; the scar and the girdle—“þe bende of þis blame” (“the band of this blame”; 2506) and “þe token of vntrawþe” (“the token of unfaithfulness”; 2509)—will still be a collective remnant of Gawain’s traumatic adventures, however faint it may become and what new meaning may be inscribed on it. The jovial laughter pervading the court, directly corresponding to the Green Knight’s laugh in the beginning and thus enveloping the entire plot within the structure of a genial, ultimately harmless game, simultaneously silences and enhances the trauma of shame and fractured identity experienced by Gawain. If anything, this closing anecdote complicates its own hopeful vision of the future, since the almost exact replicate of the opening Trojan frame with its foreboding imagery of “þe segge and þe asaute” (“the siege and the assault”; 2525) of Troy follows immediately after. “Mony aunterez here-biforne / Haf fallen suche er þis” (“Many adventures here before / Have befallen such before this”; 2527-28), the poet reminds us, hearkening back to the warlike men born in the realm since Brutus’s arrival. There exists a strange sense of resignation among the vigor and gaiety of the Round Table, in joyous celebration of their newfound token of courtly culture; the Trojan frame encircles and traps the Arthurian narrative, ensuring that the descendants of Aeneas will repeat their history as they have done before.

The Trojan past, as understood by these two late medieval Arthurian romances, constitutes a scar that never fades away completely from the surface of historical self-making. These inheritors of Trojan legacy discover that the comforting vision of *translatio imperii* entails decline and destruction fated to all secular empires, among which Troy, as the birthplace of Europe, stands as a crucial example. That the English Arthurian narratives betray such marked ambivalence when handling their ancestral prestige conferred by Troy is very telling; in the vexed history of Troy and its aftermaths, these poets identified social unrest that they witnessed

as emblematic of British history itself. As Federico writes of the authorial practices shown in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the *House of Fame*, “Medieval redactors of the Trojan legend project themselves into the past and find nothing but themselves and their own textual practices to transmit to the notoriously unfaithful future” (32). The continued resurrection of Troy seen in historical narratives, even as it channels the imagined birthplace of Britain where the mythical genealogy promises glory and honor, also conjures up the disturbing history of exile, strife, and destruction. As traumatic memories tend to do, the memories of Troy refuses to be relegated to the past completely. The possibility of history repeating itself, after all, is guaranteed when said history is repeatedly brought back to life.

As suggested by the presence of Morgan and Guinevere, women and their sexuality form a crucial foundation for the system of chivalric masculinity and legitimacy. Women’s importance in these power structures is especially noted in Troy narratives, where male control over female sexuality is constantly attempted and challenged. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Criseyde, along with her classical predecessor Helen, signifies the desire and anxiety surrounding the sexual politics that govern the history of Trojan war. While she is incessantly exposed to the threat of objectification and exploitation by Trojan and Greek men, Criseyde nevertheless illuminates the inner schematics of sociopolitical systems victimizing her. Connected to the image of loss and destruction intrinsic to Troy narratives through her infamous treachery, she claims for herself a spectral presence congruous with the traumatic resonance of the medieval Troy.

“Rolled shal I been on many a tonge”:

Criseyde as the Medieval Helen

Desire and sexual politics surrounding the control over women loom large in Troy narratives. The string of stolen women, from Hesione to Helen to Criseyde, marks the trajectory of aggression which masculine societies engage in over the possession of female sexuality. Even Medea, whose involvement with Jason implicates her in a larger historical narrative surrounding the enmity between Greece and Troy, can be seen as a marriageable daughter stolen away from her father’s household by a hostile foreign suitor. And of course, Achilles’s sudden, ardent desire for Polyxena not only generates a new possibility of marriage alliance and peace but also results in his own death, with the eventual sacrifice of the Trojan princess by the Greeks serving as a posthumous acknowledgment of the failed courtship. In a sense, the significance of women and their sexuality in Troy narratives is to be expected considering the heavily gendered premise of the war. The question has always been: who gets to own and control women?

Critical analysis on sexual economy and politics can shed light on the power structure informing the lives of these women. Gayle Rubin’s study of the sexual trafficking of women helpfully illustrates how the intersection of anthropology and psychoanalysis can be utilized as a conceptual framework for understanding sexual oppression. For my project, the repeated and often disastrous traffic of women in Troy narratives illuminates the artificiality and fragility of sociopolitical structure based on such economy. For a study more closely aligned with medieval English literature and especially Chaucer, I turn to *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics* by Carolyn Dinshaw. Dinshaw’s understanding of writing and translating as fundamentally masculine activities, with the physical text becoming the feminine object, provides insight into women’s

position in medieval historiography. This diagram of heterosexual dichotomy in relation to textual tradition is particularly useful for reading Criseyde. Although Criseyde is essentially a creation of medieval Troy narratives distinct from classical tradition, Chaucer reshapes the inherited figure(s) of Criseida and Briseida into a complex heroine with equal measures of vulnerability and autonomy, showcasing his own attentiveness to the Trojan politics of gender and desire in the process. As Dinshaw argues, “Chaucer . . . is alert to the social construction of gender and to the patriarchal power structures that keep these gender notions in place. But, in addition, he shows an important awareness of the difficult relations between abstract or figurative gender formulations and people with real bodies and ‘sely instruments’” (*Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics* 12). Through the works of Chaucer and other medieval authors on Troy, Criseyde comes to embody the nuanced and often troubled relations between the matter of Troy and the gendered dynamics of its key figures.¹ Criseyde’s interactions with Troilus, Pandarus, and Diomedes showcase the patterns of homosocial bond incorporating heterosexual desire as their derivative expression through the repeated exchanges of her sexualized selfhood among men.

The interplay between desire and historiography has been noted in the precursor of medieval Troy narratives and the birthplace of Criseyde (in this case, as Briseida), the *Roman de Troie*. Benoit’s focus on and invention of multiple love stories, sprinkled throughout the larger history of the Trojan war, provides a keen perspective into the sexualized power dynamics of the famous figures in Trojan history. Perhaps equally remarkable is the fact that none of the couples arrive at a happy outcome. Jason and Medea’s vows of passionate love are immediately accompanied by an afterword revealing that Jason “kept neither covenant nor marriage vow”

¹ For studies on the sexual politics and feminine experience explored in the intertextual tradition including Chaucer’s poems, see Karma Lochrie, Angela Jane Weisl, Jane Chance, and Suzanne C. Hagedorn. Lisa J. Kiser’s study is an example focusing on the *Legend of Good Women*.

(“Covenant ne lei ne li tint”; 1637). Later, the story of Jason’s adventure for the golden fleece is concluded with another reference to the disastrous end of the young couple’s romance, with Benoit expressing a hint of compassion for Medea’s “act of great folly” (“Grant folie”; 2030) and noting with displeasure that “he later abandoned her, thus committing a very shameful act” (“Puis la laissa, si fist grant honte”; 2036). On the contrary, Paris and Helen are remarkably not subjected to overt criticism, with the emphasis placed only on their extravagant beauty and wealth. However, since Benoit follows Dares in having the rape of Helen be a part of politically motivated attack orchestrated by Paris, the premise of the incoming war looms heavily over their illicit love. Indeed, Helen frames her very existence as the cause of world-scale strife and misfortune when mourning the death of Paris (“A ma naissance vint sor terre / Ire e dolor e mortel guerre ; / Del mont chai e joie e pais”; “With my birth there came to this world anger, sorrow and murderous war, and joy and peace fell away from the earth”, 22939-41). Finally, Achilles’s love for Polyxena is distinctly seen as the start of his personal destruction (“C'est l'acheison e la manière / Par qu'il sera getez de vie / E l'ame de son cors partie”; “That was the cause and the way leading to his death and his soul’s departure from his body”, 17542-44), which alludes to the false promise of Polyxena’s hand in marriage that will lure him to his death. Whether by design or unwitting coincidence, Benoit’s novel focus on heterosexual love and courtship is inextricably linked to the sense of impending doom. The context of Trojan history sets these private relations on a path to predetermined endings, which, in the case of Benoit’s narrative, invariably spells disaster.

Interestingly, Briseida seems to be the only woman who induces explicitly negative comments from Benoit, presumably owing to her overt sexual treachery lacking in other women in the poem—except Helen, whose steps Briseida retreads in a symbolic recreation. Although

wary of incurring the anger of a certain peerless noblewoman, commonly assumed to be Eleanor of Aquitaine, Benoit takes time to denounce Briseida's quick change of heart and the fickleness of women in general (13429-70). Juxtaposed with the genuine sufferings of love displayed by Diomedes, Briseida's ambivalent reaction towards her Greek admirer is seen as deceptive and manipulative.² Troilus's final, bitter prediction that Diomedes will be as disposable as he is now for a woman such as Briseida ("S'este avez la ou jo fui, / Pro i avra des acoilliz, / Ainz que li sièges seit feniz"; "If you have been where I was, plenty more men will be welcome in that place before the siege has come to an end", 20092-94) seems to echo Benoit's criticism. As an earliest known version of the medieval Criseida figure, Benoit's Briseida establishes a select few traits as her defining attributes in the vast narrative of the *Roman de Troie*—sexual desirability, inconstancy, and the loss signified by separation and treachery.

The *Roman de Troie* is one of the forerunners of medieval romances with a distinct focus on amorous affairs, and the entanglement of local, private relationships with the larger movements of history is further underscored by the inherently political nature of each love story. Since everyone involved hails from noble lineage, the choices made by these lovers invariably affect not only their personal dynamics but also the sociopolitical landscape which they are situated in. For both Medea and Helen, the shift of sexual allegiance spells betrayal of their home/country. Polyxena's marriage to Achilles, though ultimately made impossible, is presented as a potential means for peacemaking. In the case of Briseida, who is subjected to a prisoner exchange and eventually abandons her Trojan lover to accept a Greek courtship, politics is

² Both Benoit and Boccaccio include scenes of Diomedes showing familiar tropes of a dejected lover, such as private moments of sighs, complaints, and self-doubts. These moments of sincerity are markedly absent in Chaucer's version, where Diomedes is consistently a confident and aggressive suitor to Criseyde. This distinction is a point I will return to later.

inseparable from matters of personal networking and survival. Heterosexual love comes to have meaning only in relation to its purpose in aristocratic society, and the early Troy narrative of Benoit—similar to another early medieval romance of antiquity, the *Roman d'Eneas*—serves as a frontier for exploration of changes in courtly milieu caused by such politicized love.³

Further complicating the sexualized sociopolitical dynamics within and without Troy is the unmistakably foreign identity possessed by the ancient city, which asserts itself even as the premise of *translatio imperii* promises a comfortingly linear and homogenous line of descent continuing from Trojan antiquity to medieval Europe. Troy's Eastern, pagan identity coexists with a politically charged genealogy linking the fallen city to the contemporary ruling class. As a medieval successor to the Homeric Helen, Criseyde invokes the images of sexual excess and treachery often inscribed upon the East, while testifying to the inner machinations of the patriarchal economy dominating her world. To understand Criseyde's connection to Trojanness, I turn to not only Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* but also the *Testament of Cresseid* by Robert Henryson, in which literary and historical heritage merges within the figure of the Trojan heroine. When Criseyde is identified as an Oriental woman, the double layers of fetishization she is subjected to, materializing from her connection to Troy and the exoticized perception of the past/East, can become visible. However, due to their very nature as conduits of sex, desire, and

³ Barbara Nolan's *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique* is an illuminating monograph on this topic. Despite the foregrounding of Chaucer in the title, Nolan's reading of prominent continental romances—including the *Roman de Troie* and the *Roman d'Eneas*—is thorough and persuasive. Reading the romances of antiquity as literary spaces within which “hypothetical or possible rules for secular ethical conduct” (9) could be argued and explored, Nolan contends that these works functioned as practical exemplars demonstrating not only an acceptable code of conduct for the ruling class, but desirable and undesirable forms of heterosexual relations as well.

legitimacy, women in medieval Troy narratives often disrupt the system of sexual exchange which commodifies the material and affective values attached to their persons.

“Criseyda, In widewes habite blak”: Criseyde and Troy as the Fetishized Other in *Troilus and Criseyde*

Troilus and Criseyde maps the precarious identity of Troy on its equally precarious and ambiguous heroine, Criseyde. Introduced in black garments signifying not only the lack of a male protector in her personal life but also the loss and trauma associated with Trojan history, the enigmatic and socially vulnerable widow provides a nuanced commentary on the workings of the private, yet public, dynamics of desire in Chaucer’s Troy. To understand the gendered power structure surrounding Criseyde, I wish to turn to the network of men that exerts varying levels of control over her. For this, I focus on Pandarus and Diomedes, with Troilus being discussed in terms of his relations with these men and Criseyde. As I aim to argue, Pandarus and Diomedes enhance and define the relationship Troilus constructs with Criseyde, rendering the eponymous couple almost a byproduct of the trilateral union that they form with a second man.

Chaucer’s introduction of Criseyde is filtered through images of danger and desperation, which almost eclipse the familiar assertions of idealized beauty accompanying a courtly lady. Her father Calkas fleeing Troy for Greece and her unnamed husband already dead, Criseyde is left without a patriarchal figure whom she can rely on for protection and survival. As the narrator attests to, the angered people of Troy declare that “[Calkas] and al his kin at-ones / Ben worthi for to brennen, fel and bones” (1.90-91), directly threatening the wellbeing of Criseyde, who was at this point “bothe a widewe . . . and allone / Of any frend to whom she dorste hir mone” (1.97-

98).⁴ Despondent, she appeals to Hector for mercy and manages to obtain a promise of protection and honorable treatment. Interestingly enough, this favorable outcome is the result of three separate factors: “Now was this Ector pitous of nature, / And saugh that she was sorwfully bigon, / And that she was so fair a creature” (1.113-15). The generous disposition of Hector is corroborated by Criseyde’s sorrowful demeanor and exceptional beauty. In Criseyde’s very first introduction, Chaucer succinctly demonstrates the formula that governs the essential traits of his heroine and her relationship with men around her; she signifies sorrow and loss, she is sexually desirable, and these traits influence male affects to various results.

Before moving on to Criseyde’s relationship with Pandarus and Diomedes, it would be helpful to review the influential work of Eve Sedgwick on the topic of male homosociality in the context of heterosexual relations. Examining a familiar diagram of the love triangle (most often involving two men and one woman), Sedgwick contends that the beloved in this relationship is desired not because of any intrinsic, personal value, but because the preexisting romantic tension between the rival and the beloved imbues the beloved with attractive qualities. That is to say, the female beloved is merely a channel for the intense bond/enmity shared by the male rivals, which takes the center stage. In chivalric romances, this dynamic often results in a socially beneficial effect for the knights participating in said relations, motivating them to strive for valor and contributing to the military power of their courts. As Sedgwick observes, “in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (*including* homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power” (25). The rivalry aspect of Sedgwick’s analysis is of course readily applicable to Diomedes and his interest in Criseyde. However, the cooperative relationship established between Troilus and

⁴ All citations of Chaucer’s poems follow the third edition of the *Riverside Chaucer*.

Pandarus presents a variation of the homosocial bond, in which the shared objective of the sexual control over Criseyde unites them in a congenial partnership.

As the couple's go-between, Pandarus constructs a curious love triangle with Troilus and Criseyde in which the men are not competing for the woman, but affirm and reinforce the homosocial bond with each other through their relationship with the woman.⁵ Pandarus becomes privy to the private desires and sufferings of Troilus when he implores the lovesick Trojan prince to confide to him, emphatically invoking the "love or trouthe" (1.584) between friends to be the witness and guarantor of this newly established bond of secrecy. Indeed, the affectively rich moments shared by Pandarus and Troilus during their deliberation of romantic schemes, most of which take place in a private space at either men's houses, suggest connotations of intimate desire in their bond.⁶ Conveniently, Pandarus is decidedly not a heterosexual rival to Troilus: although he alludes to his own frustrated love for an unnamed woman on multiple occasions, Pandarus removes himself from the pool of men Troilus would potentially compete against ("If God wole, thow art nat agast of me, / Lest I wolde of thi lady the bygyle! / Thow woost thyself whom that I love, parde, / As I best kan, gon sithen longe while"; 1.715-18). Remarkably, Pandarus does not entertain the possibility that he may be sharing his object of desire with Troilus even before learning the identity of his friend's beloved, thus averting the danger of sexual rivalry in a rather forceful manner. When Troilus reveals that he is in love with Pandarus's niece Criseyde, Pandarus promises to aid his friend, reframing their relationship with a rhetoric of exchange and profit: "Yef me this labour and this bisynesse, / And of my spede be

⁵ For relevant discussions on the topic of masculinity in *Troilus and Criseyde*, see *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde* edited by Tison Pugh and Marcia Smith Marzec.

⁶ Tison Pugh's queer reading of Pandarus is an enlightening example. Pugh identifies erotic desires in the deeply intimate relationship of Troilus and Pandarus while also noting the aggressive sexual control exerted by Pandarus over Criseyde.

thyn al that swetnesse” (1.1042-43). For Pandarus, courtship is a socioeconomic process in which sexual access to a woman can be achieved through alliance and a shared goal among men.

Having thus dubbed himself a romantic delegate for Troilus, Pandarus essentially courts his niece on behalf of his demure friend, coaxing and threatening her to reciprocate his advances. Between impassioned speeches on love to pragmatic schemes of sexual gratification, Pandarus becomes, as Gretchen Mieszkowski argues, an amalgamation of two distinct traditions of medieval literary go-betweens—both a helper of idealized love, and a co-conspirator of sexual conquest (137). This duality materializes into a deeply exploitative power structure with Criseyde as the object of both modes of heterosexual desire. Whereas Boccaccio had Pandaro be Criseida’s cousin, Chaucer casts his Pandarus as Criseyde’s uncle, placing subtle emphasis on the uneven power dynamics between the two. The first meeting between Pandarus and Criseyde in the poem is preceded by Procne the swallow’s sorrowful song about the rape of Philomela by Tereus, an Ovidian tale readily recognizable for medieval audiences, while Philomela the nightingale herself prefaces Criseyde’s enigmatic dream of heart-exchange with a white eagle. That is to say, the onset of the relationship is decidedly framed within the context of sexual aggression and violence.⁷

The actual encounters of Pandarus and Criseyde provide more direct instances of erotically charged interactions. When Pandarus delivers a love letter from Troilus to his seemingly reluctant niece, the narrator reports a strikingly intimate moment in which, reportedly, “[he] hente hire faste, / And in hire bosom the lettre down he thraste” (2.1154-55). On Pandarus’s morning visit to Criseyde after the lovers’ consummation, the short exchange of arch

⁷ On the theme of sexual violence against women in medieval English literature, in which the legend of Philomela provides crucial discursive material, see Corinne Saunders.

but playful banter between the two ends with Pandarus lifting Criseyde's bedsheets, after which "With that his arm al sodeynly he thriste / Under hire nekke, and at the laste hire kyste" (3.1574-75). The titillating scenes in which Pandarus engages in indirect courting with Criseyde introduce surprisingly sexual overtones into their relationship, as attested by the heated debate on the topic in critical literature.⁸ The aggressive intensity of Pandarus compensates for the modest passivity maintained by Troilus, who is likened to "an esy pacient" (1.1090) of love awaiting instructions of his physician. Troilus talks to, writes letters to, and gets into bed with Criseyde as Pandarus instructs, with courtly decorum never departing from his lover's persona.

This unique twist on the conventional love-triangle, where Troilus and Pandarus perform mutually exclusive modes of heterosexual courtship with Criseyde as the object, supports the systematic control of women enabled by patriarchal economy of sex while exposing the inner workings of idealized courtly love. In effect, Pandarus acts out the sexual aggression that the code of courtly love presupposes but conceals in languages of honor and decorum—a venue of action impossible for Troilus the virtuous knight. With the overt rejection of possible sexual competition between Troilus and Pandarus, the two men are free to participate in vicarious enjoyment that they reciprocally procure for each other during the courtship of Criseyde.

⁸ The alleged incest between Pandarus and Criseyde, especially during the perplexing bedroom scene in Book 3, has been a vexed question. Critical response has ranged from contemptuous refusal to entertain such a possibility (Robert apRoberts, T. A. Stroud, and famously, Stephen Barney in his footnote to the *Riverside Chaucer*) to postulation of sexual activity veiled by the narrator's ambiguous description (Beryl Rowland, Haldeen Braddy, Richard W. Fehrenbacher, and Cory James Rushton). While a detailed survey of this debate is outside of the scope of my project, my reading aligns closely with that of Mieszkowski, who makes note of the intimate aspect of Pandarus's relationship with Criseyde while identifying the "undercurrent of sexual sharing" (145) between Pandarus and both lovers. Ultimately, however, whether or not an incestuous sex act has indeed taken place at certain moment(s) in the poem is not my concern. Rather, I am more interested in the masculine desire for control over female sexuality as represented by Pandarus, the larger system of sexual trafficking present in Troy, and the homosocial bonding which Pandarus and Troilus establishes upon these bases.

Pandarus gets to partake in aggressive courtship presumably impossible in his own enigmatic love life, while Troilus gets to maintain the image of a courteous lover while pursuing his beloved with assertive and pragmatic tactics.

In fact, the alliance of sexual procurement is far from one-sided in that Troilus is more than happy to return the favor. After orchestrating the first meeting of the lovers, in which Criseyde promises to reciprocate Troilus's love within the extent that her honor allows for, Pandarus expresses shame and regret at his own machinations so far. He has debased himself to become "swich a meene / As maken wommen unto men to comen" (3.254-55) for the sake of his friend, Pandarus argues, and the least Troilus can do in return is keeping the affair secret and honorable. Considering the pragmatic and somewhat cynical stance Pandarus takes towards idealized love throughout the poem, the sincerity of these remarks is doubtful at best. Yet for Troilus, confronting the mercantile nature of their courtship in such candid manner is not an option, for it would jeopardize the very premise of courtly love necessary for the affair to continue. Troilus is quick to validate Pandarus by redefining his actions as a sexual trafficker within the framework of compassionate friendship, as opposed to monetary interests: "But he that gooth for gold or for rcichesse, / On swich message, calle hym what the list; / And this that thow doost, calle it gentillesse, / Compassioun, and felawship, and trist" (3.400-03).

The masculine bond of the two friends is further cemented by a continued discourse on sexual exchange of women, understood in the context of reciprocal congeniality. More precisely, Troilus enhances his affective association with Pandarus by suggesting a counter-offer of sexual trafficking. The prince, amiable as ever, proposes to give Pandarus access to any one of his kinswomen as a show of gratitude for his service:

And that thow knowe I thynke nought ne wene

That this servise a shame be or jape,
I have my faire suster Polixene,
Cassandre, Eleyne, or any of the frape—
Be she nevere so fair or wel yshape,
Tel me which thow wilt of everychone,
To han for thyn, and lat me thanne allone. (3.407-12)

The promise of an explicit woman-for-woman exchange fully exposes the commercialized system of heterosexual desire operating in Troy. If, as both Troilus and Pandarus allude to, the identity of Pandarus's mysterious beloved is known to Troilus, it would be awkward to assume that one of the women explicitly named here is Pandarus's object of affection. However, the ambiguity surrounding the unnamed beloved and the desirable ladies offered in this passage blurs the distinction between the two categories of women in a provocative, disturbing manner. As Dinshaw argues, this momentary slip of a courteous lover's persona testifies to "a more fundamental system of trade of women" (*Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* 60) informing heterosexual relations in Troy. Moreover, Troilus's offer is succeeded by an appeal to "this grete emprise / Perfourme it out; for now is moste nede" (3.416-17), which further links the ongoing courtship of Criseyde to the economy of sex and contractual alliance for sexual access among men. Hector's noble objection to the exchange of Criseyde and Antenor in Book 4, in which he claims that "[they] usen here no wommen for to selle" (4.182), only serves to underline the very active selling of female sexuality that the Trojans participate in.

The intricate homosocial equilibrium between Troilus and Pandarus, in which the two men share an intimate bond built upon sexual procurement and control of desirable women, collapses when usurped by a more traditional love triangle based on male rivalry and hostility.

The anxiety surrounding theft of women, which constructs the most basic premise of the Trojan war, has subtly permeated and dictated the romance of Troilus and Criseyde even during the earlier stages of their history: the lovesick Troilus is plagued by the jealous fear “that [Criseyde] som wight hadde loved so, / That nevere of hym she wolde han taken hede” (1.500-01), and Horaste the imagined rival is a key component of Pandarus’s machinations to bring the lovers to consummation in Book 3. With the entrance of Diomedes, no feasible means to reclaim Criseyde, and Troilus’s refusal to accept romantic replacements, the foundation for the homosocial bond between Troilus and Pandarus shatters. Thus the crafty Pandarus is rendered speechless and powerless, with a lingering curse directed towards his treacherous niece accompanying his final admission of defeat (I may do the namore. / What sholde I seyen? I hate, ywis, Cryseyde; / And, God woot, I wol hate hire evermore!; 5.1731-33, And fro this world, almyghty god I preye / Deliver hire soon! I kan namore seye; 5.1742-43). Again, a microcosm of the rape of Helen has taken place for Troilus/the Little Troy; the patriarchal order of sexual economy is destroyed by male aggression and female complicity, the very components of said order.

Diomedes distorts the diagram of cooperative male courtship established by Troilus and Pandarus by stripping off the idealized courtly framing from heterosexual desire and claiming the part of an aggressive suitor for himself. Perceptive and astute, the Greek warrior observes the evident distress of Troilus when Criseyde is led away, with the narrator testifying to Diomedes’s knowledge in “more than the crede / In swich a craft” (5.89-90). Notably, Diomedes’s understanding of a preexisting romance between Troilus and Criseyde seems to precede, and even generate, his desire for Criseyde. This causal relationship is explicitly underlined in Diomedes’s contemplation while leading Criseyde to the Greek camp:

This Diomedes, that ledde hire by the bridel,

Whan that he saugh the folk of Troie aweye,
Thoughte, “Al my labour shal nat ben on ydel,
If that I may, for somewhat shal I seye,
For at the werste it may yet shorte oure weye.
I have herd seyde ek tymes twyes twelve,
‘He is a fool that wol foryete himselve.’”

But natheles, this thoughte he wel ynough,
That “Certeynlich I am aboute nought,
If that I speke of love or make it tough;
For douteles, if she have in hire thought
Hym that I gesse, he may not ben ybrought
So soon away; but I shal fynde a meene
That she naught wite as yet shal what I mene.” (5.92-105)

Troilus, though unnamed, is a strikingly potent figure in Diomedes’s earliest motive for actively pursuing Criseyde. It is therefore only natural that the subsequent arguments Diomedes constructs in favor of himself largely revolve around Greek superiority and desirability: the Greek might and vengeance will soon bring complete destruction to Troy, and he can be “A moore parfit love . . . Than any Troian is, and more kynde, / And bet to serven [Criseyde] wol doon his myght” (5.919-21), with an added benefit of being “As gentil man as any wight in Troie” (5.931). The confident, aggressive demeanor shown by Chaucer’s Diomedes is markedly different from Boccaccio and Benoit’s Diomedes, whose opportunistic courtship of Criseida/Briseida is

still interspersed with genuine pains and uncertainties of love.⁹ This Diomede, however, is decidedly a skilled seducer, fueled by the desire to plunder a military rival's most cherished possession.

The bitingly cynical attitude towards love and desire showcased by Diomede exposes the unsavory aspects of sexual trafficking which Troilus, and Troy at large as the ravisher of Helen, utilize for establishing and understanding heterosexual relations. To Diomede, Criseyde's value stems from her status as the beloved of Troilus, a spoil of war whose possession would bestow him the title of "a conquerour" (5.794) but devoid of intrinsic significance or meaning of herself. Hence, his acquiring of love tokens from Criseyde—a glove, a sleeve, and finally, a brooch originally given to her by Troilus—functions as a boast of victory against his rival. The exchange of "the faire baye stede" (5.1038), which Diomede wins from Troilus and subsequently receives from Criseyde as a gift, also indicates a symbolic re-calibration of sexual dynamics. Ultimately for Criseyde, there is not much difference between Troilus and Diomede, or the courtly streets of Troy and the warlike Greek camp—she has simply relocated herself from one network of male-authored desire to another.

As a woman located within the tradition of Trojan historiography, Criseyde is doubly objectified by the masculine social order of Troy and the fetishizing gaze of historical narrative framing her world. I return at this point to her first entrance in the poem; dejected and beautiful,

⁹ In Canto 6 of *Il Filostrato*, Diomedes despairs of winning Criseida's affection when witnessing her private laments about leaving Troilus, but still resolves to communicate his amorous passions to her under pain of death. Similarly in the *Roman de Troie*, Diomedes is tormented by the interchanging hopes and fears of love, often sighing and unable to sleep (15001–37). The familiar language of amatory suffering used by Boccaccio and Benoit grants their Diomedes vulnerability, and in turn some room for sincerity in love, in stark contrast with Chaucer's Diomede.

without a father or a husband, her vulnerability is almost synonymous with her desirability. The “widewes habit large of samyt broun” (1.109) adorning Criseyde’s body signals her connection with the concept of loss intrinsic to the appeal of Troy itself. That is, the traumatic destruction and exile intrinsic to Troy narratives generate not only anxiety but also desire. If the moralizing impulse of medieval historiographers of Troy is a response to their fear of history repeating itself, the repeated themes of sexual treachery and feminine inconstancy betray the fetishizing gaze directed towards the classical past. Criseyde embodies the contradiction wherein Troy is alluring not despite, but because of, the loss and pain associated with it.

The dark attire signaling loss and desire continues to be Criseyde’s defining visual trait in her very next major appearance: the festival of Palladium in which Troilus sees and falls in love with her. Palladium being the mythical statue of Minerva, the theft of which will ensure Troy’s fall, the innocuous celebration dedicated to it is already charged with ominous vision of impending destruction. Within the festivities and merriment attached to this object of doom stands Criseyde, still clad in modest black clothes but somehow outstanding in physical appeal. Indeed, the narrator closely juxtaposes Criseyde’s dark clothing and accompanying atmosphere of somber gracefulness with her peerless beauty:

Among thise othere folk was Criseyda,
In widewes habit blak; but natheles,
Right as oure firste lettre is now an A,
In beaute first so stood she, makeles.
Hire goodly lokyng gladed al the prees.
Nas nevere yet seyn thyng to ben preysed derre,
Nor under cloude blak so bright a sterre

As was Criseyde, as folk seyde everichone
That hir behelden in hir blake wede.
And yet she stood ful lowe and stille allone,
Byhynden other folk, in litel brede,
And neigh the dore, ay undre shames drede,
Simple of atir, and debonaire of chere,
With ful assured lokyng and manere. (1.169-82)

Notably, Troilus's interest in Criseyde is strongly motivated by the visual aspect as well. His wandering eyes land on the visage of Criseyde, which immediately captivates him, and it is expressly "hire look" (1.295) that stirs "gret desir and . . . affeccoun" (1.296) within his heart. Whereas Criseyde's beauty and sorrowful demeanor affected the benevolent mind of Hector, his brother Troilus is moved to amorous passion by her beauty and dignified modesty. In both cases, the black attire of a widow is a common denominator of male affects—be they pity or desire—directed towards Criseyde.

Yet the fetishizing gaze does not originate from the interior of the narrative alone, for Chaucer fashions his narrator into another male presence who desires and objectifies Troy and Criseyde. The narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde* is infamous for the obstinate tone of ambiguity that he maintains regarding narrative elements of varying significance, ranging from the contents of the lover's letters or undisclosed personal intentions and emotions. Often invoking the name of his *auctor* Lollius, the narrator withholds elaboration on details, citing not having enough evidence in the source material ("For sothe, I have naught herd it don er this / In story non, ne no man here, I wene"; 3.498-99) or the lack of his own poetic skills rendering the events

“impossible to [his] wit to seye” (3.1311). These knowing gestures towards his literary predecessors underscore the inherited nature of Troy material, while the *occupatio* surrounding what has or has not empirically happened in Troy discloses the authorial nod to his own work’s existence as a variation of Trojan historiography. By demurring from the very act of historiography, the narrator acknowledges the impossibility of telling the story of Troy with absolute truthfulness and objective integrity.

For the narrator, Criseyde as the beautiful but treacherous heroine of his Trojan history becomes the crux of the desire for, and anxiety about, the classical past. The narrator is profoundly equivocal in his stance towards Criseyde, attempting to vindicate her at times but letting dubious allegations against her slip on other occasions. When Criseyde at the Greek camp tearfully resolves to return to Troy, the narrator closes off the scene with a harshly plain statement of what is to come—that “bothe Troilus and Troie town / Shal knotteles thoroughout hire herte slide; / For she wol take a purpos for t’abide” (5.768-70). But the language surrounding the act of infidelity itself is markedly evasive: the narrator refuses to prove the veracity of Criseyde’s seemingly affectionate responses to Diomedes on his own accord, as indicated in the equivocations such as “the storie telleth us” (5.1037) and “in stories elleswhere” (5.1044), and most troubling of all, “Men seyn—I not—that she yaf him hire herte” (5.1050). The loss defined by Criseyde—be it loss of love, moral judgement, comforting stability in the intertextual history of Troy—confounds the narrator, resulting in ambiguous and often contradictory sentiments for his heroine and her city. “I wolde excuse hire yet for routhe” (5.1099), the narrator exclaims, even as he contributes to the undying infamy brought upon Criseyde. The Boethian vision at the end grants the narrator a sudden sense of cultural distance with which to denounce the “payens corsed olde rites” (5.1849) informing his Troy, but this

attempt at differentiation ultimately rings hollow. Similar to Criseyde, Troy is a traumatic symbol which incites desire due to its signification of loss.

Troy's dual attributes of ancestral familiarity and sociocultural alterity allow for a reading of Criseyde as a feminine-coded Eastern Other. The concept of Orientalism introduced by Edward Said is useful in this regard. While Orientalism as argued by Said largely concerns developments after the eighteenth century, the concept has been discussed in postcolonial reading of medieval European literature depicting encounters with foreign cultures. Notable monographs on the topic of race, nationhood, and the reception of the cultural and religious Other in medieval Europe include *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* by Geraldine Heng, *Medievalism and Orientalism: Three Essays on Literature, Architecture and Cultural Identity* by John M. Ganim, and *Medieval Literature and Postcolonial Studies* by Lisa Lampert-Weissig. As for works more adjacent to Chaucer and late medieval English literature, with a focus on the issues of gender and sexuality, the studies by Sheila Delany and Carol F. Heffernan are especially illuminating. As these studies demonstrate, crusades, pilgrimages, and mercantile interactions have provided lenses through which Western Europeans perceived the East. Interestingly, women and heterosexual dynamics loom large in the studies of Orientalism in Chaucerian texts; as shown in the works of Delany and Heffernan, Constance and Canace in the *Canterbury Tales* and Cleopatra and Dido in the *Legend of Good Women* are well noted examples. Although not overtly exoticized, Troy in *Troilus and Criseyde* is a version of Eastern empire geographically and temporally removed from Chaucer's immediate environment, with the invocation of pagan customs lightly intruding on the surface of an imagined sociocultural congruity with medieval England. In fact, James G. Harper points out that there existed a late medieval artistic trend of portraying Trojans in Ottoman Turkish

garments, the development and suppression of which reflects “a collective anxiety in Europe, which developed in the face of the military and the cultural threat of the Ottoman Empire” (151).¹⁰ Pervasive as the foundation narrative of Troy was, medieval historical imagination perceived Troy to be a conceptually foreign space, at once a familiar and an alien point of their own origins.

Although the medieval Troy is often represented through cultural and visual lenses largely congruent with contemporary Western Europe, the textual space of *Troilus and Criseyde* harbors locations that are decidedly “Trojan” as defined by their non-English and Eastern characteristics. The aforementioned festival of Palladium is an example of a religious-political ceremony of the East as imagined by a Western narrator, comparable in its cultural significance to the magnificent temples of pagan gods in the *Knight’s Tale*. Another moment of cultural heterogeneity occurs when Criseyde, visited by Pandarus in her garden, is seen listening to “the geste / Of the Sege of Thebes” (2.83-84) being read by a maiden with her two companions. Despite its ostensibly familiar atmosphere of Western courtliness, Chaucer’s Troy is a site of cultural polymorphism where non-English traditions converge and intermix with one another. As Harper points out, “In a chronological and geographical sense the Trojans are Other, yet at the same time, as putative ancestors, they are somehow familiar. Every Trojan image exists somewhere on a triangular field that is defined by three considerations: geographical distance, chronological distance, and cultural distance” (154). These three modes of distances separating Troy from contemporary Western Europe inform the latter’s perception of the former, shaping

¹⁰ Although Harper concentrates more on visual arts than literature, his analysis of Orientalized Trojans in medieval artistic representation is enlightening. According to Harper, Romans including Aeneas often got this treatment along with Trojans, sporting “Eastern” clothing ranging from Phrygian caps to turbans along with Roman garb.

Trojan spaces into simultaneously familiar and alien locations that can fascinate, unsettle, and provoke those who observe them.

For a reading of Criseyde as an Eastern woman, I focus on Criseyde's connection to her literary predecessor, Helen of Troy. Frequently crossing cultural boundaries, stolen and exchanged among men, and synonymous with sexual infidelity, Helen maintains a subtle but extensive presence in the strikingly similar history of Criseyde.¹¹ The narrator reminds his audience that the Greeks waged war against Troy "The ravysshyng to wreken of Eleyne, / By Paris don" (1.62-63) in the opening stanzas of *Troilus and Criseyde*, and the ongoing war is constantly present in the characters' mind, with Troilus and Pandarus discussing battle results and Criseyde expressing concerns over military activities. Moreover, Helen is a consistent point of reference for female beauty and heterosexual intimacy in Troy. The infatuated Troilus considers Criseyde to be "fairer . . . to sene / Than evere were Eleyne or Polixene" (1.454-55), and when coaxing Troilus to reveal the object of his affection, Pandarus assures his friend that he would not deter him from pursuing his beloved "theigh that it were Eleyne / That is thi brother wif" (1.677-78), which Troilus reciprocates when he includes Helen among the royal women he offers to Pandarus as a show of gratitude. The Spartan Helen has already become a Helen of Troy, a valid object of exchange within the Trojan male network.

Helen's most prominent appearance in *Troilus and Criseyde* is in Book 2, where she and Deiphebus unknowingly contribute to Pandarus's scheme to bring the lovers together. Believing that Criseyde is being antagonized by a man named Poliphete, Deiphebus invites her to a dinner at his house to show his support. Among his other guests are Troilus, who is feigning illness, and

¹¹ For a comprehensive survey of Helen's representation in Western epic tradition, see Mihoko Suzuki.

Helen, whose power to “leden Paris as hire leste” (2.1449) is expected to work in Criseyde’s favor. As it turns out, Helen is a major figure during the dinner party: she is vocal in her support of Criseyde, holding her hand while casting a benevolent gaze on her, and imploring Troilus to become a “good lord and frend, right hertely, / Unto Criseyde” (2.1677-78). Soon, Pandarus presents a rather ominous excuse to lead Helen and Deiphebus out of the room, which marks their exit from the scene; he produces “The copie of a tretys and a lettre / That Ector hadde hym sent to axen red / If swych a man was worthi to ben ded” (2.1697-99), which Helen and Deiphebus consider for an hour “In earnest greet” (2.1703). Throughout the party scene at Deiphebus’s house, Helen is consistently a gracious queen seemingly detached from her infamous history, aiding both lovers without divulging the extent of her knowledge about their hidden agenda.

With a single physical appearance, Chaucer presents a picture of a Helen whose air of courtly elegance coexists with ominous implications of impending disasters, corroborated by her close association with Deiphebus and Criseyde herself. Helen’s presence in *Troilus and Criseyde* is an enigma since, unlike Deiphebus, whose counterpart in *Il Filostrato* interacts with Troilus on multiple occasions, her active involvement in the dinner party appears to be entirely Chaucer’s creation. As pointed out by McKay Sundwall, Helen’s association with Deiphebus would have reminded medieval audience of their subsequent marriage after Paris’s death. The suggestive pairing of Helen and Deiphebus at an earlier point of time during her marriage to Paris (which in turn is a testament of her first infidelity), tinted with implications of larger courtly intrigue involving Hector, profoundly dictates this moment of distinction for a Chaucerian Helen. The vision of Helen’s remarriage also informs Criseyde’s first personal interaction with Troilus in Book 3, joining both women in the function of conduit for the heteroerotic economy among men.

Christopher C. Baswell and Paul Beekman Taylor identify “a paradoxical and double role” in Chaucer’s Helen, where she is at once a disastrous reflection of sexual treachery—eventually embodied by Criseyde herself—and a detached initiator of private and public tragedies in the war (310). Within Helen, the alluring but treacherous Otherness shifts into an amalgamation of femininity, classical past, and cultural Easternness. By juxtaposing Helen at a dubious moment in her exchange among men with Criseyde at the onset of her romance with Troilus, Chaucer acknowledges and comments upon the parallel between the two destroyers of Troy—one, the literal city of Troy, and the other, Troilus the symbolic Little Troy.

Helen enters the poem again when Criseyde’s impending departure from Troy prompts discussion on potential countermeasures, in which Paris and Helen emerge as an uncanny double of Troilus and Criseyde. In the beginning of Book 4, a remorseful Calkas beseeches the Greek commanders to retrieve his daughter for him, and an agreement between the warring parties declares that Criseyde will be exchanged for a captured Antenor. As Helen once did, Criseyde will cross over the boundaries between Troy and Greece, inscribing a culturally ambiguous and effectively empty meaning upon her femininity—a process Troilus finds himself unable to protest against, due to his own implication in the system of exchange. When his suggestion that Troilus find a new, more desirable woman is rejected, Pandarus exasperatedly encourages his friend to “ravysse” (4.530) Criseyde. The appeal to Troilus’s “manhod” (4.529) frames the act of ravishing as an acceptably masculine solution for the issue, as opposed to the helpless “wepyng” (4.537) the prince is currently engaging in. However, Troilus presents counterarguments supported by concerns over politics and honor. As Troilus points out, “this town hath al this werre / For ravysshyng of wommen so by myght” (4.547-48), and hindering the process—either by opposing the exchange or publicly asking for Criseyde’s hand in marriage—

is neither desirable nor feasible since Criseyde being “chaunged for the townes goode” (4.553) is a legitimized political action. The potential “disclaundre to [Criseyde’s] name” (4.564) caused by the rape is an additional danger which Troilus rejects. Essentially, Troilus stands by the sociopolitical economy of sex defining patriarchal power structure but cannot accept the corresponding values attached to the trafficked women; whether exchanged or ravished, Criseyde is already a second Helen in the eyes of the system. Thus Pandarus asks Troilus again: “Thenk ek how Paris hath, that is thi brother, / A love; and whi shaltow nat have another?” (4.608-09). To his understanding, Criseyde is merely “another” following Helen, and becoming a second Paris is almost a natural course of action for Troilus.

The lovers’ rejection of Paris and Helen as a model of conduct only serves to illuminate the symbolic similitude between the two pairs. The precedent of *raptus* established by Paris and Helen is considered again by Troilus himself, who proposes the plan to Criseyde and is in turn rejected. Whereas Troilus was mostly concerned about the validity and legitimacy of political action in his refusal, Criseyde concentrates on the system of values and mores constructing their social personae. People will assume that Troilus eloped due to “lust voluptuous and coward drede” (4.1573) instead of love, Criseyde argues, and her “honeste” (4.1576) will be irrevocably ruined as well. Interestingly, this projection partially comes true even without the elopement coming to pass: Criseyde would indeed become the icon of feminine inconstancy. As Robert Henryson’s post-Chaucerian epitaph to Criseyde would testify to, the intertextual tradition of Troy narratives fashions Troilus and Criseyde into a pair embodying the dichotomy inherent in medieval Trojanness. The fidelity of Troilus, coded masculine, becomes synonymous with idealized chivalric ethos in the public sphere, while private desires and changeableness, coded

feminine, are inscribed onto Criseyde. Troilus does not become a second Paris, but Criseyde cannot avoid her literary metamorphosis into a second Helen.

Fittingly enough, Criseyde's final appearance in the poem has her present a personalized anticipation of her own intertextual legacy, as opposed to the transcendental vision surveying the entirety of secular/pagan history experienced by Troilus's spirit. As Criseyde predicts, the words transmitted by "bokes" (5.1060) and "many a tonge" (5.1061) will seal her infamy, reshaping her into a literary specter haunting Troy narratives. Thus the black mourning garments are again an apt attire for Criseyde to enter and exit Troy in, as she promises to Troilus before her departure ("And, Troilus, my clothes everychon / Shul blake ben in tokenyng, herte swete, / That I am as out of this world agon, / That wont was yow to setten in quiete"; 4.778-81). Trojan history as represented by Criseyde is a traumatic object lost to the desiring medieval subject, itself in mourning for the foretold destruction and tragedy, familiar yet fascinating in its Otherness.

Trojan Historiography and the Legacy of Henryson's *Cresseid*

The *Testament of Cresseid* by Robert Henryson, written with overt nods to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, has often been read in its chronologically and thematically dependent relationship with the Chaucerian text. So much so that David Benson, in his examination of the reworking of Chaucer by Lydgate and Henryson, declared that "[t]he ultimate tribute to Henryson's success is that the Testament was for so long regarded as Chaucer's own despite clear signals to the contrary in the poem" ("Critic and Poet" 33). To be sure, Henryson's positioning of Chaucer's work as "ane quair . . . Writtin be worthie Chaucer glorious" (40-41) and his supposed direct source as "ane uther quair" (61) reinforces the perceived filial

relationship between Chaucer and Henryson's works.¹² Yet immediately after mentioning his "uther quair," Henryson famously questions, "Quha wait gif all that Chauceir wrait was trew?" (64), placing doubt on the authority of Chaucer's *Troilus* as one of the canonical sources on Trojan history. Henryson sets out to extend the narrative scope of the Chaucerian text while subtly challenging its textual authority, with Cresseid, the focus of both works, as a crucial element in his project.

Henryson's choice of the matter of Troy testifies to a specific interest pertinent to the political feud between contemporary Scotland and England. As a Scottish poet working under the influence of the "worthie Chaucer," Henryson was deeply implicated in the often-hostile relationship of the two nations and, specifically, the political and historiographical conflict concerning English claim to Scotland. R. James Goldstein has extensively examined what he terms the "war of historiography" between the two nations, the gist of which is as follows: Edward I of England traced his ancestry back to Lochrine, the son of Brutus and eventual conqueror of Albany, and also to Dunwal, the Briton king who acquired Scotland from a defeated Scottish king, utilizing the legendary history by Geoffrey of Monmouth as evidence for the legitimacy of his claims. The Scottish counterargument was likewise based on legendary history—that their foundress, Scota, established an independent Scottish identity distinct from the Britons. Goldstein observes that "the appeal to a specifically Scottish legend enables the Scots to derive their origins from a parent race as old as the Trojan remnant" (74). Although this dispute over legitimacy based on the authority of foundation narratives happened almost a

¹² There have been philological attempts to locate Henryson's "uther quair", although its existence is often thought to be dubious at best; see, for instance, Robert L. Kindrick's summary of possible candidates, among which Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini's the *Historia de duobus amantibus* is considered the most plausible.

century before Henryson's time, it was far from a remote and unfamiliar incident for the Scottish poet. George Edmondson, examining the literary "neighboring" relations between Chaucer, Henryson, and Boccaccio's versions on the story of Troilus, reads Henryson's text as both thematically and geographically adjacent to Chaucer's text. According to Edmondson, "for a fifteenth-century Scottish poet, the Chaucerian text—a text already being promoted in Lancastrian circles as distinctly and definitively English—could not help but occupy the structural position of the neighbor, a position invariably connected, for the Scots, with an unrestrained enjoyment, a death drive, in the Other" (48). National identity as defined by antagonism and separation informs the social climate in which the contemporary English and Scottish poets found themselves in, with Henryson, working with an English predecessor, counted among them.

It is worth noting that, due to the strangely nebulous point in Trojan history in which the *Testament* situates itself, Troilus himself escapes death and interment within the narrative scope of the poem. While Chaucer briefly mentions Troilus's death by Achilles and details his ascension to the seventh sphere, Henryson's Troilus survives his former beloved, at least long enough to publicly lament that "Scho was untrew and wo is me thairfoir" (602) and compose her epitaph. Edmondson reads this change as Henryson's deliberate attempt at undoing the chronology of Troilus and Criseyde established by the Chaucerian text, dismantling the entire scenario of the Anglo-centric founding of Britain in the process:

Whether intentionally or not, the *Testament*, by insisting on the existence of Troilus in a continuous present, disinters, revives, that which must remain dead and buried so that the English New Troy may go on existing on its canceled ground. So long as Troilus remains alive, then for that suspended period of time Troy has never fallen, or has yet to

fall, and so, according to the logic of imperial translation, England has never existed, never arisen in Troy's empty place. (77)

The *translatio imperii* outlining the succession of empires from Troy to Rome to Britain is unraveled by symbolically bringing Troilus back from the dead. Henryson's voice of doubt about whether everything Chaucer has said is true finds its echoes in the reversed fate of the lovers and, possibly, the contemporary political landscape. At the intersection of past accounts of Trojan history and present myth-making lies Cresseid's grave, her identity as both "the flour of womanheid" (608) and "lipper" (609) neatly summarizing the start and end of her connection with Troilus/Troy. As the cause of happiness and despair for Troilus, the "Little Troy" whose premature death was said to be one of the catalysts for Troy's fall, the treacherous Cresseid becomes a distinctly medieval, literary sister of Helen of Troy.¹³

It might be no surprise, then, that Henryson's reception and reworking of Trojan history would be structurally and thematically distinct from the Trojan historiography in English. Emily Wingfield, examining the medieval Scottish variations of Trojan narratives, observes that Chaucer's Criseyde and Henryson's Cresseid "are constructed not simply as characters *per se*, but also as texts – emblems and symbols of the Trojan textual tradition. As such, they voice wider concerns about literary interpretation and authority and ultimately question the very nature and existence of poetic truth" (121-22). Wingfield sees Henryson's critical approach to "literary

¹³ Troilus in the classical tradition was a youthful prince, sometimes said to be the son of Apollo instead of Priam, whose fate was tied to Troy the city as his namesake. As with other prophesied objects ensuring Troy's continued existence—for example, the Palladium—his meaning as a symbol hinges on the inevitability of the destruction encroaching upon Troy and himself, and he is invariably killed by Achilles, dooming his city as well. Although medieval authors tend to not concern themselves with this anecdotal information, the signification of tragedy and loss inscribed upon the medieval Troilus is remarkably apt for a personification of Troy itself.

interpretation and authority” as closely related to “a sceptical and interrogatory approach to reading and writing” (149), which she dubs a distinctly Scottish poetics. The political enmity with England informed Scottish poets with a mode of historiography marked by a critical reception of Anglo-centric materials, and in the case of Henryson and the *Testament*, an autonomous retelling of Trojan history borrowing from, but not directed by, a Chaucerian precedent.

This literary mode of Scottish skepticism also gives rise to an alternative interpretation of Chaucer’s *Criseyde*, which Henryson, despite his seemingly harsh treatment of his *Cresseid*, participates in. While Henryson has often been accused of antifeminism, his narrator, whom critics sometimes see as an overly moralistic, if not outright misogynistic, commentator on *Cresseid*’s history, shows a contradictory and ambivalent attitude towards the sexual transgression, punishment, and suffering of *Cresseid*. When Diomed abandons *Cresseid* after satisfying “all his appetyte” (71) through her, the narrator reports that “desolait scho walkit up and down, / And sum men sayis into the court common” (76-77), implying that she has become a “common” prostitute or at least a promiscuous woman—possibly in order to secure a new lover/protector in the Greek camp. Henryson’s narrator, while unhappy that *Cresseid* would “be with fleschelic lust sa maculait / And go amang the Greikis air and lait, / Sa giglotlike takand thy foull plesance” (81-83), declares that “quhat ever men deme or say / In scornfull langage of thy brukkilnes, / I sall excuse als far furth as I may / Thy womanheid, thy wisdom and fairness” (85-88) in a tone that is strikingly reminiscent of Chaucer’s narrator’s pained exculpation of his heroine. Suffice it to say, then, that Henryson and his narrator both engage in a reading of the *Troilus and Criseyde* story which directly responds to the Chaucerian text but refuses to be governed by it. Through this process, the Scottish *Cresseid* emerges as a figure no less complex

than the English Criseyde. In order to examine the complex mixture of autonomy and victimization showcased in the personal history of Cresseid, I now turn to the most explicit instance of her attempt at her own microscopic Trojan historiography enclosed within this poem full of her complaints and lamentations; the eponymous testament.

Cresseid's testament, together with her heartfelt remorse for her transgressions, invites discussions on the relationship of female authorship, self-making through autobiographical writing, and autonomy. When Troilus encounters Cresseid on the street, now a leprous beggar, he fails to recognize the disfigured Cresseid but casts gold and jewels in her skirt, being reminded of "The sweit visage and amorous blenking / Of fair Cresseid, sumtyme his awin darling" (503-04). Learning of the identity of this generous knight only later, Cresseid begins what would be her final repentance before death. After imploring future lovers to take what she phrases as the story of "fals Cresseid and trew knicht Troylus" (546) as a warning tale, Cresseid writes her testament. She bequeaths her body to the worms and toads to be consumed, and her last bit of physical possessions to the leper folk for burial, thus shedding all traces of her secular, material existence in preparation for death. Her soul is to be left to Diana, with whom she wishes to walk among the wilderness. "This royall ring, set with this rubie reid" (582), which was given by Troilus as a love token (and which well might be a conscious nod to a similar ring in Chaucer's text), is to be sent to him at the time of her death "To mak [her] cairfull deid unto him kend" (585), although Cresseid regretfully notes that the "broche and belt" (589) are still in the possession of Diomed.

Writing as the final action of Cresseid before her death carries significance in that it grants Cresseid, a woman widely denounced for her inconstancy in Troy narratives, an opportunity to construct a narrative of her own. The testament allows her to articulate what she

wishes to be done with regards to her personal belongings, which includes not only her gold and jewels but her body and soul as well. Laura Wang, emphasizing the fact that the will was regarded as an independent literary genre in medieval Scotland, especially for women to construct selfhood through autonomous management of their possessions and relationships, sees Cresseid's testament as "both an assertion of personal agency and an attempt at self-redemption" (144). Wingfield also agrees that Cresseid's final writing has "redemptive value" similar to the feminine writing in Ovid's *Heroides*, in that "although Henryson presents us with a flawed Cresseid throughout the majority of his poem, he nevertheless succeeds in allowing his heroine her own voice *and* her own piece of writing" (142). Cresseid's voicing of repentance and testament-writing serve to complicate the accepted perception of her as a false woman by allowing her to speak for herself.

However, the redemptive reading of Cresseid's testament often overlooks the tenacity and significance of her literary infamy, especially considering how her sexual treachery is intimately connected to the medieval perception of Troy as a symbol of loss and trauma. Her literary existence is ultimately not too dissimilar from that of Troilus, who lets his preoccupation with the past—where Cresseid is still his beautiful beloved, rather than a leper—bespeak his nature as a creature of the "past".¹⁴ Although Cresseid demonstrates a capability of internal change unlike Troilus, she still exists to instigate, or reinforce, Troilus's hatred towards the Greeks, indirectly directing his death in battle. As the symbol of the enmity between the two warring nations (a war that started for a series of stolen women, no less), Cresseid would

¹⁴ Benson notes that Troilus, in his failure to recognize the leprous Cresseid, reveals himself to be implicated in "his self-absorption and inability to escape from the dead past" ("Troilus and Cresseid" 265). Honyeman also reads Troilus's ignorance as an indication that "his construction of his former lover is so rooted in their history together that her leprous appearance inspires recognition not of who she *is*, but who she *was*" (62-63).

continue to be the center of desire and aggression caused by her existence, even with her attempt to construct a single counterargument against the countless books defaming her. Troilus and Cresseid as creatures of tradition will endlessly reenact the story of “fals Cresseid and trew knight Troylus” in Troy narratives, as parodied by Cresseid’s own repeated use of the phrase. The repentance of Cresseid, itself not without the dangers of simplifying her history into a patronizing morality tale of a remorseful whore, is continued to be placed after—and prior to, if one views the post-Henryson Troy narratives to be literal continuations and repetitions of the same story—the history of her guilt.

If nothing, Cresseid’s bequeathal of her spirit to Diana seems to anticipate her continually marginalized state. At the very end of her testament, immediately before her lament about lost love tokens of Troilus, Cresseid declares: “My spreit I leif to Diane, quhair scho dwellis, / To walk with hir in waist woddis and wellis” (587-88). Critics have read this solemn bequeathal as a redemptive gesture to serve the goddess of chastity in the peaceful afterlife situated in wilderness, which seemingly suggests that Cresseid will be able to regain her sexual and moral integrity after death. Yet the “waist woddis and wellis”, as the domain of Diana, signify wilderness as the dark periphery of civilization, akin to the leper house Cresseid retreats to; as indicated by the adjective “waist”, these forests and marshes would not necessarily be serene, pastoral locations. Perhaps similar to Emelye’s wish to remain unmarried (and thus continue to serve Diana) in the *Knight’s Tale*, Cresseid seemingly expresses desire to abandon the worldly sociopolitical and sexual order governed by men, instead choosing the liberating lack of such an order imagined to exist in Diana’s feminine-coded wilderness. Sarah M. Dunnigan’s reading that Cresseid in this passage renounces her carnal femininity by embracing posthumous chastity, since “[t]o renounce the flesh would appear to be to renounce the feminine also” (117),

is intriguing but troubling in its own right; if rejecting the notion of a male-authored, fractured femininity means rejecting the notion of gendered identity as a whole, what kind of significance would Cresseid's distinctly feminine plight have? Does her desired afterlife with the goddess of chastity imply that a woman cannot be a woman unless she becomes a whore?

In the end Cresseid, perhaps appropriately for a variant of the literary Criseida figure, remains too ambiguous and opaque to allow for a satisfyingly stable reading of her history, be its direction accusatory or redemptive. This interpretive frustration is mirrored by the duality of male affects—desire and aggression—directed toward Cresseid, not just in the *Testament* but in the tradition of the Troilus and Criseyde story as a whole. Similar to Troilus and Chaucer's narrator, the readers often find themselves to be forced to either love or hate Cresseid, as if there could be no in-between. Examining the paradoxical coexistence of love and hate for the Trojan heroine expressed by her readers within and without the texts, Jamie C. Fumo discovers what she terms as “attempts by characters or authors in the medieval Troy tradition to get the ‘last word’ on Cressida, to close her off—as often happens—by demonizing her” (21). According to Fumo, the dual affects of love and hate mark the in-text transmission of Cresseid from one lover/nation to another, while also testifying to the channeling of her history in literary tradition of Troy narratives:

[H]atred of Cressida as much as love for her impels her literary transmission, and . . . this transmission is often cued, in association with the rhetoric of hatred, within the texts themselves. A contest of love frames Cressida's transfer from one man to another, but this love—a reflex of wartime politics—easily metamorphoses into hatred, and it empowers more and more men (authors, readers, rumor-mongers) to appropriate her. Cressida's sexual conveyance between lovers from warring nations is a model for the

transmission of her experience between authors of different national and literary traditions. Hatred is the mark, the code word, of this literary transference; it is a sign of dispossession of her story (I'm through, I've said my part) that invites repossession by the next author (the cycle of love and hate begins again). (Fumo 30-31)

The male competition to gain access to Cresseid within the narrative is echoed by (male) authorial attempts to gain control over what she is and what she means. Therefore, the intertextual love and hate directed towards Cresseid is symptomatic of the love and hate directed towards her history as it is transmitted through the *corpus* of medieval Troy narratives. As Fumo points out, "Cressida's sexual conveyance between lovers from warring nations is a model for the transmission of her experience between authors of different national and literary traditions" (31).

Cresseid's identity as a leper as established by the *Testament*, positioned against her former identity as a fair courtly lady, also supports the understanding of Cresseid as the object of simultaneous male desire and aggression. While Cresseid's dual identity signals the familiar misogynistic dichotomy of women as both desirable and reprehensible objects, her leprosy is more than a merely facile punishment for her sexual treachery. According to Wingfield, leprosy in the middle ages was "seen on the one hand as a sign of damnation and its victim the object of repulsion; on the other hand, the disease could be seen as a sign of redemption and its victims were objects of desire, with female saints and mystics wishing actively to associate with them" (139).¹⁵ Although this observation may imply that the desire caused by the leprous Cresseid is mainly spiritual in nature, it is important to note that her function as the instigator of desire is

¹⁵ For discussions on the cultural significance of leprosy in the middle ages and its function as a basis of collective identity for its sufferers, see Elma Brenner and François-Olivier Touati.

still not lost, even in her diseased and disfigured state. Cresseid remains, in more ways than one, a woman that she always has been; a cipher for sexual and textual desire to control her narrative, either to reproach her or redeem her.

It would be helpful to remember at this point that Henryson himself is often troublingly ambivalent in his treatment of Cresseid, in that he simultaneously expresses desires to punish Cresseid for her transgressions and to forgive her in light of her repentance. Although Henryson's treatment of his heroine is sometimes thought to be overtly antagonistic, critical attempts to identify more sympathetic undertones in the suffering of Cresseid as described by Henryson are persistent. Benson sees Henryson's Cresseid to be a concrete character with a "detailed moral life" who evolves "from self-pity to responsibility" ("Critic and Poet" 40). His diagnosis of the redemptive Cresseid finds its precedent in his earlier reading of the poem, in which he argues that Cresseid is "morally a more admirable figure" compared to Troilus ("Troilus and Cresseid" 268). In Benson's view, Cresseid's heartfelt remorse and final message to Troilus directly contrast with Troilus's unchanging perception of her as an "untrew" woman, since "[s]he dies thinking of others, and especially of him; Troilus is informed [of her death] and can think only of himself" ("Troilus and Cresseid" 270). Benson is not the only critic to see Cresseid's remorse and willing acknowledgement of her sins as such to be positive traits that signal redemption. Chelsea Honeyman contends that Henryson offers an intentionally unsatisfactory account of Cresseid's death, "extending her existence as a literary character" (51) and giving her what she calls a literary afterlife. Their readings of Cresseid's redeeming qualities are based on what they see as her moral development, or her ability to profess that "Nane but [her] self as now [she] will accuse" (574) instead of others or the cruel gods.

Yet for Cresseid to repent her faithlessness would mean undermining the connection between Troilus's fate and her treachery, between her crime of inconstancy and the fall of Troy. From the perspective of the *translatio imperii* scenario, the possibility of Cresseid becoming something other than the "fals Cresseid" signals a minor but troubling afterthought attached to the predetermined course of history at best, and a reminder of the powerful anxiety that may unsettle the master narrative at worst. The redemptive, salvational readings of Cresseid's psychological transformation tend to presuppose the masculine urge, be it the desire of Troilus, the narrator, or Henryson, to contain and limit her change, identifying her potential to change as an inherent threat to their narrative control. While it is true that the transgressive femininity and the dangers of unsatisfactory sexual trafficking represented by Cresseid are disturbing for these men, one should not forget that changeableness, even in seemingly positive instances, *is* her nature as an object of desire. The potent changeableness of Cresseid persisting until her death is a source of relief and terror at the same time, both for the men attempting to see through her ambiguity and for the readers seeking a less censoring and more comforting closure for her. More unsettlingly, the male-authored tradition from which Cresseid was born suggests that there may be nothing beyond that titillating ambiguity; trafficked women are expected to be malleable, after all, and the changeableness inscribed upon the Criseyde figure can only define femininity as an empty cipher devoid of meaning. Dunnigan's observation on the dichotomy of Cresseid's beautiful and leprous selves, that "[f]emale moral duplicity is frequently figured as the power of transformation, opposition, reversal, or inversion" (110), is apt here. Thus Cresseid's redemption can be imagined only with ambivalent and often anxious nods to her own ambiguity; after all, who can be sure that the notoriously changeable woman has changed *for good*?

Interestingly, Cresseid as imagined by Henryson is almost as preoccupied with the didactic reception of her history by others—especially fellow women—as with her infamy itself. In what is often understood to be a moralizing attempt on Henryson’s part, Cresseid directly warns other women and lovers to not repeat her mistakes. Retiring to a decrepit leper house, Cresseid launches an emphatic complaint, starting with the *ubi sunt* of her erstwhile beauty and material possessions, and ends it with a poignant warning directed to women:

O ladyis fair of Troy and Grece, attend
My miserie, quhilk nane may comprehend,
My frivoll fortoun, my infelicitie,
My greit mischeif, quhilk na man can amend.
Be war in tyme, approachis neir the end,
And in your mynd ane mirroure mak of me:
As I am now, peradventure that ye
For all your might may cum to that same end,
Or ellis war, gif ony war may be. (452-60)

Critics have variously interpreted this warning as a somber moral, a curse, or something that can be called both; a commentary on the nature of the fractured “womanhood” that even virtuous women are condemned to in the world where they can only exist as changeable, thus both alluring and repulsive, objects of desire. While Honeyman sees in this complaint a sign of Cresseid’s inability to imagine a future unbound by her static, miserable present, thus a state of self-pity she must overcome before achieving her moral growth, Edmondson’s reading of Cresseid as the embodiment of the Lacanian Thing takes a surprisingly optimistic turn. He argues, connecting the network of female readers to Cresseid’s potential salvation, that

“Cresseid’s redemption is tied . . . to the acts of neighbor love performed by an infinite, unbounded set of worthy women” (69). In Dunnigan’s reading of this female network, “Cresseid defines in a martyr-like way the ideological burden of ‘womanheid’: the necessity to be at once beautiful and self-containedly virtuous” (112). If all women can transform into the literary embodiment of treachery and destruction, a symbol born of male-authored tradition, it is only fair that they would be the ones to remember Cresseid.

With this, I now return to the “final say” on the history of Cresseid which male characters and authors ceaselessly attempt to obtain. Troilus’s epitaph for the grave of his former beloved succinctly, if harshly, captures the duality of her beauty and deformation: “Lo, fair ladyis, Cresseid of Troy the toun, / Sumtyme countit the flour of womanheid, / Under this stane, lait lipper, lysis deid” (607-09). Similarly, directing his closing remarks to “worthie wemen” (610), the narrator ends the poem with a didactic message for all women who may learn from this story: “I monische and exhort, / Ming not your lufe with fals deceptioun: / Beir in your mynd this schort conclusioun / Of fair Cresseid, as I have said befoir. / Sen scho is deid I speik of hir no moir” (612-16). Yet the shared mark of “womanheid” examined earlier, a network that binds Cresseid and the “fair ladies of Troy and Greece” in an interconnected state of gendered being, implies that the narrator’s moralizing reading of Cresseid’s history will not be able to assert full control. Although the narrator directly connects Cresseid’s death with his decision not to speak of her any more, her history will continue to be transmitted regardless of her death, or his “final say” to the story. Women’s understanding of their potentiality to come to the “same end” as Cresseid is deeply implicated in their shared mode of existence as women, making it impossible for them to forget Cresseid. Cresseid’s redemption, enabled through her own remorse and

posthumous reading of her history by other women, complicates the didactic scenario of a sinful, repentant leper, whether it signals a spiritual salvation for her or not.¹⁶

Reading the *Testament* with Henryson's Scottishness and his conscious venture into the Trojan historiography in mind can helpfully, and disturbingly, complicate the understanding of Henryson's poetics. In a sense, Henryson and his narrator inherit the moral and affective dilemma articulated in Chaucer's text; their account of the heroine's history achieves neither a satisfactory exculpation nor a full condemnation, due to the narrative ambiguity empowering both directions of reading. Critical attempts to denounce Henryson as a sadistic misogynist, despite his focus on Cresseid's feminine suffering and marginalized status, often disregard more nuanced moments in the text. On the other hand, critics who attempt more "redemptive" reading of Cresseid's repentance and death tend to overlook her existence as a constituent of larger Trojan history, in which she is deeply implicated in the narrative of *translatio imperii* prefaced by the death of Troilus/Troy. To be sure, the moment of self-reflection enabled by Cresseid's testament-writing provides a window for an alternative, Cresseidan narrative. However, the very poignancy of her counternarrative comes from the continued slander of her name by the dominant, male-authored narratives of Trojan historiography. Henryson's Scottish poetics, which consciously sought to undo the English ambitions embedded in the Trojan foundation narrative, resonate with his heroine's attempt to fashion an unorthodox historiography to a certain degree. But he, along with his narrator, eventually finds it impossible to secure a stable meaning for a character as elusive and implicated in Trojan history as Cresseid; in other words, he simply

¹⁶ Scholars disagree on whether Henryson strictly follows the classicizing structure of moral judgment as he showed in the court of the pagan gods, or he allows Cresseid a sort of Christian identity through her redemption. Benson, for example, argues for the latter in his "Troilus and Cresseid."

cannot decide whether he loves or hates her. If nothing else, similar to the English Chaucer's notoriously ambiguous Criseyde, the Scottish Henryson produces a profoundly equivocal and troubling figure in Cresseid that further complicates the vexed tradition of medieval Troy narratives.

The Criseida figure of medieval Troy narratives is a deeply troubling marker for the contemporary concept of Trojanness attesting to the dichotomy of desire and anxiety directed towards the classical past. Whereas the symbols of idealized masculinity such as Hector or Troilus betray the inner workings of the sociopolitical power structure they help to maintain, the changeable women represented by Helen and Criseyde expose the instabilities and ambivalence inherent in said structure as marginalized objects of exchange. Even so, Criseyde mostly remains in the periphery of legitimized historical narratives as a supplementary, if disturbing, figure embedded within the larger movement of the Trojan war. As Holly Crocker points out, the muted presence of Criseyde in biographical accounts of famous women testifies to the patriarchal anxiety generated from the implications of her story; "To tell her story is to uncover the cultural conditions of oppression that prevent women from fulfilling traditional expectations for women's virtue" (36). Yet despite the attempts to control the ambiguous or unsettling elements of history, Troy narratives constantly glance back to what Federico terms "the multiple interpretive chronologies belonging to historical necessity" (66). That is to say, the trauma of Troy is never truly repressed, but incessantly reimagined and reanimated by the historiographical desires of Trojan authors. Perhaps even more than Troilus, Criseyde is a symbol of the traumatic yet alluring Troy as imagined by its medieval descendants.

Conclusion: Shadows of Thebes

Troy narratives, notwithstanding disturbing and subversive elements, provided a useful point of reference with which to explore the contemporary political milieu and the concept of collective identity for medieval historiographers. Moralizing discourses on legitimacy and just kingship thus become a crucial framework constituting the medieval Troy. The express interest in this function of Troy is a powerful guiding force in the *Troy Book*, where Lydgate accentuates specific moments in the Trojan history as edifying examples for his royal patron on multiple occasions. However, Troy was not the only kingdom of antiquity reimagined to be a birthplace of such discourses. The history of Thebes, in which irregularities and disruptions within royal genealogy lead to societal collapse, presents a darker, more pessimistic aspect of the political mirror represented by Troy. Having no imagined genealogical connection with the contemporary ruling class, unlike Troy, Thebes allowed for a more overtly critical approach to the legendary figures being depicted, with chief vices including pride, anger, and incest being named as the ultimate causes of civic unrest. Thebes is therefore an inverted Troy, a space where corruption and violence could be imagined without anxious glances at the ancestral line bridging the ruined past and the unstable present.¹

Theban allusions present in *Troilus and Criseyde* imply a larger historical vision dictating the Chaucerian Troy. Even though the poem concerns a seemingly private set of relationships, the setting of the Trojan war renders them inherently political and thus deeply

¹ For discussions on the medieval reception of Theban material and its relationship with Trojan material, see Dominique Battles. Her article with Paul Battles identifies thematic similarities between Theban history and Arthurian narratives.

implicated in the public matters. The lightly dispersed Theban allusions, then, testify to the momentum of history merging the private and the public into a single narrative about civic destruction, which in turn links Troy and Thebes together in an image of ancient predecessors for the contemporary Western Europe. In Book 2 of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Criseyde summarizes the Theban romance she has been listening to as a tale about “how that king Laius deyde / Thurgh Edippus his sone, and al that dede” (2.101-02), and “How the bisshop, as the book can telle, / Amphiorax, fil thurgh the ground to helle” (2.104-05). The ominous vision of Theban deaths invades the courtly scene of Criseyde’s garden, in which she will promptly learn of Troilus’s love for her. Pandarus in return makes the *Thebaid* allusion more explicit by mentioning the “bokes twelve” (2.108) of the Theban history, and this survey of Theban history is often accompanied in the manuscript tradition by marginal glosses on the *Thebaid* by Statius. As with the premonition of Trojan destruction suggested by the presence of Palladium, and the songs of Procne and Philomela testifying to sexual violence and female silencing, the Theban history provides another ominous intertextual allusion that foreshadows the tragic ending to the love of Troilus and Criseyde.

Theban material permeates Chaucerian Troy in the layers of smaller, personal history as well. Another review of Theban history is given by Cassandra who, asked to explain Troilus’s dream of the boar, describes the lineage of Diomedes in Book 5. To fully understand the implications of the dream, Cassandra argues, a lecture on “a few of olde stories here, / To purpos, how that fortune over-throwe / Hath lordes olde” (5.1459-61) is essential. Through his father’s participation in the Theban civil war, Diomedes is indirectly connected to Thebes. And of course, Criseyde herself is surrounded by further Theban allusions: her niece Antigone and her mother Argive both possess names that can arguably be traced back to Theban history. The

Theban elements present in the personal histories of Criseyde and Diomedes incorporate Thebes into the plot as an unseen constituent of Troilus's tragedy. Theban history haunts the Trojan history of Chaucer as an omen of the destruction and loss to come, yet to happen within the scope of the narrative but always already to take place.

Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*, fashioning itself as a continuation of the *Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer, inherits the historical concern from both Chaucer and Lydgate himself. In Lydgate's version of the tale, the pilgrim Lydgate—a conscious nod to Chaucer the pilgrim narrator—presents the Theban story to the group while returning from Canterbury. Similar to Henryson, Lydgate seeks to establish a temporal connection between the Chaucerian text and his own, thereby expanding the intertextual space built upon classical material.² Consequently, the textual authority conferred to these successors of Chaucer comes with an understanding of secular history as dictated by Trojan context. The Chaucerian representation of Troy established in *Troilus and Criseyde*, that is, implicates both Lydgate and Henryson's texts in a mode of historiography informed by Trojan context which reads classical history as an extension of contemporary history. In the case of Henryson, the collision between the Scottish and English mythmaking motivates the authorial impulse to envision his text as a competing parallel to the Chaucerian text, rather than a mere extension. Lydgate, on the other hand, develops and expands his commentary on Lancastrian governance by translating his political concerns from Troy to Thebes. For Lydgate, whose interest in the intersection of classical and contemporary history was already explored in the *Troy Book*, Thebes becomes a ground for imagining, and moralizing, the end of an empire.

² For an "Oedipal" reading of the literary genealogy shared between the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Siege of Thebes*, see Daniel T. Kline.

The *Siege of Thebes* inherits the concern for just kingship and statecraft existent in the *Troy Book*. After the framing prologue with the pilgrims, Lydgate presents his intent in telling the tale in terms of practical and educational functions. His reading of the legendary foundation of Thebes, in which Amphion builds the city through the power of his music, utilizes a familiar medieval allegorizing frame of classical myths. Namely, Amphion's demonstration of "crafty speche" (226) and pleasing demeanor charmed people into aiding in the construction of the city. This fairly uncomplicated interpretation serves as a summary of the authorial intent governing the following Theban narrative; the historical figures in this tale will demonstrate "The goodlihed and lownesse of a kyng" (245), teaching an aristocratic audience the acceptable—and unacceptable—code of conduct and statecraft. Despite the favorable opening with Amphion and his eloquence, however, most of the Theban kings in the tale are exhibits of what *not* to do as a ruler. Lydgate's Theban historiography is thus at once a mirror of princes and a sober warning of a potentially dangerous future, set in Thebes as a version of Troy where violence and corruption prevent any translation of empires.

As perhaps the most famous Theban king, Oedipus signifies the corruption of a bloodline by incest and familial violence, deemed extremely dangerous for a royal house due to its capacity to not only disrupt genealogical order but beget innately cruel and rapacious offspring. Even before the killing of his father and incestuous marriage with his mother, the youthful Oedipus is reported to be "ful of pride" (469), "In hert . . . inly surquydows, / Malencolik, and contrarious, / Ful of despyt and of hegh disdeyn" (471-73). His prideful and violent tendencies among playmates instigate a heated argument, in which Oedipus is accused of being a nobody adopted into his current family ("no thing . . . Appartenyng unto his kynrede"; 489-90), leading him to the investigation of his true parentage and, in turn, the eventual patricide

and maternal incest. The natural vices of Oedipus establish a clear correlation between undesirable qualities and disrupted genealogy, but the inverted temporality refashions the generational destruction of the Theban bloodline into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Oedipus was naturally cruel and thus committed familial crimes, but simultaneously, Oedipus transgressed and thus is retroactively imagined to be a cruel person. This destructive cycle, in which sins and vices are born from each other, propagates itself in the personal history of Oedipus and the fatal dispute between his two sons, Eteocles and Polynices.

Yet among the two generational sins committed by Oedipus, Lydgate's moral emphasis decidedly falls on incest rather than patricide. "And tofor God is neither feire ne good / Nor acceptable blood to touche blood" (787-88), Lydgate asserts, comparing the marriage of Oedipus and Jocasta to a biblical precedent of Herod taking his brother's wife by force (794-801). The warning is directed to any "prynce, lorde, or kyng" (803) who may learn of Oedipus's tale, with an emphasis on the violence and misfortune caused by incest ("Er that the swerde of vengeance hym manace, / Lest he lese hap, fortune, and grace, / Takyng ensample in al manere thyng / Of Edyppus in Thebes crowned kyng"; 805-08). The matter of Oedipus's "ignoraunce" (809) in the incestuous union is addressed but not used to exculpate the Theban king, instead leading to a denouncement of the sinners who are indeed aware of their unnatural actions yet still pursue "such spousale, to God and man unclene" (816). For Lydgate, incest is more pernicious than patricide in its ability to irrevocably disrupt and damage a royal genealogy, not only in the perversion of sexual order within familial structures but in the production of illegitimate lines of descent as well. Incest is considered a corruption in the bloodline, contaminating and thus making the reproductive resources of affected individuals socially unusable.

Similar to Oedipus, Eteocles and Polynices embody the concept of incest as a product of violence which begets violence, destroying domestic power structures and the larger social order built upon them. The sense of familial bond is virtually nonexistent between Oedipus and his sons, as exemplified by a graphic incident where Oedipus tears out his eyes to throw at the disrespectful sons and they in return scornfully trample on the eyes (1005-09). The pattern of generational violence continues into the death of Oedipus, where the sons, “Wers than serpent or eny tigre wood” (1013), unceremoniously throw their father’s corpse into a pit. Lydgate’s verdict on the immoral conduct of the sons is curiously somewhat ambiguous, in that their cruelty is explained away with the innate corruption of the incestuous household while acknowledging redemptive potentials in unfavorable environments: “Of cursid stok cometh unkynde blood, / As in story ye may rede her toforn, / Al be the roos grow out of a thorn” (1014-16). The roses sprouting from thorns may be an allusion to Antigone and Ismene, the two daughters of Oedipus who, despite being products of incest like their brothers, are steadfast—if marginalized—symbols of beauty and virtue during the Theban war. Nevertheless, it is the action of the hateful brothers that the Theban historiography concentrates upon; a dispute over the throne soon arises between the two, developing into a bloody civil war in which both brothers perish. Possessing hearts “devoyded clene / Of brotherhode the faithful alliaunce” (1070-71), instead acting on “Fals covetise” (1072), Oedipus’s sons translate their fraternal enmity into belligerent political actions, in which Eteocles violates the agreement of shared kingship and the exiled Polynices organizes an attack on Thebes. The collapse of familial ties between the brothers, who were “in such disjoynte / How as they hadde of berthe be foreyns” (1078-79), serves as a microcosm of larger civil conflict generated by disrupted social order.

Standing on the opposite end of disastrous governance as represented by the sons of Oedipus are Adrastus and Tydeus, whose virtues nevertheless fail to shield them from the destruction caused by their indirect connection to Thebes. Polynices in exile soon finds allies in Adrastus and Tydeus, who would become his relatives by marriage, yet the two men are markedly different from Polynices in character. Lydgate reports that Adrastus was “most worthy of alle Grekes lond, / Loved and drad for wisdam and justice” (1204-05), his only concern being the lack of a male heir. Adrastus’s decision to marry his daughters to Polynices and Tydeus ultimately stems from political shrewdness seeking “aliaunce of some worthy blood” (1218), and the exiled status of both men accentuates the king’s “herte lyberal” (1559) in accommodating them. Adrastus proves himself to be a model of generosity again when he pays the warriors assembled for the attack on Thebes fairly and punctually, prompting Lydgate to argue that a king must always let virtues such as “bounté, fredom, plenté, and largesse” (2704) guide his actions. Tydeus, on the other hand, is also lauded as “The worthiest in this world lyvyng, / Curteys, lowly, and right vertuous” (1264-65). Prestigious heritage and chivalrous conduct adorn Tydeus, depicting him as a son-in-law no less worthy than Polynices for Adrastus. More problematic aspects of Tydeus’s character reported in classical and medieval sources are notably toned down by Lydgate; his fratricide in Calydon is excused for being an involuntary hunting accident, and his ferocity in battle is noted but not demonized, with the title of “The beste knyght and most manly man” (4231) following him until death. Lydgate also downplays the anecdote of cannibalism attributed to Tydeus by mentioning the presentation of his enemy’s head but not the subsequent gnawing of it (4235-39). The virtues of Adrastus and Tydeus, however, are marred by the introduction of Thebanness into their personal history; the familial connection with Polynices draws the two men into the Theban war, resulting in the death of Tydeus in battle and

loss of both sons-in-law for Adrastus. The dangers of corrupted genealogy, as personified by Polynices, are represented in the destruction of his extended family.

Following the ruinous history of Oedipus and his family, Lydgate identifies the genealogical corruption caused by incest to be the root of all evil and misfortune in Theban history. Consequently, the localized tragedy of the Theban royal house becomes an allegory for the unstoppable momentum of historiography carrying past actions to their established outcomes. The “blood corrupt and unkynde, / B’ynfeccioun called orygynal” (2564-65) engenders hatred and conflict, Lydgate argues, jeopardizing societal stability on domestic and national levels. The Theban civil war between the feuding brothers, while a stage of valor for martial figures such as Tydeus, does not result in a reestablishment of familiar/familial power structure. Instead, the ravaged kingdom is left without a ruling figure, “For ded and slayn was al the chyvalrye / And no wight left almost in the toun / To regne on hem by successioun” (4374-76). The newly crowned Creon has no relation to the incestuous corruption haunting the royal house, as Lydgate reminds his readers, “Although he hadde no title by discent / But by fre choys made in parlement” (4389-90). To be sure, Creon is no more just or charitable than his predecessors; Lydgate, maintaining consistency in his Chaucerian connection, incorporates the premise of the *Knight’s Tale* into the plot by reporting the new king’s cruelty in prohibiting the burial of the dead and a subsequent military intervention by Theseus. Nevertheless, Creon’s election signals the end of the “corrupt and unkynde” bloodline governing Thebes. Theseus’s invasion of Thebes, in a sense, enables a complete destruction of the genealogical corruption and a necessary, if forceful, introduction of a new order.

Theban historiography allows Lydgate a textual space to explore a darker vision of failed *translatio imperii* with no hopeful progeny, the gravity of which simultaneously grants his

moralization an air of urgency. The political anxiety held at bay by the promise of illustrious Trojan heritage in the *Troy Book* transforms itself into an overt anti-war message in *Siege of Thebes*. Lydgate has demonstrated in his Trojan narrative a celebration of Britain's ancient pedigree and an edifying attempt for the Lancastrian regime; his Theban narrative, devoid of the comforting presence of the former, heavily leans towards the latter aspect. Near the end of the poem, the pilgrim Lydgate muses on the moral implications of the violent history he has narrated so far:

wherfor ech man be war
Unavysed a werre to bygynne,
For no man woot who shal lese or wynne.
And hard it is whan eyther party leseth.
And douteles nowther of hem cheseth
That they most in al swich mortal rage,
Maugré her lust, felyn gret damage.
It may nat be by mannys myght restreyned.
And werre in soth was never first ordeyned
But for synne folkis to chastyse. (4650-59)

The Theban war, then, is a divine punishment for moral corruption within the royal family, and the abstracted language of this moralization brings the localized conflict of ancient Greece into a more universal context. Dominique Battles argues that the mirror for princes genre enables Lydgate to imbue “a certain balance and fairness” in his Theban narrative, in which “[t]he same rules of statecraft and governance apply to both sides of the conflict” (165) and the Theban defeat is attributed to political and diplomatic incompetence instead of congenital corruption.

However, as can be observed in Lydgate's diagram of disastrous cycles in the house of Oedipus, the failure in kingship and genealogical disruption engender and enforce each other. Theban history teaches its readers that the "orygynal" violence against one's own bloodline propagates itself through generational enmity and internecine feuds. For Lydgate, whose Lancastrian sympathy continues from the *Troy Book*, Thebes represents an alarming precedent which must be avoided at all costs—Britain may be a new Troy, but it cannot become a new Thebes.

The Lydgian afterword on the *Knight's Tale* retroactively problematizes Theban elements present in the Chaucerian text. Chaucer's Thebes, although being the home of Palamon and Arcite, is already in ruins from the devastating civil war. As a result, the tale mostly takes place in the thriving Athens ruled by Theseus. Yet Thebes as a political entity is strongly present in the Athenian diplomacy, as Theseus himself demonstrates when the escape and private duel of the imprisoned knights come into light. Learning of the shared passion of Palamon and Arcite for Emelye, Theseus restructures their amorous conflict into a heavily publicized tournament and attaches a political agreement to their pardon. Displaying appropriately noble generosity, Theseus demands of the knights: "And ye shul bothe anon unto me swere / That nevere mo ye shal my contree dere, / Ne make werre upon me nyght ne day, / But been my freendes in all that ye may" (1821-24). The Theban knights agree, and Theseus regains control over a precarious situation where two prisoners of war gain potential access to a marriageable woman—who is also a prisoner of war, marginalized by the silencing of her wish to marry or not marry—within his household. At the same time, the consanguinity of Palamon and Arcite, who "weren of the blood roial / Of Thebes, and of sustren two yborn" (1018-19), introduces a strangely endogamous undertone to their courtship of the same woman. Reinforced by the intertextual

tradition inherited by Chaucer and bolstered by Lydgate, Theban desire is once again marked with violent and ultimately destructive impulses.

Theban context also informs the tonal ambiguity surrounding Arcite's death and the ending, providing an understanding of history distinct in its solemn recognition of worldly transience. Although Mars and Venus both fulfill the prayers of their respective knights, this seemingly optimal outcome hinges on the sudden death of Arcite after his victory, and the eventual marriage of Palamon and Emelye is marked with an air of perceived loss and mourning. The grave recognition of human mortality and an understanding of the world as "a thurghfare ful of wo" (2847) as presented by Theseus's father Egeus, aligned most closely with neither Mars nor Venus but the baleful Saturn, overwhelm any narrative attempts at making sense of the sudden tragedy. An invocation of the omniscient First Mover is therefore apt for Theseus's final endeavor to regain order and control in the matter of Emelye's marriage. His tools are once again politics; the decision by the Athenian parliament to marry Emelye to Palamon derives from diplomatic concerns, "To have with certein contrees alliaunce, / And have fully of Thebans obeisaunce" (2973-74). The marriage would complete a royal Theban's submissive incorporation into the household of Theseus, and the name of said Theban, be it Arcite or Palamon, is a negligible matter. Indeed, the two cousins are almost indistinguishable from each other; they are introduced "liggyng by and by, / Bothe in oon armes" (1011-12) on the battlefield, equally defined by their kinship and royal status, and their rivalry in love grants another layer of shared identity. In the end, Chaucer's depiction of Palamon and Arcite is decidedly Theban not only in the two knights' heritage, but also in the close interconnection between personal history, worldly mutability, and the inevitability of traumatic loss expressed through their story.

Thebes in medieval imagination is thus an ontological site of unnatural origins and contaminated lineage sharing the same conceptual provenance with, but developed to be a distinct negative image of, the illustrious Troy. While Troy's significance as the birthplace of secular power structure coexists with the political anxieties attached to said birthplace, the fearful vision of moral and political collapse monopolizes Thebes. The destruction of Theban bloodlines, although a reassuring reminder of a perceived genealogical separation between Oedipus's house and medieval ruling houses, also leaves behind an unsettling legacy of civic disaster closely resembling that of Troy. Patterson explains the crucial difference between Trojan and Theban historiography in a succinct dialectic opposition:

Troy served the Western monarchies as their founding myth of origins because it maintained that fall is followed by rise, that heroic achievement can be reached, that empire can be translated both geographically and temporally, and—most important—that a historical origin can provide a secure foundation upon which the future can be built. But Theban history challenged all these assertions by revealing a profound corruption at the very source of historical action. . . . This is why we can say that Theban history deconstructs medieval historiography, that it articulates an anxious skepticism that medieval culture for the most part held at bay. (“Making Identities” 97)

Patterson's observation enables a reading of medieval Thebes as a space for imagining potential corruption and disastrous what-ifs. Accordingly Troy, a place of ontological trauma, finds in Thebes a fraternal proto-trauma which expires before developing into an explicit damage to the narrative tradition of history. If Troy is the unrepressed trauma continuously brought back to life for the purpose of constructing a desirable past, Thebes represents a shadowy mirror image of

Troy where self-destructive fantasies come to life relatively unfettered by requisite fears of a dangerous past repeating itself.

Medieval Troy narratives, whether situated in an actual Trojan space or conceptually Trojan spaces such as Thebes and Arthurian Britain, engender discussions on nationhood, collective identity, and desirable modes of statecraft. Yet among positive visions of a glorious Trojan past and future prosperity promised by the hopeful *translatio imperii*, political anxieties surrounding Trojan heritage also maintain their ghostly presence. The sequences of recurring wars in Trojan history, in which Troy repeatedly engages in political and militaristic conflicts until its eventual destruction, generate a historical trauma embodied not only by famous Trojan refugees of antiquity such as Aeneas, but also by medieval European nations tracing their origins back to Troy. England, in particular, has actively utilized Trojan heritage as a means to establish a homogeneous foundation narrative in the face of troubling communal fractions and disruptions within its national history, but identity invariably comes with trauma in the succession of Trojanness. In accordance with the heavily gendered structures of desire and power governing the Trojan war, such trauma finds expression in the aggressive control over heterosexual relations necessary for the legitimized propagation of aristocratic descent, or failure thereof, in Troy narratives. As such, homosocial bonds and aggression among men and trafficking of female sexuality dictate a vast line of translated empires from Troy to Britain. These multifaceted desires for the past haunt medieval retellings of Troy as both a fetishizing gaze of admiration and anxious glance towards an inevitable end. Troy, in return, haunts medieval historiography in the form of an unburied past, at once tantalizing and disturbing for the inheritors of its legacy.

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